

Overlap of Mukutani Administrative Boundary and its Definition of the East Pokot– Il Chamus Conflict in North Western Kenya

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Abstract

Mukutani is both an area and a name for a particular administrative centre in North Western Kenya. The boundary and position of the administrative centre of Mukutani on the “boundary” of East Pokot pastoralists and Il Chamus agro-pastoralists is a long contested matter. This paper presents the history of the centre, its current status and the fluidity and shifting of the boundary between the East Pokot and Il Chamus communities, the contest over the correct name, the emergence of *No-Man’s Land* and the inaction by the government of Kenya. The key question investigated in this paper is: Is the East Pokot boundary defined by River Mukutani or it is nine kilometers to the North of the River? The stalemate and absence of government direction has confused people and compromised access to public services and pasture. The paper concludes that the government of Kenya has the civic duty to resolve inter-community boundary disputes.

Keywords: Mukutani, Makutano, boundary, ownership, livelihoods, conflict, East Pokot, Il Chamus.

Introduction

The question of contested boundaries and ownership of administrative centres has been a source of concern in Kenya since the colonial period. Nowhere in Kenya are the claims to boundaries so emotive, stark and fundamentalist in posture than in the North Western Region. Boundary areas have often been problematic to pastoralist communities due to multiple, overlapping, and shifting claims which often lead to conflict over control of the strategic resources that are defined by the boundaries. Galaty (2016) clearly articulated the boundary problem in northern Kenya and how it generates conflict. Administrative boundary shifts, the transition from inclusive to exclusive control of previously shared resources among the communities in Baringo County has been a subject of previous research (Greiner, 2013). Media reports by the Kenyan dailies, radio and television have all highlighted the high stakes and deadly consequences arising from the East Pokot and Il Chamus fight over Mukutani boundary.

Land ownership disputes in Baringo County have a long history largely as a result of regional competition for land by several ethnic groups. The threat of land appropriation by other ethnic groups has often been strong motivation to mobilize one ethnic group against another. However, none of the ethnic groups in Baringo County: East Pokot, Il Chamus or Tugen can lay legitimate claim to the area of the larger Lake Baringo basin (of which Mukutani is part) as legitimately their traditional land until early 1900 (Little, 1992). The most alarming loss of land among the Il Chamus was however in Arabal region but in 1932 it was given back to them (GoK, 1932). Consistent conversion of the land to settled farming continued especially by the Tugen although the land remained under Il Chamus ownership. A survey by FAO (1967) reported that there had been a significant loss of dry season grazing land in Arabal from 13,750 to 3,333 hectares (a 75.7% reduction). The East Pokot have appropriated Il Chamus territory in Rugus and the greater Mukutani while the western Il Chamus boundary has experienced sustained Tugen encroachment in areas of Salabani and Meisori (Little, 1992). This paper acknowledges the onslaught onto Il Chamus territory from various directions but it is focused on Mukutani boundary which demonstrates the clearest fundamentalist Il Chamus and East Pokot posture on the matter.

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Data Collection

The research was undertaken between January–August 2016 in the larger Mukutani area and later on in the outlying villages of Arabal, Ngelecha, Kiserian, Rugus, Kapindasim, Nosukuro and Tangelbei. Two local Assistants (one a Pokot from East Pokot and another an Il Chamus) were recruited for interpretation/translation and guidance purposes. This design was deliberately chosen in order to get the broadest representation of views from the indigenous East Pokot and Il Chamus who live in the immediate and larger area of Mukutani. This approach was also taken in order to obtain a clearer glimpse of the varying and contrasting perspectives on Mukutani boundary. This led me to establish the fact that Mukutani is also Makutano. The strength of this approach enabled me to come face to face with the vagaries of the conflict over control of this dusty administrative centre on the banks of River Mukutani, which ideally, in the perspective of an academic who dwells in an urban environment has nothing or little to offer. The few shops (about six at most) are made of earth wall and tin roof. The health centre is one permanent block but frequently patients are treated under the imposing acacia tree. To the south of the river is a makeshift police camp. This view was, however, short-lived when I came to experience the importance of Mukutani or Makutano to the “real owners.”

The first phase of data collection was between January and March 2016 when for five weeks I traversed the upper side of Lake Baringo to capture its geographical extent as well as the landscapes that define the area and the people. In this period I was able to familiarize myself with the local administrative and political leaders both among the Il Chamus and the East Pokot. In this period, the gloom on the peoples’ faces was real for three weeks before my arrival; there had been skirmishes leading to considerable displacement of the Il Chamus. The period was an eye opener and a learning experience as well. I came to learn of the existence of *no-man’s land* within man’s land!

The second phase, much longer, was between mid April to July 2016. In the period I held key informant interviews with East Pokot and Il Chamus leaders in their own respective areas. However, most of the interviews with Il Chamus leadership were held in the comfort of Marigat town where most of them had relocated to. The Mukutani Ward Administrator and Member of the County Assembly (MCA) representing the area had been banished by the East Pokot from Mukutani and were refugees in Marigat town. The in-depth interviews yielded a lot of detailed and complex information on how they claim Mukutani centre to belong to their ethnic group. One point emerged clear from these interviews. Most of the interviewees had only recent information stretching as far back as late 1980s. The leaders were generally young people hence with a limited scope. Efforts to obtain a much longer history about Mukutani and the conflict did not yield much. This prompted me to design another approach that would fill the lacunae.

Six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held (three among the East Pokot and three among the Il Chamus). In order to get a more balanced view, one FGD was held with elderly East Pokot women and another with Il Chamus women. Although the initial intention was to obtain detailed information on the history of the area, the end result was a greater elaboration on how the conflict had affected household livelihoods and the struggles that now face women and children. The FGDs with East Pokot men were held in Mukutani and Tangelbei while the Il Chamus ones were held in Mukutani and Kiserian. The idea behind the interviews with men was to get a glimpse of the history of the conflict. The discussions were quite fruitful for the exposition of the dynamics of the conflict but they were, too, deficient in historical explanations.

Although the Kenya National Police (NPS) personnel were considerable in the area, they were not considered a useful category of respondents largely due to their transient nature. Nevertheless, the NPS play an important role in enabling the semblance of order to persist for short periods and in some places while in the larger area of Mukutani lawlessness reigns.

The third phase of the research was in September 2016. It lasted for twenty one days. This phase was particularly detailed to make observations in the area and to fill in glaring gaps. The presence of a four wheel vehicle enabled me once again to traverse the region. The focus was on gathering physical evidence that depict the consequences of the conflict. This brought me to abandoned irrigation fields, destroyed and diverted irrigation water infrastructure, abandoned schools and homesteads, schools converted into police barracks, closed roads and, an expansive and resource rich no-man’s land. One of the most outstanding observations made was of the Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) camp at Kiserian village which now accommodates thousands of Il Chamus families. I found that the IDPs were not documented and neither do they rely on government assistance. These final forays also made me appreciate the existence of the few schools or health centres that were partially functioning.

The final phase of the research was in Nairobi, at the National Archives. It took me to study colonial administrative and intelligence reports from 1913 – 1962. This finally enabled me to capture the history of Mukutani as well as East Pokot–Il Chamus relations and origin of the claims on the exact position of the boundary.

Description of the Study Area

The entire of Mukutani centre currently falls within Mukutani division of Baringo South Sub-County, and, at the same time part of it falls within East Pokot sub county of Baringo County. It lies at an average altitude of 1000m above sea level (GoK, 2013). It experiences low and erratic rainfall which varies between 500mm and 750mm per annum. The average temperatures are high and range between a low of 25°C to 39°C which is characteristic of semi-arid zones. The area falls under the midlands and lowlands agro-ecological zones. The soils are predominantly loam and clay with silt –impregnated deposits (Jaetzold and Schmidt, 1983).

The main land use is pastoralism and agro-pastoralism, but with increasing tendency towards crop production due to the proliferation of irrigation projects. The poverty incidence is high with 65% of the people living below poverty line (KDHS, 2014). The East Pokot and Il Chamus are the dominant ethnic groups but there is a considerable proportion of the Tugen community as well. The dominant vegetation in the area are: *Acacia reficiens*, *Acacia melifera*, *Acacia rubica* and *Acacia tortilis* (Gichoi and Kallavi, 1979). The common grasses in this region are *Eragrostis spp*, *Aristida spp* and *Digitaria velutina* (FAO, 1967). The overall vegetation cover is less than 20% or largely does not exist (Olang, 1982).

One of the most comprehensive environmental descriptions of the larger Mukutani area is found in the works of agricultural experts in colonial Kenya who described it as follows,

“The East Pokot and Il Chamus reserves may be considered amongst the agricultural slums of Kenya. They are difficult to administer due to their arid nature” (Maber, 1937).

And,

“The natives are more inclined to a pastoral life than interested in improving their diet and economic status by the more arduous undertakings of agriculture. In their eyes the economic status of a man is solely determined by the numbers of cattle, sheep, goats which he possesses, as such there is great accumulation of stock in these reserves far beyond the carrying capacity of the land. This has led to reduction in pasture quality and widespread soil erosion” (GoK, 1938).

The area falls within the old Baringo Basin in the area enclosed by the Laikipia fault escarpment and the Kamasia Escarpment which run roughly North and South with a slight easterly inclination. The Il Chamus territory is about 250 square miles in area and situated to the West, South East, South and South West of Lake Baringo. The greatest length in a North- South direction is about 17 miles and a width of 25 miles in an East –West dimension (GoK,1938). The area has a household average of 5 members and the rural poor constitute 57.4% of the population (GoK, 2013). Insecurity caused by inter ethnic conflict is an impediment to development for most upcoming market centres and schools located around and within areas prone to attacks do not develop due to desertion (GoK, 2013).

The East Pokot

The East Pokot (*pipatich* or *cattle people*) were initially known as the East Suk. Suk is a Maasai nickname meaning ignorant people who were agriculturalists and living in the highlands (GoK, 1929). They claim to have originated from Mount Sekerr in West Suk. The East Pokot are found in the eastern part of Baringo County. They are differentiated from the West Pokot (*pipaghar* or *people of the seed*) who inhabit West Pokot County. In this paper the focus is on the East Pokot. Gok (1950) showed that the East Pokot were about 40% of their western brethren and they broke off from the original Nandi settlement at Mount Elgon. They speak Nandi language both in structure and vocabulary. The East Pokot had a sustained collaboration with the Turkana and Karamojong from whom they acquired many customs including singing, baboon dance and *sapana* rite of passage (Beech, 1911). The close association of the Pokot to Turkana and Karamojong has also been elaborately discussed by Lamphear, (1992). Similarly GoK (1931) affirmed that the customs of the East Pokot and Turkana were similar, for instance, the baboon dance performed in Kacheliba, Lokitaung and Tangulbei was the same. The East Pokot cattle wealth makes them rank above the Maasai as the most opulent Africans and their wants outside cattle are negligible (GoK, 1951). The attachment to cattle most probably informed their refusal to destock when other neighbouring communities accepted the implementation of the destocking policy (GoK, 1939, 1950). According to the 2009 national population census the East Pokot population was expected to be 173,429 based on an annual growth rate of 2.65%. The literacy level is 66% male and 55% female and 64 -74% of the population live below poverty line compared to 58.5% at County level (GoK, 2013).

The Il Chamus

The Il Chamus community was originally known as the *Njemps* in the colonial period. *Njemps* is a derogatory Maasai reference for the poor cattle-less cultivators. The Il Chamus are said to be descendants of the original party of Maasai who first came to Lake Baringo in search of plunder. Their customs are very similar to the Maasai (GoK, 1931). Another perspective of their origin holds that they arose out of the remnants of the broken Maasai kingdom but have intermarried with the Pokot and Tugen. The third perspective holds that the Il Chamus are remnants of the several pastoralist groups that irregularly used the area they currently occupy (Little, 1992). What is not in doubt however, is Il Chamus orientation towards the Maasai although studies by Little (1992) and Anderson (1981) show greater leaning towards the Samburu, for seven out of twelve Il Chamus clans are of Samburu origin. The Il Chamus occupy the central region of largely two systems, the Central Rift Valley system and the Lake Turkana system in which they functioned as the confluence of the two systems (Waller, 1985).

The Il Chamus are part of the *maa* speaking people of east Africa who straddle the territory stretching from North Western Kenya to Northern Tanzania and comprises both pastoralists: Maasai, Samburu and agro-pastoralists Il Chamus and Arusha (Spear, and Waller, 1992). The Il Chamus are an agro-pastoralist group although early European writers referred to them as the agricultural Maasai since at the turn of the 18th century they were purely cultivators. They occupy the central zone between the Pokot-Turkana- Samburu to the north and the Maasai to the South. There was a region of irrigated agriculture. It is often argued that their central location between livestock keeping communities endeared them to transit to an agro-pastoralist economy. Early European explorers had kind words of the Il Chamus territory including: having exceptional agricultural potential (Little, 1992); land capable of producing anything (Thompson, 1885); the most fertile part of the eastern area of the province (CPK, 1926). However, by 1920's, the Il Chamus agricultural productivity was no more largely out of climatic change, improper land husbandry, overstocking and a general propensity to acquire a pastoralist status. This prompted Maher (1937) to christen the area as having reached an economic and ecological end point. Consequently, much of the period between 1926 – 1962 witnessed regular government intervention through famine relief food as most people had abandoned cultivation in preference for livestock.

The Il Chamus occupy a territory that is rich in water and swampland that provides all the year round pastures hence the envy of the neighbouring East Pokot, Samburu, Turkana pastoralists and the agricultural sections of the Tugen. The agricultural orientation of the Il Chamus is what probably informed the colonial government to advise them not to keep livestock given their proximity to the East Pokot (GoK, 1913). The government notion of an Il Chamus community without cattle was most probably out of realization that it would inevitably lead to conflict with the East Pokot, an eventuality that came to be realised.

The Il Chamus community is administratively located in Marigat and Mukutani Wards of Baringo South Sub-county, Baringo County. Following the establishment of irrigation schemes, their economy has consistently combined livestock keeping away from their exclusive agricultural history. They live on a territory of about 750 square kilometres which comprises of the Lake Bogoria and Lake Bogoria basin and bound by the Laikipia and Tugen escarpments. Its southern boundary lies about 70Km north of the equator. The area has perennial water provided by the Lake Baringo, Perkera River, Molo River, Arabal River and Mukutani River (GoK, 1938). The swamps around the lakes and the higher elevations of Arabal on Ngelecha ranges provide good dry season pastures, a factor which attracts hordes of other herders and cultivators leading to inevitable conflict with the East Pokot and Tugen.

According to Anderson (1982) the more powerful cattle keeping communities of East Pokot and Turkana were largely seasonal herders in the area and posed little challenge to the Il Chamus. However, permanent herders of East Pokot origin and cultivators of Tugen origin now characterize the dynamics of Il Chamus territory. Dundas (1910) wrote about the presence of a *maa* speaking people around Lake Baringo. Vossen (1978) indicated that in early 1900 there were refugees or remnants of the Maasai and L-Oikop wars living around Lake Baringo. However, based on the writings by Galaty (1982) the people inhabiting the Lake Baringo Basin were hunters and fishermen but did not keep cattle, hence their hunting orientation takes them closer to the *maa* speaking hunter-gatherers of the Dorobo (*Il Torobo*). The Il Chamus connection to the Kalenjin (Tugen and Marakwet communities) has also been documented. The Il Kapis clan originated from the Marakwet while the Il Mae clan has strong affinity with the Tugen (Little, 1992). The Kalenjin connection probably informs the later Kalenjin groups' migration into Il Chamus territory especially to Arabal and Mochongoi regions.

It is not surprising that the Il Chamus may not be Maasai for merely speaking a maa dialect does not make them Maasai. This spurious origin of the Il Chamus was aptly summarized by Waller and Spear (1992) as follows,

Many people who identify themselves as Maasai, or who speak maa, are not pastoralists at all, but farmers and hunters, or simply pretenders to pastoralist status

Due to its elaborate irrigation system the Il Chamus provided refuge for those communities devastated by war, drought, famine or livestock diseases (Anderson, 1981). Similarly early Arab traders from the Coast to the western parts of present day Kenya and Uganda often replenished their food supplies from the Il Chamus farmers (Jacobs, 1968). Although the Il Chamus were initially presented as hardworking cultivators and traders before the colonial period, on turning to pastoralism between 1900-1962 they were depicted as notoriously heavy drinkers (GoK, 1938).

A history of Mukutani Administrative Centre

Mukutani administrative post was established in 1904 after the break-up of the initial Il Chamus *Lekeper* and Il Chamus *Labori* villages that relied on the waters of the River Molo and River Perkerra respectively for irrigation. The nascent colonial administration merged the two villages to form one settlement at Loiminange administrative post and thereafter moved to Mukutani (on the banks of River Mukutani) which became the new administrative post (Anderson, 1981). Another perspective holds that Mukutani centre was originally founded to protect the Il Chamus and East Pokot against the Turkana attacks (EAP, 1905). However, to Anderson (1981), Mukutani administrative post was established as a way of managing the access to pasture and water by the East Pokot and Il Chamus. The East Pokot utilized the pastures to the North of River Mukutani while the Il Chamus utilized the pastures to the South. At this time the East Pokot would cross the river and settle (Little, 1992). This implies East Pokot and Il Chamus presence at Mukutani at the beginning of the colonial administration and Mukutani as a shared area. Consequently, the East Pokot–Il Chamus boundary was in 1920 defined, moved North and marked by latitude 0° 40' and entered into the Political Record Book (GoK, 1920). The boundary was again confirmed in 1924 (GoK, 1924). A review of the Baringo District Annual Report for 1920 indicated that the map showing the East Pokot–Il Chamus boundary marked as Appendix II had ostensibly been pulled out from the Report. The pull-out (in my view) demonstrates the interests several groups have on the exact position of Mukutani boundary in the context of the violent and divergent views about it. Ethnic tensions fuelled by desire for territorial identity led to the formation of the Land Commission (GoK, 1932). In 1932 the Land Commission visited Kabarnet where all the ethnic groups in Baringo District – Tugen, East Pokot and Il Chamus presented their land claims. The Il Chamus applied for the land between River Mukutani and Mount Ngelecha/Laikipia Escarpment, an application which was granted (GoK, 1932). Mukutani Centre was finally gazetted as a trading centre via Government Notice No. 352 of May 25, 1933 (GoK, 1934). In the previous year an Indian of Pakistan origin who had already established a business empire at Tangelbei opened a shop at Mukutani Centre (GoK, 1934). The following year saw the establishment of a Mukutani dispensary (GoK, 1935). In 1945 the dispensary was relocated and rebuilt on another site (GoK, 1945).

Although there had been raids for livestock by the East Pokot and Turkana against the Il Chamus and the East Pokot continued to graze their livestock across Mukutani River into Mt. Ngelecha there were no skirmishes.

The History of Conflict over Mukutani

The consensual access to the resources of Mukutani River and the region by the East Pokot and Il Chamus began to show signs of tension in late 1930s. The first East Pokot – Il Chamus conflict near Mukutani was in 1938 (GoK, 1938). The second followed as a result of drought leading to an affray between the East Pokot and Il Chamus near Mukutani (GoK, 1944).

The most formidable conflict between the East Pokot and Il Chamus at Mukutani was in 1945. The GoK (1945) reports as follows,

A fight between the East Pokot of Korossi Location and Il Chamus at Mukutani took place in August. The fight was over a woman. The Il Chamus were largely to blame in the early stages. A party of East Pokot who were on a visit to Il Chamus territory were beaten. The East Pokot retaliated by calling up reinforcements and routed the Il Chamus after a battle. Some 120 people were involved and two Il Chamus were killed. Both sides were heavily fined and one East Pokot convicted of manslaughter.

After the conflict, the government forbade the East Pokot from settling in Il Chamus territory and the Il Chamus from allowing the East Pokot to do so (GoK, 1945).

Further GoK (1945) reports,

The East Pokot receive valuable watering and grazing concessions from the Il Chamus along Mukutani River and the East Pokot had been warned that the favours would be withdrawn in the event of farther conflict and encroachment onto Il Chamus territory. There had been an affray over the boundary in 1944

Due to the continued conflict, the District Commissioner for Baringo visited Mukutani and prohibited the East Pokot from watering their livestock in Mukutani area (GoK, 1946).

The Current Conflict over Mukutani Boundary

Mukutani continues to draw divergent interests leading to considerable conflict and consequent displacement of thousands of Il Chamus and East Pokot. Several points of contention have emerged over Mukutani and which form the basis of the next presentation.

The Physical Location of Mukutani Centre

The current conflict is over whether Mukutani Centre is located exclusively in Il Chamus territory (Baringo South Sub-county) or in East Pokot territory (East Pokot Sub county). The second thread of this is whether it is a shared administrative centre and if so what marks the boundary between the two communities. What obtains today are fundamentalist positions on both sides of the competing communities. The exclusive claim is clearly evident today hence a transition from what was initially a shared region and trading centre in 1907. The initial concern by both communities was access to pasture, shared pasture and a shared river. However today it has become more specific to definition and continuing redefinition of the boundary. While the Il Chamus community claim exclusive ownership of Mukutani, the East Pokot insist on a shared ownership. An East Pokot informant living near Mukutani and familiar with its history narrated to me as follows:

‘The Il Chamus Chiefs’ wife was a nurse and employed at the Mukutani health centre which was located to the north of the Mukutani River. The Chief subsequently constructed his home to the North of the river next to the health centre where his wife was employed. He held his meetings to the North of the river. The Il Chamus took it that since the chief’s home was to the North then his jurisdiction included both the South and North of River Mukutani. The reality is that the chief was in charge of Mukutani to the South of River Mukutani because the northern side was in East Pokot therefore under a different chief’.

Another key informant from the area said the following:

‘Mukutani primary school submitted their records to Chemolingot which is in East Pokot territory. However, in late 1980’s the retired President Moi ordered that the school submits its reports to Marigat which is in Il Chamus territory. For fear of reprisals we kept quiet until he retired that is when we sought the injustice to be corrected. Look at it this way, Mukutani Health Centre which is next to Mukutani primary school has always reported and obtained its medical supplies from Chemolingot so why should the school report to a different administration? That we won’t accept. This has created a lot of confusion among the people. Sometimes you are tossed between two jurisdictions to get services’.

Observations made while on a visit to Mukutani showed that both Mukutani primary school and Mukutani health centre are adjacent and to the north of River Mukutani but the two report to different administrative jurisdictions.

The Exact location of the Mukutani Administrative Boundary

The exact or approximate location of the boundary is a hotly contested issue. To different people with different orientations it is at least in two places at the same time. To the Il Chamus community the boundary is nine kilometres across the river to the north. An Il Chamus informant summarized his claim as follows:

‘The Divisional Officer (DO) from Marigat came to Mukutani one day in mid 1990s and while he was leaving he gave us a lift in his Land- Rover vehicle. After some drive he stopped the car by the roadside and showed us the Il Chamus –East Pokot boundary. He told us that it was nine kilometers from Mukutani on the road towards Tangulbei’.

The question of the East Pokot – Il Chamus boundary at Makutani has equally received considerable attention at national level. The Government of Kenya in 2010 established the Interim Independent Boundaries Review Commission (IIBRC) (2010) whose terms of reference included correcting and re-aligning contested administrative boundaries in the country. This involved the IIBRC visiting disputed boundaries or the disputants submitting memoranda to support their claim. The East Pokot memorandum in reference to Mukutani centre to the IIBRC read as follows:

“The Pokot permitted establishment of a Mission School, Church and Dispensary by the Full Gospel Church on East Pokot territory at Mukutani just like they had earlier established the same in Pokot territory at Kapedo. The Pokot accommodated their Il Chamus neighbours in sharing the services offered by the institutions. The Il Chamus abused this East Pokot generosity and became one of the most controversial sources of conflict. The Il Chamus’ exclusive claim to the North of Mukutani Centre and the institutions is a classical case of a proverbial camel which was accommodated and later wanted to evict the host”.

Administrative Overlap

Mukutani centre is governed by two administrative jurisdictions. One is the Baringo South Sub County based at Marigat town and the other is the East Pokot Sub County based at Chemolingot town. In 2015, an East Pokot chief was appointed to administer the location to the North of River Mukutani, yet the area was ostensibly under the Il Chamus whose jurisdiction straddled both sides of River Mukutani. The overlap of administrative jurisdictions has made Mukutani a scarcely governed area. Consequently the East Pokot people recognize and report only to their Pokot chief, and, similarly the Il Chamus recognize and report solely to their Il Chamus chief. This situation has functioned to confuse people and undermined rule of law in the area. In 2015 again, the East Pokot community resisted the posting of a Divisional Officer (DO) from Marigat (an Il Chamus sub-county headquarter) for fear that would imply the whole of Mukutani was in Il Chamus territory. An East Pokot informant familiar with area and a resident of the area presented as follows on this administrative stalemate:

“Mukutani area is under the effective administration of the DO in Tangelbei. Why bring a DO onto another DO? If the Government wants they can post their DO from Marigat but he must be stationed only to the Southern side of River Mukutani, but not this way. They have always wanted to take our land. As it is now I do not think any Pokot would accept this”.

Had the DO been posted to Mukutani from Chemolingot, their Sub county headquarter the East Pokot would have accepted and probably the Il Chamus would have rejected the posting. Consequently, the DO is marooned at Marigat (30km away from his “station”). A senior government officer commented on this administrative quagmire as follows:

“The Pokot threatened to burn the vehicle of the DO and shoot him if he dared step in Mukutani. For the safety of my officer I quickly withdrew him. The Pokot claim that posting a DO to Mukutani from Marigat would imply the area is solely in Il Chamus territory. We did not want to be seen as favouring one community on this matter. We left it at that until the national government resolves the boundary matter. Even when I called a meeting of political leaders from both communities to a meeting to resolve the matter only a few turned up in spite of all of them having confirmed. The meeting did not take off. Immediately I realized hollowness of my initiative”.

Hence Mukutani presents a continuing administrative and safety complex in the region today.

Mukutani or Makutano?

Names matter a great deal. Names confer identity, ownership and belonging. Another thread to the East Pokot-II Chamus conflict is about the correct name for the administrative centre of Mukutani. To the Il Chamus the correct name is Mukutani. According to those of this view, the centre is named after a tree species (called Mukutani in Il Chamus language) which is dominant in this area. However, the East Pokot insist that the correct name for the same centre is Makutano. To them, the centre is at the T-junction where the Tangelbei road meets the Marigat road. Therefore resolution of the correct name presents another difficulty to the conflict. Therefore both names are in use in depending on one’s orientation and/or sympathy.

The No Mans’ Land

In the midst of this complex situation the conflict over Mukutani has displaced thousands of families leading to creation of a huge area christened no –man’s land between Mukutani/Makutano and Kiserian Village on the shores of Lake Baringo. The no mans land is about 20km wide, rich in pasture and water but cannot be accessed by the East Pokot or Il Chamus for grazing for fear of attacks. No Man’s land is now a training and surveillance ground for the East Pokot and Il Chamus *moran* and militia.

The No-man's land was initially a key pasture area but later it became the theatre for the fights between the East Pokot and Il Chamus in the context of the wider Mukutani conflict. The No-man's land now functions as the buffer zone between the two communities. The conflict between the two communities over Mukutani was so intense and sustained that most people were displaced. One Il Chamus informant who is now an IDP estimated the displacement as follows:

"In Mukutani Ward 98%, Rugus Location 99%, Arabal Location 99% and Kiserian Location 75% of the people have been displaced by the East Pokot. Even the Ward Administrator, Member of the County Assembly for Mukutani including the chiefs from Rugus have been displaced and now live far from their administrative Locations. This area is lawless and there is little the government has done to resolve this boundary conflict. How can a leader be a refugee in his own home? This is not acceptable".

The East Pokot–Il Chamus positions on Mukutani/Makutano acquired fundamentalist positions between 2004–2015. According to one informant, the Mukutani conflict peaked in this period following the Governments' confiscation of thousands of East Pokot livestock to compensate the Il Chamus.

Conclusion

The question of contested, fluid or sometimes ill-defined boundaries has haunted the North western region of Kenya in general and the East Pokot and Il Chamus communities for long. Similarly, each community's push for exclusion of the other has in itself been a characteristic of the relations between them from the late 1980's. This state of affairs has defined Mukutani/Makutano as one of lawless, unruly, uninhabitable and inaccessible area of North Western Kenya. In spite of all these, the government of Kenya has done little to show resolve to arbitrate and put the conflict to end. What remains clear is that the boundary issue must be resolved and history is best placed to provide the avenue for its resolution. So far, the push for exclusion presents the remotest possibility for resolution while the polarities between the two communities become more cemented, wider and wider. However, the governments' inaction and the political leaders' inaction presents greater gloom than hope for the future. In spite of this, it remains the governments' responsibility to align contested boundaries.

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