

The Legacy of Colonialism and its Contribution to Conflicts in among Communities living in the Marsabit County of Kenya (1964 -2011)

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Abstract

African societies and the developing nations have been undergoing difficult times in terms of ethnic conflicts and antagonisms. The Northern part of Kenya is known for infamous attacks between communities since the pre-colonial times. These conflicts seem to be increasing range and magnitude. The study explores the causes of contributing of colonialism to the conflicts among communities of Marsabit County between 1960 and 2011. A descriptive survey design was used targeting community conflicts in Marsabit North Sub-County. Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study to get the location or district in which the units of observation had required characteristics, along with snowball sampling which is useful when the population that possess the characteristics under the study is not well known and therefore need to find subjects. Secondary information was obtained from books, journals and news papers. The study revealed that creation of colonial administrative boarders led to competition for scarce resources was a major cause of violent conflict between the communities living in Marsabit county of Kenya.

1.1 Background of the Study

African societies and other growing nations have been undergoing difficult crisis due to ethnic hostilities and conflicts since the pre-colonial times. Since colonization, the range and magnitude of the conflicts have escalated into different shapes and dimensions and magnitude of that poses a serious problem in the world (Emeka, 1999). According to Guy (2002), conflicts over natural resources affected the socio-economic developments in many countries. Africa continues to be one of the most conflict-ridden regions in the world and this has led to major human suffering (Guy, 2002).

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Ethnic conflict(s) is a worldwide phenomenon experienced by even the most established political systems such as those of industrial democracies (Christie, 1998). Ethnic conflicts have led to deep divisions in many states and manifested themselves in varied forms; the ethnic hostilities in Northern Ireland, Ethnic Genocide in Rwanda and Burundi between the Hutu and Tutsi (Horowitz, 2000) as well as the interstate conflicts such as when Somalia invades Ethiopia, the eviction of Chinese from Vietnam and the Asians from Uganda. Kenya has had numerous ethnic conflicts like any other African state. Most Kenyan districts are haunted by either Political or Ethnic Conflict. This is partly because different communities continue to knowingly rely on their ethnicity to perpetuate their dominance. Inadequate policies, poor state security arrangements, diminishing role of traditional governance systems, competition over control and access to scarce natural resources as well as idleness among the youth has led to an atmosphere characterized by fear and prejudice (Witsenburg & Roba, 2003). Violent conflicts have had negative and severe impact on Kenyan Communities (Nyukuri, 1997). In Northern Kenya conflicts are always associated with competition among ethnic groups over various issues that often led to both positive and negative effects, some associated with violence (Fisher, 2000).

Antagonistic pastoralist groups are often drawn into local political rivalries by politicians seeking to gain votes, and this worsens the violence in the Northern Counties of Kenya which include Marsabit. In Marsabit, inter-ethnic conflict between communities living in the region is an issue of concern. Ethnic conflicts have become a major economic challenge, which perhaps explains why there are reduced economic activities, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, inaccessible health services, low food production, poor communication and transportation infrastructure, lack of markets for products, displacement of people, stalled development projects and amplified number of children dropping out of school which has resulted in widespread poverty in the county (Ruto et.al, 2003). The challenge in question has made inter-ethnic conflict to be seen as the reigning concept in African studies. Pre-independence events such as colonialism, change in global trends, events, which took place during and after World War II are the main causes of uneven economic distribution as well as political and social unrest which lead to the majority of African conflicts (Harsch, 2006).. Almost all boundaries in Africa were created by Europeans during the colonial times as they were negotiating on how to share their power in Africa. They used poor maps in these negotiations and did not seek the views of the African people as they created the borders. This has been the major cause of the unsatisfactory nature of inter-state and regional borders and is the main source of many conflicts in Africa.

Independence instilled in African societies immense optimism for the future but the African governments did not take initiatives to correct the boarder problems created by their colonial masters. This might be due to the fact that these nations did not attain independence at the same time (Oyeniyi, 2011) or Due to the numerous structural problems inherited from the past so the new African governments were unable to meet the growing wishes of their people (Harsch, 2006). The British colonial rule colonized Kenya and at around 1919, a Briton by the name Zaphiro. established a colonial at Marsabit. During the sharing out of power by the colonialists, they created two countries (Ethiopia and Kenya) and created two boarders. This affected the Gabbra- Malbe-Booran relationship. This led to conflict in communities living in this region as they competed for resources. These conflicts increased in the 1990s and have been manifesting themselves from simple village levels to a complex web of social, legal, political and economic proportions that extend from local to national and regional dimensions. Even where no direct clashes have occurred between the tcommunities, cases of intermittent killings across the communities have been reported. This has created insecurity that has forced significant number of Gabra households to move with their livestock from Borana Administrative Zone in Oromia Region State to Udet and Moyale Districts of Ethiopia Region State (Odhiambo, 2012). It is therefore necessary to review how the the legacy of colonialism contributedconflicts in among communities living in the Marsabitcounty of Kenya (1964 -2011)

Research Question

- i) How has the Legacy of Colonialism contributed to conflicts among communities living in the Marsabit county of Kenya (1964 -2011)(1960-2011)?

Location of the Study

This study was done in Marsabit North Sub-county of Marsabit County of Kenya. Marsabit County is a home to a number of diverse ethnic communities that include the Borana, Burji, Gabra, Rendille, Samburu, Turkana, Dassanetch and EI - Molo.

The Target Population

The study targeted to collect information from leaders who included the chiefs from the region, leaders representing various women groups, the Leaders Non-governmental organizations operating in the region, Religious leaders and Members of the Council of Elders.

Research Instruments

The research used questionnaires and interview schedules to collect the required information. The questionnaires were administered to religious organizations and NGOs, Data from community elders drawn from Gabra and Dassanetch communities was collected through Focused group Discussion

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This split the Kenya – Ethiopia Border by the Colonialists and the prevailing government regulations affected the demographic distribution of the communities. There were grazing movements between the Ethiopian escarpment and the Kenyan lowlands for many centuries before the invasion by the colonialists that were affected by this split (Robinson, 1985). This split disrupted grazing movements, sharing of resource patterns and also changed the way communities related to each other. The creation of the Kenya – Ethiopia boarder led to the emergence of separate groups of Gabra and Borana who started identifying with each of the countries depending on where they lived.

At the end of 1918, the Borana from Ethiopia began to cross the frontier boarder in large numbers to escape persecution by “Tigre brigands”. They entered Kenya in 1920 and they were moved southward in order to keep the Frontier clear of natives. This is an action that preceded a joint “Anglo-Ethiopian” effort against the Tigre. At this point distinct records to distinguish between the “British Boran” and the “Abyssinian Boran” were created and made clear hence an ‘ethnic’ reality was created (Sobania, 1979: 98 - 99). The immigrants were raided by the Abyssinian soldiers in the British territory in order to force them back to pay taxes but the British protected them and eventually gave them asylum (KNA/DC/MBT 7/1/2: 1907-1940).

A large number of the Gabbra, Malbe and Booran migrated into the British territory between 1912 and 1913. Most of these immigrants entered the British territory around Sololo and the Hurri Hills via the Magado escapement. In 1922, it was agreed that British would not "force" the Gabra to go back to Ethiopia (Sobania, 1979: 81)". The Gabra and Borana were distributed into Kenyan and Ethiopian Gabras and Boran; but Dassanetch were all considered as Ethiopians. As a result, much effort was put to prevent the Dassanetch from inhabiting Kenyan territory. The British policy of excluding the Dassanach from the colony effectively destabilized the northwest corner of the district. The Dassanetch invaded into the Kenyan territory, to raid or to reside along the eastern shores of the lake so as to graze. This led to conflict between Dassanetch and both Gabra over grazing areas in the northwest of Marsabit district (Salvadori, 2000). In 1948, some Dassanach known as "British Gelluba" were allowed to remain in British territory. However, the British policy towards them was that they were not to be considered British subjects so they would not be taxed; and their presence in Kenya would only be "tolerated" (Ibid, 1979:12). This group was considered more trustworthy for theoretically refusing to raid with the Ethiopian Dassanach. Violence arose in 1952 when Dassanach raided the Rendille and left 75 people dead, mostly, women and children. Soon after, three other attacks occurred: a Kenyan police patrol was attacked by 200-300 armed Dassanach, which led to a seven hour battle; on another occasion 26 were killed; and in a third attack, the Dassanach raided a Gabra village.

British Dassanach occupied the region near the Kenyan border post at Banya. The Ethiopians made a new attempt to govern the Dassanach by creating a combined province. The Dassanach continued to occupy the area of Ileret under Kenya control. In 1961, on the eve of Kenyan Self-Rule, British administrators were doubtful whether they could ever be able to get rid of the Dassanach so they agreed that the Dassanach strictly be confined to the area allotted to them, the north of Ileret, and be encouraged to return to Ethiopia" (Sobania, 1979: 126). Sections of Dassanach had always occupied the North-Eastern shores of Lake Turkana. The creation of the border left most of the lake in British-Kenyan hands, but on Geopolitical grounds allocated the headwaters of the Omo River to Ethiopia. This has been a basis for Twentieth and Twenty-first Century post-colonial politics in the area where Kenyan Politicians have been demanding that the 'Ethiopian' Dassanach return to north of the border at Banya Lugga. The Dassanach, in turn, are further consolidating their presence along the North-Eastern shores of the Lake where they fish and exploit wet season pastures.

The split of the Kenya-Ethiopia boarder also led to disruption of patterns of how resources were traditionally used across the borders. The border left more water points, especially the permanent water sources that were utilized during the dry season, on the Abyssinian side. The British authorities and the Abyssinian Empire signed the trans-frontier agreement on the 6th of September, 1907 which proposed unrestricted access to resource on either side of the frontier by the ethnic groups living across the border. The Abyssinian Empire did not honor the agreement so the Booran and the Gabbra in the British colony were occasionally denied access to the water and grazing resources on the Abyssinian side (Obba, 2000). The communities could only be allowed to access the resources if they paid tax to the Abyssinian Empire. This adversely affected their drought coping strategies since access to resources across the borders was crucial during the drought years (Ibid, 2000). This marked the beginning of marginalization of these communities. This marginalization continued into the post-colonial era and created root for conflict between communities Northern Kenya because was little respect for international boundaries by pastoralist communities living at the boarder of Kenya and Ethiopia; so cross-border raids became a frequent phenomenon.

There were seasonal conflicts between the Gabra and the Dassanetch at the south of Ileretbut these conflicts became a national issue after the Dassanetch were declared legitimate residents of Kenya. The Dassanetch have constantly used the settlements at the northern tip of Lake Turkana in Ethiopia as a haven after raiding Gabra and other pastoralists further south. At the same time, the Gabrabecamenotorious of raiding Dassanetch homesteads along the lake. The British colonial governments separated the grazing areas of the various pastoral groups because they thought the main problem that often led to bloodshed in the Northern Frontier Districts (NFD) was jealousy and bitterness between the diverse tribes over grazing and water resources (KNA/PC/NFD/2/2/2:1935). It was clearly stated under section 18 of the Special District Ordinance that no tribesman was to leave the area preserved for his tribe to go into an area reserved for another tribe without a pass" (KNA/PC/NFD/2/2/3:1947). Different grazing zones were designated to the main pastoral groups in the district, the Gabbra, the Booran and the Rendille. The grazing areas associated with the Gabbra included Maidahad, Maikona, Karawe, Kalacha, Malabot, Maddo, Segunti, Wano, Gus, and at Khomode and Loyangalani. (KNA/PC/NFD/2/2: 1941).

The Rendille grazed around Loyangalani, Bor, Khomode, Kargi, Bichibor, Ret and Laisamis; and were allowed to graze on the lower southern slopes of Marsabit Mountain. They occasionally used the permanent water holes in the region. The Rendille were prevented from encroaching onto the Gabbra areas due to persistent bloody feuds between the communities (KNA/PC/NFD/2/2/2:1938). The Rendille were considered to have more rights over grazing lands than the Gabbra and the Booran since the British considered them the original inhabitants of the region unlike the Gabbra and Booran who were considered new immigrants from Ethiopia (KNA/PC/NFD 1/2/2:1935).

During droughts, adjustments of the grazing borders were occasionally made to allow one group to graze in another group's area. However, grazing in certain areas at times was not allowed due to security reasons. For instance in conflicts between the Dassanetch who are mainly found in southern Ethiopia and the Gabbra, who were living in the north western corner of Marsabit district was closed for several years. The area was referred to as the "forbidden area" demarcated by the Stingad line (Stingad was the British officer who drew this line). Any members of a tribe found in the forbidden area were fined, 5 to 20% of the amount of stock they were grazing, depending on the gravity of offence (KNA/PC/NFD 1/2/2: 1932). In 1935 the Gabbra and the Booran who were caught trespassing in the prohibited areas were fined 10% of the stock (KNA/PC/NFD 1/2/2:1935).

In spite of the stringent rules placed by the colonial government to prevent conflicts, still feuds and were common among the pastoral communities of Marsabit County. Conflicts were mostly reported between the Geluba (Dassanetch) and the GabbraMalbe in the Kenya's lowlands (Mburu, 2005). The Gabbra were the more affected by the Geluba raids with a record death of 93 people being killed in a single raid on 30th September 1932. The magnitude of this attack can only be compared to the Turbi Massacre on the 12th July 2005. There have been four major violent attacks in Marsabit County. These include the Shifta war of 1963-1967, The Kokai Massacre of 1997; the Turbi and Bubisa of 2005. Of the attacks, the Kokai Massacre was the only one that was between the Gabra and the Dassanetch but the other three have acted as eye-openers that the conflict between the Gabra and the Dassanetch should not be taken for granted and that immediate steps need to be taken to create long-lasting peace. Before looking at the Kokai Massacre which it is

The Shifta War of 1963-1968

The Shifta War arose out of a long history of political unrest in Northern Kenya. Ethnic Somali and other Northern Kenya communities resisted centralized rule from the very earliest days of colonialism. From 1893 to about 1918, various Somali groups engaged in primary resistance to the colonial powers. Resistance at this stage lacked an explicitly positive political objective and instead centered on resistance to the British invasion of previously independent territories (Whittaker, 2012). The Shifta conflict was a result of contending visions of the future of the Northern Frontier District (NFD). During the colonial period, British neglect of the region, which was administered as a separate entity within Kenya, resulted in economic and political marginalization. As a result, more meaningful relationships were made between people who were living in the Northern Frontier District (NFD) and those living across the border in the Somali Republic than with the people living in the Kenyan state. The residents, of the NFD united behind a campaign for NFD secession in favor of unity with the Somali Republic when Kenya was set on the road to independence in 1960 (Branch, 2011). As a consequence, a number of radicalized NFD residents, who were labeled as Shiftas by the Kenyan government, defected to the Somali Republic from where they waged a guerrilla insurgency in 1963 which lasted until November 1967.

In 1964, Kenya was faced by a region that was threatening to secede; President Jomo Kenyatta, the then president of Kenya, declared a state of emergency in Northern Kenya. This led to 'Shifta war' that led to widespread and systematic violations of human rights in Kenya by state security agencies (TJRC, 2013). The Shifta War lasted four years, resulted in the deaths of between 2,000 to 7,000 people both civilians and combatants. There is, however, some evidence that the Shifta War had an international dimension. The Somali government clearly provided assistance to the Shifta forces operating in Kenya - in fact it was out of the agreement reached between the governments of Kenya and Somalia in 1967 that effectively ended the Shifta War. Villagization in northern Kenya emerged as a response to conflict, and in particular, to the specific trajectory that the Shifta insurgency took. Villagization was, therefore, informed by existing negative official opinions of the region and its inhabitants. This enables us to appreciate the interplay between the use of villagization as a counter-insurgency strategy and as a developmental imperative, which resulted in the criminalization of pastoralism. The criminalization of pastoralism, affected all the Pastoralist Communities including the Gabra and the Dassanetchs that has led to continued conflict.

Turbi Massacre

Turbi is a small town located some 130 kilometres North East of Marsabit Town, and lies on the boundary between Marsabit and Moyale. The population is primarily nomadic. There is very little infrastructure, and the only visible structures are the manyattas. Reports indicate that Turbi is one of the least developed areas in Kenya. The Turbi massacre occurred in Turbi Location of Marsabit County. The first incident in the long chain of incidents that eventually exploded in Turbi and Bubisa was the killing of a Gabra man at Turbi by members of the Borana community. In response, members of the Gabra community stole 728 goats from the Borana. A meeting to resolve the conflict was held in Turbi between Gabra and Borana elders on September 6, 2002. The elders resolved to maintain peace. Two days later, on September 8, 2002, a follow up meeting took place at Sololo in Moyale District. The meeting was attended by Provincial Administrators, members of peace committees and opinion leaders from Moyale and Marsabit districts. In the meeting, the members of the peace committees recommended that the Borana community was asked to pay 100 cattle to the Gabra as compensation for the one person killed. The Gabbra community was to give to the Borana three times the number of goats they had taken. The compensation based on the Garissa (Modogashe declaration). Both parties opposed the peace committees' recommendation for compensation. Subsequent meeting to calm the situations were held on the 16th and 17th of September 2002 in Yabello, Ethiopia and the two communities reinforced their commitment to peace and the situation temporarily calmed down.

On the 17th of October, 2002, another meeting was held at Funnanqumbi (near Turbi) to seek solutions of the conflict between the two communities. No agreement was reached because neither of the communities was ready to pay compensation as recommended by the Peace Committee. Thus, a resolution was passed restricting the sharing of resources between the two communities. Borana living in Funnanqumbi were asked not to access to Turbi town and Gabras were prohibited from accessing Rawan and Woldaa water points, which are the Gabras nearest permanent water sources but controlled by the Boranas. Though calm continued after the passing of these resolutions, tension resumed in November 2002 and continued throughout 2003. A year later, on December 22, 2003, 6 prominent Borana leaders from Moyale started a peace campaign amongst the Gabbra in Turbi, Bubisa and Marsabit.

This peace campaign took one week. Afterwards, these leaders consulted with Marsabit leaders planned a joint Marsabit -Moyale meeting which was scheduled for 12 February, 2004 in Turbi. This meeting did not take place because the Turbi people scuttled it claiming they had not been sufficiently informed, even though the Moyale Boranas had turned up in big numbers. This meant that tension remained throughout 2004 and early 2005. There was no sharing of resources or exchange of animals throughout this period. In early March 2005, the Gabbra and the Borana communities living in Turbi and Rawan met but no resolutions were made. On May 23, 2005, the two communities met and reached an agreement. The Gabbra people agreed to return the 728 goats they had stolen from the Borana and the Borana would compensate the Gabbra's dead person according to Borana law. The Gabbra's handed over the goats on 30 May 2005. However, the peace lasted for only two weeks. On 5 June 2005, three out of five Ethiopian Boranas were killed near the Ethiopia border. In a revenge attack Ethiopian Boranas invaded the Gabras villages along the Kenya-Ethiopia border and stole animals. The Borana leaders and the government condemned the actions and quickly recovered the stolen animals. In the meantime, Ethiopian Boranas made peace with the Kenyan Gabras and made a pact that the Gabras would not attack the Kenyan Boranas in revenge. Nonetheless three herds of Borana cattle were stolen from Marsabit and Hurri hills. In addition, a Borana chief and his reservist were also shot dead. In retaliation to the attack, some Boranas burnt Gabbra houses in Marsabit and killed a Gabbra. In response, the Gabras killed six Boranas in their sleep around Forolle, near the Ethiopian border and this was what triggered the Turbi Massacre. On the morning of 12 July 2005 raiders, armed with sophisticated weapons and machetes, descended on the small village of Turbi. They attacked Turbi Trading centre and the Turbi Primary School causing a trail of destruction. They also burned dwelling places (manyattas) to ashes. They killed 80 people were reported and injured scores of other. Thousands of people were displaced and livestock worth millions of Kenya shillings driven away.

The Kokai Massacre

In revenge of the Turbi Massacre, the Gabra attacked a smaller trading centre called Bubisa, 80 Kilometers from Turbi in the afternoon of 12 July 2005. They killed four children and six adults. Those killed were all Boranas from Sololo Catholic Parish. They were members of a church group, catechists, their wives and children. Ethnic, clan and community conflict like the one between the Gabra and the Dassanetch was one of the major causes of the Turbi and the Kokai Massacre.

These two communities as also locked in frequent and deadly conflict over pasture, territory, water and more recently political and economic power.

Conclusion

The legacy of colonialism contributed to conflicts in among communities living in the Marsabit County of Kenya between 1964 and 2011 because the colonialists created administrative borders which affected the distribution of natural resources hence disrupting the grazing patterns of the pastoralist communities. This led to jealousy and animosity between these members of these communities resulting to persistent violent conflicts among the communities.

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