

The Relationship Between Maintaining Status As A Socio-Cultural Element And Conflict Dynamism Within Kerio Valley Delta

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Abstract- Whereas the Kerio Valley Delta, in Kenya, like many other arid and semi-arid regions has been experiencing pastoralist and ethnic conflicts that has resulted to the increased numbers of humanitarian aid by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), there seems to be little empirical focus to isolate the factors relating to maintaining status as factors behind escalation of conflict and the shift in the nature and intensity of the conflict. The study thus, sought to establish the relationship between maintaining status and conflict dynamism within Kerio Valley Delta, Kenya. Two theories, the conflict transformation theory and cultural anchored the study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to target the community members in the in the Kerio Valley Delta. The sample size was calculated by getting 400 respondents from the target population. Snowball sampling was used based on the acquaintances who know the resource persons from the community. This study utilized questionnaires and interview schedule to get relevant data from the respondents. The study used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative elements of the data received from the questionnaires categorized per objective. The results show that maintaining status enhanced influence on conflicts in the Kerio Valley Delta. The study thus recommends that a systematic and concretized framework to deal with the causes, nature and underpinnings of maintaining status to reduce conflicts should be created.

Index Terms- maintaining status, culture, conflict outcomes, conflict dynamism

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts are common phenomena in many regions of the world, especially in dry lands which are endowed with scarce natural resources (Sterzel et al., 2014). Conflict has been one of the devastating phenomena in Africa in the last three decades, with Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASAL) being the most vulnerable (Hussein, 2014). Conflict in these areas manifest with violence that is often based on ethnicity; indeed, ethnic connotations to conflicts have been touted as a major cause of conflict after resource-based conflict narrative. Keller (2009) in a study done in the USA on status and power noted that throughout history, the drive for obtaining status and power has been thought of as a fundamental motivator of human behavior and which then become

a precipitate to conflicts when the power shifts. He states that to maintain status and have power is to have control over resources, to have the ability to influence others' behavior, and to be able to act of your own volition. The extent to which the said status can be attributable to conflicts in Kerio Valley Delta therefore needs investigation.

The idea of conflicts over power or power struggles is not new, with many examples of power conflict within other disciplines, such as sociology and political science. For example, in his development of a general theory of conflict processes, the sociologist, Blalock (1989), incorporates the concepts of power and dependency as key components of explaining real world conflicts including warfare, international conflicts, ethnic conflicts, and even interpersonal interactions. Blalock (1989) argues that with its basis around dependency created by a need or desire for certain resources, the notion of power is a key part of conflict processes and influences both the initiation of conflict as well as the outcomes of conflict episodes. Similarly, other sociologists include struggles for power and status as key components in their definitions of social conflict. With this conceptualization, it would be helpful to investigate the extent to which maintaining status has impacted on conflict dynamism in Kerio Valley Delta.

Socio-cultural factors extends to concepts of race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, sexual orientations, political and religious association and conflict would arise from struggles over values, community status, power and resources. According to Geller and Alam, (2010) in a study done in Europe, socio-cultural factors are important in creating and understanding conflict in general, socio-cultural factors feed into the systems dynamics processes. He further states in conflict-torn Afghanistan 'traditional' socio-cultural mechanisms, political culture and power structures are important factors in understanding the conflict. Culture is not something groups belong to but rather a tool that guides action, culture plays a role in our increasingly interconnected lives where we must interact with people from vastly different cultural backgrounds and are exposed to ideologies and events from the other end of the world hence, peace and conflict are culturally influenced processes (Wagoner, 2014). In the 20th century, anthropologists began theorizing about culture as an object of scientific analysis. Some understood culture as being definitive of human nature and used it to distinguish human adaptive strategies from the largely instinctive adaptive strategies of animals, whereas

others used it to refer to symbolic representations and expressions of human experience, with no direct adaptive value (Laland & Brown, 2011).

Maintaining status has contributed to the growing tension and persistent internal conflicts in Cameroon which are potential ingredients for conflict (Sama, 2007). As seen in South Africa the causes of conflict between the San community and other communities is associated with unemployment and unfair treatment which are socio-economic factors (Beyene, 2014). However, Hagg, (2006) states that Cultural diversity can be a tool for conflict resolution and peace-making processes.

In Kenya, conflict and its dynamics have reached unprecedented proportions in the past decade. It has changed in nature, scale and dimension due to a number of factors, including the proliferation of small arms in the region, the commercialization of raiding, high rates of unemployment in pastoral areas, frequent droughts and reduced respect for traditional conflict-solving mechanisms (Bond & Meier, 2005). It is clear that researchers have mostly focused on the economic aspects of cattle rustling creating a gap on the social aspects of it. Some conflicts within and between pastoralist communities, such as raiding and cattle rustling have a long history and to some extent, have become an aspect of traditional pastoralist culture (Kaimba *et al.*, 2011). Thus, the reference to cattle rustling in the study as a culture and a way of maintaining community status. On the one hand, raiding leads to distrust between communities which are prerequisite of conflict (Schilling, et al., 2014). It is therefore imperative to examine the the relationship between maintaining status as a socio-cultural element and conflict dynamism within Kerio Valley Delta

Statement of the Problem

Whereas the Kerio Valley Delta, in Kenya, like many other arid and semi-arid regions has been experiencing pastoralist and ethnic conflicts that has resulted to the increased numbers of humanitarian aid by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) (Kimenju *et.al* 2003;), there seems to be little empirical focus to isolate the maintaining status factors behind escalating conflict and the shift in the nature and intensity of the conflict. Thus, this study aims at creating an understanding as to what extent socio-cultural factors like maintaining status, tribal identity and cultural belief systems have impacted the dynamics of conflict in the Kerio Valley Delta remains; particularly now that the conflict has escalated and is executed with more creativity and sophistication. This study hopes to fill this gap.

Research Objective

The research objective was to assess the relationship between maintaining status as a socio-cultural element and conflict dynamism within Kerio Valley Delta

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by two theories; the social conflict theory and the culture theory. The social conflict theory was suggested by Karl Marx in 1867 and it claims that the society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources, it holds that social order is maintained by domination and power rather than consensus and conformity. According to the social conflict theory, those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible chiefly by suppressing the poor and the powerless (Coombs & Avrunin, 2013) A basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups within a society work to maximise their own benefits. It focuses on competition between groups within the society, it views social and economic institutions as tools of struggle between groups or classes used to maintain inequality and the dominance of the ruling class (Cragun & Cragun, 2006).

Social conflict theories assume that competition is the default rather than cooperation, given conflict theorists assumption that conflict occurs between social classes, one outcome of this conflict is revolution, the idea is that change in a power dynamic between groups does not happen as the result of adaptation position control (Andrews, 2012). In Africa, the culture of conflict and violence stems from ethnic, religious, regional, racial differences and class divide. These reflects the diversity of cultures, and increased economic inequalities between the haves and have not. Oftentimes, cultural and economic factors intertwine as causes of conflict, highlighting the complexity of conflicts in Africa. Violent conflicts in Kerio valley between communities living in Baringo, Elgeyo Marakwet and west Pokot counties, have led to unprecedented displacements in the past years (Elfverson, 2016) with more than 30 people dead and many others displaced from their homes and farms from a single episode of conflict. Competition over access to pasture and water and control of dwindling resources along River Kerio, ethnic intolerance and political differences have been blamed for the conflict in the valley. As much as the national government has been blamed for being a bystander, political rivalry is also to blame for the escalating Pokot-Marakwet conflicts dating back to pre-colonial times. The conflicts have in recent times become more violent and complex at least from the fatalities and displacements being reported.

Culture theory as espoused by Ogburn (1966) is a subbranch to semiotics and comparative anthropology that is intended to explain the heuristic concepts attendant to culture in practical and scientific terms and format. The 19th century saw scholars define culture as the vast portfolio of human activities but others substituted culture with 'civilization.' It was until the 20th century that culture was viewed using scientific lenses. Consequently, culture was considered as strategies used by human as opposed to the instinctive animal dynamics. Others still looked at culture as symbolic expressions and representations of human action but all looked at culture as distinctive to human nature (Fridgal, 2013).

Culture theory seeks to elucidate the integral relationship between human nature and human actions (Ogburn 1966). Consequently, culture becomes such an essential element of human existence within the human environment and the human adaptation to historical events that comes from it. Furthermore,

now that culture is considered as a principal adaptive instrument of humans and occurs much quicker than human biological evolution, significant cultural modification can be looked at as culture adapting to itself (Ogburn 1966).

Consequently, anthropologists often argue on if human behaviour is dissimilar to animal behaviour in grade more than in kind; they must surely get ways to differentiate cultural norms from sociological behaviour and psychological norms and behaviour. This infers that in the event culture is utilized as a cause to conflicts, it is just a response to distinctive human behaviour. It is in this last argument that this theory becomes relevant to the present study.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Orodho and Kombo (2012), a research design is the strategy, assembly and approach of investigation considered so as to gain answers to research questions and to control variables. The study adopted a survey design to describe the existing research concern by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitudes and values or through observation. This study aimed to investigate maintaining status and conflict dynamism in the Kerio Valley Delta. Since the research problem under investigation was descriptive in nature, a survey research design was considered appropriate for collecting, analyzing and presenting the data. Further, descriptive survey allows for a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The descriptive element was useful to describe the status maintained and the conflict dynamics.

Study Area

Kerio Valley lies between the Tugen Hills and the Elgeyo Escarpment in Kenya. Kerio valley stretches about 80Km long and 10 Km wide with the deepest point being Cherangani hills and the Tugen Hills. The valley also serves as natural border line in most sections between the counties of Elgeyo Marakwet, Baringo, West Pokot, Turkana and Samburu. The communities living along the valley are predominantly pastoral with Tugen and Marakwets practicing little of crop farming. The Tugen, Pokot and Marakwet are linguistically related groups from the larger Kalenjin ethnic group Pkalya *et. al* (2004). Kerio valley has highly variable and erratic rainfall, the temperatures are high with a mean of between 26°C and 38°C, (Schilling *et.al*, 2012). At Kimwarer in the southern part of the valley, fluoride is mined by the Kenya Fluorspar Company. The southern parts of the valley are settled by the Elgeyo people and the northern part by the Marakwet people. Tugen people live on the slopes of the Tugen Hills. The Valley extends into West Pokot and Marakwet border and ends at border to Turkana County. The valley narrows as it nears Samburu-Turkana border before ending at Lake Turkana. The choice of Kerio valley for this study was informed by the inter-relations of the groups; being pastoral and secondly being Nilotic

have a common practice in raids, and code of conduct relating to the practice, yet for many years, this communities have constantly fought along the valley and no solution has ever been reached as to the ownership or resource use pattern.

Study Population

A target population refers to a group of people or study subject who share similar factors and who form the anchor of a study. This study targeted the community leaders and members in the Kerio Valley Delta. It sought to get data from the community elders, members and 'soldiers' from the Pokot, Turkana, Marakwet, Ilchamus and the Samburu. According to available County records they were approximately ten thousand residents.

Data Collection Tools

This study utilized questionnaires, focus group discussion guides and key informant interview guides to get relevant data from the respondents. The selection of these tools was directed by the general landscape of data to be put together as well as the objectives of the study. The questionnaires comprised of both closed and open-ended questions so as to offer the respondents the option to reply to that which has not been clearly written down in the questionnaire. Key informant interview guides were designed for the elders from the community, opinion leaders and 'war generals'. The focus group discussions and key informant interviews was recorded and later transcribed.

Data Management and Analysis

The study used descriptive techniques to analyse the quantitative elements of the data received from the questionnaires categorized per objective. The descriptive statistics used was the frequency percentages, mean, which indicates the average performance of a group or a measure of some variable, and the standard deviation which indicates how to spread out a set of scores is around the mean. All data was analysed at a level of significance of 95% and the degree of freedom depending on the particular case as was determined. Analysis was done using SPSS version 22 which is a computerized statistical package by encoding responses from questionnaires and interview guides. Data from the interview guides was analysed using narrative analysis where people's quoted words are categorized according to themes and presented in prose based on their relevance to the study objectives. Presentation of this information was done using tables.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Conflict Dynamism

The first part of the study sought to examine the dependent variable that was conflict dynamisms. The results are seen in Table 1

Table 1 Conflict Dynamism

	Mean	StD
Conflicts has become our way of life	2.70	0.74
We have been unable to resolve conflicts	2.19	0.95
The conflict has become too much	2.16	0.84
Many people have died as a result of conflict	2.67	0.83
We would wish to resolve the conflict	2.23	0.72
Conflicts have affected education attainment in our region	2.17	1.09
Conflicts have created diminishing economic returns in our region	2.06	1.11
Conflicts have affected our social lives in our region	3.09	0.99

The results above show the extent to which conflict dynamism is significant in Kerio Valley Delta. Looking at the Mean and standard deviation results it is clear that all the aspects were significantly true for the area. Thus, conflicts had become a way of life for the Kerio Valley Delta inhabitants (M=2.70 SD=0.74), they had been unable to resolve conflicts (M=2.19 SD=0.95); the conflict had become too much (M=2.16 SD=0.84); Many people had died as a result of conflict (M=2.67 SD=0.83); They wished to resolve the conflict (M=2.23 SD=0.72); conflicts had affected education attainment in the region (M=2.17 SD=1.09); conflicts had created diminishing economic returns in the region (M=2.06 SD=1.11); and conflicts had affected the social lives in the region (M=3.09 SD=0.99).

This results generally agrees with literature. Basically, cconflicts are mainly manifested as political, economic, environmental, exploitation of natural resources, land clashes, religious differences and lately terrorism and Kenya has continued to be divided on the basis of ethnic, socio-cultural, regional, political and economic lines. As a result, there have been sporadic conflicts among different communities in Kenya (Lenairoshi, 2014). Community divisions along political and ideological lines, gave rise to protracted and institutionalized waves of ethnic and land clashes.

For the Marakwet, Pokot and Turkana, these communities experience high levels of inter-communal violence; much higher than elsewhere in Africa (Dowd & Raleigh, 2013). This violence is perpetrated by identity based communal militias and often involves cycles of attacks and counter attacks (Dowd & Raleigh, 2013). Competition over land ownership and land use drive local conflicts, which is sometimes triggered by the migration of herders in search of water and pasture. This is not helped by a minimal

presence of security and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

This is further supported by the focus group results from the selected groups from the regions looked at, namely; Baringo, Turkana, Samburu and the Pokot. They generally observe that conflict is when an enemy attacks them as a community and with an objective of stealing their stock or displace them from their land. They noted that conflict is common, most of the time it is not reported but occurs almost every two months with their neighbors, for the Pokots, its mostly the Turkana and occasionally the Marakwet.

The common conflict is as a result of cattle thefts but also sometimes, people are killed while grazing or while on transit. The group blamed the attacks on the neighbors who attacks them especially when they have low strengths in an area and the aim is normally to displace or revenge. Further, the cause is mostly competition for grazing land, the Turkana came to our land and have now even put an administration from their side. We can never have peace unless the Government moves this people (Turkana).

The conflicts are normally fought by youth, but they have blessings from their elders. Even the Turkana women participate in conflict unlike our community where women are not supposed to fight. The elders bless and finance the youth while women support them with food and even fight back if they see an enemy. Turkana hate them because we are fighting for the rights of our land which they encroached and do not want to leave. Secondly is that they have fire power because they were provided with arms government as KPRs and also accessed them from neighboring countries.

An interviewee from Pokot Community, 6th Aug 2019, Ameyan, Baringo County.

The Pokots further believe that the that the Governments since the colonial time have been favoring the Turkanas and that is why the Pokot feel undervalued. The injustice has been always there but they don't really know why they are hated. The youths say they post security sentries at all times to the border lines to protect them from raiders from the Turkana community.

Maintaining Status and Conflict Dynamism

The overall objective of the study was to ascertain the relationship between maintaining status and conflict dynamism. The results are seen in Table 4.7 and succeeding focus group and interviews.

Table 4.7 Maintaining Status and conflict Dynamism

	Mean	StD
My community is highly respected	2.80	0.75
My family is highly respected	2.18	0.87
We fight to maintain the respect	2.27	0.94
The other tribe does not respect us and we must teach them a lesson	2.89	0.83
Generally, We must fight to keep the respect	2.19	0.72
For one to be recognised they must have large stock	3.11	1.02
For one to be respected they must have more than one wife	2.07	1.04
For one to be respected they must participate in raid	2.89	0.79

From Table 1, it is evidently clear that all the statements on maintaining status were significantly valid and true. Thus, the respondents felt that their community was highly respected (M=2.80 SD=0.75); the family was also highly respected (M=2.18 SD=0.87); they fought to maintain the respect (M=2.27 SD=0.94); the other tribe did not respect them and they had to teach them a lesson (M=2.89 SD=0.83); Generally, fought to keep the respect (M=2.19 SD=0.72); For one to be recognised they had to have large stock (M=3.11 SD=1.02); For one to be respected they must have more than one wife (M=2.07 SD=1.04); and for one to be respected they must participate in raid (M=2.89 SD=0.79).

Literature reviewed correspond with the findings from the first overall objective. Keller (2009) in a study done in the USA on status and power noted that throughout history, the drive for obtaining status and power has been thought of as a fundamental

motivator of human behavior and which then become a precipitate to conflicts when the power shifts. He states that to maintain status and have power is to have control over resources, to have the ability to influence others' behavior, and to be able to act of your own volition. The extent to which the said status can be attributable to conflicts in Kerio Valley Delta therefore needs investigation.

Maintaining status has contributed to the growing tension and persistent internal conflicts in Cameroon which are potential ingredients for conflict (Sama, 2007). As seen in South Africa the causes of conflict between the San community and other communities is associated with unemployment and unfair treatment which are socio-economic factors (Beyene, 2014). However, Hagg, (2006) states that Cultural diversity can be a tool for conflict resolution and peace-making processes. Identity plays a crucial role in the management of social systems and maintaining social order, individuals behaviour is guided by and equally defines the community identity and knowledge of community provides a critical source of socio-political hierarchy (Masolo, 2002). Social groups rapidly self-organize into hierarchies, where members vary in their level of power, influence, skill, or dominance (Koski, et al, 2015).

Based on the focus groups discussions this aspect was prominently noted, that, the Pokots for instance are status minded and expansionists and that is their nature. They always push off other communities. They made an attempt to push the Turkana and after a month's fight, Lomelo centre was opened up so that that became a base and the fight was successful. One interviewer mentioned that the two tribes have had inter marriages and some of the prominent politicians in Pokot, their mothers or fathers were from Turkana. The other focus group discussions touching on the Tugen, Marakwet, Samburu and Turkana noted that while conflicts occurred as a result of land pressures and land use coupled with revenge and cattle rustling, they all soon escalated to preserving respect and pride within the tribe. The 'we-cannot-loose-and-we-are-men attitude' become a conduit via which escalation of conflicts took place.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study objective, it is evidently clear that the Kerio Valley delta inhabitants felt that their community was highly respected, the family was also highly respected, they fought to maintain the respect and the other tribe did not respect them and they had to teach them a lesson. Generally, they fought to keep the respect and for one to be respected they must have more than one wife and must participate in raid. It can thus be concluded that maintaining status has a strong and positive relationship with conflict dynamism in the Kerio Valley Delta.

The government both nationally and at the County should engage communities in joint activities like schools where children from both communities go together. This will help forge friendships and conduits of understanding that builds consensus and peace.

The government should conduct a simultaneous disarming of communities to reduce de-escalation of conflicts. This should be done in a fair manner that does not leave one group feeling discriminated or targeted. More involvement of local politicians in

such operations together with chiefs to help build rapport amongst the influencers and the influenced.

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