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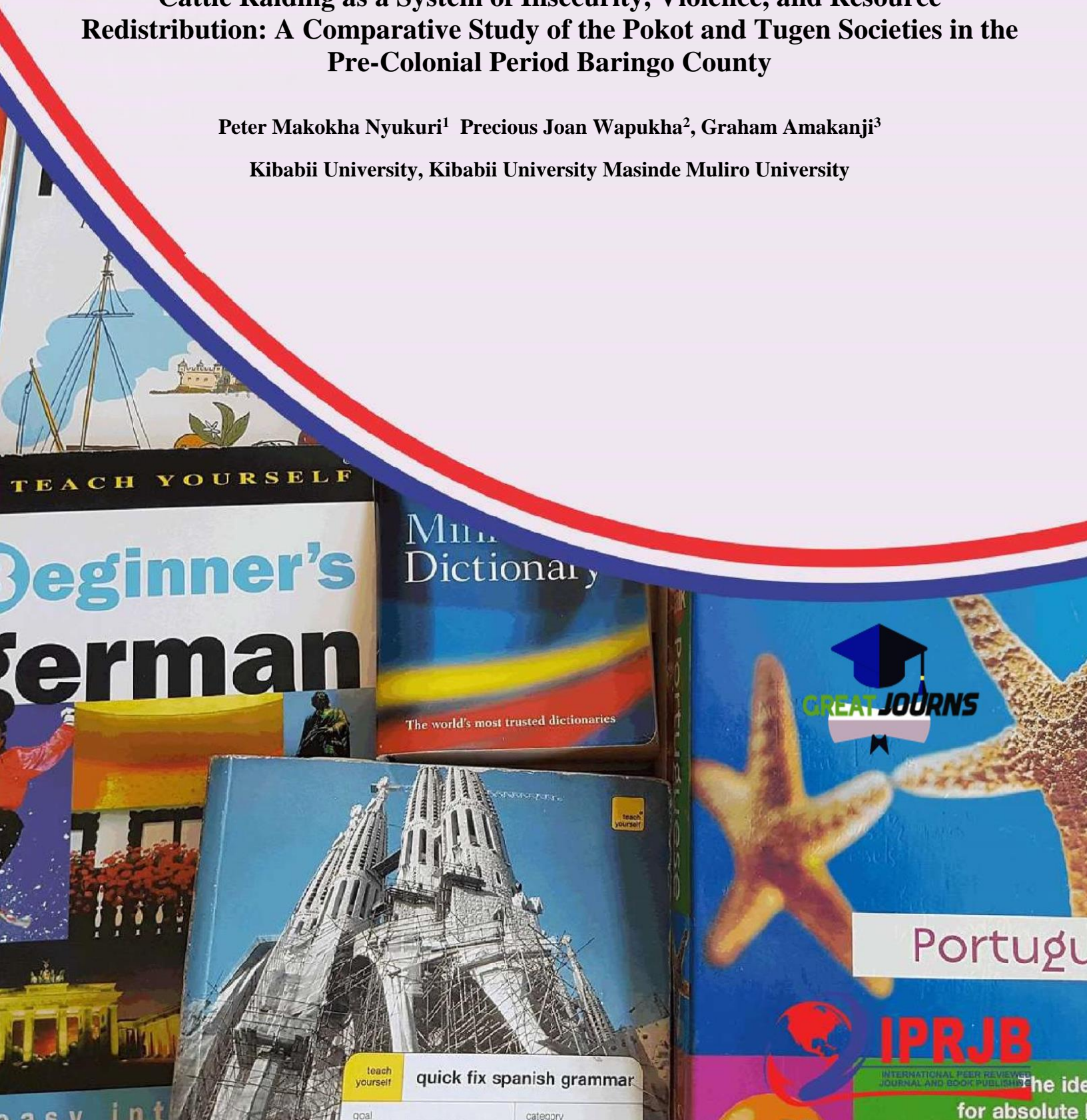
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Cattle Raiding as a System of Insecurity, Violence, and Resource Redistribution: A Comparative Study of the Pokot and Tugen Societies in the Pre-Colonial Period Baringo County

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ABSTRACT

Globally, violence and insecurity continue to pose significant threats, often manifesting through ethnic tensions, political instability, scarcity of natural resources such as grazing land, and the proliferation of illicit weapons, factors that have become central drivers of conflict. More specifically Baringo County, was not an exception. This study explored cattle raiding as a system of insecurity, violence, and resource redistribution among the Pokot and Tugen in Baringo County. The study was anchored on the Cultural Violence Theory, which explains how violence is legitimized through deeply embedded cultural beliefs and practices. A historical research design was used and a qualitative research methodology was employed with a combination of interview schedules, focus group discussions, and content analysis of secondary sources of data. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to select 216 respondents, including local administrators, village elders, women, youth, and religious leaders. The findings from the study revealed that cattle raiding was not only an economic activity but also a deeply ritualized and organized cultural institution among the Pokot, contributing to a cycle of retaliation and insecurity with the neighboring communities. In addition, the resource scarcity of water and pasture was further worsened by environmental degradation and the weak state influence in managing the conflict. The study concluded that violence has evolved from traditional cultural practices into modern militarized conflicts exacerbated by political manipulation and inadequate governance. This study recommends strengthening of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, enhancing youth livelihoods, and improving state led security and resource management frameworks.

Key words: *Cattle Raiding, System of Insecurity, Violence, and Resource Redistribution*

1.0 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Global violence and insecurity are significant issues driven by factors such as ethnicity, political hegemony, scarcity of natural resources, and the proliferation of illicit weapons, influenced by a state's history and leadership personalities (Bellamy, 2008). Insecurity adversely affects development, highlighting the need for prioritizing "securitization" to mitigate armed violence. If left unaddressed, such violence can create an environment of insecurity that undermines community development (Krause and Keith, 2014).

Sri Lanka's dominant ethnic groups are the Sinhalese and Tamil. The country's history of violence and insecurity has been marked by periodic disharmony stemming from poor ethnic relations. This conflict, roots back to pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods and was fueled by political struggles and economic disparities. (Gunatilleke, 2018) highlights the crucial role of politics in perpetuating violence in Sri Lanka. According to (Perera, 2001), the current ethnic conflict can be traced back to British colonial rule, which disrupted the local power dynamics by favoring the Tamil minority for administrative roles, this fostered resentment among the Sinhalese who are the majority. Following the country's attainment of independence, the Sinhalese dominated government enacted policies that marginalized the Tamils such as the Sinhala Only Act of 1956, which designated Sinhala as the official language. This led to increased ethnic polarization and ultimately triggered a civil war that lasted for three decades.

Eghosa and Suberu, (2005) postulates that Nigeria's complex society was marked by intertwining ethnic, religious, regional, and sub-ethnic identities, which were major sources of violent conflict. Historical violence rooted during pre-colonial period, stretching to post-colonial era has been caused by ethnic diversity exacerbated by distinct political systems and economic challenges that has often been driven by competition for limited resources and power.

South Sudan was characterized by more than 60 ethnic groups during pre-colonial period, with traditional religions and Christianity being the dominant religion. The conflicts and violence often arose from competition over resources, such as land and cattle, as well as inter-tribal raids. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as negotiation and reconciliation, were prominent but often strained by resource scarcity.

Following Sudan's independence in 1956, tensions between the north and south escalated due to cultural and economic disparities, leading to the first Sudanese civil war of 1955-1972 as the south sought autonomy (Opongo, 2015). This resulted to the formation of the SPLA. Despite the cessation and attainment of independence in 2011 by the South, conflicts continued to erupt in December 2013 between the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups. This led to civil war exploding in the country following confrontation between the forces allied to the President and those allied to his Vice President, Riek Machar.

In Kenya, violence and insecurity are prevalent in marginalized ASAL regions, particularly in Turkana, West Pokot, Baringo, Marsabit, Samburu, and Laikipia counties, where pastoralism is dominant. The notable pastoralist communities include Turkana, Samburu and Pokot, Maasai among others. The Turkana and Samburu ethnic groups are among the many groups that live in this conflict affected areas. The two communities' despite being resident neighbors, they have been embroiled in decades of inter-ethnic conflict driven by competition for vital resources such as pasture and water, especially during prolonged droughts. (Mkutu, 2001) states that cattle raiding was a cultural practice among the Moran mainly to replenish their livestock after severe droughts. This practice has contributed to decreased cohesion between the communities, leading to tensions and violence as they compete for dwindling resources. The raids are mostly cycles of retaliatory violence escalated by availability of SALW which occasionally disrupts livelihoods (Odhiambo, 2020).

Political leaders in Kenya often exploit ethnic divisions to consolidate power, exacerbating violence associated with cattle raids through ethnic identity politics and ethno-nationalistic mobilization. For instance, during the Baragoi massacre of 2020, a Samburu Moran reported that ammunition was distributed to them at Baragoi police station by police officers in the presence of local politicians (Okumu, 2021). The Samburu Moran's were mobilized for revenge, and before the eve of the attack, they were ambushed by Turkana Moran, resulting to significant casualties in Suguta Valley, (Okumu, 2012). The Standard newspaper referred to the incident as the "Valley of Death" massacre.

This study therefore will focus on Baringo County since the county experiences frequent banditry despite the government interventions of putting up security measures. In late 1970s, the acquisition of arms by pastoralist groups in response to insecurity led to an escalation of violence, resulting to significant community displacement and a breakdown of social cohesion.

While these conflicts often affiliated with cattle rustling, they are deeply rooted to historical grievances and competition over limited essential resources such as grazing land and water point as a result, violence and insecurity continue to plague Baringo County to date.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Pokot and Tugen are traditionally pastoralist communities, being immediate neighbors they have depended on one another for various aspects such as sharing of resources like pasture and water points especially during prolonged drought. In spite of the symbiotic relationship between the Tugen and the Pokot communities for decades they have experienced protracted violence and insecurity. However, this violence has taken a varied trajectory that arises from socio- economic, political, environmental, ethnic tensions, and the impacts of colonial and post colonial governance. This violence has rendered the area insecure leading to underdevelopment and economically marginalized. Despite the peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives by the government and stakeholders the area still remains a hotspot for violence and insecurity. The initiatives by the scholars can't be left out for instance (Mkutu 2001, Odhiambo, 2020) who have researched on violence and insecurity in Baringo and proliferation of SALW. However, their scholarly works didn't unravel the relationship and evolution of the Tugen and Pokot in reference to violence and insecurity.

Therefore, this study offered a comprehensive understanding of historical trends of violence and security and how specific epochs influenced the current situation. It is against this background that the study seeks to fill the gap by providing a detailed historical analysis of violence and insecurity between the Tugen and Pokot communities of Baringo County in the precolonial period.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this research, Cultural Violence Theory of Johan Galtung was applied which states that cultural norms, beliefs, and institutions normalize and justify violence in society, making it acceptable, particularly in conflict-prone societies. In the example of Baringo County, this structure is seen in the constant conflict between Tugen and Pokot communities over limited resources such as grazing fields and water sources, since some cultural norms, including cattle raids and revenge attacks, are continuous in the society with the support of the elderly, religious leaders, and the warriors. The theory explains why such communities have traditionally articulated violence as a source of cultural survival in the forms of intergenerational grudges, structural disparities, and poor national outreach. Nevertheless, the cultural orientation of the theory does not support the dynamic facet of conflict, causing a lack of consideration of the causative factors like economic, political, and historical development, innovations like modernization, political exploitation, and abandonment by the state. Nonetheless, Cultural Violence Theory can still be applied to the violence legitimization in terms of deeply rooted traditions, with the focus being on the necessity to apply varying or shifting socio-political dynamics as well as the transregional (systemic) factors acting as sources of violence and conflict between the two comm

unities.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a historical research design to investigate the long-standing nature of violence and insecurity between the Tugen and Pokot communities in Baringo County, Kenya. Baringo was a perfect choice on the basis of its geographical, demographic, and climatic patterns, which were unique features defining the county, especially the borderline areas of Tiaty and Baringo North Sub-counties, where the most common conflicts occurred between pastoralists. Key stakeholders that formed the target population were administrators, religious leaders, elders, women, and the youth; the sample size was 216 respondents, who were chosen using the purposive and snowball sampling methods. The collection of data was based on interview schedules, a focus group discussion (FGD) as well as a content analysis of secondary sources, namely the books and dissertations. The key information in primary data was on the internal stimuli of conflict, the part of conflict stewardship, and the involvement of the community. FGDs allowed dynamic knowledge, especially by the old, women, and the young, and the views by the administrative officials were guaranteed by the interviews. The ethics in data collection conformed to the ethical standards of data collection that consisted of NACOSTI approvals, community consents, confidentiality, and voluntariness. Lastly, the information was thematically examined, keeping the voices of the respondents unaltered by use of verbatim transcription, and had accuracy and integrity supported by oral corroboration and triangulation of information.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1.5 Organization of cattle raiding among the Pokot in the Pre-colonial period

According to Ruto (1980), cattle raiding among the Pokot is a deeply embedded socio-economic and cultural practice, characterized by structure and symbolic meaning, rather than being simply an act of theft or violence. Cattle served as a fundamental indicator of wealth, social status and livelihood among the Pokot pastoralists. They played a central role in various aspects of life, including marriage through the payment of *Sapuna* religious rituals, conflict compensation, and as a symbol of male maturity and courage. Thus, the need to acquire cattle, especially by young men, was not simply economic but was tied to their identity, social advancement, and fulfillment of cultural expectations. Therefore, a young man couldn't marry or be considered an adult without successfully participating in a cattle raid. This tradition formed the foundation of Pokot *moranism* (warrior), whereby initiation into adulthood included a man's participation in a successful raid, often as the final step in the rite of passage (Ruto, 1980; Berndt & Berndt, 1980). The *Sapuna* requirement was particularly motivating, as it was not just a private arrangement but a communal expectation; young men who failed to meet this obligation risked social shame and exclusion from marriage, leadership, and ritual participation.

Raiding was not an individualistic venture but a well-organized, communal activity involving a spectrum of roles and actors. Age set systems among the Pokot served as the structural basis for organized raiding parties. (Berndt & Berndt 1980) note that *morans* of the same age-set, having undergone initiation together, maintained loyalty and coordination in raids. Raids were not random acts but were carefully planned and involved thorough intelligence gathering, spiritual

guidance and ethical consideration. Prior to any raid, the proposal had to be brought before the *Kokwo*, that held both political and spiritual authority. The elders would deliberate on the timing, purpose, and consequences of the proposed raid, considering the risks of inter community retaliation, spiritual readiness, and alignment with cultural norms (Leroy, 1975). Before the raid Kaseyi Lokalia one of the elders narrated.

A black goat is slaughtered and an elder who is a specialist as well as a diviner will observe the position of the goat's intestine and interpret them. The intestine was regarded as 'a map and a compass', the position of the intestine will be interpreted, as showing a river, including a lagoon, which routes to be followed when going for the raids and the valleys where the dangers which the enemies will possibly use to attack the raiders. This ritual enabled them to pre-determine the outcome of the raid. If it would be successful or not, by looking and staring at the intestine's position. The same ritual can also be used to predict if the Pokot land will be affected by calamities such as flood, drought or animal disease (Kasayi Lokalia Loyamorock, 18/05/2025).

In some cases, the diviners used alternative methods of determining the success of the raid that is.

The Seers using special sandals/open shoes (*Akala*) to determine the success of the raid. The sandals are thrown up and depending on the angle in which it will fall and the direction it will face will determine if it was good timing for the raid or not. Then the elders will advise the Morans accordingly and by any chance, the Morans go against the advice and proceed for the raid in most cases the Morans never came alive. At times the rituals performed by the diviners will also alert the council of elders if there are looming attacks coming hence adequate preparation was needed to counter any form of aggression. (Kasayi Lokalia Loyamorock 18/05/2025).

Similarly, the elders functioned as gatekeepers, ensuring that raiding was not merely an act of greed or aggression but a controlled, culturally sanctioned practice aligned with the collective interests of the community. Upon a successful raid, the elders will distribute the raid proceeds according to the contributions of the cattle raiders. From a cultural violence theory perspective (Galtung, 1990) believes that, the raids conducted represented more than just physical conflict, they reflected structural and symbolic systems that justify and perpetuate violence as a normalized part of cultural identity. The Pokot raiding was not merely for violence's sake but was sanctioned by Council of Elders, mediated by spiritual beliefs, justified by economic and marital needs and ritualized through ceremonial practices.

The intelligence obtained played a critical role in shaping the raid's strategy, including selecting the most effective approach routes, deciding the size and scope of the raid. Upon their return, the scouts presented their findings to both the elders and the spiritual leaders; the diviners and seers, whose sole responsibility was in forecasting the potential success or failure of the raid. Using ritual rites, chants, animal entrails, and omens drawn from nature, the diviners would determine whether spiritual forces were favorable. If the signs were negative and the warriors chose to

proceed, it was widely believed that they would face disaster. Oral histories reveal multiple instances where raiders ignored 'prophetic warnings' and ended up in death, defeat, or supernatural misfortune (Barongo, 1988). This spiritual checks and balance system reinforced moral discipline and restricted raiding to culturally permissible situations.

The actual raids were military operationalized that typically involved between 20 and 300 warriors, depending on the target and strategic objectives (Emley, 1937). Larger raids were mounted when multiple clans collaborated, often for revenge or large-scale livestock acquisition. The warriors moved mainly at night or at dawn, using ridgelines, bush paths, and natural cover to avoid detection. Raids were characterized by speed, stealth, and surprise. The *Morans* would silently surround the livestock enclosures, then strike quickly to induce panic among defenders and herd animals away with minimal resistance. Guerrilla tactics such as flanking maneuvers, diversionary noises, and rapid withdrawal routes were commonly used to out maneuver defenders (Ochieng, 1990).

The Pokot raiding ethics dictated that the aim of the raids was to acquire cattle but not to kill. Killing was highly discouraged unless absolutely necessary, harming of women, children or elders were highly discouraged and could trigger retaliatory blood feuds and curses as they were considered vulnerable and non-combatant hence protecting them helped preserve the community's values, maintained social order and prevented unnecessary escalation of violence. However, violence sometimes occurred, especially during resistance or when a raid turned chaotic.

After a successful raid, the warriors returned to their home community, where they were celebrated with songs, dances, and ululations. The cattle were distributed among the raiders, with greater shares awarded to those who had performed bravely or held leadership roles. A portion was also given to the elders and diviners as a symbolic gesture of respect and recognition of their guidance and blessings (Barongo, 1988). Celebratory rituals followed, including feasts and spiritual cleansing. These post raid ceremonies were vital in purifying the warriors from bloodshed, honoring their bravery, and invoking protection from retaliatory spirits or ancestral disapproval. A *Moran* stated that;

In case one *Moran* is killed in the raid, they are not supposed to cry since the warrior had gone to look for wealth, however if the raid became successful, the *Morans* are celebrated especially by women through songs, ululations e.t.c. And if the raiders come home empty handed after unsuccessful raid, they were mocked by women. This notion of celebrating success and condemning failure made raiding perceived to be a cultural practice (Lokapel Aboi, Chemlingot 16/05/2025).

Contrary to humanity, the Pokot community valued cattle, they rather preferred a life lost than livestock either stolen or not recovered. This explains as to why among the Pokot, when a *Moran* is killed during a raid, open mourning was discouraged, since it is perceived that the warrior had undertaken a respected mission to acquire wealth rather than simply engage in violence.

Successful raids were enthusiastically celebrated, especially by women who express their joy through songs and ululations while raiders who returned empty handed faced mockery from women, creating strong social pressure to succeed. This cycle of praise for success and condemnation for failures embeds raiding deeply within cultural norms. According to Galtung's (1990) cultural violence theory, these customs legitimize violence by embedding it within the community's values and symbols, portraying it as honorable and necessary, thus concealing its damaging effects, such ritualized behavior played a significant role in normalizing and sustaining violence.

1.6 Violence arising from competition over grazing land and water resources

In the pre-colonial period, the Tugen and Pokot communities of present-day Baringo County were often embroiled in violent conflict driven primarily by competition over grazing land and water resources. Although the two communities belong to the wider Kalenjin linguistic group, they developed distinct land use systems and economic strategies that frequently brought them into conflict especially during periods of environmental stress. The scarcity of pasture and water, exacerbated by the region's arid and semi-arid climate, made access to these resources a matter of survival and, ultimately, a source of prolonged tension.

The Pokots', being nomadic pastoralists, depended on transhumance type of livelihood in search for water and pasture for their livestock. During prolonged droughts, they frequently migrated into the more fertile and elevated lands inhabited by the Tugen, who practiced a semi sedentary agro-pastoralist lifestyle. These movements often led to confrontations, as the Tugen viewed them as unauthorized incursions that disrupted farming activities and will deplete their local resources (Kandagor, 2005; Little, 1992). The conflicts often began when Pokot herders entered their territory without prior agreements. One elder from Bartabwa noted;

When the Pokot came with their herds during the dry season, they would trample our crops and take water from our springs. when questioned they answered that their cows could not survive without water and when we denied them access, they started fighting, this made us respond by retaliating since if we didn't do it, they would keep coming back. (Elder, 21/05/2025 Bartabwa)

This testimony aligns with the findings by Bollig, (1990), who observed that in arid part of northern Kenya, pastoral mobility often results in violent confrontation especially when accessing key natural resources which are contested. Both groups relied heavily on livestock for economic sustainability, bride wealth and cultural identity any threat to their herds such as denial of water or pasture was perceived as a direct threat to community survival (Galaty, 1981; Mkutu, 2008).

Tension was also fueled by territorial disputes arose from the different understandings of land ownership and use. The Pokot viewed grazing land and water as communal resources open to all,

particularly in times of need, while the Tugen sought to protect their cultivated land and controlled pasture systems. These differing philosophies often led to accusations of trespass, triggering violent responses

As a result of prolonged insecurity and such violent episodes, the Tugen community gradually migrated from the Ngaratuko–Loruk belt an area lying between Tugen highlands and Tiaty lowlands seeking safety in more elevated regions. This displacement created a vacuum in Ngaratuko, which the Pokot community exploited by asserting territorial control and grazing their livestock in the now pasture rich zone, claiming traditional ownership (Chelang’a, 2020). The Pokot view land, water points, and livestock not only as survival assets but also as expressions of identity and power, reinforcing their commitment to defend and expand territorial claims (Mkutu, 2008). Knighton (2006) explains that such conflicting land ideologies often produce misunderstanding and tension, especially in regions where formal boundaries were absent and resource access was guided by customary practice.

Raids over cattle and territorial access were typically carried out by the *morans*, often with the suctioning of the elders. These raids were not spontaneous acts but rather organized strategically shaped by cultural and economic imperatives. As noted by Kjærby (1977), traditional institutions in both communities not only facilitated the mobilization of warriors but also attempted to mediate disputes. However, during periods of scarcity of natural resources, mediation often failed to prevent escalation. A Akileng Nyangan a Pokot elder recounted,

The elders tried to speak, but when our youth saw
our cows dying of thirst, they didn’t wait. They
fought to save them (I.O., Akileng Nyangan,
22/07/2025, Mkutani)

Despite repeated clashes, there were instances of resilient factors such as negotiations. Elders sometimes brokered temporary truces during extreme droughts, allowing limited Pokot access to Tugen grazing zones or water points. However, such agreements were fragile and frequently broken either by misunderstanding, youthful defiance, or violations of grazing limits. Once broken, they often triggered retaliatory attacks and revived longstanding grievances (Osamba, 2000).

1.7 Resource competition as a contributory factor to violence during the pre-colonial period among the Tugen and Pokot

Competition over scarce natural resources, particularly pasture and water, has been a major driver of conflict between the Tugen and Pokot communities in Kenya’s North Rift Valley. Pokot herders often migrate towards Tugen areas in search of water and pasture, sparking accusations of trespass or theft. These tensions often escalate into retaliatory cattle raids or violent confrontations (Mkutu, 2008). The two communities heavily depend on pastoralism and as land pressure intensifies due to environmental degradation and population growth, disputes over grazing areas have become increasingly common and violent. Key grazing zones such as

Baata Hills, Chesiron, Nyalibunch, Kibuloni farms, Ngarutuko, Rehabilitation of Arid Environment (REA) land covering about 2,000 acres previously held by European settlers are particularly contested due to their fertile pastures. The growing number of livestock has worsened land scarcity, creating tensions as communities vie for control over these limited resources.

Pokot raids continuously recycle in these areas hence contributing to the displacement of Tugen communities, who often vacate the land to avoid attacks. This temporary abandonment allows pasture to regenerate, which in turn draws the interest of Pokot herders. As Francis Lotodo West Pokot Member of Parliament once noted and was documented on the leading newspaper;

Pokot and animals are inseparable and any one going for our cattle will face the full force of the Pokot, The area member of parliament had ultra conservative and stubborn stickler adhering to traditions perceived to be repugnant in the modern Kenya (Standard nation newspaper 9/10/2020).

When the Tugen pastoralists attempted to return and graze their livestock, they often face renewed violence, including ambushes and livestock theft. These incidents have made the region increasingly unstable. The situation is further worsened by prolonged droughts, which exacerbate the scarcity of essential resources.

The long-standing cultural practice of cattle raiding has also evolved. Traditionally used for herd restocking or to demonstrate bravery, these raids have become increasingly militarized in the post-independence period, largely due to the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Pastoralist groups such as the Pokot, Samburu, and Turkana have transformed raiding into a tool for asserting territorial dominance, gaining economic assets, or retaliating against rival groups. The consequences have been severe ranging from loss of life and livestock to large scale displacement and enduring inter-communal hatred (Mkutu, 2008; Bevan, 2007).

1.8 Conclusion

This study has conducted a comprehensive historical overview of violence and insecurity between the Tugen and the Pokot people of Baringo County in Kenya. The study revealed that the conflict between the two pastoralist communities is deeply rooted in cultural practices, particularly cattle raiding, which, while once a structured, communal, and ritualized tradition, has increasingly become militarized and more destructive in the post-independence era due to the proliferation of small arms. Cultural violence theory provided by Johan Galtung was used to explore how norms, beliefs, and traditions of societies make violence common and acceptable to generations, so that it becomes part of the communal identity and rites of passage. Scarcity of natural resources, especially water and grazing land due to such factors as long droughts, increasing population and land degradation also compounds this conflict as it forces the communities to encroach into Somalia and the conflict zones. All these have been compounded by structural and political marginalization, fragile state presence and ethno-political

manipulation by local elites which has led to a vicious cycle of retaliation, displacement and insecurity. The reasons behind the inability to eliminate the violence are the inability to identify the historical grievances and address them properly, the presence of a competition over resources and the evolution of modern conflict.

1.9 Recommendations

The government should reinforce the community-based peacebuilding initiatives by enabling the roles of the council of elders to ensure a peaceful resource-based inter-ethnic conflict resolution

An empowerment program for the youth should be developed with the aim of coming up with alternative sources of income to curb dependency on cattle raiding as a cultural economic activity

The state should increase security and a quick response unit in the volatile regions of Baringo County to deter violent conflict and restore the faith of the people in the government

1.9 Suggestions for further studies

From the study findings, future scholars must explore the impact that climate change has on resource-based conflict between the pastoralist communities of Kenya in the arid and semiarid regions

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