

Assessment of Intra-Ethnic Conflict Causes among the Sabaot of Mt. Elgon, Kenya, 1970-2008

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Abstract: The Study sought to research about the historical development of intra ethnic conflict among the Sabaot of Mt. Elgon Sub-county in Kenya. The study dealt with Sabaot community because it is a major community in Mt. Elgon Sub County with many clans. The year 1970 is important because this was when animosity and tension surfaced after allocation of Chebyuk I resettlement scheme and 2008 was the period when government intervened by deploying Kenya Defense Force. There is insufficient research on recurring intra-ethnic conflict between the Soy and Mosop of the Sabaot hence there was need to be re-examined. The study employed two theories primordialism theory that stipulates conflict springs from differences in ethnic identities. Constructivist theory that argues that colonial state structured pattern of society, Identity formation in society. Literature was reviewed at international, regional, Bungoma and Mt. Elgon Sub County. Literature review focused on intra-ethnic conflict as supported by the theoretical framework with key attention to relevance and research gaps. The study employed survey research design which was used to gather both qualitative and quantitative data relevant for the study. The Sample size comprised of 150 respondents comprising of women group, religious organization, teachers, students, youth groups and local administrators drawn from a research population of 34,000. The sample size was selected through purposive and convenient sampling strategy. Data was collected using interview schedules, questionnaire, and document review. Two research assistants were employed due to language barrier and insecurity. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data that was reported by verbatim using statements as captured from the field. The findings revealed that land, Emergence of militia groups, political incitement, scarcity of resources cattle rustling and colonial delimitation were the major causes of conflicts in the study area. The government should address the land tenure question and ensure equitable distribution of resources among the warring groups if a lasting solution would be reached. Land is such a sensitive issue and hence, if not adequately and appropriately handled, cases of violence may not cease any time soon. The government agencies on the ground should strive to improve on equity in the management of natural resources so as to enable the community adapts to effects of climate change and builds resilience.

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Introduction

Naturally people tend to disfavor outer groups as they embrace the inward grouping. This is so majorly because people naturally belong to ethnic groups which give everyone identity. By the 1980s it was commonly agreed by students of nationalism all over the world that the phenomenon was on the upsurge. Smith (1981) In his book *The Ethnicity and Nationhood Under Communism* he points to the revival of ethnic sentiments among dominant nations, such as the French, the Romanians and the Poles, as well as to a surge of support for ethnic movements claiming autonomy from the states of which they were currently members. He gives examples Scottish, Québécois, Croat and Slovak nationalism (Smith, 1981).

The anthropologist, E. E. Roosen, makes a similar observation: 'Ethnic groups are affirming themselves more and more. They promote their own new, cultural identity, even as their old identity is eroded' (Roosen, 1989). The year Roosen was writing – 1988 – was the year when ethnicity and ethnic conflict first became burning questions in the Soviet Union, a development that was related directly to the freer atmosphere under Mikhail Gorbachev, who by his reforms made it permissible for the first time to raise questions of constitutional change in public. The process occurred somewhat later further west, in Eastern Europe proper, except in Yugoslavia, where the liberalization of the late 1960s had already produced the first signs of disintegration. In every area where there was the potential for ethnic conflict, the decline and fall of Communist rule triggered this off from 1988 onwards when national movements of various kinds began to come into conflict with each other and with the state authorities in the Soviet Union.

Fowkes (2002) posits that the South Caucasian region (formerly Transcaucasia) the conflicts were particularly acute. All three South Caucasian republics were involved. Armenia and Azerbaijan were in conflict over the Nagorno-Karabagh autonomous region (also known as Nagorny Karabagh, or in its Armenian version, Artsakh); Georgia's drive to independence stimulated resistance from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The growth of independence movements in the Baltic lands (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) met with resistance from local Russian minorities. The process of emancipation from Communism seemed to spark off immediate ethnic conflict. Even the euphoria of the year 1989 did not prevent nationalists from misusing their new-found freedom to agitate against formerly deprived ethnic groups. This was clear particularly in Bulgaria (the Central Committee's resolution of 29 December 1989 guaranteeing the 'genuine exercise of rights' to all Bulgarian citizens irrespective of 'nationality, origin, creed, sex, race, education or social and material status' sparked off a wave of anti-Turkish protests from disappointed Bulgarian nationalists).

In Romania (the post-1989 political mobilization of the Hungarian minority soon produced a reaction in the shape of the setting up in February 1990 of Romanian Cradle, and the March 1990 riots) (ibid) German pressure both prevented a peaceful settlement of the Serb-Croat conflict and sparked off the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The argument here is that whereas the Badinter Commission in its report of 15 January 1992 distinguished between Slovenia and Croatia, saying the former could be recognized immediately while Croatia could not, because 'it had not provided sufficient guarantees for the protection of minorities' (meaning above all the Serbs), the German government had already ignored this, recognizing both Slovenia and Croatia unilaterally on 23 December 1991, despite a warning from Lord Carrington on 2 December that 'premature recognition might well be the spark that sets Bosnia-Herzegovina alight' (Woodward, 1995). Inter-ethnic conflicts involve distinct plural societies living in a certain geographical area while intra-ethnic conflicts involve internal feuds within a singular ethnic identity. Ethnic struggles of smaller communities for political

autonomy and freedom from socio-economic exploitation by larger communities saw the breakup of former Soviet Union in the 1990s, when ethnic nations seceded from Soviet Union. This trend was replicated in the rest of Eastern Europe (Goodhand, 2003). Globally, such inter-ethnic conflicts have been fuelled by the presence of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). Indeed, more of them are held by civilian populations than governments and the police. More than 640 million SALW and 16 billion rounds of ammunitions are in circulation globally, with an addition of 8 million new weapons entering the market each year (Mkutu, 2008). Inter-ethnic conflicts and other regional conflicts are responsible for half a million deaths each year, including armed conflict and Small Arms Survey (Tropp *et al.*, 2011).

Martin (1982) argues that the phase of colonialism was anchored on economic and political domination in Africa. The colonial administrative policies of the French in Africa which were based on assimilation were racial in character since the French and their culture were viewed as better than the Africans and their culture. The indirect rule system was not better in its categorization of Africans as either collaborators or those who resisted. Neo-colonialism adopted the same phase with new political leaders in Africa advancing the divide and rule system leading to economic marginalization of some communities. Conflict is considered ethnic when it involves organized political movements, mass unrest, separatists' action, and civil wars with opposing lines drawn along ethnic motives (Stavenhagen, 1991). The Congo has been trying to initiate democracy since 1991. A conflict within the political class, after the end of the Cold War, led to a weakening of the state, which in turn, made it possible to promote demand for a national conference. The state no longer constitutes a supreme authority with monopoly over the use of force. Instead, a number of feudal lords/warlords claim an equal right to supremacy and to their own territories (Sundberg, 1999).

Kenya is the seventh most violent country in the ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project) data set, with just over 3,500 recorded politically violent events between 1997 and September 2013 (Dowd and Raleigh, 2013). Parts of the country experience low-levels of persistent violence which has become unremarkable to many citizens (Scott-Villiers *et al.*, 2014). Many Kenyans now treat rampant theft and robbery as a normal burden of citizenship (Ombaka, 2015). Levels of violence between 1997 and September 2013 peaked during January to March 2008 with 341 recorded incidences of violence (Dowd and Raleigh, 2013).

Over the past few years Kenya has continued to experience violent insecurity which has 'destabilized a swathe of Kenya's peripheral counties' and resulted in terrorist attacks in the capital, Nairobi (Lind *et al.*, 2015). The increase in the incidence, gravity and intensity of violence since 2010 includes 'persistent terror attacks, intercommunity conflicts and violence targeting law enforcement officers as well as a big number of extra-judicial executions' (KNCHR, 2014).

Causes and Effects of Intra-Ethnic Conflict

Nyukuri (1971) postulates that ethnicity is more prevalent in plural societies such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Somali, Rwanda, Malawi and South Africa. In this context therefore, ethnicity refers to grouping of people basing on color, language, religion, race, ancestry or beliefs. Many scholars have done study around the subject of ethnicity however; there is a single agreement on the major cause of ethnic conflict. Eboe (1999) observes that the ethnic conflict in Africa dates back to the history of Africa itself. He attributes it to compulsory labor market to help construct great Africa empires such as Songhai, Ghana and

Mali as the some of the causes of ethnic conflicts in Africa. He portends that the Egyptians used forced labor during the construction of the pyramids and the structure of great Zimbabwe. The modern day conflict among the Sabaot clans is a major issue of concern of this study for some scholars; ethnicity and the ethnic conflict are due to colonialism. Colonial manipulation leads to the re-definition of the boundaries of the inherited pre-colonial ethnic lines and as a results arousing ethnic consciousness with the possibility of ethnic conflicts.

Rodney (1989) bears responsibility of ethnic conflicts in Africa squarely on the hands of the colonialists from Marxist perspective. Like other scholars, he attributes the boundary demarcations of the colonialists in the nineteenth and twentieth century's purposively to facilitate European control and imperialism with utter disregard of post animosity and hostility within and between different ethnicities. According to Mugambi (2003), elaborates that nearly countries in Africa are multi-ethnic except a few like Swaziland and Lesotho that are ethnically homogeneous. This is because national border drawn by colonial regimes were arbitrary, artificial, cut across traditional societies and merged diverse people. According to Adedeji (1999) many of the countries in Africa are just a creation of land mass being a creation of the colonialists. These studies have not incorporate historical development of intra ethnic conflict, in their findings. The current study on intra ethnic conflict among the Sabaot of Mt. Elgon with incorporates the element of Historicity.

Gecaga (2001) also notes that ethnic conflict is majorly due to dissatisfaction over uneven distribution of resources appropriated in the colonial period among communities inhabiting, central, rift valley and Western provinces. The tensions were aggravated during the post-independence period due to politicized ethnicity. Okoth (2000) supports this view suggesting that every conflict possesses its own historical character and underlying cause. He notes that it is better to confine any conflict to the underlying issue in dispute between or among parties.

He divides causes of conflicts into two: domestic. He however differs with the school of thought that argues that all internal conflicts in Africa could be labeled ethnic in character citing cases of class conflicts, caste, occupational conflicts, regional antagonisms, just to mention a few. His trust of argument is that all forms of identity exist ranging from class, nationality, religious, occupational, regional and linguistic groups. Still, he argues that ethnicity is a dynamic concept that may possess both an ethnic and class character. Though these studies (Osaghae, 1995; Okoth, 2000) are indicative of the multifaceted nature of the causes of ethnic conflicts, they fail to include struggle for natural resources as the main cause of intra ethnic conflict which is an age old problem in Africa. This was one of the causes of intra-ethnic conflict between Mosop and Soy clans of the Sabaot, which created a vacuum in this study that the research has filled.

Mamdani (2009) posits that socioeconomic dimensions are some of the major causes of ethnic conflicts coupled with political competition. He points out that some of the conflicts are brought about by the "divide and rule" policy of the colonial administration. For example conflict between the Nuer and Dinka communities of South Sudan is about tribal competition. According to Mamdani, (2009) the Hutu and Tutsi case of conflict was as a result of political economic monopoly from one tribe over the other. That the monopoly of economic resources and control of political power by one ethnic group to the exclusion of the other tribal grouping led to decent on the other leading to a full blown genocide that claimed lives in hundreds of thousands (Nnoli, 1978). Aseka (1989) and Gecaga (2001) do support the argument that colonial manipulation has greatly led to inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa crystallization especially with the establishment of the state system. This is true given that the

systems of governments experienced both before and after colonialism tend to deliberately exclude the masses and gross failure to contain the violence when it explodes.

Methods

The study employed mixed research designs which were qualitative research design that included survey research design and quantitative design which involved bar graph, pie chart and line graph. The target population for the study comprised of women groups, religious organisations, Elders, Teachers, youth groups, *Boda boda* operators, local administrations, from the two main clans of Saboot the Mosop and Soy. The study used non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling was the main technique which the researcher used in the present study. The sample population of 150 respondents was representative of the research population since it was calculated at 0.2% of the research population that totaled to 135,033. Through field research; the study generated primary data using oral and written interviews. Archival information (Annual Reports, Handing over Reports and Administrative Reports) were accessed from the Kenya National Museums. In the study, secondary source of data which was collected in the field is the review of hospital records of patients admitted to the hospital as intra ethnic conflicts victims of Mt. Elgon Sub County from 1970 to 2008. A search for relevant studies was conducted by combining two search strategies. The first strategy was to retrieve all references listed in previous literature surveys. The second strategy was to perform a computer search in the intra ethnic conflicts in the world, Africa and Kenya, and Mt. Elgon. Literature data base using intra ethnic conflicts, root causes, effects and mitigations measures. Data was managed and analyzed using MS Excel. Data collected was analyzed through measures of frequencies and descriptive statistics. Data presentation was form of frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts. Inferences were made objectively and systematically by identifying specific characteristics of text units, searching for emerging themes and testing anomalies.

Findings

Causes of Conflicts

It is strongly believed that cause of conflict in Mt. Elgon is Land but from the study there were other major triggers of conflict which were indicated by the respondents. The bar graph below provides the responses of people in Mt. Elgon Sub County on the issue of intra ethnic conflict

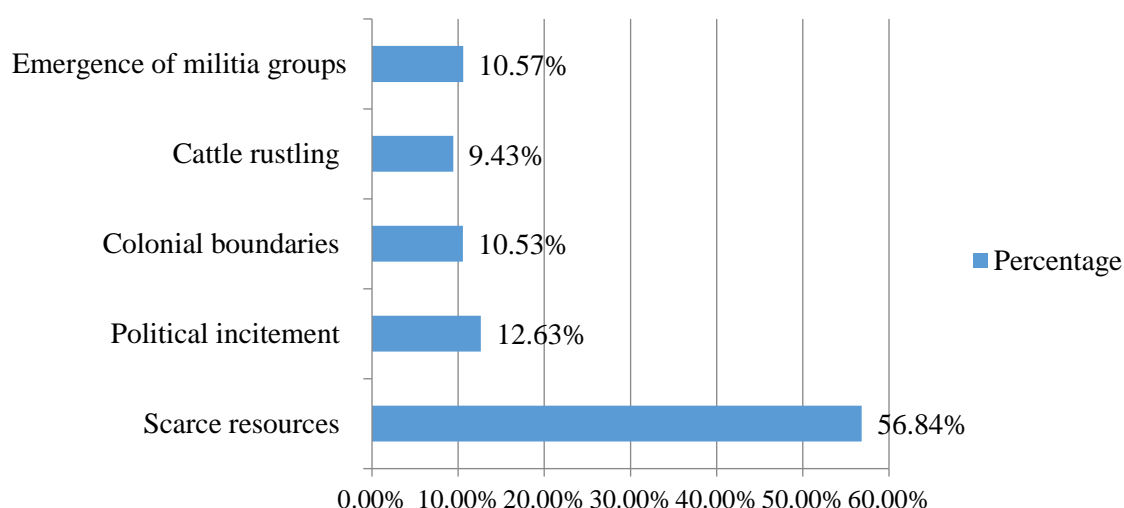


Figure 1. Causes of Conflicts

1. Causes of Intra Ethnic Conflict

The conflict experienced in Mt. Elgon Sub County has been a thorn in the flesh of the government from the research carried out; the finding of violence is competition over land. Even though that is the main cause from the study the researcher came across other underlying causes of intra ethnic conflict between the Mosop and Soy clans of the Sabaot community.

2. Land Question

It is apparent that one of the problems in Mt Elgon Sub-County is that of insecurity or uncertainty of land tenure.

Mosop were favored in the allocation of the lands therefore this angered the soy. The resettlement of the Soy and the Mosop in Chepyuk I and II was not immediately followed by the issuance of land title deeds, not only making the ownership uncertain, but also reversible. The situation was compounded when the parcels changed hands (in some cases many times) without the necessary transactions being recorded and formalized (Ruto Ibrahim, O.I., 26-3-2019, Kaptama).

The issue of land has played one of the major roles in igniting conflict among the Sabaot due corrupt method of allocation and issuance of title deed. According Gecaga (2001) ethnic conflict is majorly due to dissatisfaction over uneven distribution of resources appropriated in the colonial period among communities inhabiting, Central, Rift Valley and Western provinces.

Most of the respondents complained whenever annulment of allocation was effected or evictions carried out, not just the initial allocates but people who had bought land from them suffered or were dispossessed. Allegations of corruption, political interference and nepotism have marred all phases of the resettlement program me. This is in line with Simiyu (2008) who notes that the eviction of Soy also occurred in the early 1990s when many non-Sabaot were evicted and lost their lands. The majority of them could no reclaim their land because they were unable to prove ownership.

As Mushtaq (2008) observed, 'land tenure remained uncertain and subject to official review which was done in every election year, leading to Chepyuk becoming a political tool in the hands of local politicians and civil servants'. This situation provides the background for the role of the Soy in the so-called tribal violence leading to the 1992 general elections and President Moi's subsequent acquiescence to Soy demands for land allocation and an administrative district in 1993, as well as the Soy's belated inclusion in Chebyuk I and II, which were meant for the Mosop. It also explains the inclusion of the Mosop in Chebyuk III, which had been intended for the Soy, after the 2005 referendum. The political rhetoric of 2002 perpetuated the situation and served to complicate the resettlement program me in Chepyuk III, as did the 2007 political context, which led to an escalation of the present conflict

When the game reserves were established at Chepkitale in 1968 it took up part of Chepkitale trust land, reducing the available grazing area of the Mosop and restricting their access to forest resources that formed an important component of their livelihood. These actions by the government are led to their down-slope relocation that in due course resulted in tensions between them and the Soy and souring of the cordial relations between the two groups (Ndiwa Mercy O. I., 28-3-2019, Kipsigon).

According to the Assistant county commissioner he said:

During Daniel arap Moi error he allocated land and even annulled previous allocations depending on the political leverage of community representatives and various local factions. This often occurred without any objective audit and appraisal of petitions from the different communities and environmental implications of such actions. Some people have benefited from land allocations at the expense of others, while some legitimate claimants have been evicted, adding to the resentment and tensions. This in turn led to the politicization of land as local politicians exploited the land issue in Mount Elgon for political gain as either defenders of their people's land rights or as dispensers of the scarce resource. The process of land allocation itself, the procrastination surrounding it as well as the fact that it has for most part not been conducted in a fair and transparent manner have all contributed to the conflict.

The governmental was also involved in conflict by taking too long to allocate land after dividing along community lines and deciding on the number of beneficiaries and size of allocations per family. This angered the Sabaot drawing suspicion and spread of propaganda among themselves hence leading to unending conflict.

Time lapse between establishment of settlement schemes and official allocation of land natural increases in family size occurred, creating demand and scarcities, by the time the government started the process of allocating land, the eligible families always were more than those that had initially been considered. Therefore land allocation meant that some families, including those (from the Soy and Mosop clans as well as migrants who were not supposed to benefit but had either allocated themselves land or purchased or leased land from earlier settlers, were evicted. This rendered many landless and homeless increasing the number of impoverished. The result was feelings of bitterness and injustice, and accusations of favoritism which intensified intra- and inter-community tensions between evictees and latter allocates (Chief Komen O.I3-4-2019 Kaptama).

In a way, these clashes have demonstrated that land rights struggles in Kenya increasingly form the contexts within which ethnic identity and local and national citizenship are negotiated and contested (Kariuki, 2004).

A village elder informants complained:

The illegal self-allocation of land by the landless whenever they were evicted became routine, further complicating the subsequent land allocation process. The process of land allocation in Mount Elgon and the inequalities resulting from it, with the underlying political patronage and corruption and favoritism by government officials.

The report emphasizes that land allocations which was surrounded by selfishness and corruption was the reason why the Sabaot fight among themselves each other due. In this case competition among elite from the same region for patronage resources—in itself becomes a source of conflict, adding to the challenges to resolve it (Obi, 1999).

3. Political Incitement

A number of the respondents pointed that politicians played a key role in the conflict between the Mosop and the Soy. An informant cited that politicians from the Soy befriended the rich Mosop men so that they can frustrate the poor by grabbing their land. He further said that the politicians used Forest land to acquire more votes by in sighting one clan against the other. From the research it was evident that Leaders from the Soy like the Matakwei who was local political leader had acquired large tracts of land from the Forest.

The finding above is supported by (Nasong'o and Murunga, 2007), who purported that Political marginalization had been a source of simmering outrage and formidable interest articulation from pastoralist communities particularly during the General Elections Politics of insecurity and identity provided the government with a strong argument against political pluralism. The politicians had occasionally incited their communities against others (Amisi, 1997).

The hostile social relations had been an important cause as well as effect of intense and violent competition over land in Mount Elgon District and that it operated on three levels. The Mosop lacked political representation until 1997 when the first Mosop councilor was elected. By 2004, the Mosop had only one councilor, one chief and four assistant chiefs in a district with an MP, eleven councilors, sixteen chiefs and forty two assistant chiefs (Western Kenya Human Rights Watch 2004). According to an administrator the soy were sidelined during delegations to state house to petition president Moi on land matters and have always been underrepresented on land allocation committees. The Soy on the other hand were dissatisfied by government decision to include the Mosop in Chepyuk III, which was created for the Soy.

The conflict had been exacerbated, as Mwasserah (2008) put it, by efforts 'by the clans to alienate each other and clear the area of the other clans'.

Assistant county commissioner said that Political competition between rival Soy politicians, especially between Serut and Kapondi, also created feuding factions within the Soy community, which was compounded by competition for land allocation in Chepyuk III.

Serut was not only accused by his rivals of including the Mosop in Chepyuk III, but also of using his position to privilege members of the Soy community allied to him in the land allocation process to the exclusion of his opponents' supporters. The feuding factions of the Soy community perceived the other faction's leader as a threat to their land rights and were therefore prepared to fight to ensure the ascendancy of its own leader. During December 2007 elections in which political violence between supporters of the two rival politicians escalated (King'wa Hellen, O.I., 26-3-2019 Kipsigon)

The Sabaot ethno-nationalist aspirations had taken various forms. The first was the Sabaot demand that an administrative district be created exclusively for them. They wanted such a district to be hived off the larger Bungoma District (in which they felt they were dominated by Bukusu) and Trans-Nzoia District in Rift Valley Province (their original homeland). They further demanded that the district be administrated by Rift Valley rather than Western Province (Human Rights Watch 1993; ICJ-Kenya 2000).

Mount Elgon area remained grossly underdeveloped because state resources channeled to the district were directed towards areas dominated by Bukusu. The Sabaot saw this pattern of resource distribution as a deliberate and systematic scheme by Bukusu politicians and technocrats to marginalize them on the basis of ethnic identity (Kibet Jonathan O.I., 6-4-2019 Kipsigon).

A *boda boda* respondent from Cheptais:

We thought that development of the district of their own would correct this imbalance and enable them to receive their fair share of state resources and enable them to chart their own development path. But that was not the case because we are still underdeveloped up to now.

From the field it came to the researchers' attention that the entire Mt. Elgon Sub-county was underdeveloped compared to the neighboring Sub-counties. Therefore it was evident that the politicians were involved in pushing the community to have their own district through conflict but still nothing much had been done in terms of development.

Simiyu (2008) the desire for an administrative district was granted in 1993 by the then president, Daniel arap Moi, but the district was hived exclusively from Bungoma District. Because Trans-Nzoia formed part of a different administrative province, incorporating parts of it into the new Mount Elgon District, as the Sabaot had demanded, would have required more than a presidential decree altering provincial boundaries can only be done within the constitutional frame work.

Informants from the Chepyuk schemes complained that in the period of Moi regime land could be assigned to those who were politically correct and in case of various local factions. This often occurred without any objective audit and of fallout; he could reposes the same land and allocate it to the new found friends. This led to formation appraisal of petitions from the different communities and environmental implications of such actions.

During Moi's regime there were allegations of corruption, political interference and nepotism have marred all phases of the resettlement programme. Some of the people benefited from land allocations at the expense of others, while some legitimate claimants have been evicted, adding to the resentment and tensions.(O.I 28/3/2019 Chebyuk)

An informant postulated that due to politicization of land as local politicians exploited the land issue in Mount Elgon for political gain as either defenders of their people's land rights or as dispensers of the scarce resource. The process of land allocation itself, the procrastination surrounding it as well as the fact that it has for most part not been conducted in a fair and transparent manner have all contributed to the conflict.

4. Emergence of counter-insurgency Militias

Most of the respondents asserted that after repeated attacks by the Soy-led SLDF, the Mosop organized their own defense despite the presence of security apparatuses and the establishment of three police bases in the area (at Chepyuk, Kopsiro and Kaimugul). That is how conflict sprang out among the Sabaot clans.

This is in line with Kiliku 1992 who notes that the situation worsened as the two worrying clans formed community vigilant groups to protect their communities.

A respondent from Kipsigon noted that SLDF fighters wore military fatigues and police uniforms and communicated in the national language, Kiswahili. We could not easily distinguish them from regular security personnel and usually mistook them for the latter. They used to carry out operations concurrently with security personnel, especially at night, in which they would enter homesteads, harass people and beat them up, confiscate property and extort money from the villagers. Contrary to the widely held belief that SLDF fighters lived in the forest, they actually not only lived amongst the local population, but most of them operated from their homes. They only assembled whenever 'there was a job to be done' – such as attacking a specific target at a specific time – after which they would merge with the civilian population again while security personnel would mount futile operations in the forest to hunt them down. When the SLDF attacked, they organized themselves in small groups of 10 to 12 people that made their movements difficult to detect''

According to the former MDF soldier he said that:

The murder of a respected Mosop elder and retired chief, Tenderesi Temoi, precipitated the formation of a counter-insurgency militia called the Moorland Defense Force (MDF). The MDF operated in the moorlands high in the mountain from where the Mosop had been relocated early on and to which they fled after attacks by the SLDF.

Therefore it was noted that the two militia groups were involved in the escalation of conflict in Mt. Elgon as they were carrying out revenge mission against each other in the name of protecting their own interest. One of the MDF fighters who explained their reasons for forming the MDF pointed out that the police bases did not protect them from the SLDF militia. They continued raiding us and we became desperate, leading to the creation of MDF. Like the SLDF, the MDF had retired military officers in its ranks who trained the youths in various aspects of combat (Chepkwemoi Maureen O. I., 27-3-2019 Kaptama)

This is in agreement with Simiyu (2008) only a small group – mainly the commanders and strategists, including former army and police officers – had specific bases and hiding places (such as caves on the forested mountain slopes). Here they had the advantage of being more adaptable to the terrain compared to the security officer. Also, during operations SLDF fighters did not carry weapons for long distances. Rather the weapons were delivered to them at designated places within close range of the target, to which they returned them after the operation and from where they were transported back to the ‘armory’ deep in the forest. It is claimed that people responsible for transporting the weapons disguised themselves as women, because their loads were rarely inspected. Intimidation and threats of retribution ensured that fearful residents did not volunteer information about the militia’s activities; let alone who its fighters were. As noted above, the militiamen lived amongst ordinary villagers and would probably have found out about betrayals from other locals.

5. Colonial Delimitations

Colonial delimitations come out as another cause of conflicts among the two groups with 10.53% of the respondents saying it causes of conflict. This is clear that where the boundaries exist today according to some group is not where there were originally with their ancestors. This was an indication that the causes of the conflicts are multi-faceted given that land is not the only reason for conflicts as it is widely thought. This argument is further supported by the elders’ analogy on the history of the conflicts among the Sabaot.

According to an elderly informant:

The Europeans moved us from our land in Chepkitale (Kitale) to the slopes of Mt. elgon where the land was scarce this has become a challenge for us because our source of livelihood is Agriculture. Therefore Due to Soy’s desperation Mosop invited the Soy whom they referred to the “strangers” to assist them cultivate the land because the Mosop depend on hunting and gathering. They worked on the Mosops land and later own they acquired their land through gifts from their masters and buying. The Mosop became jealousy hence sending them away from the land they had acquired.

The theory of constructivist is applicable to this report because the according to this theory the colonial powers structured the pattern and boundaries of African communities. During the colonial period laws were many. But this particular enactment meant that Africans had lost their land. This was cemented the Crown Lands Ordinance of 1903, revised in 1915. The revision was due to an opposition in 1908 as stated by Okoth, (1991). Kakai, (2000) notes that the reiterates, were insincere since they continued to acquire and administer land

selfishly, this led to occupation of a huge chunk of land that was very fertile in colonial Kenya. The region commonly referred to as the „White Highlands“ was inclusive of Trans Nzoia District which by November 29th, 1912 occupied a lot of the present areas of Bungoma County to which the area of study is found. The line of demarcation was from the source of River Kamukuywa in Mt. Elgon forest, passing through the confluences of rivers Kibisi and Nzoia to River Kipkaren opposite Marabusi Hill since pre-colonial days but after independence it is clear that there has been conflict between the Mosop and the Soy over raiding of cows.

According to a Soy informant:

The Mosop believed that they are the owners of the cow, therefore the we are cultivators and whenever they were found us keeping cattle's the Mosop raided them at night. Due to this hatred they could not sell their cows to the us. We started domesticating animals but the Mosop raided the Soy hence leading to tension and conflict among the two groups.

A Mosop informant pointed out that the Soy's had been stealing their cows and every time the two clans raided they killed people. Hence the blame game on who stole the cows has been an old age problem not only among the Sabao but it is also common among the pastoralist communities the raid and kill because of their value for cow. The cattle rustlers deplete the socio-economic livelihoods of the Bantu communities, dispossessing them of their herds of cattle. Worse still, the rustlers steal the food stuff first, and then burn the food stores/houses (Akiwumi, 1999).

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that; conflicts between the Mosop and Soy occurred primarily as a result of a clash in the sharing of the scarce natural resources. The conflicts over boundaries, governance and economic development as well as negative ethnicity escalated the volatile situations in the county.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended that; the government should address the land tenure question and ensure equitable distribution of resources among the warring groups if a lasting solution would be reached. Land is such a sensitive issue and hence, if not adequately and appropriately handled, cases of violence may not cease any time soon. The government agencies on the ground should strive to improve on equity in the management of natural resources so as to enable the community adapts to effects of climate change and builds resilience.

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