



Migration and Settlement of Ethnic Communities in Relation to Land Question in Laikipia County, Kenya

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Abstract: Laikipia County experienced the land question arising from migration and settlement that stretched over a century. In spite of intervention measures the problem escalated. This study, therefore, sought to establish why migration and settlement of the ethnic communities generated the land question in Laikipia County. The study was hinged on the instrumentalism and articulation of modes of production theories, using the historical research design. The study established that pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial migrations and settlements of the Pokot, Tugen, Ndorobo, Maasai, Somali, Kisii, Meru, Agikuyu, Europeans and Samburu led to the rise of the land question in Laikipia County. The study recommends that both the Laikipia County assembly and Kenyan national assembly should enact laws that protect pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial land holding rights. This will fix the land question among the ethnic groups residing in Laikipia County.

Keywords: Communities; ethnic; Laikipia; land question; migration; settlement.

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Introduction

Land question concerns ethnic settlements and how these settlements generated land contests among ethnic groups (Leo, 1984; Ndege, 2012). Land question related issues arising from migration and settlement are universal. In Canada, the primary conflict between the Indians and Europeans settlers revolves around the European westward expansion (Elliot, 1974). Indians were displaced as settlement progressed from East to the plains and later to the Pacific. This situation created the land question in

Canada that has survived countless regimes unresolved. Land contest pitted Vietnamese against the Chinese in the second half of the 20th Century. The cause of disagreement was the Vietnamese settlement in Cambodia in 1978. The resultant ramification of this crisis was the displacement of nearly one million ethnic Chinese from Vietnam (Schaefer, 2012).

Several studies took place on how human settlements impacted the land question. A study by Achoki *et.al* (2019) evaluated the Abagusii's

movement into the expansive South Rift at the height of colonialism in Kenya and during the post-colonial regimes. It established that the Abagusii movements during this period led to ethno-territorial contest over land with the Luo, Maasai and Kalenjin. The findings on ethno-territorial contests between the Abagusii and the communities they encountered and clashed over land were crucial to this research article.

A study on intra-ethnic relations among the Sabaot of Mt. Elgon, Kenya, from 1945 to 2010 established that as a proto-Kalenjin, the Sabaot cradle land was believed to be in the area between North and North West of Lake Turkana, near Ethiopia and Lake Baringo. From this origin, the group made a historic trek and peopled Mt Kamalinga before their movement went on to settle on the North West of the slopes of Mount Elgon (Imbuye, 2016).

In Laikipia County, policies enacted by successive colonial and post-colonial governments in Kenya disregarded primordial pastoralists' communal land, holding rights at the expense of ranchers and horticulturalists, whose resettlement into the area was recent (Tyler, 1999). Taking no notice inflicted more woes to the pastoralist groups, primarily on their access to land as grazing field. Their ancestral land claims in Laikipia County dates back to their migration and settlement into the area during the pre-colonial period.

This research article applied the historical research design to examine migration and settlement of the ethnic communities in Laikipia County 1850-2022. The selected research design suited this study, given the unique nature of historical evidence which required interpretation of evidence thematically instead of analysing the findings on the basis of general laws (Berg & Lune, 2012).

This study traced the origin, migration and settlement of the Highland Nilotes, Plain Nilotes and Bantu groups of people in Laikipia County in Kenya. It further substantiated how emerging dynamics from these social evolutions contributed to the genesis of the land contestation in the County.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This research article was hinged on the instrumentalism and articulation of modes of production theories. Instrumentalism pioneers include Posen Barry, Horowitz Donald, Collier Paul and Anke Hoeffler. The theory has it that the land question arose from politicisation or weaponization

of land by elites (Imbuye, 2016). The theory was useful in the conceptualisation of the rise of land question in Laikipia County as the weaponization of anthropological factors by elites. The articulation of modes of production theory was a neo-Marxist theory propounded by Banaji through his summarization of the Kautsky's agrarian question. It conceived modes of production as a construct which defines social relations and class formation in a capitalist society. It was handy in explaining how the land question led to the formation of social relations in Laikipia County (Jairus, 1990).

Findings and Discussion

This section highlighted the migration and settlement of the Pokot, Pokot, Tugen, Ndorobo, Maasai, Samburu, Turkana, Agikuyu, Meru, Kisii and Europeans into the Laikipia County during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. It further underscored how these human settlements throughout the period under review created ethno-territorial tensions

Migration and Settlement of the Pokot

The Pokot entry into the Laikipia County in Kenya can be attributed to the vacuum created by the exodus of the Maasai people into the southern reserve in Loita. The presence of the Maasai in the area since the pre-colonial era prevented the Pokot from moving further south into the Laikipia County. Clearly, the point of contestation was land as a critical force of production. But in the colonial period, Pokot and Suk settled in the northern part of Laikipia (Warurii, 2015). During the colonial era, the colonial regime allowed the Pokot to graze on unoccupied crown land dry period in Laikipia County. This colonial proposition created the land question in the Laikipia County. The Pokot claimed that land in Laikipia County was ancestrally their ethno-territory basing on the foregoing. This research article affirmed that the settlement of the Pokot in Laikipia County during the colonial era became point of these ancestral land claims. The land question was consequently created among the Pokot, Maasai, Samburu, Ndorobo and Tugen in Laikipia County. All these ethnic groups contested that land in Laikipia County was their ancestral ethno-territory. Land was contested by these ethnic groups because it was a factor of production among these ethnic groups (Jairus, 1990). Elites manipulated cultural factors to ignite the land question on ethnic grounds (Imbuye, 2016).

Migration and settlement of the Tugen

The earliest Tugen population in Laikipia County was traced to the colonial era on a settlement scheme in the Lembus forest. They were illegally squatting on crown land, which had been previously alienated as a forest reserve by the colonial authorities. Another Tugen population was located at Kamorra glades on unalienated crown land in the Laikipia County (Warurii, 2015). Basing on this information, this article affirmed that the need by the Tugen to protect their land, holding rights on ethnocentrism grounds in Laikipia County was informed by their anthropological background in the area. The alienation of land by the colonial regime to establish settler farms displaced the Tugen in the area. This decision created the land question among the Tugen. They insisted that Laikipia County was their ethno-territory before their settlement in the area was moved during the colonial era. Their contest over land in Laikipia was informed by the fact that land was their factor of production. Elites manipulated ancestral land claims among the Tugen in the expression of the land question among the Tugen (Mwenda, 2018).

Migration and settlement of the Ndorobo

By 1920, seven years after the last Maasai group were moved to the Southern reserve in Loita, there were three Ndorobo Villages squatting on the unalienated land in Laikipia County. The Ndorobo settlements cut across forest reserves and near the Samburu Southern border by 1923. In 1931, the Ndorobo were reportedly still squatting on unoccupied crown land between Uaso Narok and Uaso Nyiro Rivers in Laikipia County. There was no native reserve in Laikipia County for any indigenous ethnic group around this time (Warurii, 2015). Presently, the Ndorobo remain in Laikipia North as part of the indigenous ethnic communities. The Ndorobo settlement into the Laikipia County dated back into the pre-colonial era. This was the reason why they held ancestral claim of land in Laikipia County on anthropological and ethnocentrism grounds, which contributed to the land question in the study area. The need to control land as a force of production by the Ndorobo was on the grounds that the land enabled them to hunt and gather food for their survival (Ng'ang'a, 2006). The settlement of the Kisii, Meru and Agikuyu during the colonial and post-colonial era was contested by the Ndorobo as impinging on their ancestral land. Land was manipulated and contested through the influence of

elites because it was a factor of production among the Ndorobo.

Migration and Settlement of the Maasai

The Maasai belonged to the Maa group together with the Samburu to who they shared numerous cultural features (Ochieng, 1975). The Origin of the Maasai as a single group was traced to a place known as Kieu.-(Ng'ang'a, 2006). Kieu is believed to be the area between Northern Lake Turkana and lower Nile Valley. However, this research article has it that the Lower Nile Valley in Sudan was the origin of the Maasai group as a subset of the plain Nilotes. It was because all the plain Nilotes originated from this region. From here they trekked into Lake Turkana before moving to other parts of Kenya in the course of their migration and settlement.

At their point of origin in Kieu, the Maasai roamed their northern settlement, coming into contact with the Kalenjin and the Silikwa people. From Lake Turkana, the point where plain Nilotes dispersed, the Maasai traffics wandered South East and made settlement in the area east of the Rift Valley (Maxon, 2009). Certainly, from their northern migration, the Maasai settled around Lake Turkana before dispersing to Rift Valley, Western Kenya before retracing to Rift Valley.

The Maasai settled in the area between Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya and Taita Hills. At this point they experienced a robust cross dissemination of culture and languages with the neighbouring Kikuyu, Kamba and Chagga. Besides, an informal web of commerce was entrenched between the herding Maasai and cereal agriculturalist neighbours, exchanging farm products for livestock products. By 1850, the Maasai population had settled in the North and Central Rift Valley; however they remained a stateless society and unterritorial owing to their nomadic nature.

The Maasai settlement spread as far as the area between Nyandarua range and Kilimanjaro along the plains neighbouring the Rift Valley region (Ehrest, 1978). Laikipia Maasai was a group of the Maa group that settled on the Laikipia plateau in the course of their migration and settlement before their settlement was interjected by the introduction of the colonial rule in the region (Ng'ang'a, 2006). This is the same group that was moved as a consequence of the Anglo-Maasai agreements of 1904 and 1911 to Loita region in the southern Rift. In 1950's, the Maasai were employed in Laikipia as herdsman. During this same period, the Abaluhya, Ameru, Abagusii and Agikuyu were hired to offer domestic

services in white settlers' households (Warurii, 2015). The Maasai resettled into Laikipia County long after they were moved to the South Rift Valley by the colonial regime. They resettled back as labourers on Europeans farms during the colonial era in Kenya. The Maasai were part of the earliest ethnic groups to settle in Laikipia County during their pre-colonial movements. This pre-colonial Maasai settlement was moved during the colonial era to create a settler economy in the area. They were rallied along their ethnic identities by elites in the expression of ancestral land claims. The resettlement of the Kisii, Meru and Agikuyu in Laikipia during the colonial era created the land question. From the preceding, the Maasai ancestral land claims in Laikipia County was centred on the resettlement of the Kisii, Meru and Agikuyu in Laikipia at their expense. Land as a factor of production was contested by the Maasai as grazing field in their pastoralism livelihoods.

Migration and settlement of the Samburu

Anthropological evidence buttressed with linguistic features validated Samburu, Maasai and Njemps as proto-Maa. The speakers in Kenya comprise of the Samburu, Maasai and Njemps (Ng'ang'a, 2006). Their historic separation between these communities occurred during the Maasai great trek Southward into Central Kenya. By the close of the 16th century the Njemps and Samburu had split from the Maa nucleus to become the northern Maasai. The Samburu took the northern turn while the Njemps peopled the area on the shores of Lake Baringo. Samburu socio-cultural and customs values were similar to the Maasai and Njemps with slight variation in their languages (Ng'ang'a, 2006).

From their northern origin the Samburu, they moved and settled on the western side of Lake Turkana before they were displaced by both the *Loosekelai* Maasai and the Turkana. *Loosekelai* Maasai and the Turkana pushed them to El Barta, where a confrontation between the Samburu and Borana left the Borana displaced from the area (Ng'ang'a, 2006). The Samburu filled the vacuum left by the fleeing Borana and settled in the area. The Laikipian Samburu moved and settled on the Laikipian plateau in the present Laikipia County. At the advent of colonialism in the Laikipia County, another group of the Samburu tried to occupy vacant land left by the relocated Maasai but they were repulsed to the North by the colonial regime (Warurii, 2015). The Samburu who drove into Laikipia were attributed to the external pressure

exerted on them by the Turkana in the North. From the foregoing, the Samburu affirmed that Laikipia County was their ancestral land basing on their pre-colonial migration into the area. These ancestral land claims by the Samburu along their ethnic identities formed part of the land question in the Laikipia County. Land was contested by the Samburu as a factor of production in their nomadic herding livelihoods. The resettlement of the Agikuyu, Kisii and Meru during the colonial and post-colonial era was consequently viewed by the Samburu as an invasion on their ancestral land.

Migration and settlement of the Turkana

During the pre-colonial era, Turkana movements never occupied the Laikipia County. But, they frequently exerted pressure on the Samburu over land use (Ng'ang'a, 2006). Moreover, some Turkana settled in Laikipia as labourers during the colonial era. This research article acknowledged that while the Turkana did not migrate and settle in Laikipia during the pre-colonial period, they have over time embroiled in the land use contest in the Laikipia County. Being pastoralist, land was useful to them as a force of production. Their proximity to Laikipia County enabled them to roam into the Laikipia County during the dry spell in search for water and pasture for their livestock. Their settlements into Laikipia contributed to the land question as the Maasai, Samburu, Tugen and Ndorobo accused them for encroaching on their ancestral land.

Migration and settlement of the Agikuyu

The Agikuyu settlement into the Laikipia County was traced to their employment as labourers on settler farms during the colonial era. In 1920, there were eighteen Kikuyu families registered in the Laikipia County as a consequence of the Resident Native Ordinance (Warurii, 2015). They preferred for colonial labour in Laikipia County because of their loyalty and hardworking nature. From the foregoing, the colonial regime shaped the land question in the Laikipia County by creating an avenue for the Agikuyu in the Laikipia County. The land question was created on ancestral land claims by the Samburu, Maasai, Tugen, Ndorobo, Pokot, Somali and Ogiek, who maintained that the ethnic Agikuyu impinged on their ethnic territories. Land for these ethnic communities was contested as a vital factor of production in their agrarian sources of livelihoods.

Migration and settlement of the Meru

The Meru belonged to the Eastern Bantu group whose oral tradition points their origin to Shungwaya (Munro, 1967). The Meru were among the *native* ethnic communities recruited by the colonial regime to offer labor on Europeans' farms (Warurii, 2015). This research article reiterated that migration treks of the Meru did not settle on the Laikipia plateau. Their settlement into Laikipia County was first traced to the colonial era when they were recruited to offer labour on settlers' farms. Their settlement in Laikipia County therefore escalated the rise of the land question among the Maasai, Pokot, Tugen, Somali, Ndorobo and Samburu, who claimed that they settled on their ancestral land. Moreover, the post-colonial government adopted the land buy out policy that enabled the Meru to acquire land in Laikipia County; this led to the intensified the land question. Land was contested as a factor of production among these ethnic groups.

Migration and settlement of the Kisii

The Kisii first settled in the Laikipia County during the colonial period as part of the laborers recruited from Kavirondo in 1922 (Warurii, 2015). Even so, their numbers were very minimal compared to the Agikuyu who formed almost ninety five per cent of the colonial laborers. Furthermore, they acquired land in the Laikipia County during the post-colonial era through the land buy-out policy adopted by the post-colonial regime. Their settlement in the area created the land question on ethnocentrism grounds. Ndorobo, Maasai, Turkana, Ogiek, Pokot and Samburu maintained that they settled on their ancestral land which was their factor of production.

Migration and settlement of the British and Boers

The first European to visit Laikipia County was the Scottish explorer Joseph Thomson in 1883. Thomson's visit to Nyahururu led to the naming of Thomson falls in Nyahururu town after him (Warurii, 2015). However, white settlers' arrival in the Laikipia County was traced to around in 1920. This was several years after the last batch of the Maasai was relocated to the Southern reserve (Tyler, 1999). By the end of March 1920, only eighteen farms had been occupied by Europeans in the Laikipia County. A year later, fifty eight settlers had settled on alienated African land in the Laikipia County. From the above mentioned, the colonial regime created the land question in the Laikipia County by alienating the *native* African land. This was done through

contested land concessions like the Anglo-Maasai treaties of 1904 and 1911, which resulted into the movement of the ethnic Maasai to the Loita country (Warurii, 2015). In addition, the colonial regime also moved Samburu and Somali and restricted the indigenous, Pokot, Tugen and Ogiek from accessing Laikipia during the colonial period, which escalated the land question. The contest over land arose from its use as a factor of production by both European settlers and indigenous ethnic communities in modes of production.

Migration and settlement of the Somali

The Cushite originated from Arabia before moving and settling in the North Africa and later in the Horn Africa. From the Horn of Africa, they migrated and settled in Northern Kenya and roamed the expansive North Rift Valley region in Kenya (Ogot, 1995). Shortly after the Maasai had been moved into their southern reserve, Somali inhabited the area around Uaso Nyiro (Ng'ang'a, 2006). As a result, the Somali were rallied along their ethnic identities to claim Laikipia as their ancestral land as their factor of production. They insisted that the Meru, Kisii and Agikuyu were resettled on their ancestral land by the post-colonial regimes in Kenya.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The migration and settlement of the Pokot, Tugen, Ndorobo, Maasai, Somali and Samburu during the pre-colonial and colonial era created the land question in the Laikipia County. Pokot, Tugen, Ndorobo, Maasai, Somali and Samburu claimed that land in Laikipia was their ancestral land. They argued that settlement of the Kisii, Europeans, Meru and Agikuyu during the post-colonial regimes was an impingement on their ancestral land. Land to the Pokot, Tugen, Ndorobo, Maasai, Somali and Samburu was their factor of production in their modes of production.

The colonial administration created the land question in the Laikipia County by moving the Maasai to Loita and restricted the Samburu and Somali to Isiolo to create room for settler farming in the Laikipia County. The colonial regime also moved and restricted Tugen and Ndorobo settlements in Laikipia County. Further, the establishment of settler farms in Laikipia County became an avenue for the Bantu to live, work and acquire land in Laikipia County. Moreover, the post-colonial regimes in Kenya adopted the land buy out policy that enabled the Kisii, Meru, Agikuyu and Europeans to purchase land in Laikipia County. The

Pokot, Tugen, Ndorobo, Maasai, Somali and Samburu held that they were unfairly dispossessed their ancestral land as a result.

Recommendations

This study recommends that addressing ancestral land claims by the Pokot, Tugen, Ndorobo, Maasai, Somali and Samburu ethnic groups in the study area would fix the land question in Laikipia County. Both the Laikipia County assembly and Kenyan national assembly should enact laws that protect pre-colonial land ownership rights for the Pokot, Tugen, Ndorobo, Maasai, Somali and Samburu. Further, land purchased by the Kisii, Meru, Agikuyu and Europeans in Laikipia County should be protected and legally recognised.

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