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Cattle Rustling and Banditry in the Rift Valley: Is It Culture or Food Security and Climate Change Adoptability?

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Abstract
Cattle rustling in the Rift Valley has become endemic and pastoral areas, in particular, are among the most affected. This vice often overlaps with climate change and desertification. There have been constant conflicts among pastoral communities especially those occupying the arid and semi-arid regions of northern Kenya, mainly the Pokot, Turkana and Samburu. This paper seeks to establish whether cattle rustling and banditry is an expression of culture or an approach employed by these communities towards achieving food security and climate change adaptability. This paper is guided by two theories; the social conflict theory and social cubism theory. Social conflict theory argues that individuals and groups (social classes) within society interact on the basis of conflict rather than consensus. On the other hand, social cubism theory, originally designed for the analysis of international ethno-territorial conflict, is used in the analysis of micro-conflicts in other settings, such as the case of the conflict among the Pokot, Samburu and Turkana within the Rift Valley of Kenya. Social cubism directs the researcher to look at an issue from a multiplicity of perspectives and to acknowledge that at different times, under different circumstances and in different settings, the factors will interrelate in different ways. On methodology, this paper relies on both primary and secondary data. Primary data comprises archival materials and oral interviews, while secondary data is obtained from published materials such as books, journals and magazines. The collected data was analysed using three analytical frames; that is, content analysis, theoretical reflections and document analysis.
Keywords: Banditry, cattle rustling, climate change, food security, Rift Valley

Introduction

Cattle rustling or raiding to steal livestock has been a social-cultural practice among communities for the longest time. From Moses' Law in the book of Exodus, seemingly, it was a major societal practise that seemed to have been condemned. Cheserek et al. (2012) defines it as an act of forceful acquisition of cattle from one community by another using guns or other weapons and in turn leaving behind loss of lives and destruction of property.

In Australia, the act of stealing livestock is often referred to as duffing, and the perpetrator is referred to as a duffer (Baker, 1945) while in other places like Queensland, the practice is known as poddy-dodging with the perpetrator commonly referred to as a poddy-dodger (Anderson, 2018). Elsewhere in North America, especially in the Wild West cowboy culture, cattle theft is dubbed rustling, while an individual who engages in it is a rustler (Lincoln, 1976).

Banditry, on the other hand, is a type of organized crime committed by threatening victims or use of violence. A person who engages in banditry is known as a bandit and primarily commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, either individually or in groups. Banditry is a vague

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concept of criminality and in modern usage, it can be synonymous with gangsterism, brigandage, marauding, terrorism, piracy and thievery. In modern usage, the word has become a synonym for 'thief', hence the term 'one-armed bandit' for gambling machines that can leave the gambler with no money. For cattle rustling to flourish, therefore, cattle rustlers have to employ banditry to the best of their tact and experience (Zmora, 1997).

Using desktop review as a study methodology, this paper examines the concept of cattle rustling and banditry, its historical origins, reasons for its practice by various communities and the nature. More significantly, the paper focuses on cattle rustling and banditry in the Rift Valley of Kenya with a view to establish whether cattle rustling and banditry is an expression of culture or an approach employed by the cattle rustling communities to achieve food security and climate change adaptability.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by two theories; the social conflict theory and the social cubism theory. Social conflict theory was proposed by Karl Marx (1818-1883), a political theorist, philosopher and economist who criticised the capitalist system in most of his works. He advocated for socialist and communist societies hence being regarded as the father of social conflict theory. Marx looked at social conflict theory from a primarily economic perspective. This theory argues that individuals and groups (social classes) within society interact on the basis of conflict rather than consensus (Collins, 1974). In this paper, this theory is utilised to explain the existing struggle for wealth creation among the cattle rustling communities in the Rift Valley creating social hierarchy that effectively creates distinct classes based on wealth, power and prestige.

On the other hand, social cubism theory, originally designed by Byrne and Carter (1996) for the analysis of international ethno-territorial conflict, is used in the analysis of micro-conflicts in other settings, such as the case of the conflict among the Pokot, Samburu, Turkana and other communities within the Rift Valley of Kenya. Social cubism directs the researcher to look at an issue from a multiplicity of perspectives and to acknowledge that at different times, under different circumstances and in different settings, the factors will interrelate in different ways.

Origins of Cattle Rustling: A Global Survey

Cattle rustling dates from way back with the first attested case said to have taken place over seven thousand years ago. This is one of the oldest-known aspects of Proto-Indo-European culture, which is seen in inscriptions on artifacts such as the Norse Golden Horns of Gallehus, and in works such as the Old Irish, the *paṇis* of the *Rigveda*, the *Mahabharata* cattle raids and cattle rescues, and the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, who steals the cattle of Apollo (Lincoln, 1976).

In Central Asia, cattle rustling was practised by the Turco-Mongol an ethno-cultural synthesis that rose in Asia and attempted to raid their neighbouring communities in the 14th century. They conquered Timur, and a small band of followers raided travellers for goods, especially animals such as sheep, horses, and cattle. Marozzi (2004) described how this practice was conducted including a tactical kill that was employed.

Cattle rustling in Britain was practised in relation to an act of insult under the code of conduct or to keep the whole clan fed during a difficult winter. This was counted as a major achievement during war among the Irish clans which extended into the 18th century. These acts have been depicted in the stories from Irish mythology. At the Anglo-Scottish border, cattle-raiding and banditry by the Border reivers was a serious problem for many centuries on both sides of the warfare between Scottish clans. During the 17th and 18th centuries, many Scottish clan

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chiefs would similarly operate an extra-legal watch over the cattle herds of the Lowland gentry in return for protection money, which Highland Chiefs similarly used to feed their tenants and clansmen. Any stolen cattle from herds under the Chiefs' Watch were either retrieved or paid for, in full (Murray, 1982).

Elsewhere in the Old West American region, the act of cattle stealing was seen as a serious crime to an extent that in some cases, it resulted in having vigilantes hanging or shooting cattle raiders and thieves found stealing (*Reinhold, 1987*). Additionally, it is argued that one of the major causes of tensions between Mexico and the American states in the years leading up to the Mexican–American War of 1846–1848 was the frequent cases of cattle raids and or rustling by Native Americans from north of the border who found flourishing cattle markets in Texas. These raids left thousands of people dead and devastated in northern Mexico. When American troops entered northern Mexico in 1846, they found a demoralized people and so got little resistance from the civilian population.

Cattle raiding and stealing in Chile and Argentina became a major issue at the end of the 19th century in Argentina, where cattle stolen during *malones* were taken through *Camino de los chilenos* across the Andes to Chile. Here, they were exchanged for alcoholic beverages and firearms. Several indigenous groups and outlaws, such as the Boroano and Ranquel peoples, ravaged the southern frontier of Argentina in search of cattle. To prevent the cattle raiding, the Argentine government built a system of trenches called Zanja de Alsina in the 1870s. Most cattle raids ended after the military campaigns of the Conquest of the Desert in the 1870s, and the following partition of Patagonia established by the Boundary Treaty of 1881 between Chile and Argentina.

Livestock theft In Israel, especially that of sheep, goats and cows along with tractors and irrigation equipment, has been in the recent past, one of the most difficult problems confronted by farmers. It is argued that more than 400 cases of cattle rustling and livestock theft are reported annually especially in the northern region of Israel. This leads to loss of millions of *shekels* annually. Most of the stolen livestock is taken to the West Bank, quickly slaughtered, then smuggled back into Israel, where it is sold by butchers to unsuspecting customers (*Bennet, 1976).*

In the continental Africa, the practice is not any different from the rest of the world. For instance, in Nigeria, cattle rustling has been a common practice for long. Cattle rustling activities have resulted in the theft of millions of cows as well as causing loss of lives and destruction of property. This has continued to create a security challenge to the civilians and seem to have become a major business involving the herders and heavily armed bandits.

In Sudan, the conflict over pastures and cattle raids has been happening more specifically between Dinka and Nuer as they battle for grazing grounds. For instance, in the state of Jonglei, cattle raids in August 2011 left around 600 people dead. Once again in January 2012, ethnic clashes related to cattle theft killed between 2,000 and 3,000 people and displaced as many as 34,500 in the area around Pibor (Diamond, 2012).

Is Raiding a Culture or an Organized Crime?

For centuries, cattle raiding among pastoralists in East Africa was a generally accepted cultural practice to acquire livestock to replenish decimated herds after periods of drought. Cattle raiding as an institution of mutual exchange among communities was governed by regulations established by elders to protect life. Warriors sought the blessings of elders and seers in order to successfully raid neighbouring communities.

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Raiding was seen as the job of a warrior as it was used as a process through which young men (warriors) exhibited their bravery which is key to defending community property (livestock and territory). Raiding was also important for warriors as it was the only means to acquiring livestock for the payment of bride-wealth. Raids therefore involved combat between warriors from opposing communities. Women, children and the elderly were never targeted.

From a critical perspective, it seems like cattle raiding changed when communities started acquiring illicit firearms trafficked from neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia in the 1980s. Guns weaponised the conventional raiding and through force, enabled the acquisition of large herds of livestock, which precipitated commercialised cattle raiding. The use of automatic weapons such as AK47s and M16s saw the cultural practice of cattle raiding evolving into cattle rustling-a violent organised criminal enterprise aimed at acquiring cattle from pastoralists' lands for commercial gain.

> *Traditionally, small-scale stock theft was a way of balancing community wealth and power, but crime and capitalism have commercialised this practice, making it a significant economic threat. This practice has caused many deaths among rural communities and security forces in Kenya and South Sudan are concerned.* (Kurgat Rono, former Anti-Theft police officer).

In the northern Rift Valley of Kenya, cattle rustling has been a major concern. It is no longer a cultural practice, but a form of organised crime which results to deaths of people (including the police and military), destruction of property, and theft of hundreds of thousands of livestock.

Causes of Cattle Rustling in the Rift Valley: Is it Cultural, Climate Change or Food Shortage?

In Kenya, cattle rustling is the dominant cause of conflicts among the Pokot, Masaai, Marakwet and other pastoral community members. Cattle rustling in West Pokot County involves the Turkana, Sabaot, Samburu, Marakwet, Sabiny and Karamajong communities and it is a way of life for the pastoralists where pastoral communities like the 'Morans' organized raids and execution as a symbol of dominance. These raids are normally planned, guided and moderated by community elders. Usually, retaliatory attacks always taken place by the rival community elders at the most appropriate time, although fatalities do not occur. However, contemporary raids have become more frequent and fatal. This is attributed to the increase in extreme climatic events, particularly droughts and proliferation of arms respectively (Huho, 2012).

Most importantly, scholars associate cattle rustling with culture, illegal proliferation of arms, hunger, climate change, boundary disputes, insecurity, political issues, unemployment and economic gain and means of livelihood among others (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2014). Greiner (2013) in his analysis of cattle rustling in Kenya, notices that livestock raiding among the Northern Kenyan pastoralists has profoundly changed from what it used to be. It has been politicized in relation to claims over administrative boundaries, struggles for exclusive access to land, and attempts to establish or safeguard an ethnically homogeneous electoral base. These conflicts are part of Kenya's troubled politics of decentralization and as such, they must be viewed in the context of wider political developments in the country.

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Based on ethnographic field work in East Pokot and surrounding areas in Kenya's Central Rift Valley Province, this also shows how cattle rustling has become a specific form of violent determining factor and as an adapted, dangerous, and powerful political weapon. Greiner, (2013) goes on to say that, in studying the patterns of cattle rustling in Kenya, the links between raiders and politicians often remain obscure. However, the violence in pastoralist areas is intimately linked to recent political developments in Kenya at large. Processes of democratization, particularly the re-establishment of multi-partyism in 1992, the end of the Moi regime in 2002, the post-election violence of 2007–2008, the current political administrative restructuring, as well as the ongoing land reforms have created windows of opportunity for violent negotiation of territorial claims in the pastoralist areas in Kenya's arid North. These cause and triggers cattle rustling in Kenya.

Based on the study, there are numerous causes of cattle rustling which include cultural causes, ecological causes, economic causes, and political and colonial antecedent. However, for the purposes of this paper, cultural factors, food security and climate change causes are discussed.

Cattle Rusting As a Culture

According to Ngaga (2012), the cultural practice of giving bride price before marriage is a major cause of cattle rustling. It is apparent that this factor has had a major impact on the spread and practice of the culture of cattle rustling and conflict in the North Rift part of Kenya. This cultural practice has made the Pokots, the Marakwet and the Masaai among others think that cattle rustling is a normal way of life.

It is also noted among the Pokots in Kenya that there exists the practice of 'Sapana' (a Pokot male traditional rite of passage from adolescence to elder hood), which influences cattle rustling. During 'sapana' ceremony, the man spears his favourite bull and serves meat to his friends and other elders, after which he is officially introduced to the elder hood club and is allowed to participate in community matters as an elder. Those who have not served 'sapana' meal have no say in community matters. The 'sapana' cultural rite encourage the young adults to acquire bulls by whatever means so that they could be respected in the community. Women are identified as one of the major factors that triggered the spread of cattle raid because they celebrate successful cattle raiders with songs while using mockery against those who did not participate in raids. The women respect men with huge herds of cattle, while those without cattle are seen as cowards and not respected. The women always had songs for each occasion when raids are conducted successfully (Cheserek et al., 2012).

Manu (2014) observes that traditionally, cattle rustling among the pastoral communities in other parts of the world are considered as a cultural practice which is sanctioned and controlled by the elders. This shows that in Eastern Africa, most especially among the herders in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan and even other parts of Africa like Lesotho, have cultural rites and practices are the major causes of cattle rustling. One can argue that it is from the cultural practice over a period of time that the cultural raid developed new trends, tendencies and dynamics, leading to commercialization and internationalization of the practice, contrary to the views of early scholars who trivialized cattle rustling as a mere cultural practice. By way of inference, it could be deduced that the cause of cattle rustling among the Pokot and the Marakwet people of Kenya is largely attributed to cultural practices, traditions, customs, values and beliefs. Although there are other factors that cause cattle rustling among the Pokot and the Marakwet people, the major cause identified by the scholars is the culture and tradition of the Pokots and the Marakwet.

Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) also observe that cattle rustling is connected to political struggles as is evident in some parts of Africa. They illustrate that, in 2013, many people were

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killed and wounded in a series of massive cattle raids perpetrated by rebels in Jonglei region of South Sudan. To them, the killing and massive cattle rustling took a political perspective. Similarly, in Nigeria, the spate of cattle rustling in the Northern part of the country in the recent years has sometimes been associated with the activities of the Boko Haram insurgence group. Based on this analysis, it seems that the views of Greiner (2013), Okoli and Okpaleke (2014), are similar in the way they analysed the causes of cattle rustling in relations to politics and political processes.

Cattle Rustling Due To Climate Change

It is no doubt that climate change has greatly contributed to shortage of rains with prolonged seasons of high temperatures across the East Africa region and beyond. This has led to a decrease in animal feeds, drinking water and grazing grounds, especially in the vast and expansive Rift Valley region. It is argued that 'high' season of cattle rustling in Kenya usually occurred at the onset of the rains, between August and October, when herders moved from dry-season pastures to community-owned pastures. As pastoralists moved back home, there was always a higher propensity for raids to enable the replacement of decimated herds.

In Africa, some 500-600 million people live in the arid and semi-arid parts of the world and 30-40 million of them depend entirely on animals for their livelihoods. Of these 30-40 million people, 50-60 percent of them are found in Africa. The Horn of Africa, where arid and semi-arid areas make up 70 percent of the total land area, contains the largest grouping of pastoralists in the world. These areas provide an average of 20 to 30 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the Horn countries. At the local level, as much as 70 percent of cash income is generated from livestock. All aspects of pastoral social and economic life are ordered in relation to livestock and the environment in which they live (Mette, 2013).

In pastoral societies, cattle hold central value within society and are the basis of association in a complex of social, political and religious institutions. The system depends largely on the availability of water and its distribution as well as the quality of pasture and access to it. However, pastoralism is under threat due to a range of factors including: weak governance; inadequate land and resource management policies; political and economic marginalization of pastoral groups; and increasing insecurity resulting from cattle raiding fuelled by growing access by all sides to small arms and light weapons.

Cattle Rustling As a Means to Food Security

The third factor contributing to cattle rustling is food insecurity. Beef, sheep and goat are a sure source of protein which leads to resource based conflict in several parts of the country, especially in the northern region which is classified as Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL). This is where communities who source for their livelihood are mainly pastoralists. Conflicts affect the entire ASAL region and the specific counties include Baringo, Laikipia, Marsabit, Samburu, Turkana and West Pokot.

Economic analysis of the outcome of conflicts shows that outbursts of violence between pastoralists affect milk and livestock prices. This also indirectly affects the prices of many other goods, as insecurity and low incomes influence both demand and supply. On the other hand, the loss of livestock usually induces herders to sell animals in order to buy food and to compensate for the fall in milk production (Keen, 2017).

Cattle rustling among various communities in the Rift Valley seem to be a resource-based type of conflict. For instance, the conflict among the Pokot and Turkana of Kenya has been

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dynamic over time, especially since independence. Pastoralist groups in these areas have the highest poverty levels, lowest education levels with large numbers of school drop-outs, highest food insecurity, and the highest levels of civil insecurity. A significant number of members of these communities depend largely on animal husbandry and subsistence agriculture. Unreliable rainfall and cyclical drought impoverish them causing food scarcity, malnutrition, and high child mortality. Competition over scarce pasture and water is often severe and violent.

Cattle rustling, traditionally practised, has become more destructive with increasing poverty and proliferation of illicit arms and the influence of external political and economic motives. Land grabs and political incitement is contributing to growing ethnocentrism and violence. Lack of clarity and breach of rights related to boundaries, inheritance and land sales, user rights, evictions are the major concerns.

Among these communities, livelihoods are frequently disrupted, and unemployment among young pastorals is turning them into main perpetrators of conflicts. Welfare facilities are limited, and the existing few are destroyed, leaving children with no access to education and health services. The causes, mitigation or approaches to solving these resource-based conflicts, nature and dynamics and the impact of these conflicts have not been properly documented hence this study.

Conclusion

Traditionally, cattle rustling was a sport; a game and a form of cultural expression. In fact, small scale theft of livestock was a considered way of balancing communities' possessions, wealth and power. This was also highly recommended and blessed by elders. However, in the recent past, cattle raiding which is characterized by banditry, violence and crime and capitalism have commercialized this practice, making it a significant economic threat. It has caused many deaths and threatened peace and co-existence among communities leading to displacement of people especially women and children.

As to whether the practice is geared towards adaptability to food shortage due to climate change, the practice of cattle rustling does not significantly address food shortage since most stolen livestock, especially cattle, is said to be ferried for beef production by wealth merchants who are heavily funding it. Therefore, to address this crime requires a regional legislative and development approach and framework that addresses both security and the marginalisation of pastoralists. As a matter of fact, members of these communities should be equipped with alternative approaches towards livelihood.

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