

The culture and environmental ethic
of the Pokot people of Laikipia, Kenya.

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Lizanne du Plessis

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Arts (Philosophy) at the University of Stellenbosch

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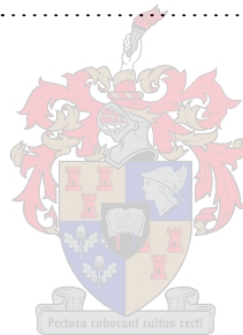
December 2005

Declaration

I, Lizanne du Plessis, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:.....

Date:.....



Financial assistance by the National Research Foundation is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this thesis or conclusions made, are that of the author and are not necessarily those of the National Research Foundation.

Abstract

This study sets out to document the culture and environmental ethic of the Pokot tribe of Laikipia, Kenya. This is done in order to find the wisdom this culture contains and to seek alternative ways for conservation and development in Africa.

The concept of indigenous knowledge is a highly contested one, especially in the light of the phenomenal strength of the scientific method in the western world. Indigenous knowledge is in many instances regarded as primitive, backward and therefore of little value. This study will attempt to show that such statements are ill-informed and will aim to show that indigenous knowledge contains much wisdom with regard to living in harmony with the earth. In this attempt we will specifically look at the Pokot tribe of Kenya.

The culture of the Pokot will be discussed within the larger framework of African thought and philosophy. There exists remarkable differences between African and western ways of thought and this thesis sets out to find what they are as well as whether there can be found any similarities between them. This process will aim at finding correlating principles between African environmental ethics and modern day radical western environmental ethics, in order to find a middle way between the two. The argument behind such action is that even though the west is far ahead of Africa regarding technological development, it is these same technologies (and the comforts it entails) that are also bringing about monstrous consequences for humans as well as the natural environment. Large scale overconsumption and lifestyles that exceed the earth's capacity to care for its inhabitants are at the core of our global environmental crisis. Alternative ways are thus necessary to correct instances of the over-exploitation of our natural heritage, and I propose that Africa holds many of these answers.

African thought differs from western thought in many important aspects. One of these is the deep seated communality that exists within African societies. This can be described as a thick set of relational circles that is ever-widening, even into the sphere of the environment and in which every role player has a high level of responsibility to

all others. This flows into the concept that all things are the manifestation of a single life-force, and that they are simply different expressions of this force. This has far reaching implications for an internationally accepted environmental ethic and contains valuable concepts to challenge the global environmental crisis. The Pokot (and most African cultures) seem to view the web of life as an interconnected, whole system. This is in stark contrast to the compartmentalised world view found in western thought.

In order to better understand and identify this environmental ethic of the Pokot, their culture and rituals are documented and important concepts analysed. Once this is done, the Pokot environmental ethic is compared to the basic principles of the radical western environmental ethic theory of Deep Ecology. It is seen that there exists many similar concepts found in both the African as well as the radical western theory, and it is suggested that the way forward can in part be achieved by looking back to more traditional ways of thought and living.

With regard to the practical solution of problems of developmental and environmental concern in Kenya, it is seen that African philosophical sages have a big role to play. These persons are intimately acquainted with their own traditional cultures, but they retain a rational critique of their societies. As all elders in the African community, they are extremely respected and this, together with their independent views, makes them invaluable to solve matters of environmental conflict.

One practical solution where African and western ways of thought are combined, is found in the establishing of cultural conservancies. In such cultural conservancies the local people entertain tourists with their traditional dances and rituals and receive an income in return. But the main attraction though, is most often the environment and the wild animals, and this provides motivation for the local people to conserve these.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie is daarop gemik om die kultuur en omgewingsetiek van die Pokot stam van Laikipia, Kenia, te dokumenteer en sodoende die wysheid daarin vervat na te vors. Sodoende sal daar ook gepoog word om dit te gebruik om alternatiewe oplossings vir bewarings- en ontwikkelingsprobleme in Afrika te vind.

Die konsep van inheemse kennis is 'n hewig gedebatteerde kwessie, veral in die lig van die fenomenale invloed wat die wetenskaplike metode in die westerse wêreld gehad het. Inheemse kennis word in baie gevalle as primitief, agterlik en nutteloos beskou. Hierdie studie sal poog om die valsheid van sulke aansprake uit te wys, en aan te dui dat inheemse kennis 'n magdom wysheid bevat rakende 'n leefstyl wat in harmonie met die natuur is.

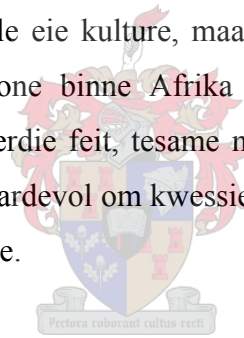
Die kultuur van die Pokot sal binne die groter raamwerk van Afrika denke en filosofie bespreek word. Daar bestaan groot verskille tussen Afrika en westerse maniere van dink en hierdie tesis gaan streef daarna om dit uit te wys, asook om die ooreenkomste tussen die twee te probeer vind. Hierdie proses is nodig, omdat Afrika haar denkpattone sal moet aanpas om in voeling te bly met die ontwikkelingstendense in ons huidige "global village". Maar aan die ander kant het tegnologie en ontwikkeling ook vernietigende gevolge vir die mens en die omgewing gehad. Alternatiewe oplossings is dus nodig om hierdie uitbuiting van die natuur reg te stel. Dit is my opinie dat Afrika filosofie en inheemse kennis een so 'n alternatiewe oplossing is.

Afrika en westerse denke verskil in baie belangrike aspekte. Een hiervan is die gemeenskaplikheid wat binne gemeenskappe in Afrika bestaan. Hierdie gemeenskaplikheid kan verduidelik word as 'n stel konsentriese sirkels wat wyer uitkring, selfs tot binne die natuurlike omgewing en waarin alle deelnemers 'n basiese verantwoordelikheid teenoor alle ander het. Hierdie konsep behels verder dat alle materiële dinge die uitdrukking van slegs een lewenskrag is – 'n krag wat op verskillende maniere en deur verskillende mediums uitgedruk word. So 'n siening het verreikende implikasies vir 'n internasionaal aanvaarbare omgewingsetiek (en dit

bevat waardevolle konsepte om die globale omgewingskrisis teen te werk), juis omdat dit 'n respekvolle ingesteldheid teenoor alle vorms van lewe voorskryf.

Om die omgewingsetiek van die Pokot beter te verstaan, is hulle kultuur en rituele gedokumenteer om dan die belangrikste konsepte daarin te analiseer. Die omgewingsetiek van die Pokot is daarna met die basiese beginsels van die radikale westerse omgewingsetiek van Diep Ekologie vergelyk. Daar is gevind dat daar baie konsepte ooreenstem tussen die Afrika en westerse teorieë, en dus dat oplossings vir die hede en die toekoms in baie opsigte gevind kan word deur terug te kyk na meer tradisionele maniere van dink en leef.

In sake die praktiese oplossing van omgewings- en ontwikkelingsprobleme in Kenia, is daar gesien dat Afrika wysgere (“sages”) 'n groot rol het om te speel. Sulke persone is diep bekend met hulle eie kulture, maar hulle behou 'n rasionale kritiek daarvan. Soos alle ouer persone binne Afrika gemeenskappe, word hulle baie gerespekteer en hoog geag. Hierdie feit, tesame met die onafhanklike sienings wat hulle huldig, maak hulle baie waardevol om kwessies van omgewingskonflik op te los binne die plaaslike gemeenskappe.



Een moontlike praktiese oplossing wanneer Afrika en westerse denkpatrone gekombineer word, kan gevind word in die vestiging van kulturele bewaringsareas. Hier stel die plaaslike stam hulle kultuur en omgewing bekend en vermaak toeriste met hulle tradisionele danse en rituele. Die hoofaantrekkingskrag is egter gewoonlik die wilde diere en die omgewing en dit motiveer die plaaslike stam om hierdie bates te beskerm. Sulke bewaringsareas bevoordeel dus die omgewing, die diere, sowel as die plaaslike mense wat daar woon, omdat toeriste 'n bron van inkomste verskaf.

Acknowledgements

Professor Johan P. Hattingh, for his support of this project and giving me the freedom to go out as my heart lead – but even more for bringing structure to my thoughts throughout every part of this process. His deep understanding of difficult environmental ethics concepts and his ability to help put my research findings in a meaningful framework was invaluable to me. I am very grateful and have been privileged to work with professor Hattingh, for his outlook and style have undoubtedly made the writing of my thesis a very enjoyable experience.

Kuki and Sveva Gallmann and the Gallmann Memorial Foundation, for giving me the opportunity to visit their Conservancy in Laikipia, Kenya, as well as to make use of their facilities and share in their friendship. Their commendable relationship with the tribes bordering the Laikipia Nature Conservancy was by far the most important reason that made this study possible. I am indebted to them forever for sharing the magic of Kenya and her people with me. Laikipia was a healing, liberating and inspiring experience, and it will forever remain as a treasure in my heart.

The Pokot people in the villages I visited, for sharing their culture and ways with a foreigner and treating me like a guest of honour. Their shining eyes and ever-ready smiles have once again impressed on me the value of a strong community bond and a simple life close to the earth.

My translators, Patrick Koas and Pastor Musa Maklab, whose help played a tremendous part in the completion of my research in Kenya.

Didi, the elder from Amaya village, for sharing his incredible wisdom with me in what felt like a sacred afternoon.

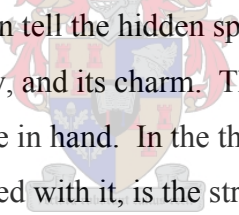
Dr Workineh Kelbessa from the University of Addis Ababa, for his guidance, help with stucture and clear sense of environmental ethics among African people.

All pictures used in this thesis were taken by the author.

For mom and dad

For showing me the magnificence of life in the bush.


Dad,



“But there are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness. That can reveal its mystery, its melancholy, and its charm. There is delight in the hardy life of the open. In the long rides rifle in hand. In the thrill of the fight with dangerous game. Apart from this, yet mingled with it, is the strong attraction of the silent places. Of the large tropic moons and the splendour of the new stars. Where the wanderer sees the awful glory of sunrise and sunset in the wild waste spaces of the earth, unworn of man, and changed only by the slow changes of the ages, through time everlasting ...”

Theodore Roosevelt

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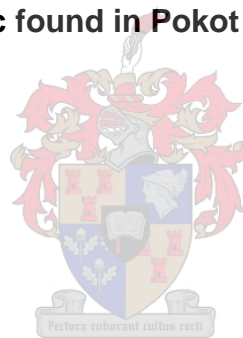
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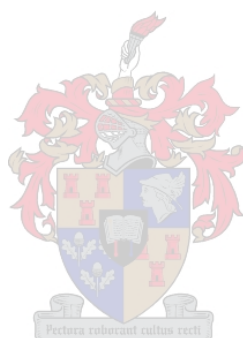
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Introduction

a) Background to this study

The need for, and my interest in, this study was born of the alarming rate of environmental degradation world wide. The situation as summed up by J.R. Des Jardins (1993:53), led to my initial interest in matters of environmental concern:

Largely through human activity, life on earth faces the greatest mass extinctions since the end of the dinosaur age 65 million years ago. Some estimates suggest that more than one hundred species a day is becoming extinct and that this rate could double or triple within the next few decades. The natural resources that sustain life on this planet – air, water, and soil – are being polluted or depleted at alarming rates. Human population growth is increasing exponentially. The world population of 6 billion people in 2000 will likely increase by one billion people by the year 2010. The prospects for continued degradation and depletion of natural resources multiply with this population growth. Toxic wastes that will plague future generations continue to accumulate worldwide. The world's wilderness areas, its forests, wetlands, mountains, and grasslands, are being developed, paved, drained, burned, and overgrazed out of existence. With the destruction of the ozone layer and the resulting greenhouse effect, human activity threatens the atmosphere and climate of the planet itself.

He is also of the opinion (and I agree with this) that our society's ways of coping with this problem is insufficient to heal the wounds:

The tendency in our culture is to treat such issues as simply scientific, technological, or political problems. But they are much more than this. These environmental and ecological controversies raise fundamental questions about what we as human beings value, about the kind of lives we should live, our place in nature, and the kind of world in which we might flourish. In short, environmental problems raise fundamental questions of ethics and philosophy. (Des Jardins, 1993:54)

With a background in philosophy, this problem thus challenged me to inquire into possible philosophical solutions to these problems that are threatening our world.

The possibilities in this regard are innumerable, and much like the uncharted waters that those early discoverers and adventurers had to face. It was thus possible to embark at almost any point, but because of a deep love for Africa and specifically Kenya, I chose to start there. My passion for Kenya was much enhanced by the life of Karen Blixen who lived there and had a wonderful relationship with the people of the land early in the 20th century. I was also very much inspired by Kuki Gallmann who currently lives there, more specifically through her books “*I dreamed of Africa*” (1991), “*African nights*” (1995) and “*Night of the lions*” (2000). The enviable relationship that she and her family have been able to establish with the local people neighbouring them is truly something commendable and something I knew I would love to contribute to and also learn from. I also realized that one of the reasons I admire these two women so much, is because of their understanding of the indigenous people of Africa and the acceptance they received in return. This I knew could only be possible if both of them were able to understand something of the voice of the earth and of Africa, and also to respect the thought and philosophy found among the indigenous people. This was important to me, because even before I started contemplating this study it was my basic assumption that the indigenous people of Africa have knowledge about living in harmony with the earth that we as westerners have somehow lost. This study is thus also a personal quest – a journey to find out more about the things that fascinate me so, even without my being deeply acquainted with it. With the warm hospitality of Mrs Kuki Gallmann, who presides the Gallmann Memorial Foundation (GMF), I thus took my journey to Kenya.



1.



2.

Fig. 1 Sveva Gallmann dancing with children.

Fig.2 Kuki Gallmann with Pokot women.

Because of the wonderful relationship between the Gallmanns and the Pokot people who live around the Laikipia Nature Conservancy (where Mrs Gallmann and the GMF are situated) it was possible to focus my study on this specific tribe.

From a preliminary literature study I was able to conclude that the traditional indigenous people of Africa have a lot to teach others about living in harmony with their environment (as I suspected) and much wisdom to share in this regard. Their thoughts would thus prove helpful for studies that aim at finding alternatives for solving the global environmental crisis.

For centuries the traditional people of Africa have had the opportunity to live in close relation to their natural surroundings. This has enabled them to know their environment and its messages intimately, and they can in many aspects be regarded as specialists in their specific areas and environments. In the specific case of the Pokot people, their “environment” borders that of the Laikipia Nature Conservancy.

For the duration of this study I lived in the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, which lies about 5 hours’ drive north of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya. Some of the nearby sites in the area include Lake Baringo, Thompson Falls, and the town of Nanyuki.



The area was very favourable for research because of the current developments in cultural conservancies among the local people of the area. The creation of cultural conservancies is a concept gaining more and more success and approval in the region (with regard to nature conservation), mainly because it benefits the people living close to the borders of existing nature conservancies. I have found such an example at one of the Pokot villages where I spent most of my time. At this “Kaptuya” village, plans were underway to create a cultural and nature conservancy bordering the already existing Laikipia Nature Conservancy. The situation thus presented very valuable exposure to such endeavours as practical solutions for sustainable development and the environmental crisis. The concept of cultural conservancies seems to benefit most of the stakeholders involved with it, as it helps to conserve both the traditional, indigenous cultures of Africa as well as the wildlife and plants that surround the specific areas.

b) Problem Statement

The Global environmental predicament has many causes. These differ among different areas, and Africa certainly has its load to carry. In the case of Africa, she is finding herself in a modernising period. One of the inevitable results of this is that western ways and traditions are rubbing off on the African's mindset and world view. A difficulty arises when the new culture displaces African traditions to such an extent that whole cultures within Africa disappear. And with the disappearance of traditional ways comes the disappearance of African indigenous knowledge – an invaluable source of mostly untapped and undocumented wisdom.

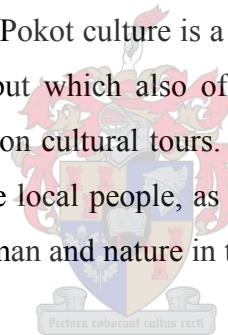
The first problem that this thesis will discuss is the documenting of the culture and African indigenous knowledge of the Pokot tribe of Laikipia, Kenya. This needs to be done urgently, as the elders of the current day are the last generation who are personally acquainted with and can really remember the tribe's earlier ways.

The second aspect relevant to this thesis is that there exists an implicit wisdom in the indigenous knowledge of the Pokot tribe. This wisdom is contained within many of the tribe's folktales, riddles, customs, rituals and beliefs. Their customs and beliefs often point to a deeper-lying environmental ethic of which they are not always aware, but which nevertheless holds much value for conservation in Africa. On the other hand, a few of their ways are derogatory for conservation, and in this instance the west has a role to play with ideas for conservation again.

Because the tribe has been living in this area for centuries, they have a deep-seated understanding of the land and its creatures. This has enabled the traditional Pokot to live mostly in harmony with their natural surroundings. To show the relevance of their understanding and wisdom for living in harmony with their environment, the environmental ethic of the Pokot will be compared with the radical western environmental ethic theory of Deep Ecology as exemplified in the work of Arne Naess and others. It will be seen that many of the key concepts between these two ways of thought overlap.

In the third instance, the environmental ethic of the Pokot may introduce us to a few new ideas and solutions for conservation and sustainable development. Their thought will especially be valuable to ensure the successful implementation of conservation efforts in their region. Their knowledge contains a lot of value and wisdom, something which can be applied with great success to contemporary problems in the area. Chapter 1 will discuss the debate involving science and so-called “non-science”, as well as the debate concerning the difference between oral and written forms of knowledge. It will be shown that the idea of western science as the superior and only worthwhile system of knowledge, does not hold water, and that indigenous knowledge is an invaluable source of wisdom.

With regard to contemporary problems in Kenya, the concept of cultural conservation will prove to be a practical example of the way forward in the often difficult situations arising with wildlife conservancies and traditional tribes living together as neighbours. The richness of the Pokot culture is a fascinating treasure which needs to be learnt from and preserved, but which also offer many opportunities for a wide array of people to visit the area on cultural tours. The income these visitors provide may solve many problems of the local people, as well as provide many solutions for the harmonious co-existence of man and nature in this area.



The aim of this thesis is thus to learn from the culture of the Pokot tribe of Laikipia, Kenya. The specific aim is to look at their cultural ways in order to identify deeper-lying environmental ethical concepts which may prove valuable for addressing contemporary environmental issues in Africa.

As will be seen throughout this thesis, the concept of holism and interconnectedness features very strongly in almost all of their ways and finds an echo in modern day, radical environmental theories, such as Deep Ecology. It amplifies the argument that solutions and the way forward for contemporary problems may in part be achieved by looking back to more traditional cultures.

c) Understanding another culture

At the onset of this study, I realized that for myself as the researcher, there were a few serious stumbling blocks to overcome in order to be able to really learn from the Pokot people of Kenya. The first of these were the general difficulty of understanding cultural expressions of a culture with a world view very different from my own. In the first part of this section I thus look at the difficulties of understanding another culture, as well as possible ways to overcome these. I then went on to show the importance of expanding our own views and even transforming them, in order to incorporate different cultures and ways of seeing the world.

Let us begin this part by dealing with the problem of interpretation and understanding. The central problem here is: how is it possible for myself as the researcher – a white, western educated woman who grew up in an Afrikaner culture – to understand anything of the ideas and world views of a culture totally different from my own, e.g. the Pokot people of Kenya? How is it possible for the western/European world to understand Africa? Is it possible at all? Would any interpretation not merely be the projection of concepts from our own western mindset onto the acts and cultural expressions of that which is African? But if it is possible to understand something of another culture, what are the dangers surrounding this enterprise of cross-cultural research?

These are some of the hermeneutical questions that arise during a study like this one and the following part is an explanation of the methodological choices that I have made in this regard (acknowledging that the hermeneutical problem of understanding other cultures is a whole topic on its own, the details of which falls outside the scope of this thesis). Let us now first look into the concept of understanding others, and see how this is linked with simply understanding ourselves. Afterwards in Chapter 1, we will more specifically consider the difficulties of understanding oral, non-scientific, African cultures.

In 1964 Peter Winch wrote an article entitled “Understanding a Primitive Society”. In this essay he raised two concerns: in the first place, “the degree of access that

‘western’ thinkers have to the ideas and forms of life in cultures radically different from their own”, and in the second place, “whether there are common logical, epistemological, and cultural features between cultures that point to a common rationality between cultures, or whether each culture has a particular rationality unique to its thought and life” (quoted in Bell, 2002:2). In this article he stresses the difficulties of cross-cultural comparisons, but also reminds us that this kind of understanding is no more difficult than understanding ourselves. “Understanding” is itself, the primary philosophical difficulty here and not the radical differences between different world views. “It is misleading to distinguish in a wholesale way between ‘our own’ and ‘alien’ cultures; parts of ‘our culture’ may be quite alien to one of ‘us’; indeed some parts of it may be more alien than cultural manifestations which are geographically or historically remote” (Winch, 1997:198).

Given this admission, Winch then goes on to establish some guidelines as to the possibility of finding some kind of meaningful understanding of another culture. He states: “We shall hope for a description of the alien practices that create some pattern that we can recognize; we shall also perhaps hope to find some analogies with practices characteristic of our own culture which will give us some landmarks with reference to which we can take our bearings” (Winch, 1997:197). But does this leave us with cultural relativism? What are these “landmarks” from which we can “take our bearings”? In helping to address these questions, we turn to social anthropologist Clifford Geertz.

In trying to explain this difficulty of interpreting another culture, Geertz writes: “The truth of the doctrine of cultural relativism is that we can never apprehend another people’s ... imagination neatly, as though it were our own. The falsity of it is that we can therefore never genuinely apprehend it at all. We can apprehend it *well enough*, at least as well as we apprehend anything else not properly ours; but we do so *not by looking behind* the interfering glosses which connect us to it, but *through* them” (Geertz, 1977:799) (Italics mine).

It thus seems that the argument here is that we can understand “some aspects” of another culture, or as Geertz puts it, we can understand it “well enough”. We can thus more or less describe many aspects of another culture’s world and how it is inhabited,

in the same way as they can describe ours (Bell, 2002:3). But the important point to ponder here is that if it is I who want to understand, the understanding will have to occur within *me*. Thus even if it is possible to understand something of another culture, the interpreter will have to make room within himself/herself to incorporate new views and ideas within himself/herself, instead of merely placing his/her own ideas onto that of another. Winch (quoted in Wilson, 1970:102), has confirmed this very well: “Since it is us who want to understand the Zande category [of magic], it appears that the onus is on us to extend our understanding so as to make room for the Zande category, rather than to insist on seeing it in terms of our own ready-made distinction between science and non-science”.

Orientation of the author

Given these admissions, the aim of this study for me as the author, is thus to expand my own self-knowledge, and thus be open to new insights. I would think that this involves both opening up myself to new views and ways of thought, as well as giving a step out into something alien which lies outside of myself. This is a process of expansion which broadens, changes and enlightens the individual’s self-knowledge, his/her knowledge of people as well as his/her way of seeing the world.

My role as an author thus had to focus on the following important factors: As the author of this thesis, the key to understanding the Pokot people of Kenya lies with my ability to see and “make room for” the Pokot’s categories and concepts that find expression in their daily life. As stated by Bell (2002:4), I had to be prepared to have the concepts as expressed in African life, open new imaginative avenues in me and not expect their expressive forms to conform to how I see the world or to such western categories as I may have. To understand African philosophy I had to be prepared to see the world in new ways and appreciate the African way of knowing. To understand the Pokot culture I had to be prepared to find and respect other ways of doing things than those in my own culture. To understand the significance of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development, I had to accept that there are different ways of living with the earth that is most likely more successful than the dominant western way. Anthony Giddens noted that “through becoming aware of the dazzling variety of human societies, we can learn to better understand ourselves” (1982:20). My dialogue with the Pokot thus had to be seen as a critical exchange, one

that perhaps could even contribute to transforming the dominant western system, in the same way as the western system could be used to critically look at (and perhaps even transform) the indigenous Pokot system. In all of this I had to realize my own pre-judgemental tendency as a westerner and therefore it was important to know that in my dialogue with the Pokot people the emphasis should fall on becoming aware of my prejudices and the limitations of my western perspective, rather than merely to expand these prejudices and perspectives in a linear way.

Accordingly, I made a serious effort to look at myself, as the researcher, in a self-critical way – to continually remind myself that I may have pre-judgemental inclinations that I am not aware of. I realized that a real dialogue with another culture was only possible if I recognized myself as “an other” to them, and that I should look at myself, as Geertz said, “through the glasses of the other” – through their distinctive concepts, literature, art, and other practices – and hope also to find something of ourselves in them (cited in Bell, 2002:5), or of “them” in us.

For all practical reasons I do however realize that I stepped into this arena with 23 years of western culture embedded in me, and that this has in many cases influenced my views and attempts at understanding. But given the needed willingness to discover what is different in the Pokot culture and in their interaction with the natural environment, and to discover the significance of that difference for us – for western culture – I am of the opinion that the journey was worth its while. As it will become evident during the course of this study, I believe that, albeit in a tentative way, I have identified in the cultural-ecological wisdom of the Pokot people numerous insights that could be used as basis for a critique of dominant western world views – if we are to strive towards ethical living and harmony with the earth. Some of the solutions provided in this thesis may thus be considered as possible new ways of seeing the world and thus help us to act in corresponding ways. Such new insights could play a positive role in many levels of society, e.g. with new policy frameworks and solutions for co-existence around conservation areas, etc.

Transforming our views

In this process of being challenged by new views, there have been many important factors which had to be considered. As W.L. van der Merwe said: “In and through

this process it may become evident that certain aspects of the other's culture are inadequate and/or that aspects of one's own are – in which case the understanding of the other may lead to a transformation of one's own" (1997:77). As will be seen throughout this thesis, I side myself with arguments which proclaim that transformation of western views and attitudes towards the environment are crucial. Throughout this thesis I will stress and indicate my opinion that Africa has a lot to teach the western world and that the current global environmental predicament has a lot to do with warped western world views and attitudes. Such attention to the other and to oneself indicate real listening, a real conversation, and this (to the limited extent that the researcher was successful in her attempts) is what was necessary to take some of the first tentative movements towards a middle way between African and western environmental ethics.

In this thesis it will be emphasized that no one culture or way of thought can provide the panacea for all ills regarding the harmonious co-existence of man and nature, but that both Africa and the west have much to learn from each other. This is a conversation that can and should never end, because every new day and change on earth influences all other things in a never ending web of relational change. This diversity must be acknowledged and respected. It must also be accepted that a dialogue will constantly be needed to keep a healthy flow of understanding and problem solving between the African and western world, especially in situations like those surrounding African game parks and the indigenous villages surrounding these. In this thesis the emphasis will be on the contrasts and differences between the African and the western world views, but it will also be an attempt to find a dialogue or middle way for the situation among the Pokot in Laikipia, Kenya.

The idea of understanding and of a dialogue between two cultures is thus an important concept, because the understanding of another culture is not just a neutral question exchanged between them. Any understanding is inevitably confronted with a differentiation of power between the relevant cultures – and when one culture sees itself as raised above the other, many distortions may arise. Such distortions create steep barriers to understanding and transformation and are especially true given the written/oral and the scientific/non-scientific dichotomy between western culture and

traditional indigenous cultures. In Chapter 1 we will consider these barriers to understanding and transformation in more detail.

d) Methodology

The methods used in this study were aimed at unlocking the indigenous knowledge of the Pokot people of Laikipia. When embarking on such a journey, there are a few general and practical problems that inevitably needed to be addressed, including the ones mentioned in Section c) above.

In the first place, the philosophical ways of thought that I was in search of, are embedded in the rituals, cultural ways and tales that were shared with me. It is an embedded knowledge and in its essence very difficult to tap. Because I am from a white, middle-class, South African culture very different from the one I was researching, this task seems even more problematic. To lessen the chances of misunderstanding and misrepresenting the Pokot people, I conducted a literature study beforehand in order to become aware of possible problematic areas when researching another culture, and then to try stay clear of them during the project.

There are a few factors which lessened the discrepancies between the people involved in the study (i.e. the researcher, the translators and the interviewees). The most important of these is the fact that many cultural bridges between the African and western cultures have already been crossed in Laikipia, Kenya, by means of education and missionary work. Therefore my culture and ways were not totally alien to them, as was mostly the case for me regarding *their* traditional ways. Because most of the younger generation did receive some sort of western education at the local schools, and because I was able to learn from prior studies on the Pokot, our minds were not totally inaccessible to each other and this process of intercultural dialogue and understanding was thus possible indeed.

The second problem was that I, as the researcher, approached this study from a western, scientific, analytical paradigm and that the people that I approached shared their knowledge from an African oral paradigm. As was shown in Section c), this is a

barrier that can certainly be overcome (and this theme was developed further in Chapter 1) but I had to go about it in a self-critical way and be aware and alert to culturally conditioned views within myself. I also had to make room within myself for new and even better ways of seeing the world. Chapter 1 of this thesis is focused specifically with the differences between the written word and orality, as well as between science and non-science.

There were thus a few stumbling blocks that had to be overcome, as it is very possible to misinterpret what is being shared from a person with a world view different from your own. In this regard, the work of my translators, Patrick Koas and Pastor Musa Maklab, has proved to be most valuable. These two persons, Patrick Koas and Pastor Musa Maklab are both western educated, but grew up in the very traditional Pokot ways as found in the communities of the Kaptuya and Amaya villages. Patrick is on his way to college and pastor Musa was educated at the A.I.C. Eldoret Missionary College in Nairobi, via which I still have contact with him. Because of the fact that they have a background in both the cultures involved in this study, they were able to explain many of the concepts strange to my way of thought, and this in a way made the information accessible and understandable to me. The fact that both of them are fluent in both English and Pokot, overcame many of the barriers with the people interviewed, as most Pokot people can only speak and understand Pokot and Swahili.

Another difficulty was the difference between the scientific and the mythological paradigms. Because of the differences in the scientific and so-called “non-scientific” paradigms (which will be discussed in Chapter 1), I also sought to find out whether the mythological explanation given to me in certain circumstances, might have some western explanation. With regard to the prophetic reading of animal intestines, I had meetings with knowledgeable people back in South Africa, e.g. Mr Martiens Booysen from CEVA Sante Animale Pharmaceutical Company (Animal Health), who assisted me in identifying possible scientific explanations for the patterns sometimes found on animal intestines. (This will be dealt with in Chapter 4.) This thesis thus contains some possibilities which I can recommend for further study, but it can in no way be accepted as the scientifically proven conclusion as to the occurrence and indication of certain markings on animal intestines.

The techniques I used to find the deeper lying philosophy and environmental ethic of the Pokot, were two-fold: 1. Interviews and observation via a field study and 2. A literature study on African philosophy, culture and the ways of the Pokot specifically.

For the practical aspect of this study I visited the Laikipia district in central Kenya for a period of 6 weeks during March and April 2004. During this time qualitative research in the form of a field study was conducted. I have spent much time in interviewing the tribe's people, from the wisest elders and the medicine women to the young, western-educated boys and girls. I visited four different villages two to three times a week from morning till late afternoon, and would stay over for a night about once a week. These villages were Kaptuya, Amaya, Churo and Lonyek. A lot of interaction thus occurred and I was well able to observe their ways and daily activities in between the various times of formal interviews. I do however realize that this is much too short a time to be intimately acquainted with their ways and thoughts, and that this study is a short introduction into this specific area of philosophical overlap between the western and African cultures. I realize that this is an area that can and should still be very much expanded and further researched.



Fig.3 Kaptuya village.

In this study 32 people were formally interviewed, but because of reaching a point of saturation (meaning that no new information emerged), not all of these interviews were quoted in the thesis. It was my aim to interview mainly the elders of the community, because it is these men who still have the most knowledge of the traditions and ways of the Pokot. This made up about 70% of the interviews. The rest was taken up by the keen young girls and boys at the school in Kaptuya who are on their way to college, as well as the women who joined on the periphery of the group discussions whenever these occurred.

In between interviews I also made a point of making field notes, as memory is not always a reliable source with so many concepts to consider. The field notes I made consisted of jotting down ideas or observations; keeping a diary to keep track of my emotional highs and lows in order to be aware of my personal bias; creating a log of how I planned to spend my time and resources; I also made field notes using a Dictaphone (Bernard, 1995:310).

I found the diary of much use to keep a clear mind towards the research process and found it true that “fieldworkers not only risk offending their informants by misunderstanding their way of life. They must also face the shock of the unfamiliar and their own vulnerability” (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990:57). As the researcher this was my biggest challenge – not to draw quick conclusions in order to categorize my unfamiliar surroundings. I put a lot of effort into trying to make correct interpretations of the information that was shared with me. “The problem becomes how to make sense of what we observe. In order to do this we must interpret our observations ... Interpretation is the process of making something foreign and strange, familiar and comprehensible. This requires representation, explanation or translation and is then somehow ‘brought to understanding’” (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990:57). In this regard the two translators, with whom I spent most of my time, were an invaluable source of help, explanation and direction.

I do realize that my presence in the villages will have caused slight alterations in the social behaviour of the people. The visit of a non-African person is not a frequent occurrence, especially in the villages further away from the conservancy and deeper into the interior.

During the period of research I lived in a little stone and thatch chalet in the Laikipia Nature Conservancy. The chalet was about 30 km from the nearest village, Kaptuya, where I focused most of my attention. One of my translators, Patrick Koas, a member of the Pokot tribe and of the Kaptuya village, stayed there with me during this period. This enabled the constant flow of my questions to be answered immediately and faithfully.



Fig.4 The author's accommodation at the Laikipia Nature Conservancy.

The transport for the 30 km to Kaptuya village was always provided by the Laikipia Nature Conservancy in one of their Land Cruiser vehicles. I was escorted by my translator, an armed ranger (askari) and sometimes a friend or other volunteer. The ranger would always keep some distance in order not to pose an intimidation to those being interviewed. This was not a problem though, as these armed rangers patrol the Conservancy's fences daily. The border is about 10 minutes walk from the village, and the rangers are thus a regular sighting.



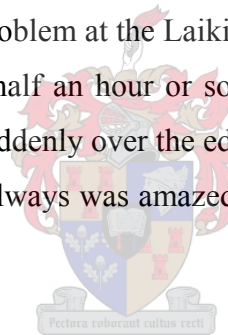
Fig. 5 The view of Kaptuya village from the border of the Laikipia Nature Conservancy.

When visiting Amaya village, I drove there with Pastor Musa Maklab on his red motorcycle. He is a member of the Pokot tribe, speaks both Pokot and English and his parents live in Amaya village. He himself lives in Kaptuya village, where he is the local pastor of the African Inland Church, but he drives to Amaya weekly to visit

his parents at their homestead. A typical homestead in the villages consists of five to six huts with one or two goat sheds or cattle kraals. It was during these visits that I had the opportunity to visit the village with him. Because of the frequency of his visits, neither the pastor's visit nor the motorcycle was a rarity for the people of Amaya, although the girl with the white hair on the back, i.e. the author of this study, was not a regular sight and may have caused a difference in their behaviour.

On one of my visits to Churo village with pastor Musa, we were unable to drive there with his motorcycle, as it had rained earlier the morning and the gravel roads were slippery and unsafe. To overcome this problem and to enable us to keep an appointment with a crucial interviewee in Churo, we hired the only motor vehicle in Kaptuya village. The vehicle was not a rare sight in Churo either, as a larger gravel road runs through the village and motor vehicles do sometimes pass through.

On days when transport was a problem at the Laikipia Conservancy, my translator and a ranger and I would walk for half an hour or so from where we were dropped off towards our destination. Then suddenly over the edge of a hill we would be greeted by a mud and thatch village and I always was amazed at how these villages were able to blend into their surroundings.



When visiting Lonyek village I would drive there on a motorcycle with Daniel Lemoe, the liaison officer of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum. We went there to visit the Lonyek Cultural Boma and to be entertained by traditional dances. Our visit was thus expected and didn't influence the local people's spontaneity too much.

A few days before a visit, word would usually be sent to inform the interviewees of my visit and its purpose. They were told (and I would tell them again) that I wanted to learn of their culture in order to write it down and preserve it for future generations, and also so that it would benefit their proposed cultural conservancies. I would also beforehand send word to them to try and recall some of their traditional folktales, as these are sometimes difficult to remember on the spot. These folktales are an important way to tap into the Pokot way of thought, and we also created the idea to publish the best of these stories in a book, with the drawings done by the Pokot themselves. Income received from such an endeavour would be directed back to the

people of the village, especially for educational purposes and to create opportunities for further education. This brought a lot of hope for the children and the community, as most parents do not have the means to pay for their children's further education. The collection of stories was highly successful and numbered 72 after the six week study. This project was handed over to the highly capable Sveva Gallmann, the daughter of Kuki Gallmann, as she is permanently residing in the Laikipia Nature Conservancy.

The interviews were conducted in the following manner: Before an interview I would converse with my translator, who was either Patrick Koas or Pastor Musa Maklab, in order to establish the status and role of the specific persons to be interviewed. From the general interview guidelines, I would then select the questions that we agreed would be suitable for the specific interview and which the interviewee would be most able of answering with insight. All of the interviews were recorded with a Dictaphone and once I was back at the Laikipia Nature Conservancy I would then transcribe the interview. Because of the language barrier and the fact that I understood only about 20 words of the Pokot language, I proceeded to recording only the translated English version as it was related by the translator. I would then write down the new information and details according to specific themes that I had established and would quote the person who shared their views. These themes were created beforehand but were much extended and divided as my new knowledge expanded.

During my stay in Laikipia I already started analyzing the data and further conceptualised general themes as I felt them emerging from the field study. I was thus using this qualitative analysis in my search for paradigms, philosophies and ways of thought. "Qualitative analysis is the search for patterns in data in order to find ideas that help explain the existence of those patterns" (Bernard, 1995:360). Once back in South Africa the material was further analysed and a further literature study was conducted. I tried to incorporate the findings of the field study with the literature I found and tried to show when and where there were discrepancies between the two. I tried to follow the advice of H.R. Bernard (1995:360) who stated that "as ideas are developed, it should be tested against your observations, which may modify your ideas. You should make sure not to invent patterns and continually check yourself". I

strived not to buy into folk explanations right away, but neither to reject these without considering their possible validity. Whenever I came upon discrepancies or concepts which puzzled me, I would add them to my interview guideline and emphasise them during the interviews that followed, in order to clarify the issue.

The data that was collected will be presented systematically throughout this thesis as it becomes applicable to the theme and the issue being discussed.

While in Nairobi, I also visited the National Museum of Kenya, and saw some Pokot utensils and traditional dress on display. Some of these, or parts thereof, were displayed to show other tribes with similar utensils and beaded jewels. Because these pieces were displayed together with artefacts from the other Kenyan tribes, it made the way that the tribes influenced each other's culture very clear. It was especially interesting to note the similarities between the items of the Pokot and the Karamajong tribe. In Chapter 2 it will be shown how the Pokot sought refuge with this tribe during times of continual raids. The whole dynamic character of culture became clear to me once again, and it helped me realise that intermingling with western culture is something which cannot (or needn't be) avoided.

The second part of the methodology consists of a critical literature study which focussed specifically on the Pokot tribe, but I also consulted more general philosophical literature of Africa. The literature ranged from anthropology and cultural studies to questions about the existence of an African philosophy at all. But all of it served to illuminate the areas of concern in this thesis. The general literature on African philosophy proved more helpful than the specific literature on the Pokot, as these are very limited in number. The most comprehensible book on the Pokot is that of M.W.H. Beech which was published in 1911 and is also the only one I could find in South Africa. During my stay in Kenya I learnt that there is one other book available on the Pokot but only accessible in the library of Oxford University in London (I was not given the name of this book though). Other sources which were of help mainly came from articles published in journals and magazines, of which the most comprehensive ones were written by Elizabeth L. Meyerhoff (published in *National Geographic* in 1988) and Barbara A. Bianco (published in *American Ethnologist* 1995 and 1996).

These books and articles, as well as others, were used to create the first interview guidelines. They were updated and expanded into second and third interview guidelines once I arrived in Kenya and started to learn more about the specific position of an interviewee and the ways of the Pokot people for myself. I made a point of letting the interviews flow, and gave the interviewees room to share with me what they felt was important. When things got carried away, though, I would try and go back to the interview guidelines and take things further from there. I would also allow the opinion of my translators to lead me in the directions that I took with the interview and questions. This ensured that the interview progressed in the right direction but also made room for the interesting and valuable ideas along the way, which I could not have known to ask about.

The questions were chosen in order to gain a wide field of knowledge and information, and not only to enquire about those aspects relevant to the environment. The aim of this study is partly also to document the ways and culture of the Pokot as a way of preserving indigenous knowledge. Questions were therefore posed to gain as much as possible knowledge on as much as possible concepts and ways. The idea was that the broader our understanding of the Pokot people's ways and culture, the better is the background knowledge we have from which to interpret their environmental ethics. Many cultural ways were thus documented in this thesis and some were later used to extract concepts valuable to environmental ethical concern.

Many of the original interview questions were motivated by the reading of general African philosophy as I found it mainly in articles in the following books: E.D. Prinsloo, A.P. Appiah and S. Biko in *Philosophy from Africa* published by Thomson Publishing; W. Kelbessa in *Thought and Practice in African Philosophy*, published by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung; P. Hountondji in *African Philosophy*, published by Indiana University Press; Mudimbe, V.Y. in *The Idea of Africa* and Masolo in *African Philosophy: In search of identity*, both published by Indiana University Press. While in Kenya I also looked at *Concepts of God in Africa* by J.S. Mbiti, published by Camelot Press Ltd.

e) Scope and significance of the study

I realize that the results and findings of this study cannot be considered as universal and that the study is limited in its scope. The findings and results of this thesis were obtained using specific measures and tools, within a certain context and environment and upon a certain group of people. The aim is not to present a comprehensive analysis or guideline pertaining to the environmental ethic of the Pokot people and its relationship with the radical western theory of Deep Ecology. This study is an early investigation and inquiry into this field, and aims merely to point in a rather new line of thought and of comparison. It is an area which can and should still be researched much further.

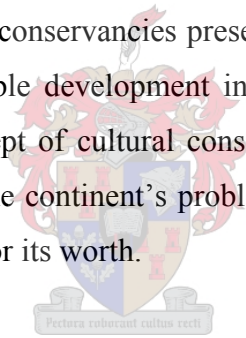
I also realize that my own personality and unique kind of presence among the people may have had some influence on what was shared as well as on the varying degrees of ease it was shared with. The period of 6 weeks was also not enough for a deep and comprehensive study. All in all I feel (and this was confirmed by local people) that I was privileged to have been accepted and welcomed into much of the community and their way of thought. They have enriched my life in innumerable ways and I hope that this study will bring some benefit to them as well.

The value and importance of this study lies firstly in the fact that the Pokot people in the villages that I visited still live in a relatively traditional way. The tribe, especially the elders, still have a good memory of their tribal customs and ways and they still live in accordance with many of these. This, as well as written literature on the tribe, enabled me to have a rather clear view of their customs and beliefs, which served to help identify the paradigms most important to them. In order to find the middle way for development in Africa, and thus engage in a dialogue between the African and western way of thought, it was important to try and grasp as much as possible of the African world view, as manifested among the Pokot of Laikipia. It should be mentioned that the “African way of thought” is often very diverse, in the same way as the “European way of thought” is diverse and differs dramatically from region to region. The “Pokot world view” will thus illustrate the “African way of thought” as it materialises in the specific area of the Laikipia region of Kenya, and especially in the four villages visited.

The second reason why this study has value and importance is the progress that has already been made regarding the creation of cultural conservancies in the region. It was possible to learn of the people's views and concerns in this regard, as well as find some of the issues important to them when these conservancies are created. The concept of cultural conservancies may have great benefits for many more areas in the rest of Africa, because similar situations are found in many other areas where the survival of humans and wild animals are in conflict.

As an example in Southern Africa, similar situations are found e.g. in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park with the Khoi-San living there. Many of the lessons learnt in this study can be applied to those situations, and thus enhance the chances of their success.

It is important to realise that the scope of this study is limited, and that much more research would be necessary to ensure continuing success of the middle way or the cultural dialogue which cultural conservancies present. It is also important to realise that the endeavours of sustainable development in Africa is a complex and multi-layered issue and that the concept of cultural conservancies proposes only one tiny thread towards the solution of the continent's problems. It does seem to have merit, though, and should be credited for its worth.



f) Structure of the study

In Chapter 1 we will consider the relevance and worth of indigenous knowledge, as well as that of African philosophy, within our contemporary world. Attention will be given to the barriers that make the understanding of another culture problematic. As this thesis concerns itself with indigenous knowledge, we will consider the specific barriers of the oral/written divide as well as that of the science/non-science divide. The aim will be to bridge these barriers and to engage in a dialogue between the African and western cultures, in order to create a middle way from which to interpret the information contained in this thesis.

In Chapter 2 a journey will be embarked upon to learn more specifically about the Pokot and their environmental ethic. To begin, Chapter 2 will provide an orientation

of the Pokot people. In the first place the history of the Pokot people will be considered via the means of their creation myths, their origin as provided by Beech (1911) and through personal interviews. It will also be seen how the first contact with Christianity occurred. To orientate the reader regarding the changes that are taking place (which are affecting their lives), traditional and contemporary dress are discussed. This is then extended into a word on the current challenges that the Pokot people are facing.

With this second backdrop then being coloured in, Chapter 3 will focus on the rapidly fading culture of the Pokot. The purpose of learning about their cultural concepts and rituals is to gain as broad as possible an understanding of their specific culture and conserve it for later generations. Later in the thesis these cultural concepts will then be used to learn of the deeper lying values, norms and wisdom, and specifically their environmental ethic. This chapter thus has a twofold aim: firstly to purely document as much as possible of the African indigenous knowledge and culture of the Pokot people, and secondly to then use some of these cultural concepts to extract the deeper lying environmental ethic that they stem from.

The cultural concepts discussed will range from the concepts of communality (“we”), to the sense of a person, music and dance, herbal medicine, spirits, and “poaching for bravery” etc. Rituals will be discussed regarding the cycle of life – birth, initiation, marriage etc., as well as “the way God speaks”, the boa game, etc.

With some detail having been given to the culture and lifestyle of the Pokot people, Chapter 4 will then aim to find the deeper environmental ethic contained in these. In order to bring another dimension of comparison to this endeavour, the western theory of Deep Ecology will briefly be discussed first, and then linked to the African environmental ethic as found among the Pokot. The aim will be to find some elements that overlap between these two styles/theories from different “worlds”, in order to engage in a dialogue between them.

It will be seen how Deep Ecology values the concept of systemic thinking and holism. The basic principle of such concepts is the sense of interconnectedness among all things. This features very strongly among the Pokot too. It will be shown how this

conclusion can be reached through an investigation of some of the Pokot's folktales, riddles and via examining the cultural concepts and rituals that was discussed in Chapter 3.

Having reached a conclusion about what the Pokot value, as well as the fact that these values find some echo in the theory of Deep Ecology, it will be discussed as to what would be ethical and successful actions for current problems in Laikipia. In this way, by engaging in a dialogue, a middle way can be found or created between the two cultures, and shown to be a better alternative than either could have proposed on its own.

Chapter 5 will look at the practical aspects of combining African and western ways of thought, or rather – finding ways to put the dialogue into action. This will be done via looking at cultural conservancies and the prerequisites for this to be successful among the Pokot people.

Before we start with our discussion in Chapter 1, it may be helpful to briefly define and discuss some of the key concepts used in this study.

g) Concepts used in the study

A. Indigenous knowledge

“Indigenous knowledge is the body of knowledge acquired by local people through the accumulation of experiences, informal experiments, and intimate understanding of their environment in a given culture” (Kelbessa, 2001:1). It is this intimate understanding of the environment that this thesis set out to find, learn about, and try to understand.

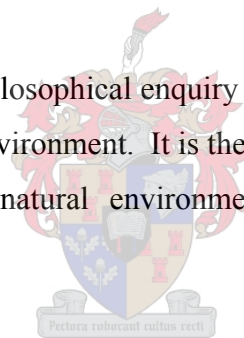
As will be seen from the history of the Pokot people (2.1.2), “rural people do not slight imported values or stick solely to their ancestral custom. Instead they have tried to improve their tradition in line with the new circumstances and thereby adapt foreign values to their way of life” (Kelbessa, 2001:1). Indigenous knowledge thus embodies knowledge that is internally generated, as well as that which is externally

borrowed and adapted. But all of this is “embedded in community practices, culturally based value systems ... relationships, and rituals” (Kelbessa, 2001:1). In order to research the environmental ethic of the Pokot people, their indigenous knowledge was sought via their cultural concepts, rituals, folktales and riddles.

The fact that the indigenous knowledge (and ultimately the environmental ethic) of the Pokot was sought through these mediums, is in some ways problematic. There exist arguments that because western philosophy was not distilled from rituals and from folktales, such endeavours cannot be labelled as “philosophy”. In Chapter 1 it will be seen that a broader definition of philosophy has thus been adopted for the sake of this thesis (Georgiades and Delvare, 1975:2) and that it is expected that indigenous knowledge will play an important role in the larger body of worldwide knowledge (National Research Foundation, 2004).

B. Environmental Ethics

“Environmental ethics is the philosophical enquiry into the nature and justification of general claims relating to the environment. It is theory about appropriate concern for, values in and duties to the natural environment and about their application” (Kelbessa, 2001:1).



In this thesis the radical western environmental ethic of Deep Ecology and the principles it advocates will be discussed. This will then be compared with the environmental ethics of the Pokot people as it is embedded in their indigenous knowledge.

C. Indigenous Environmental Ethics

As Workineh Kelbessa (2001:3) has demonstrated in his Ph.D thesis on the environmental ethic of the Oromo people of Ethiopia, there does exist something like an indigenous environmental ethic among peasant farmers and pastoralists. He showed how they “do not passively follow the course of nature. Many peasant farmers and pastoralists critically and rationally evaluate the commonly accepted opinions and practices of their people and thereby develop their own independent views about society and the natural environment. When they are affected by what is going on in society, they come up with quotable proverbs which originate from their

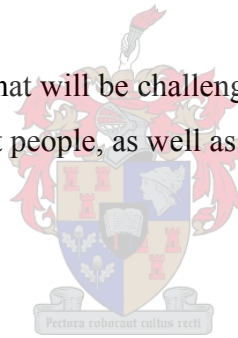
reflective remarks and their thinking about nature. Their view of the value of the natural environment is based on reasoned thought”.

This will become evident especially in Chapter 5 with the discussion of the role of sages and their rational critique of their own societies. This study suggests that many answers for contemporary and future environmental problems, may be found by looking back and learning from the people, including philosophical sages, who lived and still live in close proximity to the earth.

D. Anthropocentrism

“Anthropocentrism is the view that regards humans, their interests and their well-being as the sole objects of moral concern and the sole bearers of moral standing” (Kelbessa, 2001:1). An “anthropocentric” position or ethic is thus a “human-centred” position or ethic.

Anthropocentrism is a concept that will be challenged in this thesis by the indigenous environmental ethic of the Pokot people, as well as by the radical environmental ethic of Deep Ecology.



E. Holism

“Holism as an idea or philosophical concept is diametrically opposed to atomism. Where the atomist believes that any whole can be broken down or analyzed into its separate parts and the relationships between them, the holist maintains that the whole is primary and often greater than the sum of its parts. The atomist divides things up in order to know them better; the holist looks at things or systems in aggregate and argues that we can know more about them viewed as such, and better understand their nature and their purpose” (Holism, 2004). In this study it will be shown to what extent the indigenous environmental ethics of the Pokot can be characterised as a holistic environmental ethics.

Chapter 1 African indigenous knowledge and science

We will begin this thesis by considering the value of indigenous knowledge, and specifically that of African philosophy. As was seen in Section C on page 19 – “Understanding another culture”, there exists certain barriers when one is trying to interpret a culture different from one’s own. This is especially true when we realize a need for transformation within a certain system, which in this case is the dominant western relationship to the natural environment.

In Chapter 1 we will thus start by striving to overcome two of these barriers to understanding the indigenous knowledge of the African people called the Pokot. The first barrier that will be considered is that of the oral/written divide between the dominant African and western cultures, and the second one the divide between science and non-science. We will also consider contemporary thought and developments regarding the relationship between science and indigenous knowledge. This will then be taken one step further by looking at African philosophy as such. As a conclusion I will propose that for the success of this study, as well as its practical implementation, we have to engage in a dialogue between the African and western cultures. This dialogue is necessary to find the middle way between the two cultures and thus to solve contemporary problems of sustainable development.

1.1 The barriers of “science” and “orality”

One of the most important barriers when it comes to the appreciation of indigenous cultures and knowledge systems (like the African Pokot people’s) is the view that such knowledge is “non-scientific” and therefore of lesser importance or worth than the “scientific” knowledge of the west. One of the major issues in this regard is that such knowledge is passed down from generation to generation in a mainly oral way, and the idea persists that non-literate societies are intellectually inferior to literate ones. Emevwo Biakolo (1998:1) pointed out that this attitude confirms the “political project behind the western construction of cultural paradigms of the ‘Other’”, and this attitude has surely gone a long way to keep Africa under the dominion of western

colonizers. “The critical question was how to *think* the non-Caucasian races, the ‘Other’, with whom the western world had come into increasing contact since the great exploratory journeys of the fifteenth century” (Biakolo, 1998:1). This “Other” was notably “non-scientific”, as many writers had since tried to prove. Let us consider how western writers have historically defined the “non-scientific Other”.

V.Y. Mudimbe has mapped out the “apprehension and description of the ‘Other’ in western thought in the *power-knowledge system* of colonialism and the post-colonial period” (1994:20). This power system reveals an ingenuity which goes a long way to confirm the political project behind the western construction of the ‘Other’. To illustrate this point, Mudimbe described how L.H. Morgan categorized cultural development in seven stages, namely Lower Savagery, Middle Savagery, Upper Savagery, Lower Barbarism, Middle Barbarism, Upper Barbarism, and Civilization (cited in Biakolo, 1998:2). “Of course, in this elaborate frame, only Euro-American society attained the status of civilization, typified by the possession of writing and especially of the phonetic alphabet” (Biakolo, 1998:2).

Many scholars, like L.H. Morgan referred to in the previous paragraph, argue that civilization – certainly western civilization – owes its origin to writing. “With the Greek invention of the alphabet, the organization of knowledge was radically transformed. In oral cultures the poets, sages, and thinkers depend on poetic rhythm and narrative structure to ensure remembrance of past utterances. With the introduction of writing, the mnemonic functions are most effectively served by the medium itself, making the storage and retrieval of knowledge so much easier (Havelock, 1963, 1976, 1982). Biakolo further showed that the changes that the development of writing as a means of communication has brought, was more than merely practical. “What it achieved was alteration in the way the consciousness of western men and women is organised ... Knowledge presentation was increasingly definitional, descriptive, and analytical” (1998:6). The idea was thus formed that a superior category existed which included “Euro-American”, “writing”, “civilization” and “science”. During the course of the 20th century, the Kantian idea of universalism and absolutism also became increasingly dominant and the status of oral non-western cultures decreased even more (Biakolo, 1998:7).

Another great scientist during this time was Francis Bacon. Francis Bacon can be seen as the founder of all modern experimental science. He wrote that “man, being the servant and interpreter of nature can do and understand so much only as he observed in fact or in thought of the course of nature” (Makinde, 1988:2). His aim was to gain power over nature and manipulate and control her ways on the basis of scientific and empirical facts.

With Bacon as its instigator and following his thoughts, a transition early in the modern period took place from philosophical speculation to empiricism, especially in Great Britain. This changed people’s beliefs in God and the Divine Right of Kings. “The sacrosanct nature of monarchy was eroded by an empirical philosophy” (Makinde, 1988:2). Bacon advocated sensory experience and the empirical method as the only basis of reliable knowledge. This had a profound impact on beliefs about reality, as well as scientific knowledge. The centre of attraction now became nature itself – and the religious pursuit of God started to fade.

The general belief in the Victorian period was that “physical science would solve all problems, be they social, political, medical or ethical” (Makinde, 1988:2). It was the British philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who further advocated this scientific method (which was so successful in the physical sciences) also for the moral, social and economic issues of that time. As was expected, methods of science became applicable to almost every aspect of human endeavour in the time following these thinkers (Makinde, 1988:2).

Opposing this civilized, scientific category, with the image of the African as “brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful, and superstitious” (Harris, 1969:89) was much the result of writings by David Hume, Voltaire and the French *philosophes* such as Montesquieu. For instance, Hume said the following: “There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturer among them, no arts, no sciences ... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men” (quoted in Harris, 1969:88).

Because of the dominance of the scientific paradigm in the west, Africa's lack of written thought and the absence of controlled scientific research methods in her ways, led to the fact that the "insights of peasant farmers and other indigenous people have been identified with backwardness and a primitive mentality" (Kelbessa, 2002:54). Many historians, including Hume, were of the opinion that Africans are "naturally inferior to whites". Kant believed that non-European peoples have no ethical principles, no self-consciousness nor rational will (Kelbessa, 2002:55). For Hegel, Africa was the continent of the savage, the cannibal, and the lawless – all waiting for the European soldier and missionary to come and impose order and morality (Kelbessa, 2002:56). Levy-Bruhl and E.E. Evan-Pritchard reported that the "African mind is 'pre-logical'; 'mystical' and 'irrational' and they regarded African beliefs and practices as worthless" (Kelbessa, 2002:56).

Civilization was thus strongly linked to being European/Western, the action of individual speculation, manufacturing, arts and sciences. And that which did not belong to this category, was labelled "Other" and mostly "lower". Lévi-Strauss (1966:17) stated that scientific thought (as found in the west) is *conceptual* while mythical thought (as found among primitive peoples) is *perceptual*: "In a similar manner, scientific thought is innovative, ever-inventive of new technological forms, while mythical thought is conservative, recreating existing structures in a manipulative way, but without creating anything new" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966:17). But this view did not remain, as will be seen in the following paragraph.

1.1.1 A change of thought

Later in the 20th century, when Albert Einstein made time a fourth dimension of space, it began to dawn that Kant's idea of intracultural universality (the idea that universal norms are necessary among all cultures) was not necessary. And ethnologists started to realize that "non-western oral peoples are not mentally incompletely evolved 'primitives', but rather mentally sophisticated peoples who happen cognitively to arrange experience in ways quite different from persons of European heritage" (Callicott and Nelson, 2004:25).

Peter Winch agreed with this (quoted in Kelbessa, 2002:56). He argued that early western philosophers regarded European beliefs and worldviews as right because they use the scientific method, but African beliefs are wrong because they use magical ideas. But in Winch's words, "other cultures provide us with different possibilities of making sense of human life" (quoted in Kelbessa, 2002:56). When looking at the following paragraph, a "different possibility" of life may be more urgent for our sanity – and our survival – than we as westerners might as yet be willing to accept:

Western technology has indeed led to the improvement of the material lot of human beings, but it has done this at the expense of worsening the general human condition. It thus appears that philosophical or scientific materialism which has led to scientific progress, has also led to a paradox of technological progress. In recent years, the application of the monster called technology has created all sorts of problems for human societies, including the effects of the computer revolution on the human labour force and self esteem, the diabolical use of electronic surveillance for the invasion of privacy, the exploitation and dehumanisation of human beings as soulless automata or material objects without souls or minds, the complete alteration of the human mind in the form of mind-control and, the most dreadful of all, the daily fears and anxiety about nuclear war and the destruction of the human race and civilization (Makinde, 1988:7).

It seems that a lot of technological progress was made on the foundation of the Baconian empiricism and materialism, but also that a lot was sacrificed. In the words of Larry Rasmussen (1996:195): "The complete manipulation of the world, results in the complete instrumentalization of the self." If the self is then turned into a robotic instrument, the soul is compromised in a substantial way. And the human sense of self may be more than we should be willing to give up. But are there any alternatives?

Let us consider this. If we look at the opposing views of 20th century thinkers mentioned above, we may now ask that if myth/indigenous knowledge and science were really considered such dichotomous orders of knowing and knowledge, why were they so opposed? Why was the opposition not between myth and modern -

religion? This surely would be a more valid enterprise? Wasn't too much made of the written/un-written divide? Why can an oral society not be scientific? What is science? What if the difference between traditional African cultures and western cultures is more between myth and modern religion, than between myth and science? And if we realize that science was as yet simply unaware of the scientific, but holistic worth and value of many of the "illogical" and "perceptual" ways of thought and means as found among the "primitive" – there may be many grounds on which to consider indigenous knowledge as a valuable alternative to modern day western knowledge.

In my research I started out from the view that there certainly are other worthwhile ideas and ways of doing things that can be learnt from the African, which do not agree with the dominant western view, and I proceeded from that point. In the light of such acknowledgments, let us now look at the value that is placed on indigenous knowledge in contemporary times. We will first consider a few thoughts on the oral/written divide and then contemporary thoughts on the relationship between science and indigenous knowledge. It will become clear that the perceived relationship between science and indigenous knowledge have changed very much in the last few decades, and that this study on indigenous knowledge is indeed very timely and in line with global developments.

1.1.2 Against the Eurocentric oral/written divide

In considering the oral/written divide of knowledge, we will consider the views most appropriate for this study on indigenous environmental ethics – thus views concerning philosophical knowledge.

There are two opposing arguments in this spectrum: either that only written texts can be considered as philosophic and thus of scientific worth, or that oral traditions do make valuable contributions to global knowledge/philosophy as well. We will discuss these two views and afterwards I will side myself with Workineh Kelbessa and Heinz Kimmerle that both have their respective strengths and weaknesses and that they need each other.

Heinz Kimmerle (2002:1) gave the following arguments concerning the oral/literate divide: “Most of the philosophical wisdom in Africa has been handed down from generation to generation in a way which can be described as mainly oral. That is also the case with what is called ‘oral literature’. This concept which is in use in the science of intercultural literature makes clear that it is wrong to speak of an opposition between oral and literate.”

Further, Jacques Derrida (1976:164) has worked out that “the opposition of oral and literate belongs to the European way of thinking which is in its core oppositional. This can be shown by pointing at oppositions as soul and body, heaven and earth, good and bad, true and false, upper and lower class, etc. This way of thinking generally can be called hierarchic; one of the two is always higher and more powerful. That means with regard to the opposition between oral and literate, that it is Eurocentric.”

Derrida showed this by discussing the strange paradox in the main stream of European philosophical tradition, where there is a clear preference of orality above literacy from Plato via Rousseau to Hegel. He states that writing is only a help for the memory, in order not to forget what has been said orally. In accordance with that a culture should be preferred which is mainly oral in its forms of communication and tradition. But paradoxically the valuation is vice versa. “Mainly literate cultures are highly preferred to mainly oral ones” (Derrida, 1976:164).

But as will become clear in this thesis, such hierarchies are exactly what we should keep away from. Kimmerle agreed by stating that “the opposition as such has to be avoided, and mainly oral cultures should be situated on the same level as mainly literate ones. They are not higher or lower in any sense, but just different. This intervention in the way of thinking clearly is in itself politically relevant. The politics of difference turns out to be basically democratic in the sense of treating all human cultures as equals” (2002:2).

Kimmerle argues that although knowledge and its sources and applications may differ, there is value contained in all of it – something which cannot and should not be denied. He states that: “The wisdom of traditional communities is continuously

adapted to the actual situation and it is also relevant for philosophical questions of present times” (2002:6). The onus is thus on ourselves to extend our way of perception in order to be able to learn from views other than our own. This includes considering both oral and written sources of intellectual heritage.

The argument that is proposed against orality as a valid source of wisdom is that oral traditions are not hospitable to philosophy, because it is incapable of sustaining critical thought and exchange. Some western scholars regard oral narratives as performances or entertainment that cannot sustain analytical and rigorous philosophical dialogue (Okpewho, 1992:294). They stress that philosophy develops concepts that can be understood via words that have a fixed meaning, whereas oral traditions do not offer fixed meaning or encourage reflection, critical analysis and sceptical questioning. They are subject to multiple interpretations every time a story is told (Imbo, 2002:48).

These scholars argue that it is literacy as such that made western science and philosophy possible. “Without modern literacy, which mean Greek literacy, we would not have science, philosophy, written law or literature, nor the automobile or the aeroplane” (Havelock, 1976:34). This view certainly has merit, but literacy alone cannot be credited for these. The relatively low technology of India which took over the Semitic alphabet at about the same time as the Greeks, makes the argument that Greek artistic and scientific glory are based on literacy, questionable to say the least (Biakolo, 2002:14).

Literacy alone is thus not a magic wand, but it does play an important part. Paul Hountondji is one of the scholars who argue that literacy is a necessary condition for philosophy. He states that “oral tradition favours the consolidation of knowledge into dogmatic, intangible systems, whereas archival transmission promotes better the possibility of a critique of knowledge between individualists from one generation to another (Hountondji, 1987:103).

Some African philosophers however argue that oral traditions are very good sources of philosophy on their own. Henry Odera Oruka (1996:184) did not consider literacy or writing as a necessary condition for philosophy. He is of the opinion that every

culture can produce individuals who symbolize the best in intellectual achievement. He labelled these persons “sages” and concluded that a sage employs his insight for the ethical betterment of his (her) community.

Workneh Kelbessa (2005:13) also concluded that oral traditions can be the source of critical views about humans and the natural environment. “History reminds us that fragments, proverbs and aphorisms have been sources of philosophy in Europe and India. Among others, Socrates and Buddha did not write any philosophical books.” Brian Brown (1938:12) also showed that Chinese philosophy “is expressed for the most part by short sayings, proverbs, and maxims brought out in conversation with their disciples, in the manner of Socrates and his disciples”. Kelbessa argues:

Given that proverbs, aphorisms, beliefs, customs, stories, folktales, rituals, folk-songs and social institutions have been main sources of African philosophy in the past and are still functioning today, African philosophy is in a strong position to introduce and defend the importance of oral and non-academic sources of global wisdom on the global stage (2005:14).

In the view of these writers, literacy is thus not a necessary condition for philosophical reflection and exposition. This does obviously not rule out the value of written sources. The lack of written sources is one of the greatest stumbling blocks in trying to learn from or gather African philosophical thought. Appiah argues that,

In the absence of written records, it is not possible to compare the ancestors’ theories in their actual words with ours; nor, given the limitations of quantity imposed by oral transmission, do we have a detailed knowledge of what those theories were. We know more about the thought of Isaac Newton on one or two subjects, than we know about the entire population of his Asante contemporaries (1996:242).

It is thus becoming clearer that both oral and written forms of knowledge do have worth. According to Kelbessa, the ideal for Africa would be for both to be valued. Kimmerle concludes that this process of creating knowledge/philosophy as a dynamic

and ongoing dialogue between the “oral” and “written” aspects involved therein. He notes that it is a process typical of ethnophilosophy:

Take into account that ethnophilosophy is constituted by two different instances: the myths, proverbs and language structures on the one hand, and the authors, who make a philosophical text of them, on the other hand. Only when both instances do exist together, does ethnophilosophy emerge. Myth, legends or proverbs are not already philosophy in themselves. And also the opposite is true: the authors, who conceptualize ethnophilosophical texts, do not take them out of their own ideas ... From the interaction of both instances ethnophilosophy emerges as philosophy (2002:8).

Writing is thus important for the storage and retrieval of knowledge, but not a necessary precondition for philosophic reflection.

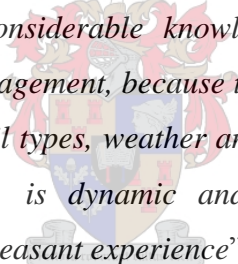
It is also important to realize that all of Africa did not only have oral forms of knowledge. Elements of writing can be found in mainly oral traditions, and elements of orality can be found in a mainly literate tradition. In this way, oral forms of communication and tradition are very important within the written sources of Ethiopian philosophy. According to Herodotus (c. 484-425 B.C.) the Egyptians had written records 15 000 years ago, and H.L. Crates Jr. also discovered that in the Middle Ages, over 50 000 volumes were found in the library in Timbuktu (Imbo, 2002:47). Kelbessa (2005:15) points to “works in Arabic in the northern and western parts of Africa” of the 17th century Ethiopian philosophers Zera Yacob and Waldo Heywat”. These examples of literate traditions in Africa was originally written in Geez but later translated into English.

It is thus clear that African philosophy is based on both oral and written intellectual heritages. Having made these remarks against the oral/written divide, let us now move further to the science/non-science divide.

1.1.3 Contemporary thoughts on science and indigenous knowledge

As is the case with the oral/written divide, the intersections and areas of overlap between mainstream science and indigenous knowledge may already have become clearer from the previous part. In comparing these different kinds of knowledge, we also find many similarities.

If we are to look at the core of mainstream science, we will find there the desire to negotiate nature through sequential processes such as hypothesis formulation, experiment and prediction. Science shares this with indigenous knowledge. In science the process of discovery may be intuitive, accidental, conjectural or inspirational but outcomes are generally predictable and repeatable. Knowledge production in mainstream science includes phases of experimentation through trial and error or otherwise, which agrees with indigenous knowledge as well, for instance with crop selection (Kelbessa, 2001:300).



“African people have considerable knowledge of their environment and rational form of land management, because they are close observers of weeds, pests, crop conditions, soil types, weather and environmental changes. Local ecological knowledge ... is dynamic and innovative for it stems from prolonged and profound peasant experience” (Kelbessa, 2001:61).

We may take this statement further and argue that observation leads to theory and theory leads to application – and this is basically “science”. As an example we can use the Nigerian peasant farmer, who – on the basis of his footprints on wet soil – “divided soil over a mile into seven micro types and named the type of crops and crop combinations that would do well in each” (Makinde, 1988:4). Scientific analysis of these soil samples taken from the seven sections, confirmed the farmer’s intrinsic method of categorizing to be sound. Similarly, the Kenyan Pokot, who was the focus point of further study in this regard, has developed a fine-grained and complex knowledge of vegetation processes. “They classify grasses according to their ... value for livestock husbandry” (Makinde, 1988:5).

But their knowledge does not end with environmental matters. “Rural people’s fields of knowledge include history, linguistics, economic science, social knowledge, politics, administration, communications ... soils, water, climate ... plants, crops, weeds, pests, domestic and wild animals, insects, etc.” as well as “taxonomic systems, systems of time, skills artefacts, religion and a host of others” (Makinde, 1988:5). All of these are sound and accurate to a high degree – both in terms of theory and factual data.

It is important to note that these knowledge systems of a specific tribe is by no means the product of that specific tribe alone. Throughout history, intermarriages, tribal wars, raids, as well as colonisation brought together and mixed many influences and practices among the people in Africa. The National Research Foundation (NRF) affirms this notion: *“Indigenous knowledge systems refer to the complex set of knowledge and technologies existing and developed around specific conditions of populations and communities indigenous to a particular geographic area ... In the case of this focus area, indigenous knowledge refers to knowledge developed by these populations in themselves, as well as knowledge developed through interaction with other populations”* (National Research Foundation, 2004).

But there are some areas of non-convergence between indigenous knowledge and mainstream science too. Indigenous knowledge seems to be relatively less transferable than conventional science, given its holistic socio-cultural and even spiritual dimensions (many local areas or trees are often considered as sacred). Indigenous knowledge also appears to be largely communitarian in terms of discovery and experimentation and the mode of transmission and sharing is often collective rather than individualistic (it will be seen later that this is not always the case, though, and that independent individual thinkers do exist within traditional African communities). Embedded in the products and services associated with indigenous knowledge are proprietary systems which are often more flexible and negotiable than its western counterpart, and in some cases it is even non-existent. For the most part, indigenous knowledge systems also provide excellent examples of community based and community biased research. The engine of growth and sustenance is neither the market nor the profit motive nor is it prone to large-scale mass production and economies of scale. This obviously opposes the dominant western system too.

But changes are taking place in our world and the value of indigenous knowledge is increasingly being realized. “The present status of indigenous knowledge is that these forms of knowledge have hitherto been misunderstood and as such suppressed. Therefore, indigenous knowledge systems should be brought into the mainstream of explaining and understanding the world in order to establish its place within the larger body of knowledge” (National Research Foundation, 2004).

For methodological pluralists such as Paul Feyerabend, by implication, indigenous knowledge is the same as science because it *functions* (Emeagwali, 2003:12). For some 'unified theorists' who believe in the concept of a single science, indigenous knowledge may probably be construed as scientific in the light of some of the common features that are associated with the enterprise, such as hypothesis formulation, experiment and prediction (Kelbessa, 2001:130). Another perspective suggests that indigenous knowledge should be integrated into the mainstream science whilst another implies that indigenous knowledge *is* science – separate from the mainstream but equal. Thus again we find many opposing views (Emeagwali, 2003:12).

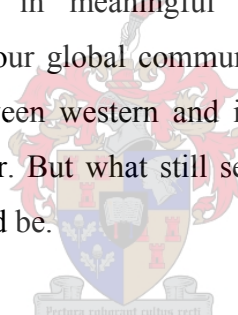
The attempt to create two categories of knowledge – indigenous/traditional vs. western/scientific – ultimately rests on the possibility that a small and finite number of characteristics can define the elements contained within the categories. But this attempt fails on many accounts, and it certainly does not include all aspects of either of these two kinds of knowledge. Two of such attempts are 1) historical differences, and 2) local vs. universal differences.

However, the presumption that indigenous knowledge is concerned with the immediate and concrete necessities of people's daily livelihoods, while western knowledge attempts to construct general explanations and is one step removed from the daily lives of people does not hold water. There surely are not many aspects of life in the west today that do not bear the imprint of science.

Indigenous knowledge is also often seen to exist in a local context, anchored to a particular social group in a particular setting at a particular time. But western

knowledge, on the other hand, has been divorced from an epistemic framework in the search for universal validity (Banuri, 1991:11). One may well question whether such a distinction makes sense. One of the most devastating critiques of technical solution-oriented development policies of the last five decades has been that they ignored the social, political and cultural contexts in which they were implemented. But if attempts to implement western technically oriented solutions failed because they did not recognize the imperatives entailed by different socio-political-cultural contexts, it is likely that the so-called technical solutions are as anchored in a specific milieu as any other system of knowledge (Banuri and Apffel-Marglin, 1993:11).

In trying to solve this question, Kyle (1999:260) suggested in a special issue of the *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, that “we can no longer afford to make comparisons between different kinds of knowledge in western and non-western cultures ... We must acknowledge that multiple knowledges exist and it is incumbent on all cultures to contribute in meaningful ways to the development and environmental sustainability of our global community.” It thus seems here that the opinion is that differences between western and indigenous knowledge should not disqualify the worth of the latter. But what still seems to be a question is what the relationship between these should be.



1.1.4 The relationship between science and non-science

There has been considerable discussion in the literature about the relationship between western science and indigenous science, or more correctly, indigenous sciences. We have seen that:

- * in indigenous knowledge systems, knowledge is perceived as holistic and purposeful to the owners

- * in western knowledge systems, knowledge is partitioned into areas or subjects, and western science is a segment of that body of knowledge acquired through particular ways (Fleer, 1999:120).

These kinds of knowledge systems point to the dominant world views in which they are contained. It is thus clearly not an easy issue. Baker and Taylor (1995:702) stated that, “although science purports to be universal, the predominant world-views of

different cultural groups and the needs of different economies are not”. What should thus be our approach when dealing with these differing world views and kinds of knowledge? Let us turn to the policies of noteworthy international organisations in trying to solve these questions.

Indigenous knowledge has received international recognition on the part of the Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the International Biodiversity Convention, and Agenda 21, the report of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Kelbessa, 2001:68). The World Commission on Environment and Development also acknowledged indigenous knowledge as a critical factor and an important variable in sustainable development (Kelbessa, 2001:68). Traditional communities “are the repositories of vast accumulations of traditional knowledge and experience ... Their disappearance is a loss for the larger society, which would learn a great deal from their traditional skills in sustainably managing very complex ecological systems” (Kelbessa, 2001:68).

In 1999 the Science for the Twenty-First Century conference, sponsored by UNESCO, was held in Budapest. From this conference came two statements, the *Declaration of science and the use of scientific knowledge* (UNESCO, 1999a) and *Science agenda: Framework for action* (UNESCO, 1999b). These documents include important references to indigenous peoples and their knowledge.

In the *Declaration of science and the use of scientific knowledge* it states that “traditional and local knowledge systems as dynamic expressions of perceiving and understanding the world, can make and historically have made, a valuable contribution to science and technology, and there is a need to preserve, protect, research and promote this cultural heritage and empirical knowledge” (UNESCO, 1999a).

The International Council for Science (ICSU) has a similar view. As a result of their Budapest meeting, the ICSU set up a study group on science and traditional knowledge, which reported back to its general assembly in September 2002 (ICSU, 2002). Among its recommendations was the following observation:

The Study Group has been particularly concerned with the gradual weakening and disappearance of traditional knowledge. This is a trend that must be reversed and the Study Group recommends that ICSU and Member Organizations take steps

- *to sustain traditional knowledge systems through active support to the societies that are keepers and developers of this knowledge,*
- *to promote training to better equip young scientists and indigenous people to carry out research on traditional knowledge,*
- *to promote and develop research to better appreciate traditional knowledge,*
- *to organize an international symposium on science and traditional knowledge.*

A proper understanding of the relationship between science, traditional knowledge and pseudo-science is important for the further development of both science and traditional knowledge (ICSU, 2002:12.)

If we dare venture into murkier waters, however, we might consider that the discomfort of these scientists gives expression to a more fundamental concern about the relationship between science and other systems of knowledge, or other understandings of the world.

There are those who believe that scientific knowledge is universal, which is commonly added to by all forms of “knowledges”. One of these is the Australian Education Council (1994a:3) who noted that: “Scientific knowledge ... has been enriched by the pooling of understanding from different cultures – western, eastern and indigenous cultures including those of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders – and has become a truly international activity.” Of course, if indigenous knowledge is conceived as just another “information set” from which data can be extracted to plug into scientific frameworks of understanding, then we do not trouble the scientific worldview. However, this practical approach – as found in the pharmaceutical industry or among conservation ecologists who validate traditional information and use it to attain pre-defined ends – may threaten the integrity of traditional knowledge systems. On the other hand, if science is seen as one knowledge system among many, then scientists must reflect on the relativity of their knowledge and their interpretations of ‘reality’.

For the survival of traditional knowledge as a dynamic, living and culturally meaningful system, this debate cannot be avoided (Nakashima and De Guchteneire, 2004:3). This is thus clearly a tricky topic and there are many contesting views. But after these considerations I have tried to follow the philosophical outlook of finding/creating a dialogue between the two relevant cultures.

1.1.5 Dialogue as the middle way

It can surely be said that in examining specific forms of investigation and knowledge creation in different countries and different groups of people, we should allow for the existence of diversity within what is commonly seen as western or as indigenous. At the same time we can find a common link in concentrating on the ways in which “indigenous” or “western” scientists create knowledge. Thus instead of trying to conflate all non-western knowledge into a category termed “indigenous”, and all western knowledge into another category termed “science”, it is more sensible to seek differences within these categories and find the similarities between them. This is then used to challenge conventional knowledge and propose new views.

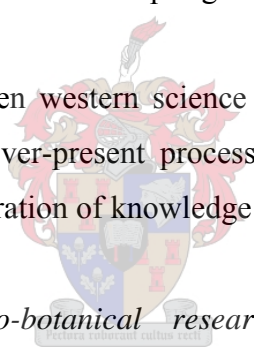
In the opening presentation of the discussion on “Western science, power and the marginalisation of indigenous modes of knowledge production” (2005), Professor Shiv Visvanathan, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, India, argued the case for what he calls “cognitive justice”. He defines this around the right of a plurality of knowledge structures to *co-exist* in a dialogic relationship with one another (2005). His concept suggests the cohabitation of western science (with its rationalist logic) with indigenous knowledge, and I side myself with this view.

The reason I choose to accept this view, is not only because I am persuaded by the literature studies so far in this part, but also because of the practical matters it entails. During my research in Kenya I have often come about situations where the aim was “development”, but which turned out to be huge failures. This was usually the case simply because it was insensitive to the local people’s world views and needs. Non-formal knowledge systems should not be lost simply because western attitudes tend to dominate thinking about development policy. The Science and Development

Network states that “western thinking should not exclude local communities from participation in the development process. Yet all too often, ‘development’ is defined only in terms of unfamiliar, sometimes not even appropriate western concepts” (2005).

Thus all too often western systems are pushed down onto indigenous groups, and no progress is made: “Analysis of attempts to tackle poverty reduction tells us that development interventions have failed. Even worse, they may sometimes have a detrimental effect on people’s livelihoods. Western solutions have been used in situations where indigenous knowledge could have provided a better response, but for one reason or another, was not even considered to be an option” (Different forms of knowledge, 2005). It is thus clear to me that although western science certainly has many things to teach, there are many things it cannot explain in a satisfactory way, and also never will, given the world view it springs from.

The dialogic relationship between western science and indigenous knowledge thus seems very important for the ever-present process of knowledge formulation and progress. This includes the generation of knowledge for nature resource management:



Through modern ethno-botanical research, indigenous knowledge is contributing to science in many fields relevant to natural resource management. In particular, indigenous knowledge is helping scientists to understand issues of biodiversity and natural forest management. Indigenous knowledge is also providing science with insights into crop domestication, breeding and management and giving scientists a new appreciation of the principles of ‘slash and burn’ agriculture, agro-ecology, agro-forestry, crop rotation, pest and soil management, and other areas of agricultural science. Additionally scientists are often adapting indigenous knowledge and re-applying it in projects of development cooperation and other contemporary issues (Different forms of knowledge, 2005).

To defend the view on the worth of indigenous knowledge, it is interesting to note the vast amount of botanical knowledge that indigenous people have in opposition to western scientists:

The Hanunoo people of the Philippines ... distinguish 1600 plant species in their forest, 400 more than scientists working in the same area. Of the estimated 250 000 to 500 000 plant species in the world, more than 85% are in environments that are the traditional homes of indigenous people. Nearly 75% of 121 plant-derived prescription drugs used world wide were discovered following leads from indigenous medicine. Globally, indigenous people use 3000 different species of plant to control fertility alone. The Kallaywayas, wandering healers of Bolivia, make use of 600 medicinal herbs; traditional healers in Southeast Asia may employ as many as 6500 plants for drugs. Almost all trees and many plants have a place in medicinal lore. Some scientists now believe that indigenous knowledge may help them to discover important new cures for diseases such as AIDS and cancer (Burger, 1990:32).

The vastness of indigenous knowledge thus cannot not be denied. In my opinion the new insights that can be achieved worldwide by paying attention to indigenous knowledge is easy to grasp and very viable indeed. In this study, I have tried to look for ways in which indigenous knowledge from the Pokot people can be used to solve contemporary issues in their area, by combining it with western ideas. It will later become clear that their thoughts are playing an important role in the creation of successful cultural conservancies in Laikipia, Kenya.

In all of the previous mentioned contexts, I am of the opinion that it is important to realize that science/indigenous knowledge is not in a contest and that the two should not be seen as competing with each other. The dialogic relationship I propose should be seen as one of supplementation. It is very important that one knowledge system not be regarded as superior to the other, but merely the result of the different (but equal) world view it stems from.

An example of this dialogic co-existence of scientific and indigenous knowledge is included at the end of this thesis as Annexure H.

In the course of this study I will thus seek to find this “middle way” and dialogic relationship between African indigenous knowledge and western science, and in the process find ways and ideas of mutual benefit for all parties included.

From the previous we can conclude that various people from different backgrounds, as well as international organisations, regard indigenous knowledge as valuable when considering environmental problems. Most writers agree that indigenous peoples and peasant farmers can be called the first environmentalists, for they have developed wise procedures to protect their natural resources. A dialogic study between an African and western culture is thus indeed a viable one. One aspect in this area that has received very little attention so far is that of the underlying philosophy and environmental ethic found among African peoples and from which stems indigenous knowledge. In the next part we will thus now start considering African philosophy as such, as it is presented as the source of African indigenous knowledge.

1.2 African Thought and Philosophy

Firstly, the concept of philosophy as such is a tricky one. There are almost as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers, and it is very difficult to find one suited to all those interested in this subject.

There are some who give a narrow definition of philosophy, who feel that it is something reserved for professional people who try to summarise their knowledge of reality within a theoretical system. It can be defined as “an explicitly developed system of deductively related propositions” (Apostle, 1981:14). When using this definition, philosophy should be done in an academically scientific way. The image that springs to mind is that of western armchair philosophers with an entire library full of books, who dedicate their lives to the solution of all kinds of often unimportant problems. They are thus elite philosophers, who mostly do their work within a place of isolation (Van der Walt, 2001:3).

In the case of African philosophy, this is not possible, mainly because of the dominant lack of much written material in Africa in the past. In a broader sense, philosophy may thus also mean that it is a sort of world view of persons which are lead in their actions by a certain world view. From such a view, philosophy can be defined as a

system of beliefs about the various areas of our experiences of being alive, which gives meaning to these different areas and relates them to each other (Apostle, 1981:14). In such a case we do not talk about the philosophy of an elite, but about the philosophy of a people, or folkwisdom (Van der Walt, 2001:3). In the African case, this seems the best approach to follow. It is not problematic thought, as this study will also set out to show the rational, individual contributions of sage philosophers to their communities. We will thus consider both of these kinds of philosophy.

It is important here to note that there definitely are individual philosophers, or sages, in Africa. These persons are embedded and brought up in their traditional ways and customs, but they retain the attitude of rational critique upon it. We have not known of them in the past though, because of the lack of much written word in Africa. It will later be seen in Chapter 5 what an important role such sages have to play in the way forward for Africa. This is because of the fact that they possess intimate knowledge of their societies, but they also have the ability to measure it against current trends in the world around them, and thus deliver a critique upon it.

However, for the main part of this thesis the philosophy of a “folkwisdom” has been followed. There are many dangers in such pursuits, but which does not concern this specific thesis. It is thus from this concept of philosophy that we will venture on to the concept of African philosophy. In the following few paragraphs a few main ideas and thoughts regarding African philosophy will be pointed to, and some discussion will be devoted to the question of how these differ from western philosophy and ways of thought.

Any attempt to understand African philosophy has to start from the fact which dominates all of African life: the interconnected concepts of participation, as well as that of life-force. The African feels himself integrated in and part of nature. “He does not feel himself like a swimmer in a hostile and foreign sea: he is part of this sea, he participates in it as it participates in him” (Georgiades and Delvare, 1975:2).

There is a simple explanation for this: The African does not see himself as the centre around which the universe gravitates. He is totally immersed *in* the universe – and *part* of it. This differs quite a lot from the western man, who mostly separates himself

from the world and from his fellow man. He is an individual subject “apart from and judge of an objective world” (Georgiades and Delvare, 1975:2). It will later be seen how this basic difference between African and western ways of thought is one of the most important reasons why the African man has so much to teach the west regarding environmental ethics.

Further, the true centre of the African’s world is the concept of life-force, “a floating, impersonal, yet powerful and profoundly real entity that pervades and permeates all things. Like concentric waves ... participating forces flows out from God ... the ‘integral force’ from which every being and power draws” (Tempels, 1959:22). It will later be seen in the discussion of Pokot rituals how this life-force is regarded as expressing itself in different mediums but in similar patterns on earth – in plants, animals, humans, etc.

A lot of African rituals are thus focused on becoming a part of or “one” with this life-force. In the African way, “the purpose of life is to be richly filled with vital force” (Tempels, 1959:23). The idea of an African philosophy is not mere speculations and aimless arguments. And it is not only reserved for learned intellectuals who rise in ivory towers with the increase of their knowledge. African philosophy is seen as a guideline for life, rather than an explanation of the universe. It is something to be lived. “To be is to participate” (Georgiades and Delvare, 1975:1).

If for the western mind, “being” or “existence” is the most general concept and which is applicable to every real object, for the African mind the essence is “force” (Apostle, 1981:25). The African man does not theorise about the force of life, but rather feels subjected to it. For him it is not something abstract, but a reality that can be seen all around him. The African “looks for his salvation in subjection to the world force which penetrates everywhere” (Van der Walt, 1975:101) and thus through this conducts his search for knowledge and truth. His search for knowledge and truth is thus in this subjection.

In the words of E.A. Ruch: “African philosophy is a lived philosophy, rather than a reflective one. It does not separate life from thought, reality from concepts, and subject from object. It does not separate the sacred from the profane, or religion from

everyday life. By and large it is a more harmonious and coherent life than that of western man who will speculate one way and live another” (1972:116).

In my experience with the Pokot people of Kenya I often found how God is very much a part of all aspects of their lives – even in the drinking of tea. The concept of God and the permeating character of religion is one of the most important aspects of the African world view, way of thought, and thus philosophy. R.H.W. Shephard, who has many years of experience in the area of education for Africans, reports the following very revealing conversation: “A teacher, who had grown grey in educational service, was asked the following question: ‘Where in your time table do you teach religion?’ His reply was: ‘We teach it in language to say what we mean. We teach it in geography to teach breadth of mind. We teach it in handicraft by thoroughness. We teach it in astronomy by reverence. We teach it on the play ground by fair-play. We teach it by kindness to animals, by courtesy to servants, by good manners to one another and by truthfulness in all things’” (quoted in Georgiades and Delvare, 1975:124).

The African mind is thus basically and universally religious – he is in constant relation with God, the spirits, the ancestors and stands in religious relations with other living beings (Zahan, 1970:144). This is a very useful concept and world view when considering environmental ethics. The devastating effects that western ways of thought and the capitalist concept of “every man for himself” have on the global environment, have been mentioned in Section 1.1 above. It is in this light that the relevance of a new (but old) approach like African philosophy and environmental ethics becomes important and worthy of interest.

We can thus conclude that African philosophy thus deserves our attention. “Africa has much to learn from the rest of the world, but it also has a tremendous amount to give to the world. But this cultural exchange can only take place if on both sides there is the necessary humility to receive and the self-confidence and openness to give to others what one holds as one’s most precious possession: viz one’s own personality” (Georgiades and Delvare, 1975:19). Let us thus open our minds to the “personality” of the Pokot tribe of Laikipia, Kenya when it is discussed in Chapter 2.



Fig 6. Pokot woman and child at Lonyek cultural village.

1.3 Conclusion

Chapter 1 has now laid the foundation for the rest of this study by showing why African philosophy and indigenous knowledge can and should be valued.

It was shown how the scientific method of the west developed and came to be accepted as the standard of knowledge. It became clear that this method did a lot of harm together with the development it has brought, and that African thought may hold some of the answers to these problems.

In order to interpret the alternative ways of thought that Africa proposes, we considered two important barriers to transformation, namely the oral/written divide and the science/non-science divide. We went further to consider contemporary thoughts worldwide regarding science and indigenous knowledge and for this study I proposed a dialogue between the two. In such a way we can create a middle way between the African culture of the Pokot and the dominant western culture, and this dialogue can create viable solutions for sustainable development and conservation.

Taking it one step further, we considered African philosophy (from which African indigenous knowledge springs), which will assist us in also recognizing the environmental ethic of the Pokot people in Chapter 4. African philosophy was agreed to be a set of world views which leads the people in their understanding and making sense of the world. It is not academically written down by individuals, but rather lived by communities. Even though African thought and philosophy were not traditionally written down, it was seen that its emphasis on the soul, life-force and the intimate knowledge of the environment makes it a source worthy of attention,

especially for environmental ethics. Their close relationship with their communities as well as with the natural environment, gives them an intimate knowledge and understanding of their world. It is because of this same reason that African indigenous knowledge (which springs from African philosophy) holds such great value, and this is one of the reasons why international organisations are increasingly interested in it.

The object of further discussion would now be to take one specific African tribe and learn as much as possible about their culture and way of thought. From that point on an attempt will be made at identifying some of their underlying paradigms, ways of thought and ultimately their environmental ethic.

The people whom I will focus on is the Pokot people residing just outside of the Laikipia Nature Conservancy. What will be investigated are their ways of thought as expressed through rituals, ceremonies, music, storytelling, general worldview etc. In Chapter 4 it will be seen that many of these attitudes reflect a similarity with the radical environmental ethic theory of Deep Ecology, and that both Africa and the west have much to learn from the other's way of thought.

We now move on to the Pokot tribe as such, to find an orientation into their specific culture and way of thought.

Chapter 2 Orientation

In Chapter 2 we will set out to gain an understanding of the paradigms and world views of the specific African tribe of the Pokot. We will start out with considering the creation myths of the Pokot, as well as their view on how the world has come to be as it is. The first two myths involve how the first man and woman descended from heaven and the harmony that existed between man, God and nature in these times. The third myth tells about the coming of black and white races and the fourth about the birth of the different African tribes. It is interesting to note, as we shall see, that in all of these the Pokot deem themselves as superior or “the first” race/people, which is most probably one of the reasons why they are still such a proud nation and reluctant to give up their culture and their ways. It can also be noted that according to them, perfect harmony existed in those early times and that such harmony is still today a worthy pursuit (Deba, April 2004).

The historical origin of the Pokot will be considered next. In this part it will be seen how it came to be that the Pokot are both an agricultural as well as a pastoral people, why their tribe hosts such an array of different physical features, as well as how they had to endure many raids and difficulties as a tribe. Attention will also be given to how their history is ordered via the 8 generation age group system, which “existed since their origin”.

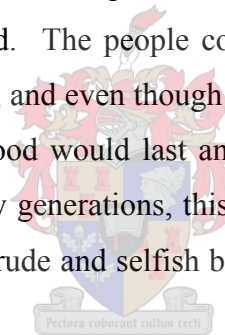
Their historical background will then be taken further by examining the first contact with Christianity and the way in which this slowly opened the doors for westernisation. One instance of this westernisation will be discussed by looking at the changes from traditional dress to more contemporary dress. With the current state of affairs and the influences of the west closing in around the Pokot, it will be discussed how their current challenges would be to adapt to contemporary times and ways of life, without losing the wisdom contained in their own ways. In this case thus once again – to engage in a dialogic relationship between the African and western cultures.

2.1 The history of the Pokot

2.1.1 Creation myths

During my stay with the Pokot, I was told three different creation myths, all equally intriguing. The first myth was told during a personal interview with Elijah Deba (April 2004) and it entails the following story:

In the beginning God sent the first man and woman down from heaven with a rope, in order for them to come and live on the earth. These were the first Pokot people, and they were very happy on the earth. There was enough food to eat and plenty of water all around. There were no droughts or diseases, and generally no calamities. In those times God would provide the people with food via the rope that they came down with from heaven. There was always an abundance of food, even when the first two people started multiplying. Whenever someone was hungry, they would ask God for food and it would come down with the rope in a very small calabash – so small that it could be hidden inside one hand. The people could ask for anything they wanted, milk, honey, fruit, blood or meat, and even though it came down in small quantities, it could never be finished. The food would last and last until everyone was satisfied completely. But then after a few generations, this harmonious coexistence with God was destroyed completely ... A rude and selfish boy cut this connecting rope to spite the other people.



When the elders found out about this they were furious. They cursed the boy and he was cast away, and soon the boy died. But even though the culprit was dead, there was no way to repair the rope to heaven. That rope connected them to God's provision and care, and it was the symbol of their deep and loving relationship. So since that day the connection between God and man has been broken, and ever since man has been trying to restore that broken relationship with God.

To do this people make sacrifices to God and pray to Him to be with them and look after them. This is usually done by the elders, because the older a man becomes, the closer he grows to God and thus the better his chances of finding favour with Him. The elders therefore make most of the decisions regarding the community, in order to try and restore them to their ways as it were before the rope was cut.

Will this relationship ever be restored? Elijah Deba says yes, there will be harmony with God again one day. The only problem is that the people are becoming so many, and just as most of them are living in harmony with God again, others are born who do wrong again and the whole process is repeated.

The second myth was told during a personal interview with an elder from Amaya village, Peter Maklab. I was told that the first two Pokot people descended from heaven on a cloud. As they came closer to the ground, the cloud moved over the territory that would become their home in a few moments, and they were amazed at the beauty and the bounty of the land. The cloud then stopped on the top of a mountain and the two people were lowered down onto the flat surface. Peter said that on the top of that mountain, which is situated near Lomut village, those first prints of the Pokot people can still be seen, as it is embedded in the hard rock. He said that the prints are also accompanied by all the animals' prints that came down with them from heaven – cattle, sheep, ostriches, goats, chickens, etc. and that some of the elders still know how to get to that place or have seen it themselves. From then on the people multiplied and became the Pokot tribe.



Fig. 7 A gift of honey from Mr Peter Maklab.

The third creation myth was told me by Longolokuch Kapedo, an elder from Churo village (April 2004). This myth explains the coming of the different races. According to him, the first two people on earth were black twins. As they were growing up, the one became fond of black things, and the other became fond of white things. The one that became fond of white things would always be playing with white things, like ash and white pepper. He enjoyed being with these things so much that he would often smear his whole body with white ash mixed with water. Later he started

doing this so often that his body began to take on this white colour, until later he became permanently white all over.

Longolokuch Kapedo also had another story, one to explain where all the people and different tribes came from. According to him, in the beginning of time there was one woman on the earth, and she wanted to have a child. She then took some dust and put it together to form a small boy. She proceeded to the sacred ficus tree, which grows high on the top of mountains and over and into rocks, sending its roots down deeply. She took a branch of this tree and gave it to the child. When pricked or cut the tree produces a white juice/milk and when this was given the child he miraculously came alive. This baby was the first Pokot man, and thus created from the dust. Longolokuch says this woman is called the “Mother of Nations”. She created other men as well, and they all came back to her when they had grown up and she had more children with them. In this way each man was the founder of a different nation, although the Pokot was the first.

We find here the correlation with the Biblical account of man being formed out of dust, but interestingly he is here formed by a female creator. Moving on to the history and origin of the Pokot and their development as a tribe, we will find some help from written literature.



2.1.2 The origin of the Pokot

Kenya has a rich diversity of different tribes, numbering 42 altogether. Among these the Pokot are classified as Nilo-Hamites and fall in the Kalenjin cluster. In colonial times the Pokot was known as the “Suk” people, a name they resented because it is the name that the Maasai gave to them. According to Beech, they were so called “owing to the small short sword worn by the hill tribes and called *chuk* or *chôk*” (1911:1).

Beech (1911:2) speaks of the old men declaring that “there always were two original Suk [Pokot] tribes living on the Elgeyo escarpment ... The names of these two tribes were *Chôk* and *Sekër*”. According to Beech, in the earliest times of the Pokot tribe they were agriculturalists because they did not have many cattle, and the few they had were hunted down by the wild animals abounding in the area. An extremely

respected elder from Amaya village, Didi, went even further and said that before that time they were hunters and gatherers, they lived in caves and had very few livestock, as these were killed by the lions, hyenas, cheetahs and other wild animals that roamed the area. They were a peaceful people though, and not as hungry for war as was the Maasai.

According to Beech (1911:2), the original agricultural tribe lived in the mountainous area of the Elgeyo escarpment, where they were constantly “raided and harried” by the Sambur tribe from the Kerio valley. In order for the Pokot to become a pastoralist as well as an agriculturalist people as they are today, history thus had to create the way. This happened as “there arose a wizard among the Suk [Pokot] who prepared a charm in the form of a stick, which he placed in the Sambur cattle kraals, with the result that their cattle all died” (Beech 1911:2). The Sambur then left the Kerio valley, leaving it open for the Pokot to descend into the valley and occupy it. From there the Pokot raided other tribes, including the Sambur, and started increasing their wealth in livestock.

Because of this historical chain of events, we today find two groups of Pokot: the agricultural (or hill) Pokot and the pastoral (or plains) Pokot. But since the pastoral Pokot have originated, it became the “aim and ambition of the hill Suk [Pokot] to amass sufficient live-stock to enable them to descend into the plains and join the pastoral Suk [Pokot]” (Beech 1911:4).



Fig. 8 Pokot women in Amaya village.

Later the Pokot was raided by the Laikipia Maasai. They fled via their mountains of the Elgeyo escarpment to Uganda (Beech 1911:4), and it is here I suspect they found safety with the Karamajong tribe of Uganda. I was told by Didi that the Pokot have

borrowed many of the Karamajong's ways and customs while living with them. One of these is the "sapana" initiation ritual which is still religiously followed today.

After they lived with the Karamajong for two years, they returned to the Kerio valley and became friends with the Turkana (Beech 1911:4). One of the Turkana rangers in the Laikipia Nature Conservancy told me that the famous "siolip" mudcake worn on the crown of circumcised men's heads is a custom that the Pokot borrowed from the Turkana. From all of this raiding and intermingling it is easy to see how much the different tribes influenced each other, and that this intermingling is a process not altogether new in our modernising world.

Beech (1911:2) affirms this as well: "Fugitives from Sambur, Rudolf, Moiven, Karamojo, and Nandi intermarried with the two original tribes, and thus the Suk [Pokot] nation was evolved". He further notes that this is probably the reason why there are found so many types among the Pokot, "from the tall, handsome Hamite, with almost perfect features, to the short, dwarf-like pigmy, with spread nose and bolting eyes" (1911:2).

The elder Didi however does not completely agree with the history, and this is a clear example of how oral histories can easily get distorted. According to Didi, the Pokot did not originally come from Kenya, but from "another place". One man and one woman came from the west, from a place called Mount Sekēr and Pkomo and started multiplying. This may correspond vaguely with Beech's reference to Sekēr and Chōk as the two original tribes. Although Beech (1911:2) notes that fugitives from Sambur, Rudolf, Moiven, Karamojo, and Nandi intermarried with the Pokot, Didi said that it was the Pokot who rather went as fugitives to the Karamajong.

David Amasilo, the chief of Kaptuya village, also mentioned the movement of the Pokot people, but referred to more recent times (April 2004). He agreed that the people used to stay in West Pokot, but had to move to the Baringo area where they are living today, because of fights with the Maasai. I was told that the Maasai moved on to the Nanyuki area.

Although no one can say with certainty exactly how the history of the Pokot tribe evolved, it is clear that they were formed with and intermingled among many African tribes. Although they mixed with other tribes quite often, their own tribe was given structure and a system of reference through consecutive age sets and the naming of these.

2.1.3 Age set structure

I was told by my translator, Patrick Koas, that since the beginning of the Pokot tribe, there have been 11 age sets, or generations, each “roughly 15 years” (Beech 1911:5). The names of these generations were given to me by Didi, John Tiyos and Musa Kakuko, the only elders I could find who can remember further than the last 5 generations. They do not correlate exactly with Beech’s findings back in 1911 though, but there are strong resemblances. The age set structure provides a good frame of reference regarding historical storytelling and remembrances (Peristiany, 1951:200). The names of these age groups are also repeated after every eighth generation. They are:

Beech’s account: **Didi, John and Musa’s account:**

1. Jumo	
2. Sowa	
3. Karongoro	
4. Kipkomeit	Pkoimot
5. Kablelach	Karongoro
6. Merkutwa →	Merkutwa (colonialism; “the white man came”)
7. Nyongu →	Nyongu
8. Maina →	Maina (from this age there are still living elders)
[1. Jumo]	Sowa
[2. Sowa]	Karongoro
[3. Karongoro]	Kaplelach (the current age group)
[4. Kipkomeit]	

These 8 age groups are supposed to be repeated cyclically through the ages, but according to the elders’ version, it seems that there was some incongruence: after Maina, Jumo was skipped and directly the next age group was named Sowa. It also seems that after Karangoro, Kipkomeit had to come, but it was skipped and directly

went to Kaplelach. Although there is no perfect consensus (as is often the case with verbal traditions) there exists a rough correlation and this system provides an easy point of reference in their society. The “siolip” or mudcake that the men wear is also painted according to these age set groups (see 2.2).

A thought that will need further research, is whether this 8 generation cycle is an indication of a more cyclical conception of time as opposed to the linearity found in western thought. Although I was unable to get explanations as to the meaning of the names, this might also shed some light on a possible process of growth that occurs cyclically.

2.1.4 The first contact with Christianity

In 1938 the first Christian missionary reached the Laikipia area. He was called Bwana Collins (Mr Collins), but was not able to have any converts among the people. Didi told me that Mr Collins mostly prayed and went from door to door to speak to the people, but that nobody bothered much with this person who wanted to tell them about another God that they had to serve, or about the good news he supposedly brought. This attitude of theirs rapidly changed when something happened that no one could ignore: a miracle that converted almost an entire community.



This miracle was told to me by the person who had experienced it – Longolokuch Kapedo. I was referred to him by Didi (who knew of the events) and Longolokuch then shared the whole story with me (April 2004). It is the custom of the Pokot that when a man dies who is not married or does not have any children, he is not buried but his body is thrown away. Thus it happened with Longolokuch when he was a 12 year old boy back in 1950. He got very sick and when he had died, his body was thrown away near the river. He laid there for two days and he told me that worms had already started eating the insides of his mouth and nasal areas. The missionary Mr Collins heard about the story and refused to accept it. He demanded of the boy’s parents to know where the boy’s body was thrown, but they refused to tell. I was told that the mother even wanted to stab the missionary with a knife, “because he wouldn’t leave the dead alone”. He wouldn’t relent, though, and in the end they told him the boy’s body was at the river. The missionary went to the river, and prayed

continuously there with the boy for a long time. Longolokuch said that he was then resurrected from the dead.

The father of this boy was one of the most prominent members of the community. He had 12 wives (where men will usually have 3 or 4) and this was a very clear indication of his wealth and status. When the story was spread of the boy's "resurrection" all of the father's children and his grandchildren (from the 12 wives), came to see about this miracle. Many people from the community and the district also streamed to this homestead. In a matter of hours there were over 100 close relatives at the father's homestead, and hundreds more of the other villagers. Many people agreed that the boy had died, and they all now had to acknowledge that he was alive once again. The missionary sent medicine for the boy to take and he grew stronger day by day.



Fig. 9 The interview with Longolokuch Kapedo (left) near Churo village. Pastor Musa Maklab is translating (right).

It may be possible that the boy fell into a very deep coma and only appeared to be dead. But Longolokuch told me that he went to a sort of heaven, "a place better than this one", and that the people there told him that it wasn't his home yet and that he had to leave. He said that the people there were all naked, but that they went about their daily lives just as on earth. Everything there was better though: although they still lived in huts, they ate only meat and drank only milk. There was also a lot of peace: there still were the same wild animals that caused them losses on earth, but these animals did not bother or harm them there. Overall there was harmony and balance. The people there wouldn't let him stay, though, and showed him to an

opening in the bush through which he had to go. As he went through that opening, I was told that he woke up with the missionary who was busy praying for him.

The effect that this happening had on the community can be understood. The people were totally in awe. The fact that it happened to the son of such a prominent person, helped to spread the story like wildfire. From that day on the missionaries were taken seriously and many people converted to this “superior faith”.

Via pastor Musa of Kaptuya village, I was able to make contact with Mr Collins’ cousin. Both pastor Musa and Mr Collins cousin (the junior Mr Collins) were involved with the African Inland Church Eldoret College in Nairobi. Via the college I got hold of the email address of Mr Collins junior in the United States of America, where he is currently involved with missionary work. He was very glad to hear news about the Pokot and about the study being conducted on them. This was done because of my promise to Longolokuch Kapedo to try and find the children of Bwana Collins in order for him to show his gratitude to them and to tell of the full life with many children that he had had.

I told Mr Collins junior about the tale of the boy being raised from the dead, and although he was hesitant to confirm this, he said that he was well aware of a boy that his uncle had nursed back to health from being deadly sick (Collins, 2004). A story of this magnitude may have caused a tremendous uproar, and the senior Mr Collins might have chosen to tell that the boy was simply very ill. Whichever way, this instance was a great turning point for the Pokot of the area and their relationship with Christianity.

The coming of Christianity to the area must have made the coming of westerners more acceptable too, as Longolokuch Kapedo said that they were generally associated with this new superior faith (Kapedo, 2004). The influence of westerners inevitably caused changes and new ways to be brought along with them. One of these was the traditional dress of the Pokot.

Let us now discuss this traditional dress and some of the ways in which it has changed over the years.

2.2 Traditional and contemporary dress

During a personal communication with the elder Didi, he told me that in the earliest times of the Pokot tribe, the people wore the whole skin of an animal. The very popular ones were cattle or baboon skins. These were skinned, the head cut off and the tail left on. A person would then wear this skin just like the animal had – on his back only. This dress code seemed to stay, even in later years, as “the nakedness of women is covered; that of the men is not” (Beech, 1911:12). The arms of the person would be covered with the “arms” of the baboon, the same with the legs and back. Such a skin was called a “kalaja” and was the very first type of clothing of the Pokot. Those who were very brave would wear the skins of the leopards they have killed and in this way increased their status with the others.

The women wear dresses/skirts made from goat skin. Mothers wear a special belt around their waist which is decorated in vertical lines with cowry shells. Barbara A. Bianco (1995:776) found that the patterns of these shells connect mothers to certain clans, but I could not find confirmation of this among the Pokot, specifically those living in Laikipia. This might also be the result of how older women in West Pokot remark that “people don’t follow their clans and its patterns strictly these years ... Fashionably minded younger women explain that they want their belts to look ‘fancy’” (Bianco, 1995:773). The belts are said to protect the mother’s baby throughout his/her life, and the mother may never take it off. It also has a practical benefit, as it helps the mother’s tummy back into place after labour. During a visit to the National Museum of Kenya in Nairobi, I learnt that young girls would wear a thin belt made from the toe bones of the dik-dik antelope, which is then decorated with coloured china beads. During the same visit I saw a ring that the Pokot made from the skin of a goat’s leg. The skin would come from a goat slaughtered for divinatory purposes and used as a protective adornment. Because the skin around the leg is already circular, it would simply be cut diagonally and worn until it wears through and falls off.



Fig. 10 Pokot women in traditional dress at Lonyek cultural village.

Men also wear a skin garter below each knee. “This is not tight, and its aim is merely ‘to alter the appearance of long bare legs which is ugly’” (Beech, 1911:13). A very distinctive decoration among the Pokot is the ring knife that is still widely worn. “A curious sickle-shaped knife ... fashioned into a ring at the base ... are deadly instruments at close quarters for scooping or picking out an adversary’s eye; while a circular knife worn around the wrist is capable of dealing a deadly backhanded blow” (Beech, 1911:15).

As the years passed and the Pokot came into contact with other tribes, many of the tribes influenced their way of dressing. For example the Pokot started making large gaping holes in their earlobes like the Maasai, and this custom is still seen in some cases among the Pokot today. The people also used to plait their hair in the way that the Maasai do. Didi further informed me that the famous “siolip” or mudcake that newly initiated men are adorned with on the crown of their heads was borrowed from the Karamajong tribe. It is clear that a lot of change and development took place with the different tribes coming into contact with each other.

This siolip is a rather quaint head dress, but the most striking part of the men’s appearance. “The hair at the back of the head is allowed to grow long, and on to this is woven other hair, in many cases said to be that of their ancestors, until a kind of chignon of oval shape is formed ... This is dressed with mud (munyan), so that the whole becomes hard and solid ... Here and there dotted over the whole surface of the head-dress are little gut sockets in which ostrich feathers are planted” (Beech, 1911:14). The rest of the head is shaven clean. During personal communication in March 2004 with Willy Kitilit, an elder from Kaptuya village, I was told that the

siolip is painted according to a man's age group. The colours usually used are only navy, white and brown, but one of these colours is made more pertinent among all the members of the same age group's siolip.

In the villages I visited, I found many Pokot still wearing their traditional garments, but almost everywhere it is combined with western T-shirts and jackets. The women still wear skirts and beads around their necks, but the skirts are not made from goat skins. These days they wrap printed sarongs around their waists, covering their knees. The men wear a thin kikoi-like blanket (often called a Maasai blanket) around their waist, but this is worn above the knee. Elongated earlobes are still found among the elders and the ring knife is commonly found among the young men as well. The younger generation seems to have lost their taste for most of the things that is traditional. But all in all, their way of dress in the communities seems like a suitable metaphor for the intermingling of the African and western cultures as it is found among them today.

Almost all of those younger girls and boys that received a western education wears mostly western clothes and they regard this as a status symbol. This to me was sad as the people's traditional clothes create a wonderful compliment to their very natural village and traditional way of life. But that way of life is of a past era. Modern developments present all of us with the daunting task of trying to regain the balance and harmony with nature that existed in earlier times, while still moving forward and progressing as human beings.

2.3 Current challenges

The Pokot are finding themselves in a problematic stage in their history. Global trends are changing the face of the world faster than their culture is able to adapt. They are a proud and stubborn people, and the elders are holding on to their traditional customs and beliefs. In my opinion, it is vital to conserve such a pride in a people's own culture and something which should be encouraged. But in order for the Pokot not to be left behind but rather find their place as a people in the modern world, it is important to find a middle way between their traditional ways and modern developments. The aim should not at all be to change the people into westerners. It is

important to learn from and develop with the notions brought from the west, but it is also important to incorporate the wisdom and world view of the Pokot. They have been living in Africa for centuries and as was seen in Chapter 1, indigenous knowledge is a vast and valuable source of wisdom and knowledge. As a first tentative step towards this ideal of incorporation, the ideal for this thesis is to find western theories which compliment the worldview of the Pokot (e.g. the environmental ethic contained in Deep Ecology) and find middle ways between these African and western theories. In other words the aim should be to find a niche and a middle way for Africa, as well as lessons and suggestions for the western world.

Africa and its people are after all not Europe or America, and the problems faced on the African continent will need solutions that cannot be based on success stories found in the west alone. “We should be able to change the situation that ... assumes that the ideas of humanism, democracy, freedom and so on, which are dominantly western, are the only genuine ones. Our education, therefore, must be one which strikes a balance between the good things that we could get from abroad and the good things also that we could cultivate from the indigenous forms of knowledge” (Gutema, 2002:214).

It is the Pokot people’s (and Africa’s) challenge to learn from western civilisation what they can, in order for them to progress and survive in a new world. Tepilit Ole Saitoti said the following about his native Maasai tribe (but I feel it is also applicable to the Pokot): “After deep reflection on my people and culture, I have painfully come to accept that the Maasai must change to protect themselves, if not their culture. They must adapt to the realities of the modern world for the sake of their own survival” (Trillo, 2002:282). It must be stressed that “although to be educated means the appropriation of new knowledge it must, however, be a critical appropriation that does not take to self-denial” (Gutema, 2002:211).

In my opinion the most important challenge facing the Pokot today, is adapting to contemporary times and ways of life, without losing the essence and wisdom of their own culture.

2.4 Conclusion

To conclude, we have now been able to gain some insight into the history and background from which the Pokot people speak their minds. We have looked at their creation myths and their myths explaining occurrences in the world. It is most probable that their great pride stems from these world views. By looking at the historical origin of the Pokot it became clear that theirs are a community moulded and formed by many difficulties, cultural intermingling and raids. As a result many of their ways and customs are borrowed from other tribes. When considering their history we also found that they had a distinctive age set structure according to which the men in the society are grouped. This creates an easy point of reference.

We then moved on to their first contact with Christianity and the circumstances which helped this process along. It was also seen that the acceptance of Christianity opened the doors for westernisation to slowly creep into their way of life. The concept of westernisation as seen through the changes that occurred in their traditional way of dress was then discussed. In my opinion the current challenges of the Pokot would be to find ways of adapting to contemporary times without letting go of the wisdom contained in their own ways.

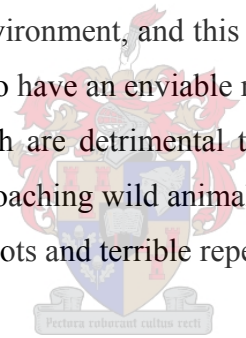
Up to this point we have now been able to see the following: firstly, looking at the international environmental crisis as well as the results of technology on the human soul, it was clear that alternative ways of thought and philosophy are needed to get to the roots of these problems. It was seen why African thought and philosophy as well as African indigenous knowledge are some of the possible places worthy of such alternatives to be sought. We then embarked on such a journey and focused on one specific African tribe, the Pokot, and found an orientation into their history and background. We will now go on to investigate their cultural concepts and rituals in more depth, in order to try and find the philosophy and environmental ethic that it stems from.

Chapter 3 Culture of the Pokot

Chapter 3 will focus on the *expressions* of the Pokot culture in order to explore the deeper lying philosophy and environmental ethic that it stems from. The problem statement of this chapter would thus be the following question: “What are the cultural expressions of the Pokot people that may assist in identifying its underlying philosophy and environmental ethic?” The investigation of the culture of the Pokot will be divided into two sections: Pokot cultural concepts and Pokot rituals. Many of the areas investigated do not directly concern the Pokot’s environmental ethic, but is still discussed in order for the reader to form as big as possible an idea and orientation of the culture of the Pokot. It also serves the purpose of conserving the rapidly fading knowledge and ways of the Pokot culture.

Starting with Pokot cultural concepts, we will look at the African notion of communality, which is often expressed in talking about “we” as opposed to “I”. It will be shown how the African people are generally embedded in wide and well-structured social systems and that the contribution of individuals to the whole of the community is a given expectation. This relational structure will later be shown to extend even further into the natural environment. The difficulties that sometimes creep in because of the differences between African and western ways regarding communality, will briefly be discussed. Moving back to the Pokot as such, it will be seen how the issue of responsibility and the way it is controlled by the elders of a village, is considered as the moral qualifications that leads to a happy and respected life. The elders thus have tremendous influence on the community and the small size of villages enhances this control. It will be seen how a person’s sense of self is absolutely acquired by his accepting of obligations and responsibilities. The sense of a person in the bigger scheme of things is also enhanced by the use of music and dance, and this plays an important role in the expression of cultural and personal needs, desires and communality. Music and dance also play a definitive role in establishing and enhancing the sense of interconnectedness among the people as well as their interconnectedness with the environment and the larger cosmos.

The plight of women will then be discussed and it will be seen that the only notable role of respect that women may acquire is found in the knowledge of herbal medicine. In matters of marriage and household, women have very little say. It will be seen that the knowledge of herbal medicine was originally given by God and thus sacred in its contents. The incidence of witchcraft will be looked at and how this is strongly opposed by the whole community. Spiritual aspects will be taken further by looking at burial, inheritance and the returning of ancestral spirits. It will be seen how this overlapping of the dimensions of the physical and spiritual worlds also plays a major role in the concept of interrelatedness among all things. Spirits are seen to link some spiritual space between God and humans and this has a strong impact on the actions of those in this physical world. Mystical elements are also found in the relationship the Pokot have with animals, and in this regard the concept of totem animals will be discussed. It will be seen that this relationship is one that benefits both humans and animals and thus it has a lot of value for conservation efforts. The lives of the Pokot are deeply embedded in their environment, and this is clear also from their reading of star signs. Although the Pokot do have an enviable relationship with the environment, they also show tendencies which are detrimental to conservation efforts. One such tendency is that of young boys poaching wild animals to demonstrate bravery. This is a way of thought that has deep roots and terrible repercussions for conservation.



One area, however, that has a lot to teach about living in harmony with the environment is that of sacred places. These places receive more respect than the rest of the environment and in these places the earth is believed to be filled with more spirit. It will be seen how water bodies, like rivers, streams and dams, as well as the top of mountains are considered as sacred and closer to God. The Pokot believe that in respecting these religious symbols lies the blessing of God, and this is a wonderful concept for conservation. On another level, it will be seen how the changes that are occurring all around them and the western ways of conservation and education bring in many distressing aspects for the elders of the communities. It will be seen how necessary it is to include elders in matters of conservation, in order for any efforts to be successful in the communities.

The second part of the chapter will look at Pokot rituals. In this section, I look at the symbolism of their rituals and through those find another window into the Pokot way

of life. My aim will be to try and gain a general overview of their lifecycle and the most important ceremonies they perform. Some of the concepts discussed may be useful to nature conservation, and others may help organisations like the Laikipia Wildlife Forum to understand and approach the Pokot people more effectively. In the same way as with Pokot cultural concepts, the rituals will be analyzed in order to find the deeper lying philosophy and environmental ethic it stems from.

The rituals we will look at will start with birth, and it will be seen that this period is one of separation and bonding between mother and child. The giving of a name will show how a person's name is strongly linked to the natural surroundings and circumstances of his/her birth. The initiation of boys and girls will show that this is another time of separation which aims to bring about responsible and informed adults into community life. "Sapana" is probably the most important ritual in Pokot culture and focuses on the change of mind needed to turn from being a young boy into that of a responsible man. The marriage ritual was described earlier in 3.1.7. "Kokwa" is the ritual of the men of a village which gather at least every third day at a consecrated meeting place beneath the shade of some trees. The boa game is a leisure activity which indicates the importance that cattle play in Pokot culture. "Amuro" and "apsekit" are two rituals pertaining to the giving of gifts to community members when slaughtering an animal. God speaks to the Pokot in four different ways: Through prophets, through dreamers, by reading animal intestines and by the throwing of shoes. All of these, including burial discussed in 3.1.11, point to an awareness and connectedness between man and the natural environment, through which God sends them messages. Becoming "an elder" increases the respect that a person receives. This confirms how important the wisdom that age brings, is considered.

3.1 Pokot cultural concepts

3.1.1 "We"

In the first instance I want to look at the concept "we", as opposed to the more western notion of "I". I also want to show how these African and western concepts are becoming intermingled in Kaptuya village.

According to Steve Biko, the peoples of African culture (if one may be forgiven for using such a broad term) are much more “prepared to have a slower progress in an effort to make sure that all of us [them] are marching to the same beat” (Biko, 1988:26). During my stay among the Pokot, I have seen this many times over – a communality among the people; a system of thought that incorporates how they can ALL benefit. This is quite different from the more western notion of individual striving and success.

One of these differences that I have found strange occurred while I was staying over in Kaptuya Village at Pastor Musa Maklab and his wife Elizabeth. During this time I could clearly see how the African and Western cultures are mingling in Kenya, and it brought about a few strange situations. They were both brought up in the neighbouring village Churo, about 40 km of dirt road away from Kaptuya. He received his pastoral training at the African Inland Church: Eldoret Missionary College in Nairobi. Upon graduating he was appointed as Pastor in Kaptuya Village, where I have done most of my work. They are living very neatly, with tables, chairs and a couch inside their tidy mud and thatch house. They served me lovely chicken (from their yard), rice and sweet Kenyan tea for supper. It was served in matching tin plates and cups, although we ate with our hands. Elizabeth came around our circle with a plastic bowl and soap for all to wash their hands. But during supper we discussed something which was a clear indication of the intermingling of African and western cultures, and this concerned the couple’s children.

Pastor Musa and Elizabeth are the proud parents of two boys, Ruto (4) and Kuto (2). Because the parents have been educated by missionaries in western ways, Elizabeth does not only stay at home to work the vegetable patch (shamba) and look after the children, but she is also the kindergarten teacher at her husband’s local church. She does this every weekday morning in the concrete and brick building about 100m from their house. Because of this, their small children would often have to be alone at home – a difficult situation for most working mothers. But since the village is still very primitive and “working mothers” are not a regular sight, there was obviously no day care to turn to as a solution. So what happened then was to me a beautiful mix of the western and African cultures.

Pastor Musa's uncle had a daughter about 8 years old at the time when this issue became a problem. This, in Pokot culture, is about the age when a girl is expected to look after the goats where they graze during the day, help with household chores like fetching water, as well as look after younger siblings. So the parents asked the uncle if this little girl could come and stay with them permanently. This to me seemed very strange, as the thought of giving your daughter away to go and live with family who needed a babysitter, did not agree with my western mind at all. But then pastor Musa explained to me that this uncle of his first wife was barren, and in most African cultures this was considered dreadful indeed – as many wives and many children are considered a man's wealth. So when this situation of barrenness came to be known, he (the pastor) was still a small boy. He was then sent off to go and live with his uncle, help with chores, look after the livestock during the day and all in all be brought up by his uncle. So now to ask this uncle for one of his daughters to come and help out, was natural and not strange at all.

Thus to elaborate Steve Biko's earlier statement, the pastor's father might have thought his own wealth would grow slower if he gave his son to a relative those many years before. If he and his own wealth were the principle driving force of his life, he would most probably not have done it. But now the whole situation was turned around and he was repaid, as he most certainly expected he would, for now his children and grandchildren were in need and it was obvious that they would help. It was not a tremendous favour. It was just the way things worked. In the words of Steve Biko: "We consider our living together ... as a deliberate act of God to make the community of brothers and sisters jointly involved in the quest for a common answer to the varied problems of life ... All our action is usually joint community oriented action rather than individualism" (Biko, 1988:27).

It seems to me that, according to this view, a person is born into an already steady and widespread relational structure. Kwasi Wiredu found this among the Akan tribe as well, stating: "a person has a well-structured social identity even before birth" (quoted in Biko, 1988:309). But with this comes a deep-seated responsibility. That which you receive is never one sided. You are expected to contribute to the welfare of the whole community. And obviously in return, the whole community looks after *your* welfare too. I will later argue that this embeddedness extends even further into

the biotic community, right down to nature and mother earth. And this may be the greatest lesson the Pokot people have to teach us westerners.

3.1.2 Difficulties with African communality in a Western civilization

As we look to find ways of successfully incorporating African and western civilizations (in an attempt to find the way forward), this beautiful concept of communality may provide some tricky terrain. In an attempt to explain the trickiness of the situation, I will look at an example taken from the South African context.

During a personal communication in March 2004 with Dr. Suzette Brynard from the department of Education at the University of the Free State, some difficult situations seem to arise when these two cultures intermingle. In her position at the university she is often expected to attend formal functions. What often happens at these functions is that the African women attending would fill many serviettes with pastries and put these in their handbags “to take to the people at home”. To western minds this is plain bad manners, but in their eyes it is a natural way of looking after everybody, sharing the benefit that they have received. In other situations people may order two large steaks at a lunch paid for by the government, simply to have the second one put in a doggy bag from the start, “for those at home”.



Neither of the ways of viewing these instances can be considered “right”, for both the “good manners” as well as “sharing our benefits” have merit. It is however a tricky situation and will still need a lot of sensitisation from both sides in order to find a way acceptable to both. As we will see further in this examination, there exists many similar clashes in concepts between western and African mindsets and worldviews. Our aim must be to find the middle way and the way forward, especially with regard to nature conservation and sustainable development.

In order to better understand this concept of responsibility towards the rest of the community in African culture, let us now turn to the Pokot specifically.

3.1.3 Responsibility, rights and control by elders amongst the Pokot

What I have found very strong in Pokot culture, is prevalent from the example of the young girl staying with her uncle: and this is that responsibility is deeply intermingled with what we as westerners call “human rights”. This goes even deeper into the concept of what it means to be a person. All your actions should always aim at benefiting the community, and certainly not only yourself.

I asked pastor Musa’s father, Mr Peter Maklap, what it means to be a “good man”, to be happy and to lead a “good life”. To this he replied the following: “Happiness is having many children, having much wealth in the form of cattle, goats, camel, donkeys, chicken and sheep. But it also entails having respect, honour and recognition in the community.” This he told me was accomplished by “not being quarrelsome, and not abusing alcohol and then starting fights among the people.” (April 2004). Thus, happiness is to contribute to peace and harmony in the community. Your happiness is not only measured by your own wealth, but also in terms of your relationships and contribution to harmonious coexistence among the people.

A further sign of being recognised by the community was “when you were often visited by people”. This often happened with a wise and respected elder (mzee), as people will often come to his homestead for advice or blessings. It seemed to me that respect and dignity increase with a person’s age in Pokot culture (and I believe this to be true in most of Africa). Unlike in our fast and productivity-mad western cultures, where the elders are put away in old age homes because they aren’t quick and effective enough anymore, the situation is different among the Pokot. A man’s life and the respect he receives increases until the absolute end of his life. When he has been a person who has engaged in his responsibility towards the whole community wholeheartedly, and lived in a way contributing to the welfare of his own family, his extended family, his village and the whole community, he is regarded with much respect. When his body does not tolerate hard work any more, he is prized even more for his wisdom and moral advice. And thus people seek his favour and blessing.

I got the impression very clearly that the elders were the control panel of the village and their words and decisions were considered law. This structure of the community gave the elders a very tight hold on the community and thus also on decisions regarding community benefit. Their decisions and ruling would often leave an individual no choice but to carry out his responsibility to the larger community. To disregard their rulings would mark you as an outcast, and in such a tightly woven community structure, this is something nobody would wish on themselves. A man is thus expected to carry out his responsibility of contributing positively to the community. Youngsters would visit elders for their blessing on their undertakings, and these blessings are firmly believed in. If the elders disagree with your planned actions and view it as negative towards the community, they would simply refuse their blessing. And in traditional culture no youngster would dare continue with such plans. Kwasi Wiredu speaks of a morality which “has an essential reference to that special kind of motivation called sense of duty” (Wiredu, 1988:306).

But this power of the elders to influence the community in terms of responsibility to benefit all is largely dependent on the fact that the villages are small and the number of people manageable.

3.1.4 Control and size of Pokot villages

Unlike in western tradition, where we strive for fewer settlements with more people, the Pokot seemed to me to have many widespread (or not so widespread) villages, with a manageable number of people living there.

As I was taken around the countryside on the back of a motorbike, swerving along animal pathways, it seemed to me that a village would pop up unexpectedly before us every now and then, as if stumbled upon by accident. Surely this was due to their way of life, which consists mainly of cattle herding and agriculture, and which demands of each family or community a rather big area to make a living from.

In my interviews with elders, including Lotelo Kwindiyo and Willy Kitilit, I was told that the villages have vegetable gardens (*shambas*) for each family, but that the surrounding areas are communal grazing grounds. As one household may easily own

100 cattle alone, not including goats, camels, sheep etc. one can imagine a rather large area is needed. Pastoralism is also prized more than agriculture. Beech (1911:4) noted earlier that the Pokot was initially an agricultural people, but since the “pastoral Suk [Pokot] originated, it became ... the aim and ambition of the hill Suk [Pokot] to amass sufficient live-stock to enable them to descend into the plains and join the pastoral Suk [Pokot]”. In an interview with Longolokuch Kapedo, an elder from Churo village, I was also told that in heaven, or the “better life after this one”, people ate only meat and drank only milk. All this indicate to the preference and reverence for cattle and pastoralism.

In my opinion this had a lot to do with the scattered structure and small size of villages, as bigger ones would make grazing grounds a highly contested source of strife, as well as the distances to find grazing for all the people’s cattle an enormous problem. Thus the solution of having smaller villages, further apart, to allow for each to have sufficient space, enables people to amass as much as possible livestock and wealth without being disturbed.

But this situation also leads to many control benefits, as well as a tight knit community structure. In a small village, of 8 to 10 homesteads (thus about 40 huts) and roughly 200 people, the elders and their decisions could rule as law quite easily and without much room for rebellions. Those opposing their decisions would most certainly be in the minority and won’t easily amass a crowd of rebels. This would soon lead to being an outcast – a terrible ordeal to their way of life.

From this discussion we now arrive at the way in which a person’s responsibilities in the community, leads to a sense of personhood.

3.1.5 Sense of a person

In Kwasi Wiredu’s comment on Akan morality, he states that “a person is social not only because he/she lives in a community, which is the only context in which full development, or indeed any sort of human development is possible, but also because, by his/her original constitution, a human being is part of a social whole” (Wiredu, 1988:309). He goes on to state that in Akan societies, a “person is essentially the

centre of a thick set of concentric circles of obligations and responsibilities matched by rights and privileges”. You simply don’t do whatever you feel like – your life revolves around that of the community and its benefit too.

The most startling evidence of this is found in an example that was disturbing to my western mind. As the size of a man’s family and the amount of its livestock are considered the family’s wealth, this would naturally serve as one of the most important measures of a man’s worth. I would suppose this to be equal to a western man’s assets and maybe the size and splendour of his house. But in the Pokot culture this was so extreme that if an unmarried man, who has no children, were to die, he would not even be buried. His worth was considered low enough as to justify the act of throwing away his body for wild animals and vultures. I was told this by Pastor Musa Maklab, while we visited his family in Churo village, and he used the example of his unmarried brother and what would happen to him should he die before getting married.

This custom was also clear when Longolokuch Kapedo told me his story about being raised from the dead back in 1950 (this was discussed in 2.1.4). He obviously was unmarried and without children at age 12 and were thus thrown by the river. This custom of death without a burial shows a very clear conception of a man’s worth and how much it is being measured in terms of his wealth, wives and children.

Viewed from another side, though, it is also important for the Pokot to find their worth within the bigger scheme of things. For this wider sense of place and proportion within the universe, they turn to music and dance.

3.1.6 Music and Dance

Because of the fact that I conducted my research in Kenya during March and April 2004, and because the initiation ceremonies occurs annually in September and October, I was unable to personally experience the dancing ceremonies and rituals that takes place with these. This part on music and dance is thus a literature study only, but one which I feel can and should bring about some very interesting symbolic

clues for establishing the links and interconnectedness between man and man, man and nature, and man and God.

Mario Azevedo (1993:119) notes that for the African, music and dance are not “exotic entertainment”, but rather something that is deeply rooted in the African culture. Music and dance is a vessel by which tradition is carried from generation to generation and they use it to project their feelings, wants and needs through movement and sound. When the African sings, the words are a lesson and not just some hollow entertainment. It is a message. A story that needs to be passed on. Whether it is a fundamental truth about life or just a hint for success in everyday life, there is always some matter of morality attached to it. Barbara A. Bianco noted in her study on the Pokot that “when they sang the songs they were filled by Spirit” (1996:34). In a culture where the written word does not exist, music and dance truly are of the most important tools to conserve matters of importance (Azevedo, 1993:119).

When music is accompanied by dancing, the movements of the dance serve as an extension of everyday life and of the features of everyday living. The rhythm and the movement form an inseparable expression of a common value system among the community. The rhythm and movement are thus functional – it serves as a mode of expression of a communal way of thought. Once again we find the concept of communality here. Singing and dancing are not ways of expressing your individuality, but in participating in the rhythm, it is a way of becoming one with the group. It is not a spectator sport, but everyone is involved (Azevedo, 1993:119).

Songs and dances also marks many milestones on all the plateaus reached in life. These include birth, puberty, marriage, and death (Azevedo, 1993:119). Among the Pokot, I was told by Longolokuch Kapedo, that dancing is done mainly for two reasons: The first is “fishing” for girls and the second is in celebration. “Fishing” for girls will mostly occur during the many initiation feasts of “sapana” (this celebration marks the end of a boys initiation period and is a festivity sometimes comprising 300 boys and 300 girls). During the initiation rites initiates have the opportunity to show their skill in a communal dance sequence, and if they show an acceptable level of competency, they will win approval and acceptance by the community as adults

(Azevedo, 1993:120). I was told that the girls will also join in the dancing and during this time the young men will have ample opportunity to eye the girls. This is one of a very few instances where an individual's dancing is given consideration.

On occasions of celebration, the purposes of dancing will often be rejoicing over the birth of a child or welcoming friends. When welcoming friends everyone in the village will sing and dance energetically. A soloist may move into the center of a circle of young men. His task will be to generate enthusiasm and appreciation through a display of kinetic flair etc. (Azevedo, 1993:122). It will not be an occasion to show off but merely to lead the people in their welcoming and to generate enthusiasm.

Following a good harvest, the dancing will be a group manifestation of rejoicing among the community. Sometimes dancing also occurs in times of mourning, or before fighting enemies, or simply to explain the unknown. The people may dance a rain dance in order to make it rain, or rather, to ask of the rain to see their supplication and bless them with its presence.

The same may happen with fire dances, where the people call on the fire to come and help them (Azevedo, 1993:120). This correlates with their ritual of "calling the fire" when the Pokot twist two sticks of a certain shrub in a 90 degree angle against each other. I saw this ritual while visiting the Lonyek Cultural Boma. The fire is gently "called" while the person is intensely twisting and rubbing the sticks together and the fire is told how much they need it for warmth at night or to light a fire for them to roast some meat. In the same way as when dancing for rain or fire, those taking part in the ritual or movements are thus seeking a connection with the natural world (Azevedo, 1993:120): they are trying to show the natural environment (which is considered as extensions of God) what it is that they need and how deeply it is needed. This already hints at an environmental ethic that seeks to be part of the natural environment and not to be over and above it. During a rain dance the people may sing songs to Ilat (which is God expressing himself as rain) and through their dances become part of nature in order for her to know their needs.

In order for this connection to be established, the tribe often imitates the environment. During the dances they use movement that visualize daily sights and sounds, especially those of animals. For example, if the person wants to imitate a lion, he will make big strong movements. For a snake, he will make a sequential flickering of the tongue. To demonstrate the graceful gazelle he will revert to air bound actions and for the attentive characteristics of a bird the person will make light quick movements with his head (Azevedo, 1993:120). The African dancer thus seeks ways of connecting to the environment via song and dance.

Movement as such in Africa is very much characterised by displaying a connectedness to the earth, or a “groundedness”. According to Azevedo (1993:121) the African dancer always seems to move downward. A musician playing the African drum is charged with the task of “drumming the dancer into the ground” (1993:121). In one study on the songs found among the Pokot, it was found that they “use the power of repetition of the assembled people to influence the non-human forces” (Bianco, 1996:35). Thus both dance and song seems to contain the element of repetition, of being grounded and of seeking connectedness – both with the environment and with the spiritual forces. Among the Pokot it was found that “singing, praying and cleansing opened the way for Spirit” (Bianco, 1996:36).



Fig.11 The grounded, stamping movement of Pokot women dancing at Lonyek cultural village.

When looking at the typical characteristics of African movement, it all seems to show towards this downward movement:

- The whole barefoot is used against the earth.
- The foot and leg have a flexed gesture.
- The support legs are flexed.

- All the limbs are angular.
- There is a hyper extended upper and lower spine (placed forward of vertical alignment).

The result of these flat and angular movements is that even when the person is airborne, there is still a perceivable connection to the earth. This differs very much from typical western modes of dancing. In the west movement is designed to give the illusion of escaping the earth's gravitational pull (Azevedo, 1993:121). In the mind's eye one can see the great halls of Europe filled with noblemen dancing daintily to a swirling piece of music. It is interesting to note that the alignment here is almost always vertical, as if to move away from the earth and swirl into the air.



Fig. 12 Pokot women performing the Rain Dance at Lonyek cultural village.

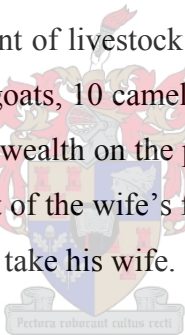
When the African people engage in ritual dance, the aim is for the spiritual self and the physical self to become one (Azevedo, 1993:122). The aim is not to escape this world, but to become part of it in its deepest essence. Once again we find here the reference to a connectedness among all things, how the spiritual world and the natural world are connected and how it can become one thing. This ritual dance does not only serve to connect the spirit and the natural world, but also to connect the whole group of dancers participating.

Very important in these ritual dances is the participation of the entire group that is present, as well as the unison in movements. The movements usually are repetitious, expressive and clear in terms of its content and the message it wants to bring over. The unison in movement ensures communal expression of a societal value system and also serves to establish these communal values.

It was seen in the previous part that the unison and communality of values in the larger village or community is considered very important. But it seems to me that among the Pokot the unison between husband and wife is not deemed very important.

3.1.7 The plight of women

During a conversation with my translator, Patrick Koas, I was told that love between a boy and a girl (or a man and woman), played no role in Pokot culture. According to him, when a boy decided on the girl he wants to marry, he would tell this to his father. If the father has enough cattle to give as dowry, and if the father approves of his son's choice, he will give his approval (it is inevitable that the girl be of a respected clan different from their own, as no intermarriage is allowed). So then the boy will go and collect some honey to prepare beer and he and his family will go to the family of the girl he intends to marry for engagement. During all of these procedures the girl has no say or preference or choice in the matter. At the engagement the two families will talk about the dowry and the amount of livestock to be given her family. This would usually include 20 cows, 40 to 50 goats, 10 camels and 15 sheep. If more livestock is being paid for a wife it is a sign of wealth on the part of the husband's family, as well as considered an honour on the part of the wife's family. The next day the boy is then allowed to bring the animals and to take his wife.



The boy would gather his friends, and on their arrival they will deliver the dowry. After this they would directly go to "grab" the girl. They will interrupt her in anything she is doing, be it carrying water, or looking after cattle. If she was carrying water, one of the boy's friends will take the water back to her family's house. If she was looking after cattle, one will be left there to look after it when she is being taken away. If the girl has some problem and does not want to go with the boy and his friends, she will be beaten until she obeys. The girl is then taken to the boy's home (either his parents' or his own), where she will now live as his wife.

So in Pokot culture there doesn't exist any prerequisite that both parties should love or at least like the other. If a boy sees a girl he likes, he will just take her. Later, when the girl had a few children, he may marry another wife as well. The girls know and accept this and they simply live together as responsible adults. I have later found that

secret boyfriend-girlfriend relationships do exist before marriage, but on rare occasions only and this is not encouraged.

Women are considered as an extension of a man's wealth and belongings. This continues after marriage as well. The husband would place his spear at the wife's hut he intends to spend the night with. She will then feed her children earlier and take them to one of the other wives' hut a few metres from her own, where the children will spend the night. But even then the husband and wife will not share a bed (except during intercourse), but will sleep on opposite sides of the hut. On a visit to Lonyek Cultural Village, I was introduced by Daniel Lemoe to an original (recreated) Pokot hut. He showed and explained to me what I have often seen in the other "real" huts and villages I visited. The wife has her bed (made of bamboo and sticks) on the left side of the round hut, and the husband his on the right.

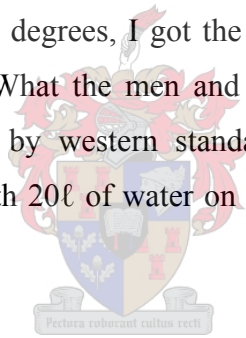
Although trends of modernisation are starting to appear, most girls are still denied education. Young girls are usually only permitted to attend school until they are 13 or 14 years old. It is then expected of them to go home and get married. For the Pokot the birth of a girl means a good future, because a lot of cattle and other livestock will be paid to her family as dowry one day (at least 20 cows and 40 goats) which will make them rich. If boys are born, they will be able to help protect the homestead, but they will not bring the family any wealth. In the Pokot culture it thus makes no sense to let girls go off to school and college.

But things are slowly changing. The local leaders of Kaptuya village, like chief David Amasilo, told me how they are starting to realize the importance of educating "girl childs". He showed me the difference between men and women when it comes to rearing children: he said that when a family receives extra money, the men will always take this to buy drink for themselves. But the mothers will buy food and extra clothing for their children. He told me that they are starting to see the benefits of educating their women, as they have a great influence on their children. They are the ones to encourage learning if they believe in it too. And they will play a vital role in the community's health and progress. But this is still a long way off, and under most circumstances women are mostly keeping to the vegetable fields (*shambas*) and their homesteads, preparing food, carrying water and fetching wood.

Another concept I found among the Pokot, was how often and in how many circumstances, women were considered “unclean”. During a woman’s period of menstruation, she is not allowed to come anywhere near a man or any of his clothes or bedding or crockery. She may not make him food or drink, nor touch it, nor come anywhere near any of his things. Obviously she is not allowed in his bed either. All in all, a woman in this state is said to lessen the strength of a warrior if he is to be in contact with her at all.

A woman is also considered “unclean” for 9 months before and after she has given birth. I suspect that this period gives her the opportunity to give all of her attention to the child that will be, or was born.

Barbara A. Bianco noted that “if cattle carry a heavy load in Pokot affairs, so too do women” (1995:777). In various degrees, I got the impression that women accepted their plight, almost slavishly. What the men and community expected of them in physical terms, was very hard by western standards, and I often found women carrying plastic barrels filled with 20ℓ of water on their backs, fastened around their foreheads with a band.



One area, in which women reign supreme, though, is in the practice of herbal medicine.

3.1.8 Herbal medicine

“Woman’s place in the practice of medicine in Africa should be emphasized. Both as midwife and as the expert in treating children’s diseases, she occupies a field scarcely touched by the professional medicine man” (Harley, 1970:193).

The practice of herbal medicine is regarded with much reverence and respect among the Pokot. It has as much to do with the blessing incurred by the medicine woman on the healing remedies, as it has with the remedies itself: “... the secret of many ... cures, and it may be added, many ... ailments, is not in the action of matter on matter, of drug on flesh, but in those occult regions where mind works on mind and mind on

flesh ... It is not the ... innocent mixture of tap-water and burnt sugar that drives out the malady, but that powerful battery of mental forces – confidence, imagination and will – hitherto inert within the patient’s own self, which [have been] cunningly and perhaps quite unconsciously, excited to activity by [the medicine woman’s] convincing and inspiring methods” (Bryant, 1970:16).



Fig. 13 Pokot herbal medicine woman preparing a brew for patient at Lonyek cultural village.

But one cannot help but wonder at how the people of Africa managed to hit upon so many good remedies “out of the thousands of materials available for experiment by the methods of trial and error” (Harley, 1970:177). Mama Ringeta says that the knowledge of the plants with medicinal value was given them by God. Another possible explanation, also in other parts like the south of Africa, is that “medicinal plants have outstanding peculiarities of taste, usually bitter, pungent, aromatic, astringent or acid, and frequently a peculiar smell as well ... From these peculiarities two or three hundred species could be selected from the nine thousand of South Africa, thus narrowing materially the field of experiment by trial and error” (Harley, 1970:177).

This seems a rather sound explanation, as Harley goes on to explain that a plant which produces one physiological effect, “such as an increase in the flow of saliva or a sensation of numbness on the tongue, would be very likely to have other physiological effects as well” (1970:177).

I’ve found this to be true very early in my time with the tribe, when I visited a medicine woman at Lonyek village. I was taken to this village by Daniel Lemoe, and

on this occasion the people prepared for my visit. The medicine woman prepared some herbal remedies for me to learn from and to taste.

The herbal medicine she prepared and offered me, included some of the remedies that was listed and researched in an ethnobotany study conducted at Ol Ari Nyiro Ranch. This ranch is today known as the Laikipia Nature Conservancy (Muasya, 1993). The remedies I was offered included:

Yemit [*Olea europea.ssp Africana (Mill.) P.S. Green*]

For stomach ache/constipation.

Preparation: Boil bark in 500 ml of water. Cool down.

Three glassfuls is a single dose. It is emetic in high doses.

(Not to be taken by pregnant ladies.)

Olopkio [*Acacia nilotica*]

For back ache, stomach ache and indigestion.

Preparation: Boil bark in 500ml of water. Cool down.

Drink half a glass. Alternatively it can be mixed with tea or soup.

OR

Leave the bark to soak during the night, chew it in the morning and swallow.

Cheposireu [*Rhamnus staddo A. Rich.*]

For persistent severe coughs and vomiting in babies.

Preparation: For coughs – chew the root.

For babies – one tablespoonful of the root decoction (boiled and cooled).

Cheptuya [*Euclea schimperi (A.D.C) Dandy*]

For constipation.

Preparation: Root or bark is roasted in hot ash or the bark is dried and ground into powder. 4-6 teaspoonfuls of powder in one glassful of water or milk is taken by adults.

Strongly cathartic.

I was given some of these brews and roots to taste in small sips, and most had a very pungent and bitter taste. On asking if I may have some of the unused bark and root as examples, the medicine woman agreed, but I could only have it after it was blessed. I was told that if she did not bless her medicine, it would be ineffective. This is also done before it is given to a sick patient.

The way it is blessed, is consistent with the custom I've found in many other areas of Pokot life – that of light spitting. Thus every piece of bark or root I received was lightly spat on, and afterwards she took me by the shoulders and did the same over each of my shoulders. In a strange way, which could surely be the result of imagination, I did feel blessed by this act, and did consider trying out some of the brews if ailments should appear.

This act of the medicine woman blessing her brews shows very clearly how the belief in the spiritual world does influence the traditional Pokot way of thought. I also had an interview with Cheposait Selale, better known as Mama Ringeta. She is the most respected and wisest of the medicine women in the district. She told me that unblessed medicine would not make you ill – it would simply be ineffective as a curative measure.



Fig. 14 *Mama Ringeta with the author.*

I've found that there exists a deep seated measure of control regarding the knowledge of herbal remedies. The reason for this I suspect to be twofold: firstly the medicine woman and her family are recompensed in livestock for her services. And secondly, the sacredness of the knowledge adds much to the psychological aspect of its curative powers.

The knowledge of herbal remedies runs in certain clans, known simply as herbal medicine clans. The medicine woman would share her knowledge only with her oldest daughter, and this only when she is old enough to keep it secret. It is solemnly believed that if she revealed this knowledge to others, she would die (if this has ever happened before, I do not know about it, but surely in a community where the supernatural is firmly believed in, it is enough to deter most people from trying).

When it happens that a medicine woman has no daughters or if they have died, other women from the herbal medicine clans may approach her in order to be taught. This would only happen after they have been married, because in order to be taught, they have to pay with livestock and this can only be given them by their husbands. This payment would roughly consist of 5 cows: one with a calf and three younger ones. But even after the pupil has been taught everything the medicine woman knows, she has to be blessed before going out to practice on her own. If this blessing was not incurred yet, it is believed that her remedies would be ineffective.

All of this has a lot to do with traditional beliefs and the belief in the spiritual world, and surely has much of the control benefits needed for order in the society. It is not always logical though, for I was told that if an old medicine woman like Mama Ringeta would die before she has passed on all of her knowledge to a youngster (and thus not blessed her yet) that which the young pupil already know would still be useful to cure illnesses among people.

Another way that an old medicine woman can share her knowledge if there is no married woman in her community (who can pay to learn from her), is to start teaching her own unmarried daughter. When the daughter then gets married, she can repay her mother, receive the blessing and the old woman would not be worried that her knowledge would die with her.

The National Research Foundation (NRF) realizes the very high priority and urgency of the study of indigenous herbal remedies. They formulate it in the following way: *“Africa has an extremely rich biodiversity that is yet to be fully understood. Some of this understanding is to be found in the indigenous knowledge systems that relate to*

the treatment of disease through the connections with spirituality and the science of herbs and plants, on the one hand, and animal products, on the other. Research activity should centre on indigenous medicine and pharmacology, encompassing human health and indigenous medicine; veterinary medicine and animal health; maternal and child health; and sexual health and disease ... The outcomes will be several, including ... bringing indigenous knowledge to the fore of national health delivery, to establish its potential and application for the benefit of society as a whole as well as for the communities where such knowledge resides” (National Research Foundation, 2004).

The “treatment of disease through connections with spirituality” is a very important concept here, and very applicable to the Pokot tribe.

3.1.9 God’s involvement in healing

The knowledge of herbal medicine, which is said to have been divinely transferred by God, serves as a sort of bridge between the physical and spiritual modes of existence among the Pokot. “Things to do with healing were given strange names because they came from Above ... After singing at night the person who was to announce the medicine was caught by Spirit and the type of medicine was revealed. That person would say ‘Tororut has told me to pick such-and-such medicine from such-and-such trees” (Bianco, 1996:37).

John S. Mbiti (quoted in Masolo, 1988:108) is of the opinion that there is a force or energy permeating the whole universe for the African, of which God is the Source and ultimate controller. But the spirits have access to some of it, and further “a few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it, such as medicine men, witches, priests and rainmakers, some for the good and others for the ill of their communities” (Masolo, 1988:108).

I was told by Mama Ringeta that God (Tororut) will go *through* the medicine to cure a disease. The herbs and plants thus serve as a medium for His healing. In our attempt to understand God’s role in these methods of healing, let us take a look at the general conception of God.

According to Sawyer (1970:4), the name for God among many African people are “sometimes the same as the word for the sky.” Among the Temne tribe for example, the word for God is Kurumasaba, with kuru meaning sky, and among the people of the lower Congo, He is called Nzambi (sky). Among the Pokot I have found the same thing, with God being called Tororut, or sky, as well.

God is seen as the Supreme Being, the Creator God. He is over and above all, like the sky dome stretching over and covering all the earth. Peter Maklab told me that the sun is also sometimes called “God”, because both give to all of man their light, or blessing, and not only to some. The Pokot also sometimes call God “Ilat”, which means “rain”, as He is the one that provides rain for them and looks after them.

Musa’s father said that it is “God’s *responsibility* to look after us”. For instance, if it has been dry for a long time, the elders will make a sacrifice and approach God with the question “why?” According to Musa’s father God is *supposed* to look after them, and why then doesn’t He? Is it because they have done something wrong to offend or make Him angry? If so, then they deserve “not to be looked after”, but if they have done nothing wrong, then God is supposed to look after them. Thus once again here, even with respect to the Supreme Being, we find the prominence of responsibility. As an extension of this, God is also responsible to help cure people when they get sick.

Mama Ringeta confirmed that the first Pokot people were given their herbal medicine knowledge from God. This happened at the beginning of creation, as God “knew that people were going to get sick and He had to provide a means for them to become healthy again”. Thus He imparted this knowledge divinely from the spiritual realm and blessed a certain clan in the physical realm with its use. This correlates with Mbiti’s findings (quoted in Masolo, 1988:105) that “God ... is outside and beyond His creation”, but on the other hand also “personally involved ... simultaneously transcendent and immanent”.

God never punishes with disease, though. Mama Ringeta says that if God is angry with a man or with men, He will only punish them by striking with lightning (one man) or by incurring a drought on the whole community or village. Most of the time

God is happy with His people and He wants to be near them, though. So even though unseen and spiritual, God's activities are "near, and they reveal Him ... God is Most Powerful, and most phenomena in nature reveal this attribute of God – they mirror His great power". God "provide all things with life" (Masolo, 1988:106), but He also has the power to take it away if the people do not please Him. But this will never be done through illness.

The reason people get sick is not as punishment from God then, but rather three-fold: in the first instance, it simply happens because of weather conditions – in cold and rainy weather, colds and flu are common, and after rains with mosquitoes flourishing, malaria often makes its appearance. Secondly, it is believed that if a man dies or gets injured while hunting, it is also not as punishment, because he was simply looking for trouble. In the third instant which I will discuss below, witchcraft. If a man has had a big quarrel with another and he or his family becomes sick a few days afterwards, it is strongly suspected that he was cursed by the other party.

3.1.10 Witchcraft (witches as seen by westerners)

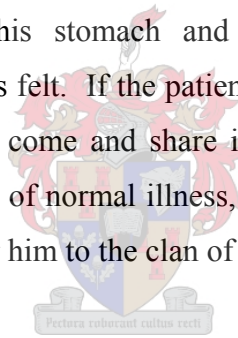
Witchcraft is firmly believed in by the Pokot, but very much discouraged. The whole community looks down upon this and those that engage in such practices are very much treated as outcasts. But it still provides people with answers to happenings they do not understand, even if it only leaves them with the suspicion of witchcraft, and thus these beliefs live on.

In the following piece we will see how witchcraft is associated with bad magic, and how it is viewed as something which runs against the natural flow and flourishing of life (and it is for this reason that it is so much discouraged): "The native cannot understand disease in any plant or animal as being in accordance with the natural order of its destiny. The only manner of death that is at all comprehensible to him is that of senile decay – when a thing has run its allotted course and expended its powers and sinks serenely back once more into the lap of Mother Earth. Of the aged who pass away in this 'natural' way the native never says that 'they have died' ... but simply 'they have gone home'. Where is the reasonableness in a thing withering away in the very prime of its existence? Obviously this can only be brought about by

some pernicious influence interfering from without. He has fixes on only two such external agents of harm – malice and magic” (Bryant, 1970:16).

Mbiti (quoted in Masolo, 1988: 106) believes that occurrences like magic, witchcraft and worship all serve the cause of a people trying to “procure and maintain the ontological balance between God and man, or the spiritual and physical worlds”. They are “rational deliberations by people in the process of their explanation of the environment”.

When you become sick and suspect to have been cursed, you would firstly go and consult a regular medicine woman. Elijah Deba, a young man from Lonyek village and specialist in divining practices (of the positive sort) told me that a medicine woman would be able to identify if you had a normal illness or if you have been bewitched (2004, April). The patient will be asked to lie down on a skin and the medicine woman will touch his stomach and certain points of the body in examination, or where the pain is felt. If the patient is found to be sick, she may call for another medicine woman to come and share ideas on the proper diagnosis and cure. If she found no symptoms of normal illness, she would suspect the patient has been cursed and would then refer him to the clan of dreamers.



These people are known for the accuracy of their dreams, and after questioning the sick person, will ask him/her to leave and will then identify his/her cursor a few days later. The fact that the patient is questioned first obviously leaves a lot of room for the dreamer to guess at the culprit, according to quarrels the parties may have had. But from interviews with a group of elders of Kaptuya village, and their many examples of correct interpretations of difficult cases, there certainly seems to be a supernatural dimension active in all of this.

For a person to lay a curse on another, he will brew a concoction of herbs and then pray to his ancestors or to evil spirits to visit the house of his enemy with calamity and bad luck. A curse is then suspected if the family experiences many deaths or illnesses or crop failures close to each other, without any apparent reason.

To turn the curse around, the spiritual world is once again consulted. When someone of the clan of dreamers has confirmed you're being cursed, he will boil another herbal concoction and perform some rituals in order to neutralize the believed curse's effects. If nothing bad befalls you after that, the persons will know that it has been successful. If your bad luck prevails, further steps have to be taken.

If a person suspects that he has been bewitched, he may also smear his whole body with a special kind of mud. This mud will shield and protect him from harm. During a personal interview with an elder from Amaya village, John Tiyos (2004, April), he told me that this mud has a whitish, yellowish colour and that it is found high in the mountains. The mud is considered sacred and is very difficult to obtain.

But if nothing works, a person who suspects himself to have been bewitched, will go and state his case to the elders (*wazee*) of the community. The one accused of cursing will then be summoned to appear before a gathering of the families and elders of the two parties. There it will be expected of him to spit on a little wooden head rest, or do any symbolic act in which he pledges not to incur any more witchcraft on the person from that day onwards. This must also neutralise the existing curse and illnesses. These symbolic acts mostly consist of rituals containing the person's saliva and the stomach residue of an animal that was slaughtered for these purposes.

Fortunately the influence and stronghold of witchcraft is fading fast under contemporary Pokot. Willy Kitilit, an elder from Kaptuya village, told me that the influence of Christianity and western education has lessened its importance and prominence among the younger generation of the community. He said that everything depended on a person's beliefs. If you believed that evil spirits cannot harm you because of the protection of, e.g., The Holy Spirit, then it can't. Or if you believed that you will die of a curse, then you will. If you believed that an ancestor is angry with you and his spirit is haunting you, then you will see/feel or find these effects in your life. This of course is a highly contested opinion and many of the elders do not agree with him.

The prevalence of witchcraft and spirits are strongly connected with a sort of life after death, which correlates with the existence of ancestor spirits still living among those

alive. The transition from this life to the next is made clearer when we look at the Pokot's burial practices.

3.1.11 Burial, inheritance and returning spirits

In the first instance, I feel that the most important aspect of burial is who is included, or rather worthy, of being buried. As was mentioned earlier, to be buried is a sign of respect – the final laying to rest of a respected man, in which he is wished a peaceful transition and further life. Those who are buried include only married men and women, who most probably already have children. If a young, unmarried man were to die, his body would simply be thrown away for scavengers, or it would simply be left in one of the huts of the homestead and the family would move away.

It is believed that if a man was not buried, the family must move away and go and build a new homestead in another place. This is because a man who was shown such disrespect with his death will certainly be unhappy with the treatment and will most probably return as a bad/angry spirit. This might bring calamity on the family, so they would rather move. If a man has reached a ripe old age though, with many wives and children, the situation is quite different.

When an old and respected man starts realizing that the end of his time is drawing near, he will call his sons together. Patrick Koas, my translator, told me that he will mostly call together the boys, because most of his daughters may be dispersed all over the area as a result of their marriage to husbands of different clans. The father will then tell them about his cattle debts, as well as about who still owes him what. These debts and credits will then be allocated among his children, as well as those cattle in his own name. The youngest son will receive the most cattle, as he is burdened with looking after his father and mother during their old age. The old man will then bless his children and tell them where he wishes to be buried.

A man will mostly request to be buried near to his home and his boma (where his cattle are kept at night), so that when he becomes a spirit, he will be nearby and able to look after his cattle. This points us to the reason why the family of a buried and respected man does not move away from their homestead: this man will become a

happy and contented spirit, and in the next life he will be a good (and not evil) spirit. This man will be happy to come back and live as a spirit among his people, and see that his animals are “not lonely”, but that the family lives on and fare well.

There is some discrepancy among the Pokot regarding this custom, though, as some told me that even when a man was buried, the family will move away. There are two possible reasons for this: firstly because of the nature of the grave. The grave is only half a meter deep (with men being buried on their right sides and women on their lefts, both with their heads facing east). The body is then covered with soil, stones, grass and finally a layer of mud or dung or thorns. Because of this shallow grave, the bad smell may attract wild animals, and this is a threat to the family’s safety. But secondly, it is further believed that because a dead spirit now abides in that place of the grave, it may be visited by other dead spirits, of which some may be evil. A personal conclusion I come to from this, is that most probably a person who was a bad, quarrelsome and disrespected person while still alive, will go on to be a bad spirit (as we have said). But since he was married, most probably with children, he had to be buried. And since his spirit will thus hover there close to the homestead, the family may decide to move away, as his presence may call on other bad spirits. But a good and respected man goes on to be a good and happy spirit, and these don’t mingle with evil spirits. Thus all is safe and the family goes on to live at the same place.

But how does the Pokot relate to spirits?

3.1.12 Spirits

John S. Mbiti (as quoted in Masolo, 1988:107) is of the opinion that “the ontological transcendence of God is bridged by the spiritual mode of existence. Individual spirits may or may not remain forever, but the class of the spirits is an essential and integral part of African ontology”. Mbiti further found among the Akamba tribe an ontological hierarchy, which may be of help in our understanding of Pokot spirituality as well. At the top level is God; the second level has two substrata – in the upper substrata is found the “real dead” or spirits, and in the lower substrata the “living dead” – these include those who have recently died and are still remembered by their living relatives. The third level contains the living humans; the fourth level contains

animals and plants and on the fifth level are the objects without the capacity to have life (Masolo, 1988:110).

Among the Pokot it was found by Beech (1911:22) that “once dead, the departed can never be seen again – his spirit has passed into the snake”. This may be a way of keeping the dead “with you”, or keeping the memory of a person who cannot be seen anymore, alive. In the previously mentioned ontological hierarchy of the Akamba, they believe that “after three to five decades, when ordinary people can no longer recognise a ‘living dead’ by name, he becomes a spirit or a ‘real dead’”. Thus the snake in Pokot culture may be an attempt at a concrete remembrance to keep this ancestor “alive” – even if only for a while longer.

In all of my 32 interviews among the Pokot of Laikipia, I could nowhere find any confirmation to this passing of the dead into a snake – not even among the oldest of the elders. Most probably it is a belief which have faded out over the decades, or maybe particularly in this region that I have visited. It is still interesting to note that Beech (1911:20) found that food were sometimes put out in the cool, back part of a hut for snakes, which is believed to be ancestors visiting the family. “If a snake enters a house, the spirit of the dead man is believed to be very hungry. Milk is poured on to its tracks, and a little meat and tobacco placed on the ground for it to eat. It is believed that if no food is given to the snake, one or all of the members of the household will die.”

These spirits are very clearly linked to some “spiritual space between God and humans” (Masolo, 1988:106). I have very clearly found among the Pokot that religion and spirituality is not something on the side, or kept for Sundays ... It is very much intermingled with daily life. “We do not believe that religion could be featured as a separate part of our existence on earth. We thanked God through our ancestors before we drank beer, married, worked, etc.” (Biko, 1988:29). And this I’ve seen for myself. The people pray for a long time before having tea, before going to sleep, etc. As Mbiti likes to say, “African religions ... are not found neatly formulated in library books, but rather in the very life of the people ... It is integrated so much into different areas of life, that in fact most of the African languages do not have a word for religion as such” (Masolo, 1988:106).

Another interesting concept of integrating the ancestors (thus the spiritual realm) into their daily lives (thus the physical realm), is the way burial sites are regarded. Whenever a person walks past the grave of an ancestor of his, he is expected to pick a little leafy branch and put it on the grave – merely as a sign of acknowledging the ancestor and paying respect. This attitude of respect and fear is found throughout Africa: “The various tribal groups in Africa show a tendency to offer sacrifices to the ancestors ... of whom they are generally afraid” (Sawyer, 1970:3). These acts of respect also serve to maintain that “ontological balance between God and man ... the spirits and man ... the departed and the living...” (1970:106).

It is important for us to understand that these little acts of worship or respect in African religions wasn't neatly and rationally “thought out” but it “evolved slowly through many centuries, as people responded to the situations of their life and reflected upon their experiences” (Masolo, 1988:104). Following this line of thought, the concept of respect for ancestor spirits and the knowledge that reckless and disrespectful behaviour on your own part may cause their wrath on you, serves as a very good control mechanism in society. This is true especially with regard to the elders of the community and their influence on villagers' lives. The elders are regarded closer to the ancestors, as their lives are further developed and they are closer to death, and thus closer to that transition of dimensions.

The passing of ancestors into snakes, also leads us to a whole set of interrelations between man and animal, something which is further exemplified when looking at the prominence of each clan's totem animal.

3.1.13 Totem animals

Mbiti portrays African ontology as highly anthropocentric. “The animals, plants, and natural phenomena ... constitute the environment in which man lives, provided a means of existence and if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them” (1970:45). This is clear also from the Pokot's relationship with their totem animals – it is a relationship that primarily benefits man. But in the instance of totem animals, this is a relationship that also benefits the animals, at least in part.

The existence of totem animals is thus a very potent and useful belief and custom among the Pokot, especially in terms of nature conservation. I was told by Lotelo Kwindiyo (2004, March), an elder from Kaptuya village, that clans were appointed their specific totem animals simply on the terms that it was the first animal a man saw when he “came out” in the “beginning”. When the “beginning” was, was not made clear, but I suspect it vaguely refers to the founders or first members of each clan, as it happened in earlier times of the Pokot tribe. When the founder of a clan thus saw this first animal he came upon, it became the animal to represent himself, his wife, his children and later his whole clan. It is interesting to note how totem animals reinforce a person’s belonging to a network of responsibility, not only to his own family, but also strengthening his bond with all of his clan.

A totem animal would not be chosen for his braveness or fierceness, but the appointment of one’s animal happened randomly. Thus even the hyena, which is considered a very coward-like animal, serves as a totem animal. None of the characteristics or personality traits of that animal has any significance or acts as any inspiration to the clan members. But why would these people have them then?

In the first place it serves as a kind of device to keep order in the society. As a totem animal is awarded to a specific clan, we should note that a clan consists of an expanded relational structure, almost an enlarged family. This totem animal then makes it easier to identify members of the same family group, as it serves as their symbol. For reasons of intermarriage problems, totem animals then serve a very simplifying purpose: It is forbidden to marry a girl from the same clan as your own.

A further benefit of having totem animals is when dangerous encounters with wild animals occur. This may happen when a lion comes around to a village and threatens the villagers. In such cases a person from the lion clan may be called to come and ask the lion to leave the village in peace. It is believed that the lion will most certainly obey. Patrick Koas, my translator, told me of an incident wherein humans are further benefited from this relationship with totem animals. It is said (and he swears that he experienced it himself) that when a pregnant woman comes about the animal

of her clan in the bush and it poses a threat to her, she will surely not be harmed by it, providing he knows of her condition.

Thus it once happened that Patrick was walking along with a few people, including a pregnant woman of the lion clan, when they came across a lion waiting in the little footpath they were following. They had absolutely no weapons with them and no other way to go in order to reach their urgent destination. The pregnant woman then remembered of the belief and the “understanding” with her totem animal. She thus took out her breast and lightly squeezed it to produce milk. This was to show the lion of her condition. Patrick told me that the lion immediately trotted off a distance, clearing their way, and when they had passed, he returned to his spot in the footpath.

Longolokuch Kapedo told me that this relationship goes even further. The act of a pregnant woman, or one with small child of showing her breast, may be used as protection under any circumstances. Even during a raid, this act will protect a woman (who is less strong) against her attackers. With this act she tells them: “I am also *your* mother; you have sucked ‘this’ breast”, and that a woman like herself has looked after him when he was a small boy. Now it is time for him to look after her. It is a sign of surrender on the part of the woman.



I was told that this act can be shown to any animal that sucks from its mother, in other words, all mammals. This act seems to demonstrate that the same things that give life to you, also give life to me. If the mother is hurt, a little boy will be motherless – a little boy who could have been you. It is a universal sign saying: “We are all connected”. This concept has far reaching effects and lessons for environmental ethics, and much to put across for the plight of nature conservation.

The totem animals as such also benefit from this relationship, at least in part. Every living creature in the country of the Pokot is eligible to act as a totem animal. The ones that seem to have become prominent among them, includes termites, snakes, black ants, vultures, rhinos, hyenas, zebras, elephants, giraffes, buffaloes, frogs, fish eagle, etc., although I was told the list is endless. The advantage for the animal lies in the belief that a man may not kill an animal of his own clan. It seems to me as if there

is some or other relationship or connection between man and animal. A link, or point of reference and connection.

This seems to be a very valuable concept to bridge the gap of a humanistic oriented environmental ethic. Although the Pokot sees animals as existing for the use of human beings, there exists this neutralizing point where “some animals” may not be killed by “some people” – which is the same as the responsibility of the animals. This seems to me to create a sort of divergence from the “lets-just-kill-everything-we want” syndrome that was often found in the west during times of colonisation.

Thus even though it is believed that animals exist for human use, there also exists a relational link and respect between man and animal. It encourages a deep-seated sense of belonging between man and nature, as if there were some spheres where the two co-exist. This was prominent one night when I slept in the village in a rectangular mud hut, surrounded by 9 giggling Pokot girls. This was the Primary School’s dormitory, and we were teaching each other Afrikaans and Pokot words. I asked the kids which their clan’s totem animal was, and they returned the question. Upon hearing that I did not have any, they raised a deeply sympathetic sound and sincerely pitied me. I sensed in them such a beautiful sense of place, proportion and belonging in their own world, that I almost pitied myself too.

Native American and Celtic shamanistic beliefs focus strongly on animal symbols too. Those that follow traditional Native beliefs explain that “a totem animal is one that is with you for life, often an animal with whom you share a connection, either through interest in the animal or your resemblance to or shared characteristics of the animal in question” (Spiritual Stew, 2004)¹. According to this source, every person has a “creature that guides us” and that this is a very symbolic relationship. “Just like normal spirit guides ... they're here from the other side to help ... Such symbolism of an animal is usually received during meditations or dreams” (Spiritual Stew, 2004).

¹ I am aware that this reference does not carry much academic weight. It is simply used to indicate that the concept of totem animals are used by certain spiritual groups in the western world as well – a concept which was borrowed from indigenous peoples.

Such notions seem to play an important role for establishing overlapping areas between traditional African ways of thought and more modern/western tendencies. It is very interesting to note that the Spiritual Stew website informs the reader about activities that is being conducted by western groups building their lives on traditional Native American beliefs.

Travis Meeks states that “the idea of totem animals has its own basis in not only being provided with guides, similar in a sense to angels, but also in being guided or taught lessons. In addition we see similarities to astrology with its use of animal symbolism, as well as animal symbolism woven through many religions and spiritual systems. Perhaps most shocking to the modern mind is the Jungian idea of Archetypes, universal symbols that can to a degree be looked at in conjunction with totem animal symbolism. Totems are a part of the spiritual path but also represent far more in their value for understanding cultural heritage as well as personality types, once totem animals were agreed upon” (Totem animals, online 2004).

Once again it is clear from such quotes that a lot has already been learnt from indigenous cultures regarding the importance of the connection between man and beast. Totem animals is a concept filled with many overlapping areas – totem animals and personality traits, spiritual guides and angels, physical and spiritual worlds, human beings and the natural environment. Still, it is an area where western societies have a lot more to learn.

A beautiful myth I want to end this part with, is about how the lion came to be the totem animal of a certain Pokot clan (I was told that this is the one of only a few incidences, where there exists a reason for a certain animal to have been appointed to a certain clan). The story was shared by an elder from Kaptuya village, Lotelo Kwindiyo.

It is said that this relationship started when a very big male lion was severely injured by a thorn in his hind leg’s paw. The thorn has gone in very deep into his flesh and the whole paw was swollen tremendously and filled up with impurities. The paw got swollen to almost three times its usual size, until the lion couldn’t bear to walk anymore and collapsed in a man’s homestead, in the centre of the family’s circle of huts. When the man arrived home, he saw that the lion was very weak and in deep

agony. So he cautiously approached the lion, and made an incision in the front paw to release all the impurities. He also removed the thorn and then told his family to stay clear of the lion, in order to give him rest to enable him to recover. The next morning the lion was gone and a few days later he was completely recovered. A few days later still, there was a loud roaring all night around the homestead. In the morning the man went to inspect the prints in order to try and find out what was going on the previous night. There the man found a freshly caught impala, which was left there as a gift of thanks from the lion. The man and his family was overjoyed and feasted on the meat for days on end. From that day on that clan and its descendents have lived in harmony with lions, and no party has ever done the other any harm.

Beautiful stories like these indicate an enviable relationship the Pokot have with their surroundings. Many other relationships with the natural environment are less mythical, and sometimes very logical. A good example in this regard is the reading of star signs.

3.1.14 Star signs

During my interview with Longolokuch Kapedo, an elder from Churo village, he asked how we as westerners receive guidance in life. Judging the circumstances and mind frame within which an answer would satisfy him, I told him that many of us pray like they do and some of us also receive guidance from star signs. Having just been told about the taboo of intermarriage between members of the same clan, I told him how there exists 12 star signs and that it is considered that members of different star signs will get along better or worse with members of specific other star signs. Upon this he was delighted and told me that they look to the stars for guidance as well.

The guidance the Pokot receive from star signs is much more practical and less subject to change than the sort of western guidance I explained to him. They use the stars more as a seasonal calendar to guide them in their farming activities. Although I was told that the stars show the people when it will rain, I later realized that the stars and the movements of the constellations merely indicate the coming and going of the annual rainy season. The concept is thus not as mystical as it appears at first.

I was told that there are three groups of stars, and that these change their arrangements to show that the rains are near or far. Reading these arrangements is considered an expert skill and Longolokuch was taught this by his great grandfather. Apart from the three groups, there also are those stars that “drop down in the north” and those that “drop down in the south”. I would be of the opinion that these would coincide with the rotation of the earth, the seasons and the changing of constellations. As I was visiting during April, the stars that “drop down in the south” were at that stage indicating that it was going to rain soon and that planting can start soon afterwards.

There also are two large stars used as guidance – one male and one female. These are called “Sitah”. When both are bright, it is indicative of rain, but if one of them stops being bright it means that the rains have passed. It further shows that bulls may not be castrated anymore – if they are, they will die. If the stars become bright after many months again, it is considered as a sign that castrating may start. This seems to show to a deeper lying environmental wisdom of which we may not be aware yet.

It seems that the Pokot are thus very much in touch with their natural surroundings and the messages and guidance it provides them with. But there exists another reality as well. Conservationists of the area are very frustrated with some of the Pokot’s ways. Pokot youngsters wreak havoc on conservation efforts, especially with their customs of impressing girls.

3.1.15 Poaching for bravery

Even though there does exist some link and relationship of respectful co-existence among the Pokot and wild animals, some of their customs are absolutely derogatory to conservation.

Daniel Lemoe, community liaison officer of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, pointed out to me the differences between the Pokot and the Maasai peoples when it comes to their environment. The Maasai seems to have a very respectful attitude towards wild animals and would not easily kill them. But they plunder plants as if this was a virtuous act and leave much destruction in their wake. The Pokot on the other hand

have a deep appreciating attitude towards the plants of the bush, especially for its medicinal purposes and the supplying of materials for their homes and bomas. On a visit to Lonyek village, Daniel drew my attention to the very well preserved vegetation found around the villages. They have been living there for decades, but the area still has a wild and untamed look and feel about it. A custom which is very much discouraged among the Pokot these days, is their traditional displaying of bravery to impress girls.

The whole custom would happen as follows: when a girl is interested in a boy, she will go to a boy and tell him that if he wants to be seen as a man, he must kill a dangerous animal for her and bring her its tail. She will then take a piece of softened cow hide, about the size of a book, and embroider this with china beads and cowry shells. She will place this piece of cloth on the back of the boy she is challenging, and secure it into the leather strip/belt around his waist. This is said to drive a boy mad and fill him with so much energy and bravery he will do almost anything to impress the girl. This happens at the time of puberty, when hormones are raging and marriage partners eagerly sought.

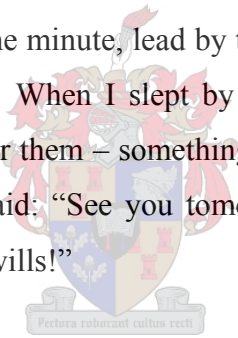
Patrick Koas told me that such a gift from a girl is so intensely sought, that boys sometimes start crying as they beg a girl to give them one of these. It is obviously still her choice, and in this she can tease at large. Boys also eagerly pursue these gifts, because the courage it “imparts” on them and the great killings it encourages them to, is not only seen and appreciated by the girls, but also by the whole village and community. Word of brave killings like these tends to spread like wildfire, and bravery among young boys is something immensely encouraged and respected. A very courageous killing would thus lead to a lot of respect in the village and surrounding areas – food for the soul of a young man.

But this leads to a lot of problems in contemporary times. Because of the fact that the girl only requires for the young man to bring her the tail of the animal, it is often killed, stripped of its tail and just left there out in the bush. Now if a lion, buffalo, or even worse in Kenya – a rhinoceros has to be killed for every young Pokot boy growing up, this would simply have disastrous results. The Laikipia Nature Conservancy, which neighbours Kaptuya village and where I have stayed, still

experiences many poaching problems from the Pokot. This they do not have with the other tribes like the Samburu and Turkana which also borders them. But although there still exists a relationship of distrust between the two parties, much has been done to alter this custom and the general mindset of the local people regarding wild animals and nature conservation. The “well-timed” drought of the last few years also made the convincing a lot easier for conservationists. Let me explain.

3.1.16 God, nature conservation, sacred places and prosperity

A very interesting finding I have made among the Pokot is how God is a natural and inherent part of their days and lives. As was quoted earlier, the existence of God is such a naturally accepted part of Life that it often is not even taught. Mbiti notes that “in their traditional setup, this religion was loosely intertwined with nearly all aspects of their lives” (Masolo, 1988:104). In Pokot tradition I have found that the day was filled with little references to Him. When we had tea in the afternoons, we would have a decent prayer of almost one minute, lead by the mother, to thank and converse with God (the Supreme Being). When I slept by the schoolgirls in their mud hut dormitory, I was asked to pray for them – something which somebody is doing every night. As we went to sleep I said: “See you tomorrow,” and one of them, Helen, enthusiastically replied, “If God wills!”



I got the idea that God (Tororut) and the traditional ways of the tribe was very much paralleled. If something went wrong, e.g. diseases or calamity would strike the village, the older people would often say it is because the younger generation does not respect the elders and the ways of their people any more, and thus God is angry. Barbara A. Bianco found this thing among the Pokot too, where the elders said that those who do not follow their people’s customs anymore, “are lost – they do not consider anything” (1995:781).

A further concept I found among them and which could be extremely useful in the plight of nature conservation is their apparent belief that God is angry at them for killing the wild animals so ruthlessly and chopping down so many trees. John Tiyos and Musa Kakuko of Amaya village told me that in “the earlier times” people did not kill the wild animals or cut down the trees. In those times there was good in the land

and there was enough rain. The animals had enough water and the vegetation to feed on. There was an abundance of trees and wild berries, and a lot of wildlife in their area.

But these days, I was told, most of the children have not even seen a zebra, or a gazelle at all. Because the animals have been so fiercely hunted in this region, they have moved on to safer places – and it would seem, so has God’s blessing. As the wild animals got fewer and fewer, the drought seemed to increase. The river dried up, the trees by the riverside were chopped down as building materials – leaving no roots to hold the ground and prevent erosion. The trees on the mountain tops were also cut down and used. What makes this worse is that rivers and mountain tops are considered sacred places – the places where God are near and where the elders go with offerings and sacrifices. John and Musa, like many of the elders, think that God got annoyed with them for cutting down trees and killing wild animals. That is why the rains are staying away – it is like a curse.

I have found the same concept with Longolokuch Kapedo from Churo village. This region and its people are already very sensitive towards nature conservation and tourism. A belief they conceptualised or which they may have been led to believe, is that trees bring rain. It is important to understand that rain is an absolute source of life in a village, and that everything revolves around it. If it does not rain, the people cannot plant their vegetable fields (shambas) and their livestock do not have grazing. These two sources feed them and are the keys to their daily survival. A belief so closely related to that which gives life, is thus sacred in itself and anyone even trying to override this will fiercely be scorned and reckoned with by the community.

In an even further step, Longolokuch told me that the elders of Churo village have blessed the trees along the river, surrounding the area of the proposed Cultural Conservancy and tourism area. I was told that the blessing also contained a curse: If anyone was to cut down any of those blessed trees, he would die immediately. In a community in which God is flowing through all of the daily activities, this is not taken lightly.

Longolokuch also said that when there are wild animals in the land, the diseases stay away. “It is like God is blessing the people when there are wild animals around – even their lifespan increases.” He does not know how God does this, but accepts that “God Himself will know”. The natural world is thus very much experienced as intermingled with the spiritual world, and some places are appointed with stronger spiritual properties than others. These special properties are also further extended to sacred objects and various sacred phenomena.

The main sacred places I could find among the Pokot were water bodies, as well as the top of mountains, “because it is a good and quiet place where God will be able to hear” (personal communication with Peter Maklab, April 2004). Although God and religion is very much intertwined in the tribe’s daily life, they do “create special occasions for worship” (Biko, 1988:29). This would often happen in cases of severe drought, when the elders would slaughter a goat by the trees along the river, perform some rituals and plead with God for rain.

It would also be an occasion to worship Him and try to find the reason for their punishment. I was told that God (Tororut) ALWAYS answers with rain the very next day after such a special ceremony. This is because the specific day, place and kind of animal required as sacrifice, is divinely appointed by a Rainmaker (a person from the clan of the Rainmakers). This Rainmaker will consult the “god of the rain” who is found on the highest mountains. These mountains included Mount Kenya, Mount Kilimandjaro, Mount Loroki, etc. They may also pray to the clouds or the stars, as these are considered “near” the rain. Rain in itself is often called “the god of livestock”, as it is this “god” that gives grass to livestock (it is also believed that when praying for rain, a sheep is the best sacrificial animal).

In some instances the sun would also be equalled to God. According to Masolo (1988:105), phenomena in nature reveals God to the African; they “mirror His great power”. Thus Musa Maklap told me that the sun is like God, for it gives its light to everyone, it does not only give it to some people. In that same way God looks after all of His creation without preference only to some.

Lightning also plays an important role in their cosmology. When lightning and thunder would appear or be heard far off, it would simply be seen as a sign of coming rain and the rain would be eagerly awaited. But if the lightning and thunder are closely surrounding the village and frightening the villagers, it would be regarded as angry spirits wanting to harm them. In this case all the women of the village would beat on drums or any piece of hide they can find, and yell at the spirits to depart from their village. The men would all take their spears and in a mock action make as if they are jabbing the air with their spears. It is easy to imagine the ferocity with which this will be done when it is felt that the village is being threatened. It is thus their belief that they can chase away the spirits in this way.

Interestingly enough, it is also believed that this same lightning is the only way that God will punish a man. God does not punish men with calamity or sickness, but when He is really offended with someone's behaviour, that man will be struck down by lightning and die. This is the only way in which God reveals His scorn with man.

But even though the natural world is so intermingled with the sacred, the Pokot does also understand and realise the purely one dimensional cause and effect argument brought to them by the westerners. What organisations like the Laikipia Wildlife Forum are trying to bring across (and which is mostly accepted with open hearts) is that if there are an abundance of wild animals in the land, people will come to visit the area. If there are visitors in the area, this creates a market for the locals to sell their wares, perform dances and generally bring cash into their homes. The community is thus blessed by an income and God smiles upon them.

Many of the elders have been on visits to neighbouring conservancies of local communities, and there they have seen the benefits coming along with tourism visits. But even though tourism seems to be the answer and the way forward, the traditional Pokot way of life is the one that will inevitably be lost and damaged by strangers flooding the land.

This is a source of great worry to many of the elders, who see no long term blessing in losing their customs and culture. They are a proud people and their intimate knowledge of the land and their way of life is strongly embedded in their psyches.

When outsiders from another culture want to impose their ways on the Pokot, it is deeply traumatising to them, and it makes the elders very indignant and defensive.

3.1.17 The distress of the elders

In one of my interviews I was talking to a group of about eight elders. Among them was the chairman of the committee of locals that was incorporated into the Laikipia Wildlife Forum (this was done to secure local input and support for the proposed Cultural Conservancy at Kaptuya village). At first they were very sceptical about my visit. I told them that I wanted to learn about their culture so that we can find ways to all live together, especially with the wild animals neighbouring them. I also told them about the folktales we are gathering to publish in a book. The income of this book was aimed at creating a bursary for the primary school, in order to send the best achieving kids on to secondary school, as most of them could not afford this. Their response made me feel really unwelcome. I was also offended, for I believed my intentions to be pure and I absolutely loved just being there. They told me that they did not appreciate people coming there in order to make money out of them, and more so to make promises of compensation that never happened.

I realised later that much of their response was due to the fact that they felt left behind and that they are being shoved around. Their children were infused with new ideas from a new world, much of which they did not understand. Many of their children went to work in the cities and drove around with shining motor cars. Their own way of life seemed to them of a past era. The elders were receiving less and less respect and this was totally unacceptable to them.

Many of the elders are now unsteadily trying to regain this sense of respect. Due to the work already done by the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, they are actually trying to regain this respect by supporting the conservation idea.

Some of the elders, like Mama Ringeta, the herbal medicine woman, had little hope for the community. While I found with some of the younger leaders of the community a sense of optimism and hope in the proposed cultural conservancy at Kaptuya, I found with Mama Ringeta a sense of hopelessness.

During an interview with her, she told me that in her childhood years the people were mostly pastoralists, and left most of the plants of the area intact. These days the Pokot people are finding themselves in the age group of Kaplelach, and she says that this age group do not respect the old ways anymore. According to her this is why it is so dry these days. The young people have brought knowledge about crops and are now cutting down trees to make room for vegetable fields (*shambas*). Because of Mama Ringeta's profound knowledge of and connection with plants and their medicinal uses, the destruction of natural vegetation is very hard to accept. She feels that the villages and people who are still sticking to pastoralism are receiving much more rain, and thus more blessing from God.

Upon a question as to what will restore the land to its previous goodness, she told me that she didn't know. She said that all the seers, prophets and diviners have died, and that nobody has learned their special powers from them. There is thus no way to talk to God anymore, and no way for God to let the people know what they must do to get the land back to its original state of being blessed. In the olden days the elders would have killed a bull and have eaten it at the river to seek guidance from God. But this generation doesn't care anymore. According to her the youngsters are only after money and will not sacrifice animals anymore. For them it is too valuable: their personal belongings, needs and wealth are more important than the community or what they can do to benefit the community. She feels that the people are on a downwards curve and that there are no way to change the situation around. In her despair she feels that everything is useless.

An important aspect of this study is thus to document the wisdom and culture of the Pokot for later generations. As we have seen, the world view of the Pokot and their culture contain many wisdoms and specific ways of thought. Much of this has a lot to offer to a modern environmental ethicist, as will later be discussed. It will also serve conservationists as well in their attempts to understand the local people and find solutions to environmental problems which would benefit the local people.

3.2 Pokot rituals

Schultz and Lavenda (1990:176) define ritual as one of four phenomena:

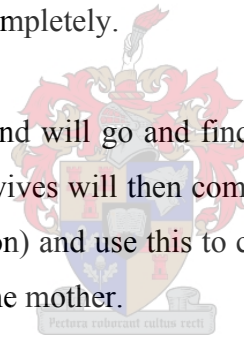
1. Repetitive social practice – as is displayed in dance, song, speech, etc.
2. A set of social routines of everyday life.
3. Culturally defined ritual schemas/patterns, even if this schema is applied to different events.
4. Ritual is also connected to a specific set of ideas that are often encoded in myth.

Let us now consider some of the most important Pokot rituals.

3.2.1 Birth

When a woman is expecting, she is accorded very high respect by her husband, by the elders, as well as from other older women. While she is preparing for the birth of her child, she is told not to take any milk, especially during the rainy season, when there are often infestations of locusts. If she does, it is believed that when the child is born, it will vomit a greenish substance and will then die immediately. For this reason she is told to stay away from milk completely.

At the time of labour, the husband will go and find midwives to assist his wife with delivering their child. The midwives will then come and wash a knife (because there are no other means of sterilization) and use this to cut the umbilical chord. After this they will then also take care of the mother.



The Pokot believe that a mother with a small child should not be seen by many people, because they believe that there are people with “bad eyes” who can use witchcraft to harm the child or even cause its death. So the mother and child will be kept and looked after in a place apart from the community, which is considered almost as a sacred place.

By the time the child has been born, the wife will obviously then not be sleeping in the same house as her husband. This is one of the reasons why the Pokot prefer that a man should have more than one wife. If the wife has then delivered, the man can visit another wife of his. This “marriage in which a person may be married to more than one spouse at the same time”, is called polygamy (Schultz and Lavenda, 1990:298). When the child is roughly about 9 months old, the mother will be released from her secluded place of living. She will move in with other women and people

may come to visit her. After another 9 months, the husband is then also allowed back in her house and they may continue to live a normal life.

3.2.2 The giving of a name

There are some basic regulations regarding the giving of a name. This ceremony will happen according to 4 factors:

- 1) whether the child is male or female
- 2) what season it was born in
- 3) the weather conditions
- 4) the place it was born at.

If it is a girl, she will be given a name with the prefix “Che-”. For example, if she was born while there were visitors, she would be called “Chepto”. In this case a boy would be called “Kepto” – boys thus get awarded the prefix “Ke-”. If a child was born during the rainy season, a girl would be called “Chepkopis” and a boy “Kepkopis”, with “-kopis” then referring to the rainy season. If the child was born during the dry season, a girl will be called “Chepkimei” and a boy “Kepkimei”. If a girl was crying very much when she was born, she would be called “Chewatse”.

If the child was born near a big tree, it would be called “Yemit” for example, which is the name of the tree, and will be called so whether it is a boy or a girl. If the child was born at a gate (e.g. the gate to the home, or a gate to the kraal) it will be called “Apoke”. If it was born at a river or on a dam, it will be called “Chelalwa”.

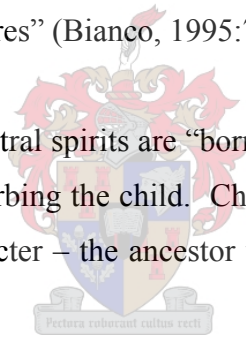
A very interesting concept regarding the giving of a name was explained to me by Peter Maklap of Amaya village. Upon my question of the strange name of “Didi”, the very much respected elder of Amaya village, I was told that this name was given to the child to “confuse the spirits”.

I was told that when Didi’s mother was pregnant with Didi’s elder siblings, she lost three of them, each a few days after they were born. After each baby died, a goat was slaughtered to appease the spirits and to ensure a healthy child the next time. But after the third baby died, his parents came to the conclusion that their ceremonies to appease the spirits did not have any effect. They then decided to give the very

uncommon and meaningless name of “Didi” to this fourth child, in an attempt to confuse the spirits regarding the child and his family. This apparently worked and Didi is today a very wise old man of 80 years.

In the area of West Pokot, Barbara A. Bianco (1995:776) found that if “a woman does not give birth well, they will tell her she should go to ... a diviner to determine the reason and then look for an ‘outside’ animal such as zebra, buffaloe or rhinoceros” to use its skin and make a belt to tie around her belly, “for you want your child to be strong like that animal”. She also noted that the “term used for a child who lives after many of its siblings have died is *kitilyit*, a reference to the small slit made by the midwife on its right earlobe ‘so that it will not die again’. To enhance their chances of survival, such children are given strange names. Like typical Pokot birth names, these too refer to the circumstances surrounding the child’s entry into human history. But rather than noting the time or the weather, they recall the bush ... as in ‘Child of the Bush’ or via one of its creatures” (Bianco, 1995:776).

One woman explained that ancestral spirits are “born into children. If their names are not called out, they will be disturbing the child. Children are said to resemble – both physically and in terms of character – the ancestor whose name they carry” (Bianco, 1995:775).



3.2.3 The initiation of girls

The initiation of girls usually happens during the rainy season. The reason for this is that during the rainy season there usually is an abundance of food and the girls are not needed to help with collecting food or harvesting. Thus it is possible to keep the girls inside the houses and teach them there.

The girls are initiated at the age of fifteen in small groups of about five, and even these five are not grouped together. Every girl is initiated in a different house by her mother, grandmother and other elders. They stay there for about two months and during this period they are formally taught how they should act to fulfil their roles in society, especially pertaining to men. The girl is expected to “become a ‘reasonable’ human being by learning the ethical rules during her seclusion” (Bianco, 1995:778).

Much of what they are taught might have been heard or seen during their lives up to that stage, but all of it is explicitly dealt with during this time. They are taught how to cook, how to read the body language of her husband, how she should manage surplus food, how to build houses, how to make special dishes, etc. When she has finished this period, she is then ready for marriage.

It is interesting to note that the circumcision of girls is widely discouraged among the Pokot themselves these days, although the ritual of the initiation *period* is still considered important. David Amasilo, the assistant chief of Kaptuya village told me that female genital mutilation is very much discouraged among the people, and I suspect this has a lot to do with the image that the people want to portray of their tribe (April 2004). The leaders of the community are very much aware how important the image as well as the media portrayal of their people will be for the success of their proposed conservancy. I am also convinced that the plight of their women are a genuine concern of theirs, as they now realize the importance a mother plays in the education and welfare of a child.

3.2.4 The initiation of boys

When boys reach the age of between fifteen and eighteen years, they enter their initiation period. This period marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. The actual initiation *ceremony* occurs after the initiation *period*, which is usually when the boys are between eighteen and twenty years. This ceremony consists of circumcision and a ritual called “sapana”.

But let us first look at the period of initiation. For boys this initiation period takes place in a secluded venue out of sight of the village and community. This may often be on the top of the hill, to make sure that no one can come near without being seen. This period lasts two to three months and in this whole time they do not see any women. Even the women who bring their food daily (which will mostly be their mothers), are not allowed to see them and will leave their food at a designated place. This is a sign of respect from the women for the process in which the men are engaged.

The boys are grouped into groups of about fifty and accompanied by many elders of the community as well as adult men. Here they are taught how to become a warrior, how to care for their families, how to look after their children and their wives, how to provide food for them, how to attack an enemy and how to react during a cattle raid. They are also taught about sexual matters and what this will entail in a marriage. The food that the men are expected to provide, includes some antelopes and gazelles that they may hunt. The finer art of hunting is thus also taught and shared.

The men also sing songs and drink a lot of beer. This all marks their bonding as the male group of the community. With the words of their songs they mock those boys who did not have the courage to join in the initiation period, and this is done as a motivation and encouragement for them to join in the future and be part of the “men”. After this period, a boy will almost be ready for marriage. There is one ceremony still necessary for him though. This is called “sapana”.

3.2.5 “Sapana”

This ceremony surely is the most important ritual in Pokot culture. It is not an authentic Pokot ceremony, but I was told by Didi, an elder from Amaya village that it was borrowed from the Karamajong tribe of Uganda. It is widely attended to by the whole district and publicly marks a boy’s transition into adulthood. This ceremony happens some time after the initiation period has occurred. Most of the information about this ceremony was shared with me by Daniel Lemoe, as well as by Patrick Koas (April 2004).

For this ceremony, the boy will prepare beer at his father’s home and invite his relatives, the elders of the community and anyone in the district who wants to join in. For this reason there can easily be 500 people attending a sapana ceremony. Two of the most popular beers to brew are Moratina (using honey) and Busaa (using maize and sorghum). The feast will go on for three days. On the first night everybody will join in for eating and drinking at the boy’s father’s house. There will be singing and rejoicing and the pouring out of blessings on the boy.

On the second day of the 3 day feast, the young boy will go through the official “sapana” ritual. In the morning the boy will go and kill an appointed bull with a spear. After it has been killed, an elder takes out the contents of the stomach of the bull, and it is then smeared all over his naked body. There is a lot of symbolism in this ritual, as it shows how the boy does now take on a new being. He is covered all over, every part of his body. After he has been washed clean, it is then believed that he will be a new person all over. All of his childish behaviour will have been washed away and only the new, responsible adult will remain. He will be given a new name and he will have a new role in the community. He is a new man. A different person.

Later in the day the feast will continue. All the women attending will have brought along sour milk for the ceremony. They will fall into single file and place the calabashes containing the milk at a few trees in the centre of the ceremonial clearing. The older men will be waiting here and in return for this gift, each woman will be awarded some meat. Each woman will kneel before the oldest of the elders and a piece of meat is then placed in a calabash hanging around her neck, resting on her back.

The elders will divide the milk among all the men. The men (excluding the uninitiated youths) will mix this milk with sugar and the blood of a different (living) bull. The oldest man among them will give a blessing, be the first to sip from this mixture and in this way open the mixture for the rest of the men. They will come to the bowl in order of seniority from the oldest to the youngest.

The way in which the blood for this ceremony is collected, demonstrates the people’s attitude towards sustainability. It is not considered necessary to kill an animal in order to use his blood for the ceremony. On my visit to Lonyek Cultural Boma, Daniel Lemoe showed me the little arrow which is used to penetrate the main artery running along the animal’s neck. The arrow head is about 0.75cm in length, ensuring that the arrow will not cut off the whole artery, but simply open one side of it. The arrow is shot from short range, 20cm into the animal’s neck, also ensuring that the arrow does not penetrate too deep. After this has been done, blood pours from the wound and it is collected. The tribe’s men know the amount of blood they can take

from their cattle. When this amount of blood was collected, the wound is closed for the animal to recover.

It is possible for more than one boy to have “sapana” at the same time. If it would happen that three boys have “sapana” together, there will be three different isles around a central group of trees in the middle of the clearing. The whole procession of elders and their blessings and the making of the blood and milk mixtures will then move from one boy’s isle to the next (it is interesting to note the importance of trees as an isle and meeting place here).

During the day there will be a lot of singing, dancing and drinking. Generally this is a day of rejoicing – in which blessings are being poured out over the boy, his family and his belongings once again. The songs will all revolve around the boy not being a child anymore, how he will defend his people and be part of the community.

The women will roast some special parts of the meat for themselves, while the men will roast their own meat. The most junior boys will be responsible to go and collect firewood as well as roast the meat. The older men will cut it, while the senior elders will divide and issue it. When all the people are fed and satisfied, it will usually be dark already and they will start dancing around the fires.

In the centre of the circle around which everyone will be dancing, the heads of the livestock killed that day will be displayed. All the people will hold hands and create a large circle, while dancing will continue for many hours into the night.

On the third day of the feast there will be more singing and the initiate will be awarded with a “siolip”. This “siolip” is a cake of mud that is made on the crown, or “top and back” part of a man’s head. “A circumcised man is entitled to adorn his hair with coloured clay after feeding his family and neighbours with the ox that he spears at ‘sapana’” (Bianco, 1995:771). His hair is covered with mud in this circular spot, and the rest of his hair is shaven off. When the mud has dried, the “siolip” is painted with interesting patterns, usually using blue and brown colours. An ostrich feather is also fastened to it, creating a wonderfully flamboyant picture of pride. From then on the boy will also be permitted to wear all the traditional decorations of beads that the

other men do. Once the ceremony is finished, the man is then free and ready to marry.

3.2.6 Marriage

The marriage ritual was described earlier in 3.1.7. It is interesting to note that the girl receives a leather wedding bracelet and that “each knot represents a gift of livestock or land pledged to her by her husband and his people so that she may nourish the children she bears for them” (Bianco, 1995:771). Marriage between clans is also strictly forbidden, for “how could you marry your sister? No one would agree. There would be no bride wealth ... there would be sickness because the blood was too thick” (Bianco, 1995:772).

3.2.7 “Kokwa”

“Kokwa” is an interesting ritual among the Pokot, and surely has a lot of benefit for the order and harmony of the community. “Kokwa” is the place or rather “the name of the shade” where the elders of the community gather twice every week (Lemoe, April 2004). This meeting takes place in the shade of a dedicated group of trees, an area which is considered sacred. Here the elders meet and discuss any matters of importance pertaining to the community at that stage. They will argue and consider and reconsider, but when the meeting has come to a conclusion regarding any given matter, it is then considered law.



Fig. 15 “Kokwa”

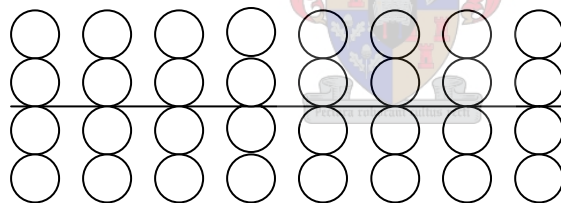
In order for any area to be considered as “kokwa”, it has to be blessed by a special ceremony. During this ceremony, the ground beneath the dedicated trees is smeared

with the residue of an animal's stomach. If it so happened that for one or other reason the "kokwa" has not been visited by the elders for three or more days, it is considered to have lost its sacred component and the ceremony has to be repeated. I was told by Daniel that if the shade is not visited at least twice a week, it might "get annoyed". This custom of the elders being expected to discuss community matters regularly, obviously serves the community very well, because any small matter can be resolved before it becomes a big problem.

3.2.8 The Boa game

When the meeting at "kokwa" has been completed, the men revert to more leisurely activities there in the shade. Some mend the leather straps of their children's sandals, some cut new leather straps, or some carve out little traditional wooden seats/headrests. But the most popular passing of leisure time is spent playing the age old Boa game. The game corresponds somewhat to modern day Monopoly.

There in the shade the men have created 4 rows of 8 holes each in the ground, about the size of tennis balls. There are 2 players and each has 2 rows.



The first row of each player is filled with 5 little stones in each hole, which is regarded as livestock (in the same way as Monopoly would play with property). The aim of the game is to win over some or all of your opponent's "livestock". The game begins with each opponent having 5 stones in every hole of his first row. He takes all 5 from any hole and in a circular way drops one in each of his other holes, until all 5 are gone. If the fifth one lands in an empty hole of yours, it is the other person's turn. If however it lands in a hole with stones in, and it is opposite the stone filled holes of your opponent, you get all his "livestock" in that hole.

The prominence and popularity of this game surely shows us that livestock are a very important commodity and source of wealth in Pokot culture. Wealth is actually

measured by livestock and thus plays a very important role in the people's lives – even in their leisure time.

I would not say that the animals are respected though, even though they are highly valued. Its value mostly lies in the human wealth it brings, like printed paper as money bring wealth in the West. Its value further lies in the fact that the animals serve the people with food and provides products for domestic use.

3.2.9 “Amuro” and “Apsekit”

One of the rituals in Pokot culture for paying respect to elders is called “amuro”. During this ritual, the right hind leg of a slaughtered animal would be left untouched until the afternoon of the day on which the animal was slaughtered. In the afternoon it will be taken to one of the respected elders of the community. By doing this, the family or group of people who have slaughtered the animal show the elder their respect, but also in doing this they seek his blessing. This is done mainly because an older person is considered “blessed by virtue of their age; because the elderly are near the ancestral spirits, their ‘hearts are good’ and their spittle, which comes from the heart, is like ... grace” (Bianco, 1995:775).

“Apsekit” is the ritual that is performed with regard to the *left* hind leg of the animal. This part is taken to the man's brothers in law. The aim is simply to create good relationship between the two in-law families.

3.2.10 The way God speaks

I found among the Pokot people a consciousness that corresponds very closely with that of the Oromo people of Ethiopia. Workineh Kelbessa (2002:53) notes how the “Oromo consider the cycles of nature, the coming of the rainy season, the movement and the cries of birds, the nature of entrails, the behaviour of domestic and wild animals and the condition of trees in order to grapple with practical problems of everyday life and future problems”. It can be said that they receive their guidance from God through the natural environment.

God speaks to the Pokot people through four means, which was shared with me by Elijah Deba (April 2004). The first way is through prophetic visions, the second through dreams, the third through the reading of an animal's intestines and in the fourth place through the throwing of a person's shoes.

3.2.10.1 Prophets

Prophets are people in the community with finely tuned abilities to hear God's Voice. It may also be said that they are "chosen ones" and that their abilities are a gift. The prophets will incline their ear to God's voice through meditation, but it does also sometimes happen that God may start speaking unexpectedly. "Prophetic discourse is a mixture of human and divine speech" (Bianco, 1996:30). In such a case, the prophet might be sitting among people in conversation. He will then immediately tell the people to be quiet and start meditating in what he is hearing and what it means. The prophet might only hear a voice inaudible to others, or he might see something in his mind's eye. The visions he sees sometimes include things like people praying or sacrificing at a specific place at the river, and this will then be regarded as a message from God that the people should go to that place and pray or sacrifice.

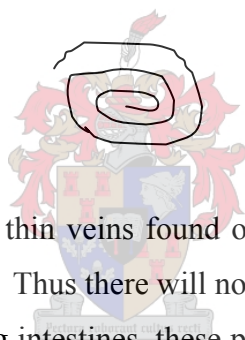
3.2.10.2 Dreamers

Dreamers also see visions, but this they see during night time and in their dreams. The way to identify a dreamer as a messenger of God is when his dreams always become true. A dreamer is seen as a prophetic messenger, and an "emissary between gods and humans, a traveller who moves through the air and treads the soil. Being human rather than divine ... he passes from earth to sky at night while others sleep. During the course of these nocturnal journeys ... he encounters Divinity's signs and, after returning home, must decipher the signs and reveal the messages they convey" (Bianco, 1996:30). The dreamer may receive a dream of people that are migrating, or of rain, and the next day he will wake up and warn the people. In the case of migrating, it is most probably because of an oncoming raid, and the people can then move with their livestock to another, safer place. In this way an attack can be prevented. The events that were dreamed of will also happen within a short time after it has been dreamt, whereas a prophetic vision might take years.

3.2.10.3 Animal intestines

This information I found fascinating, and surely not something my western mind has ever heard of. It also shows us to the extreme connectedness the Pokot have with their environment and the keen eye they have for signals it is sending them. “Pokot may seek advice from those who interpret the entrails of cattle or goats ... or the position of thrown sandals ... The faculty for interpreting signs is seen as a divinely given gift” (Bianco, 1996:29).

So how are an animal’s intestines read? During a personal interview with Elijah Deba (a local expert on the reading of intestines), I was told that the coiled part of the intestines which is found before the colon, is the part filled with signs (April 2004). When there are thick veins found where the coiling intestines touch each other (in the “valleys”), these thick veins are a sign of strong flowing rivers in the valleys, and thus points to coming rain.



If it happens that there are only thin veins found on the top of the intestines, it is a sign of dry land and small rivers. Thus there will not be any big rains shortly. If there are dots on the tops of the coiling intestines, these point to huts or homesteads. If the dots are crowded in one space, it means that people will gather in one place shortly, so most probably there is danger on its way and the people will have to gather together in order to decide on their course of action. The danger may often be in the form of a threatening illness that may erupt. This may often entail having to move to a new grazing area. But if the dots are spread evenly and far apart or scattered, everything is OK.



Danger in a homestead is signalled by a dot with a circle around it. This most probably means that a person or animal in that homestead will become sick and die. Such a sign of a dot with a circle around it, would symbolize a grave: In Pokot culture people are often buried in the centre of his homestead, and thus the symbol of a dot with an “enclosure” around it, symbolizing the branch fence protecting the

homestead. On the outside of the circle there are sometimes other dots, grouped together, and these will symbolize the cattle's dung that is spread outside the homestead. This symbolizes that all the animals will die and there will be no more cattle or dung inside the homestead.

The solutions to these signs are the following: In the case of drought, the elders will gather at the river or on the top of a mountain and slaughter an animal as a sacrifice to God. They may also wait with this procedure and first go to a person of the Rainmaker clan, and ask him what would be the appropriate procedure under the specific circumstances. The person from the Rainmaker clan will then wait until an answer from God becomes clear to him, and he will then give the specific procedure through to the elders. This will often include something like the slaughtering of a brown and black coloured goat at a certain place near the river. If God's orders were carried out in this way, I was told that it will ALWAYS rain the very next day.

If it seems that a raid is on its way, the people will move away from their village until the danger has passed. In the case of the warning about death, the reaction will be twofold: If it is a person that is destined to die the family that have slaughtered the animal will slaughter another one to appease for the person's death. And if that second animal's intestines still show that same signs, the act will simply be repeated again. But if the intestines show to the upcoming death and "scattered dung" of the animals, the family would move away from their homestead and build a new one.

The sensitive intestines of the animals must obviously indicate some very small changes in the environment or illnesses in the air, and through the centuries it seems that the Pokot was able to decode these "messages from God". But these messages may also have a medical explanation. (It should be noted that the following paragraphs contains mere possibilities and that these opinions can and should still be researched much deeper. The author makes no claim to its scientific validity.) According to Mr Martiens Booysen from the CEVA Sante Animale Pharmaceutical Company (Animal Health), dots on the intestines of animals may have a few causes. One of these is the presence of harmful bacteria, especially in warm and wet conditions. Under such conditions *E.coli* occurs regularly. Such a bacterial infection is often the result of contaminated water and may result in enteritis (bleeding).

Figure 16 shows an example of dysentery (left) and colibacillosis (right). These are two examples where we see enlarged veins on animal intestines. During a personal interview with Dr Jan van Zyl (October 2004), a gastro-intestinal internist, he indicated that enlarged veins are often the result of liver illnesses or of toxins that was swallowed. From this explanation it was difficult to draw any comparisons with the Pokot's prophecies that enlarged veins point to the coming of big rains.

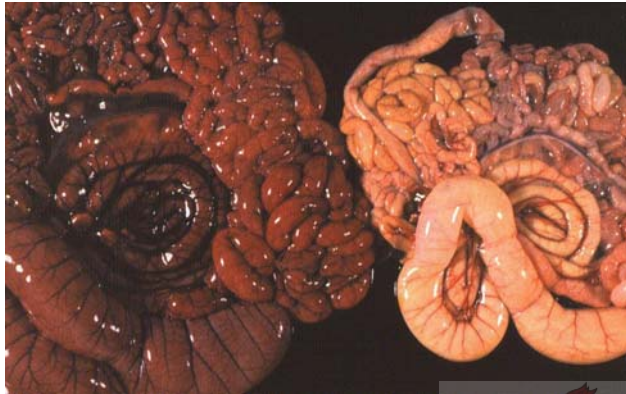


Fig. 16 Two random examples of enlarged veins: Dysentery (left) and colibacillosis (right) (Ferrer, de Jalón & De las Heras, 2002:42).

According to Dr Van Zyl, dots on the intestines are however most often the result of some or other parasite. This finds an echo in the Pokot explanation that dots on the intestines sometimes indicate that the people will have to move away from their current grazing area/village because of danger – possibly some or other threatening illness.



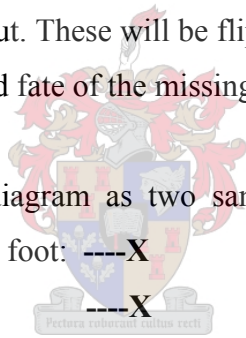
Fig. 17 A random example of dots on animal intestines: The formation of small nodules in the mucosa (Ferrer, de Jalón & De las Heras, 2002:92).

3.2.10.4 The throwing of shoes

This is another interesting custom of the Pokot, but maybe a little less easily explainable in western scientific norms. In a personal interview with Elijah Deba once again, I was told that this method was used to communicate with people when you are not near them or when they are missing. Through the shoes, God would tell you about the people's fate or their location. This method was mostly used during earlier times when the tribe often went to raid other tribes for their cattle. During these raids and the conflict it provoked, people sometimes got cut off from the rest of the party in the heat of the raid. This method was then used to help the rest of the raiding group decide how to act.

The process works like this: A person who has the ability to interpret the message from these shoes, maybe a prophet or any other person (mostly an elder) who is known to always interpret these messages correctly, will take two shoes from the person that is being inquired about. These will be flipped into the air and the way they land will indicate the location and fate of the missing person.

Please imagine the following diagram as two sandals, side by side, each with a crossed strip over the front of the foot: ---X



---X X--- If the shoes land in this position, facing each other, it means that the person is in danger. He may be caught up in a conflict or war.

----- If both shoes fall face down, it means that he is sleeping and need not be worried about.

-----X
X
|
|
When it falls facing each other 90 degrees like this, it means that the person is walking in the opposite direction as the raiding party, maybe because he has lost the group during the fight. The group will then have to go and find him.

X--- ---X When the shoes fall like this, with the heels to each other and facing in opposite directions, it means that the person is coming towards the rest of

the party or heading home. Under these circumstances the person need not to be sought, for he is not in danger and knows his way.

----- In a case like this, when both land facing downwards but partly on top of
----- each other, it means that the person has died in combat.

3.2.11 Becoming an elder

The Pokot culture revolves very much around a very clear age group set among the men. These age groups are not dependent on age, but consist rather of a group of men who have been initiated at the same time, and who are now moving through the stages of life. It is not dependent on age, because those in one initiation group are not of the same age. Furthermore, the group also doesn't move to the next stage at a certain age. For example the midway elders would only move on to being senior elders once the last members of the group before them have died.

The groups we find are young children, junior elders, midway elders, and senior elders. The children tend to the goats in the bush. The junior elders tend the cattle and sheep and go off to find greener pastures during times of extreme drought. I was also told that they are looking out for girls when they are supposed to tend the cattle. The midway elders are the married men. They are the heads of the families and decide on each day's activities. They also delegate all that needs to be done among the family members. He is more of a leader and less of a worker. The senior elders are the heads of the entire community. They make leadership decisions pertaining to matters of importance to the whole community. They are also the ones giving special blessings to young ones, to those going on a journey or to any new activity a person may embark on. They will also be reported to when the junior elders have gone off to find greener pastures for the community's livestock and will then give or withhold their blessings to take the livestock to that place. They are considered very wise and should be paid their due respect.

It is interesting to note that there exists no corresponding age set groups among women, but that a woman fall into the age set of her husband. A woman finds honour if she is married to a man from an age set older than the one of about her own age.

Although the statuses of the groups grow as they progress in years, like a ladder being climbed, there is also another status system in the midst of each group. As part of a natural process leaders arise within each age group as well. These usually are the men of great personality or those with a lot of wisdom and strength. These men are expected to be treated with due respect. Thus the leaders within your own age group, as well as all the age groups above your own, have to be respected. This is very important. With age comes authority and it is unthinkable for a youngster to challenge his elders. Those older than you are a model of what you are going to be. To disrespect them would severely damage your own growth process.

3.2.11 Burial

Burial have been dealt with previously in 3.1.12.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter the cultural concepts and rituals of the Pokot have been discussed in order for these to be analyzed later so as to show to the deeper lying philosophy and environmental ethic they contain.

With regard to the first part of the chapter, namely Pokot cultural concepts, we have seen how the African notion of communality is in contrast with the more western notion of individuality, and that this sometimes leads to clashes between the two cultures. We have seen that the elders in a village exert a lot of control over the villagers and that the small size of villages makes this control even more efficient. We have seen how a person's sense of self is very much linked to his responsibility and obligations towards his community. This sense of communality is further enhanced by means of music and dance. It became clear that the role of women among the Pokot is rather suppressed and that they are mainly respected for their knowledge of herbal medicine. The sacredness of healing and God's involvement in this was discussed, and it was also seen how witchcraft is strongly opposed by the

villagers. The concepts surrounding burial, inheritance and the returning of ancestral spirits were discussed and it was seen that the physical and spiritual worlds are strongly overlapping in Pokot culture. It was seen that there exists a mystical relationship with some animals as well, and these are seen as totem animals. An intimacy with the environment was also shown from their knowledge of star signs. A cultural concept among the Pokot people that can be detrimental for the environment and conservation efforts is that of their young boys' poaching to show off bravery. On the other hand, the importance of sacred places and its link with prosperity is a major positive point for conservation in the area. It was also seen that regarding conservation efforts there are many distressing factors for the elders, and that they need to be included in any such efforts and discussions.

In the second part of the chapter the rituals of the Pokot were discussed. We have considered the rituals of birth, the giving of a name, the initiation of boys and girls, "sapana", marriage, "kokwa", the boa game, "amuro" and "apsekit", the way God speaks, becoming an elder and burial.

In the next chapter we will look at the radical western environmental ethic of Deep Ecology. Afterwards the cultural concepts and rituals of the Pokot will be analyzed to once again look at the environmental ethic that it contains and this ethic will then be compared to some of the concepts of Deep Ecology.

Chapter 4 The environmental ethic of the Pokot, compared to Deep Ecology

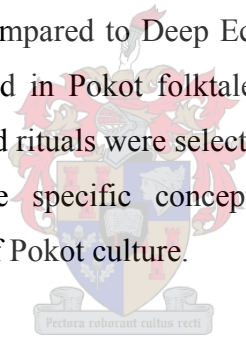
Chapter 4 will contain some of the most important aspects of this thesis. The problem that this chapter will seek to solve is whether there are some points of reference between African and western environmental ethics. We have already concluded in Chapter 1 that there are indeed similarities and areas of congruence between western science and African indigenous knowledge, and this chapter will serve to focus this subject even more. It will also further enhance the dialogue between African and western ways of thought.

To accomplish the comparison between African and western environmental thought, we will start with the radical western theory called Deep Ecology. The aim here is not to give an in-depth study of Deep Ecology, but rather an overview of its basic principles. This will be done so that once the environmental ethic of the Pokot is discussed thereafter, there will exist a platform from which it can be compared. It will be seen how this theory of Deep Ecology supports the notion of holism and interconnectedness among all things and is thus termed as a “life science”. The principles of the Deep Ecology Platform will thus be used to compare them with some examples of the African environmental ethics as found among the Pokot people.

If we are to look at the radical changes that a radical environmental theory like Deep Ecology asks for, it is interesting to note that these aims have been part of indigenous cultures all along. According to Lee and Daly (1999: 511), hunter gatherer communities “usually focus on the interrelatedness of all systems in the natural world, incorporating at the same time the spiritual world and many aspects of the social world. Their traditional ecological knowledge goes well beyond noting the interrelatedness of specific organisms; it embraces an all-encompassing world view of total relationship”. This once again confirms the validity and the quest of this thesis – that there is much to learn from indigenous people regarding living in harmony with nature.

From the above descriptions it would seem that the African ontology of the traditional Pokot, contains many of the same goals as those which are advocated by the Deep Ecology movement. The sense of communality and “oneness” with the earth features very strongly among the Pokot, as was seen in 3.1.1, 3.1.6 and 3.1.13. Therefore I am of the opinion that the attempts to find new solutions to our current environmental crises can very much benefit from looking back at the more traditional ways and indigenous knowledge of the people of Africa. In this sense it seems that it should be very rewarding if the principles of Deep Ecology can be combined with the indigenous knowledge of the Pokot people of Laikipia, to provide possible solutions and ideas for the place-specific problems experienced there. In this way indigenous knowledge and western thought can be combined and we can engage in a dialogue in order to find the way forward and find solutions to specific problems.

Once the theory of Deep Ecology has been discussed, the environmental ethic of the Pokot will be considered and compared to Deep Ecology. This environmental ethic will be considered as it is found in Pokot folktales, riddles, cultural concepts and rituals. The cultural concepts and rituals were selected from among those described in Chapter 3 and consist of the specific concepts which show a deeper-lying environmental ethic at the root of Pokot culture.



It will be seen that there are many points of reference between the radical western environmental theory of Deep Ecology and the African environmental ethic of the Pokot tribe. It will become clear that those points of reference are mainly the ones centring on the principles of harmony and interconnectedness with nature.

One of the ways in which these theories seem to combine will later be discussed in Chapter 5 when looking at the current successes of cultural conservancies in the area.

4.1 Deep ecology

Let us start with a few explanations of Deep Ecology: “Deep Ecology explains the ecological crisis as the outcome of the anthropocentric humanism that is central to the leading ideologies of modernity, including liberal capitalism and Marxism ... In short

Deep Ecologists call for a shift away from anthropocentric humanism toward an ecocentrism guided by the norm of self-realization for all beings” (Zimmerman, 1994: 2).

George Sessions goes further and states that “urban-industrial society is a dinosaur causing immense destruction in its death throes. New intellectual-social paradigms for a post-industrial society are emerging. The paradigm that embodies contemporary ecological consciousness is called the ‘Deep Ecology movement’” (Cramer, 1975:4). To those involved in the movement, Deep Ecology is about “transforming the human way of life. It encourages a fundamental shift in the way people experience nature while changing how individuals, localities, and states respond to the environmental crisis ... They seek the healing of alienation from self, community, and the Earth that shallow ecology has caused” (Cramer, 1975:4). It is thus clear that Deep Ecology seeks for a deeper connection and awareness of our role and place on the earth.

In our attempt to compare some of the environmental ethic concepts of Deep Ecology with that of the Pokot people, we will look at the main concepts of Deep Ecology and how and why it evolved. As will be seen, Deep Ecology evolved from the realization that a mechanistic world view in physics is not sufficient for harmony in our world and resulted in many devastating effects on our environment. This realization started evolving in the first three decades of the 20th century, when there occurred a profound change in the concepts and ideas of physics. As we have seen in Chapter 1, these new concepts also brought about a change in our western worldview – from the mechanistic worldview of Descartes, Newton and Bacon, to a more holistic, ecological view (Capra, 1997:5). Although this change has fortunately been growing throughout the previous century, it is still by no means the dominant way of thought in our 21st century world, nor even widely accepted. It is in this regard that indigenous knowledge can, in my opinion, be very effectively combined with western environmental ethics to pose new solutions.

4.1.1 Systems thinking

The changes in the concepts of physics have very much to do with scientists’ discovering that they cannot understand many of their problems in isolation. The problems in the world (be they biological, economic or societal) are systemic

problems. This means that they are interconnected and interdependent. “For example, stabilizing world population will only be possible when poverty is reduced worldwide. The extinction of animal and plant species on a massive scale will continue as long as the Southern Hemisphere is burdened by massive debts ... Ultimately these problems must be seen as just different facets of one single crisis, which is largely a crisis of perception” (Capra, 1997:3).

The problem is that we as westerners have an inadequate worldview. Our perception is inadequate to cope with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world (Capra, 1997:4). Like an organism, the sum of our world is much greater than its parts. There is a system at work which makes life on this planet possible, and it cannot simply be reduced to atomic movements. It is with this insight that we approach the theory of Deep Ecology.

The new paradigm, or way of perception, that Deep Ecology introduces, is that of a holistic worldview, where the world is seen as “an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts ... Deep ecological awareness recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the fact that as individuals and societies, we are all embedded in (and ultimately dependant on) the cyclical process of nature” (Capra, 1997:6). Arne Naess amplifies this point as well, stating that Life is fundamentally one thing – that all of life as it unfolds is an integrated and holistic process (1992:166).

There is a slight difference between the terms holistic and ecological. A holistic view of a bicycle would be an account of all of its parts – wheels, frame etc, as a functional whole and how all of these are interdependent on one another. An ecological view of a bicycle would add to this that it is also embedded in its natural and social environment – from where the raw materials came that went into it, as well as where effects of its use will be felt (Capra, 1997:6). When we call this emerging new paradigm of viewing reality as “ecological” in the sense of deep ecology, we emphasize that *life* is at its very centre. This is rather important, because in the former paradigm *physics* has been at the centre. There is thus occurring a shift from physics (atomistic, isolated parts) to life sciences (systems, organisms, webs, etc.) (Capra, 1997:13).

4.1.2 Deep Ecology as a life science

Deep Ecology is one of these life sciences. It is associated with a philosophical school that was founded by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the early seventies. Deep Ecology recognizes that there is an intrinsic/inherent value in all living beings, and that human beings are just one particular “living being.” It does not view the world as isolated objects, but as a “network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent” (Capra, 1997:7). This theory does not center on humans – it is thus not anthropocentric. Anthropocentric means that only humans have inherent value and that nature only exists for humans’ use. According to Deep Ecology nature’s value thus does not purely lie in its usefulness to the human species (Capra, 1997:7). It asserts that *all* of life has value.

“Ultimately, deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness. When the concept of the human spirit is understood as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels a sense of belonging, of connectedness to the cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is spiritual in its deepest essence” (Capra, 1997:7). Arne Naess (1992:165) also points out that we are not outside of nature, and thus we cannot change it without changing ourselves. Change thus starts in the inner man, the spirit and the soul, and from this point on action can have the desired effect. In most African worldviews, the idea of a Supreme Being and the interconnectedness of all things through it is also very much present (Kelbessa, 1997:114). This will provide an interesting basis for comparisons between the African and western worldviews.

As in most African worldviews, deep ecology asks its questions from an ecological (in the broad sense) perspective. It asks them from the perspective of “our relationships to one another, to future generations, and to the web of life of which we are part” (Capra, 1997:8). In this way deep ecology asks profound questions about the very foundations of our modern, growth orientated, scientific, industrial and materialistic worldview and way of life – and challenges these.

These foundations are challenged from what is called the Deep Ecology Platform (see Box 1). Before we thus go any further, let us look at the basic principles of Deep Ecology and see how these compare with indigenous thought among the Pokot. It

will also be pointed out why, in accordance with Deep Ecological principles, the concept of cultural conservancies is such a sound one.

Box 1:

The Deep Ecology Platform

1. The **flourishing** of human and non-human life on Earth has **intrinsic value**.
2. The **richness and diversity** of life forms are values in themselves and contribute to flourishing.
3. Humans have no right to **reduce** this richness and diversity, except to satisfy **vital needs**.
4. Present human **interference** with the non-human world is **excessive**, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
5. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial **decrease of the human population**. The flourishing of non-human life requires this.
6. Significant change of life conditions for the better, requires **change in policies**. These affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures.
7. Ideological change entail shifting from adhering to a **high standard of living** to mainly that of **appreciating life quality**.
8. Those who subscribe to these points have an obligation directly or indirectly to **participate** in the attempt to supplement the necessary changes.

(Cramer, 1975:6)

4.1.3 The Deep Ecology Platform and the environmental ethic of the Pokot

When looking at point one of the Deep Ecology Platform, we can conclude that *harmony with nature* is the key concept. Man is not above nature, but the flourishing of both man and nature has value. Among the Pokot we have seen that they live in great harmony with the plants of their environment, but that harmony with wild animals is greatly lacking. As we have seen in 3.1.17, the Pokot see their own human flourishing as very much linked with the flourishing of their environment. At this stage they see the drought in their region as the result and punishment for their killing of the wild animals. God is thus angry at them about this. These killings also pose a great hazard to conservation efforts in the region. One of the solutions to such problems (which Deep Ecology will certainly support) is that of creating cultural conservancies which benefits both the plants, animals and people of an environment. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Although the Pokot do not value wild animals as such (not like they do their cattle), they have come to the conclusion that, for the flourishing of their human community, it is expected of them to look after the wild animals as well.

When looking at point two there is a lesson from both sides. Deep Ecology holds the conviction that biodiversity is a value in itself and that all species have equal value. “A tree or owl has the same worth as a cactus or frog, which all have the same worth as a bacterium or human” (Cramer, 1975:7). The Pokot people do not support such radical ideas, and their paradigm is definitely much more human-centred. But they do seem to understand the principle that for themselves to flourish, they are responsible for the organisms around them too. This is “God’s law” and they are punished if they do not live in accordance to it.

The issue in point three of the Deep Ecology Platform regarding vital needs is a tricky topic to say the least. How shall one go about judging when enough is enough? What on earth are *vital needs*? This is a topic which will still need much further investigation, thought and research, but from my point of view it seems logical that the traditional Pokot are more in the right in this regard than the western world. Consumerism and the evil of material excesses are the sin of the west, and it seems worlds apart from the simple yet sufficient ways of the Pokot. As was seen earlier,

their lifestyles are simple and do not have major destructive impacts on their surroundings. Their houses are built from natural materials. They grow their food in their own vegetable fields (*shambas*) and their clothing was traditionally made from the hides of their animals.

Their ways regarding wild animals and their customs for showing bravery are hazardous in this regard though. Young boys kill wild animals merely for its tail, and this do not serve a vital need at all (see 3.1.15). This is one point of teaching from western thought which can and should definitely be taught among the people. But about simple living the Pokot has a lot to teach though. The middle way which cultural conservancies pose in this regard, seems like a wonderful example of a place specific solution. As will later be seen, it serves the interests of animals, plants and man all at once, because the income that humans receive from tourist visits, provides the motivation for them to conserve it.

In looking at the seventh principle of the Deep Ecology Platform, Cramer states that the philosophy and ideology of Deep Ecology entails societal changes (1975:9). “The Deep Ecologists aim to keep with the minority tradition. They wish to identify with primal people and find a sense of place through spirituality. Thus Deep Ecology contrasts with the dominant social paradigm and breaks from the technocratic-industrial worldview which views humans as isolated and fundamentally separate from the rest of nature” (Cramer, 1975:9).

The sense of interconnectedness among all things in the Pokot way of life has often been pointed out. From the view of Deep Ecology, their sense of spirituality is all-important and worthy of being taught and learned from. The Pokot do seem to understand the concept of holism, as it has been pointed out in 3.1.1 with the discussion on their views of communality. Even though interrelatedness is a very important concept with the Pokot and even if they perceive their lives in concentric circles, they still view all of these concepts as centring on humans. Their views are thus still anthropocentric, something which is opposed to Deep Ecology. The people do seem to understand how their actions directly influence every little part of life around them, but this does not elevate this life to be equal to their own human lives.

This is a point where Deep Ecology will differ from the view of these specific “primal people”.

Through the western theory of Deep Ecology and the new doors it opens regarding living sustainably on earth, we find confirmation of the usefulness and wisdom behind many African ways of thought. Although not all of the ways and customs of e.g. the Pokot are beneficial to the environment (as was and will become evident in the course of this thesis), many of their ways of thought correlates with what Deep Ecology has to teach, and these are worthy of attention.

Let us now turn to Pokot folktales and riddles to show us the sense of interconnectedness that the tribe seem to experience among all things.

4.2 The environmental ethic found in Pokot Folktales

By examining the folktales and riddles of the Pokot tribe, as well as through a general impression I got while staying among them, it is my opinion that the people see many of the different occurrences and modes of expression in life as very much influencing others. When taking this further (as will be done looking at their customs regarding totem animals, sacred places, religion and others), the point is further clarified: the environmental ethic of the Pokot tribe deems interconnectedness among all things as extremely important, if not all-important.

But in order to understand the role and place of the oral traditions of folktales and riddles among the Pokot, let us consider Workineh Kelbessa’s views in this regard.

According to him, oral traditions “are one of the sources of social, economic, environmental and philosophical knowledge in non-literature cultures ... Oral traditions help non-literate people to acquire a wide range of knowledge” (Kelbessa, 2001:261). It seems that most African tribes use oral media like folktales, riddles, proverbs and songs to teach and entertain the young. It is a way of sharing norms, beliefs and wisdom, and instructs the young as well as the rest of society on acceptable and commendable behaviour. These oral sources include the “historical origins, migrations, war and settlement ... plus records of land heritage, moral

principles, social and political life, God, knowledge of birds, animals, plants, geologic features and the relationship between human beings and the natural environment” (Kelbessa, 2001:264).

It is this relationship with the natural environment which differs very much from general western norms and ways of living. Because the Pokot are still very much dependent on natural resources for survival, and because they are living in and among nature and wild animals, “environmental education begins in each and every family. Fathers and mothers teach their children how to behave and live with the natural environment. Understanding starts at an early age and develops gradually” (Kelbessa, 2001:266). This wisdom and instruction regarding the relationship with the natural environment is thus transmitted since early childhood, and often through the use of folktales and riddles containing some or other moral lesson. “They embody values, items of advice or warnings, orders or prohibitions which are useful to develop environmental consciousness” (Kelbessa, 2001:281).

In the next part we will specifically look at some of the Pokot’s folktales and consider the environmental ethic contained in these.

4.2.1 Why cattle can’t speak – by Elijah Deba.

A long time ago it is believed that the Pokot people were very similar to cattle. They could all speak the same language face to face and loved keeping the other company. They would also share duties among themselves and whenever there was an issue to discuss, they would do this during the night hours. Food was never a problem among them, as it simply flowed down from the mountains and came to them by the rivers. They often had celebrations and on these occasions the cattle were always the ones to lead the dancing around a big fire at night. Life was good among them, and there was peace in the land.

One day it happened that a man’s child got sick. Because they were all friends, cow came to see how the child was. He was in a very bad state, and the next day a prophet was consulted. The prophet then told them that the only cure for the boy’s illness would be if a calf was to be slaughtered to break the curse that was on the boy. Man thus went to cow and told him what the prophet had said. Because they were such

good friends and because a blood sacrifice was part of their culture, cow agreed and gave her calf to man.

The only thing that cow asked of man was that he should slaughter the calf with a sharp stone, never break any of its bones and lastly that the tongue and liver of the calf should be given back to the cow so that she could bury it. Man promised this to cow but went on his way home and disregarded everything that cow asked of him. He killed the calf with a spear instead of a stone, he broke many of its bones and finally he threw away its tongue and liver.

The following day cow arrived at man's house to see how it all had gone and to collect the tongue and liver of its calf. When he arrived he instantly saw all the horrible things that man had done. At this cow got very annoyed and their friendship broke down completely. After a while man started to miss his friend dearly and at long last he went to say to cow that he was sorry. He even took some honey with him to put on cows tongue for her to enjoy, but cow would have none of it. She was so angry at man that she refused to accept the honey or open her mouth, for it all reminded her about the tongue of her calf being thrown away so carelessly.

That is the reason why cattle do not eat honey like men. And because cow refused to speak or open her mouth for such a long time, all cattle lost their ability to speak. Since that day, men and cattle do not share a special friendship any more.

This folktale is interesting from a few points of view. The most important view seems to suggest that man and animals were at one stage comrades – living side by side, speaking the same languages, looking out for the other, sharing duties, sharing food and generally being equals in all respects. This time is portrayed as a time of plenty: it was not necessary to work for food – it was simply brought to them via the river. The time of living in harmony with animals is thus seen as a higher state of being, as if the current way of the world is a lesser condition – the result of something that went wrong.

This same concept could be seen in the after life experience of Longolokuch Kapedo, which was told earlier in 2.1.4. In the place that he went to as he left this world,

everything was basically the same, except that wild animals and humans lived side by side and in perfect harmony. Like in the previous folktale, food was also provided and didn't need to be worked for. This entire world was experienced as a better world than the present one.

In both cases we thus find the concept that things are, or will be, better during the times when man and animal live, or will live, together in harmony. It is seen as times of plenty and the thriving of both man and animal. These concepts have a lot of value with regard to current conservation problems. As was seen in situations regarding contemporary cultural conservancies, the belief exists that God is angry with the people for killing the wild animals. Because of this the rains are staying away and the harsh drought of the last few years prevail. The concept that harmony and respect between man and animal leads to bounty and abundance, is thus strong in the culture of the Pokot, and very valuable for conservation.

As was said earlier, this is a very important influence for bringing across the message that the protection of the wildlife of the area will lead to the prosperity of the people. Even if this happens via tourists visiting the area (who will bring their cash with them), the people will still recognise these results as blessings from God for their good behaviour. And in a society where the spiritual is so deeply embedded in all of the people's lives, it is paramount that the role of the spiritual is clear in everyday, practical matters.

The Pokot concept that harmony between man and the environment leads to the prospering of man, is a valuable lesson to the west. Because of the high level of development in the west, man is often not living very close to the natural environment. The effects of actions on the environment, especially on animals, is often something we learn of in magazines – something far removed from our daily, mostly urban lives. Although the actions of westerners also have disastrous results on the environment, just as sometimes with the Pokot, it is more difficult to change western mindsets and attitudes regarding such habits, because the effects of such behaviour does not influence the people directly.

Problems in the average western society are often seen in isolation, opposed to the more African notion of holism and connection. Times of suffering will thus not easily be seen in connection with some or other wrong act against God, wild animals or the environment. Morgan (2003:38) articulates this as follows: “Western science, ontology and epistemology are underpinned by concepts of universality. Important principles include objectivity, true/false dichotomies, and Cartesian-Newtonian science that the nature of reality is mechanistic – a series of compartmentalized systems which together combine to form a whole. Central to this belief is the belief that any of these systems can be reduced to causally significant parts which can be isolated, manipulated, altered or reconfigured ...” Even though the earth is suffering and biodiversity destroyed at an alarming rate, it is difficult to bridge the gap between holism and physics in a highly developed and industrially successful world.

In the dominant western view, it is not generally believed that “all things are the manifestation of one thing only” (Coelho, 1998:67), nor is it assumed that there exists a “common energetic origin of all bodies” (Ani, 1994:99). This makes it more difficult for westerners to realize the havoc their action wreck on their world, and therefore they mostly continue in ignorance.

4.2.2 How the leopard became Merukwo’s totem animal – by Elijah Deba.

A very long time ago, the Pokot were still hunter-gatherers and lived in caves. They never stayed in one place very long and kept moving along to new areas in their search for food. Because they had to travel such long distances to gather enough food to survive, that they rarely slept twice in the same place. They had no means of preserving food and this forced them to be constantly on the move to find enough fresh food.

One night, after a few very unsuccessful days, a man named Merukwo slept in a deep cave. Just as he was falling asleep with a grumbling stomach, he heard something enter at the opening of the cave. He immediately saw that it was a leopard and that it had food in its mouth. Merukwo considered whether to run away in fear of his life, or to wait for the animal to come in and negotiate for a piece of the meat for himself. He then decided to stay in the cave and all night the leopard didn’t notice him.

Early the next morning, as dawn streamed into the cave, Merukwo started crying pitifully for help. The leopard left his food and ran off to rescue whoever it was that was in need. On reaching the back of the cave, Merukwo then desperately but politely requested some food. The leopard was more than willing to share his food and immediately brought some to the back of the cave. From that day on Merukwo used the leopard as the totem animal of his clan and this relationship passed on from generation to generation.

It was seen in 3.1.13 that the significance of totem animals in the life of the Pokot, as well as the influential role this relationship plays in their attitude towards the animals of their own clan, is very special and valuable indeed. This will be further discussed in 4.4, but at this stage it should suffice to say that this relationship with totem animals is a very enviable concept. It shows an area of cooperation for the benefit of both species, where the one looks after the other and both are better off because of this agreement.

There still exists respect and fear for the wild animals (as during the night in the cave) but upon sealing a special relationship with a specific animal, this animal becomes interconnected with a certain group of people. The animal then looks out for this clan and is never hunted by these people. On the other hand this connection plays a big role in the human's sense of belonging, and enhances a sense of connection, reverence and cooperation with all of nature.

This may be one of the most important concepts which the west can learn from the Pokot – the enhanced sense of connection and protection when people and animals are linked in totem relationships.

This area can and should be further investigated. A few ideas in this regard may be for schools to “adopt” an endangered species as their totem animal. Or this may be an idea for a town – adopting an endangered species in their area, e.g. the Oyster Catcher in the Jeffreys Bay area in South Africa. Special attention can be given to specific animal via e.g. an “Oyster Catcher Festival”, special visits from local schools of their area to meet the town's totem animal and to raise awareness – either in their natural habitat or in museums.

As will be seen in 4.4.4, totem animals are also approached more seriously with regard to spirituality among some groups in the west these days. This can also be further investigated.

4.3 The environmental ethic found in Pokot Riddles

Like folktales, riddles are another source of knowledge among the Pokot. Riddles are characterised by question-and-answer form. “However, in most cases the question appears as a statement rather than as an interrogative in form ... More generally, riddles are associated with children’s amusement in contrast to the more serious use of proverbs by their elders” (Kelbessa, 2001:272). Riddles have the role of “nourishing the intellect. Their parents ask children to identify a word or a sentence that stands for a tricky sentence” (Kelbessa, 2001:272).

Let us now look at a few Pokot riddles to guide us into their way of thought about interconnectedness and thus pointing to their environmental ethic. These riddles were collected and written down among the elders by my translator, Patrick Koas, and then shared with me.

Among the riddles of the Pokot I have often noticed how the tribe see themselves and their livestock mirrored in nature, as well as nature mirrored in the tribe itself. It is as if the patterns in nature find different forms in which to express itself and although its agents may differ, the expression stays very similar. This leads the people to learn lessons from occurrences in nature.

Let us consider the similarities between man, his activities and nature in the next riddles: “Kiotupon twachu kunyo adadotinio sany,” which can be translated as “I have buried my cows with their tails out.” The answer to this riddle is “pyasin”, meaning potatoes or sweet potatoes, because these planted crops look much like a cow’s tail that has been stuck in the ground. Another example is “kioratot cheptanyu yitin” which can be translated as “I have put pins along my daughter’s ears.” The answer to this riddle is “tolkos” meaning aloe vera, because the leaf of this thick plant protects itself with sharp thorns all over its edges.

A riddle pertaining to goats leads: “Kighyonjegho kweghoto nekachu sorokit.” Translated this means: “There are thorns standing in my goat shed”. The answer is “kuyo ngaror”, meaning goats’ horns, because these horns’ tips are the only visible parts of the goats that stand out above the rim of the shed.

The similarity that is drawn between household utensils and human beings can be seen from the following riddles: “Owetoï lalwa ngo komoi wolo otino omilo kiopighyan” which translates as “I am going to the river hungry and come back full.” The answer to this riddle is “mpira pogh” or water can. Another riddle on utensils is “Kiparpar papanyu somewo kopes,” which translates as “my father’s thighs have been bored open by a disease.” The answer to this riddle is “somongu”, which is a beer gourd. This riddle describes the L-shaped gourd into which a hole is bored in the bend of the gourd. A straw (or hollow stem) is placed into this hole and the beer is sipped from here.

The huts themselves also show some similarities with humans: “Kiayil cheptanyu lo chak” translates as “I have lotioned my daughter”. The answer to this riddle is “kipchoru” or the support pole in the center of a round hut. What often happens is that the women preparing food in the hut would rub their hands clean against this center pole, and from there the image of lotioning a daughter with fat. Another such riddle is “kinyighiton ngut mii” which translates as “my stomach is full of larvae”. The answer is “tarangoi” or the hut’s rafters/poles, which is often the home of various insect larvae.

Inside the hut livestock are also used as symbols: “kimiryë ngehino kiruchu” is translated as “my bulls are against each other”. The answer to this is “koghi nokogh” which are the three stones placed in and around the fire where food is prepared, in order to act as a stand for the cooking pot.

Outside the huts we find a riddle saying: “Kiru marelio sany”. Translated this means “the white cow has slept beside the house”. The answer to this riddle is “öor”, which is ash, because during the dry season a heap of white ash is found outside and beside the huts, the result of the leftover ash of every night’s fire.

The natural phenomena that the Pokot find in nature are expressed and compared using the following riddles: “Kiwut chemichir lalwa” which translates as “to follow a valley like a stream”. The answer to this riddle is “sokomin” or a bee, because its swiftness flows like the water, but it still follows a path. The Pokot are also aware that an anthill is a never ending growth structure, which shows from the following riddle: “Soghio chemrio manyughu”. This translates as “the bag of an elder is never full”, because one can never stop or give enough gifts and respect to an elder – it is something which is constantly expected. In the same way an anthill will always grow as the ants work inside it.

Regarding grazing we find the following: “Kolo owuwo kata kulung onyotoi”. This means “I tried to migrate from my home, then the devils infested”. The answer to this riddle is “seret” or kikuyu/course grass, because when one migrates from a usual grazing ground, a sturdy grass springs up.

Among these riddles and folktales the simplicity of Pokot thought was rather clear, as well as the many ways in which they find nature and human beings expressed in one another. All in all there seems to be a general acceptance of the interrelatedness among the phenomena on earth, especially with regards to similar patterns in nature simply being expressed via different agents. Of these I feel that the most significant is the way that the different phenomena on earth mirror each other’s characteristics.

This is something also present in radical western environmental concepts. “In the seventeenth century, at the same time that classical physics gave renewed emphasis to atomism and reductionism, Spinoza developed a holistic philosophy. According to Spinoza, all the differences and apparent divisions we see in the world are really only aspects of an underlying single substance, which he called God or nature” (Holism, 2004). Once again we find here areas of overlap between radical western environmental concepts and African indigenous ways of thought. This is valuable once again for the dialogue or the “middle way” between the two cultures.

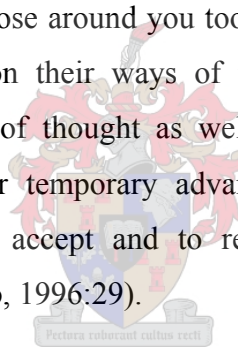
Let us now consider some cultural concepts of the Pokot in this same light.

4.4 The environmental ethic found in Pokot cultural concepts

In the next part some of the cultural concepts as discussed in 3.1 will be further analysed to identify the environmental ethic which it springs from. It will also be further compared with Deep Ecology.

4.4.1 Sense of a person

As we have seen earlier, Kwasi Wiredu speaks of a morality among the Akan tribe. In terms of this morality a person is social being because it is the only context in which full development is possible. This social embeddedness seems to form a thick set of concentric circles of “obligations and responsibilities matched by rights and privileges” (Wiredu, 1988:309). The sense of a “person” is thus not confined to that which is inside a person’s skin, but it extends into an ever widening range of circles. You “are” your relationship with your fellow human beings, and this interrelatedness “creates” you and it “creates” those around you too. In the same way that you leave impressions on other people, on their ways of thought and on their lives, they influence *your* being and way of thought as well. “Sustaining one’s self at the expense of another may confer temporary advantage, but it leads ultimately to disaster. A person unable to accept and to return companionship meets with loneliness and oblivion.” (Bianco, 1996:29).



We find that the theory of Deep Ecology takes this even further. In the same way that you leave your footprints on the ground or break down a branch for firewood, the environment also leaves an impression on *you*, in the form of your mood and state of mind. A waterfall may calm you and a bed of wild flowers may delight you. The majesty of a towering mountain may silence you in humility, or the wide expanse of the sky dome may imprint on you a deep sense of place and proportion in the greater picture of life on earth and in the universe.

In the same way as in this concept of “sense of a person” as part of a never ending range of influential circles, we again find confirmation of the Pokot people’s belief in a sense of interconnection. They seem to understand that the things that befall the earth, befall the people of the earth too, as was clear from their views on the current drought and its relationship with the killing of wild animals.

The actions you carry out have an impact on your environment and will have an impact on you too. This happens in the same way in which your actions in your community will either enhance your own life because of peace and stability in the community, or degrade your life because of strife, quarrels and immorality. A well cared for environment will provide you and your people with shade, food, medicine, shelter, good grazing for cattle, etc., but a devastated environment will lead to a lower quality of life and less produce from the land. This is an important concept which the Pokot clearly understand, if one is to look at the very well conserved state of the natural vegetation around their villages (3.1.8). This is not the same with regard to their views and actions toward wild animals, though, which need to be looked at and improved. Luckily much progress has been made in the last few years regarding this problem.

To sum up, the environmental ethical advantage which springs from the communal mindset of the Pokot is that this mindset is easily extended to include the natural environment. Although not as radical as the notion in Deep Ecology of equal value in all things, an attitude of respect and mutual co-operation with natural phenomena is not a strange concept, but easily understood among the people. In many cases such an extension of care towards the environment is prevalent (e.g. the well looked-after vegetation of the area), but this still needs to be expanded to the care of wild animals as well, in order to put a stop to unnecessary poaching.

4.4.2 Music and dance

One of the ways in which the Pokot facilitate this attitude towards and connection with nature is by means of music and dance. As we have seen earlier, there exists another major difference between the western and African way of thought, and this is in their different attitudes toward music and dance.

In the African way, singing and dancing has the aim of enabling the individual to become one with the group. In 3.1.6 we came to the conclusion that the stamping rhythm so often found in African music and dance, mostly serves to unify the individual not only with his community, but also with nature. As in the theory of Deep Ecology in which the communality of society extends into a communality with

the natural environment, these mediums of music and dance thus serves as an influential ritual for persons to become one with this greater whole. For the Pokot, singing and dancing may thus also be a means of connecting with what is bigger than themselves, not merely their society but also connecting with their environment. In the western way on the other hand, it was seen that dance is often a way to escape a connection with this physical world. Dance is light footed and an attempt to “give the illusion of escaping the earth’s gravitational pull” (Azevedo, 1993:121).

When the African way of engaging with music and dance is compared to the western way, it serves as a metaphor that westerners are often unattached to the world they inhabit. Music and dance may play an important role in an attempt to help the western world to change their attitude and mindset regarding their place in the whole of the cosmos. Via these mediums people can be lead into a deeper sense of connection, and hopefully better care of the environment. This is certainly an area where a lot of research can still be done and where a lot can be learnt from the traditional African.

Music and dance thus enables the African people (and the Pokot) to establish a connection with their environment. This connection enables them to be “at one” with the environment and thus act with insight into the greater whole. Because of such a connection, they are generally able to act in an environmental ethical way.

4.4.3 The value of plants

The Pokot’s intimate knowledge of plants is another important aspect of their environmental ethic. The medicinal value of plants as herbal remedies, as well as the role of spirituality regarding these remedies, plays an important role in the people’s protection of their natural surroundings.

These plants have other reasons to be conserved than only the spirituality linked with them. As can be seen in Annexure C, the natural vegetation has numerous uses in the daily life of the Pokot, including as firewood, building material, weapons, jewellery, household utensils, for personal hygiene, and as food. The fact that the Pokot in the villages that I have visited live in such close proximity to nature, and are therefore so very much dependent on their surroundings for survival, gives them an advantage

with regard to living in harmony with nature. For example, their traditional diet is much less damaging to the environment than that of westerners. Considering that they live in small numbers in their villages and that they use from the environment only fruit and do not need to preserve these in cans, which may contain harmful preservatives and the likes, are very beneficial. Their vegetable fields are also small and aimed at providing vegetables only for the family and these cannot destroy large areas of wilderness. The traditional diet can thus be said to be sustainable and in harmony with nature.

An area where the traditional Pokot may harm the environment, though, is by means of overgrazing to feed their cattle. This is an important matter which will need a lot of sensitization among the people, as well as tangible new solutions, because there certainly is a lack of grazing in the area. It is a very real problem for them, one with which they come face to face every day. Ethics will simply never come before survival.

As westerners, we are not faced with survival problems on a daily basis. Most of us get our food and firewood from the supermarket and thus we are very much isolated from the production of the goods we consume. In this lifestyle it is easy never to think about where our goods come from, and there thus exists a great lack of connection with the earth which produces these goods. Because the lives of the Pokot are so very much intertwined with the rhythms of nature, with the availability of food and grazing, medicine, decorating rituals and the supply of building materials, they are very much aware of the result of their actions on this fragile web of life.

During an interview with Peter Maklab, I asked him about the trees at the river which had patches of their bark stripped off (March 2004). His reply was interesting, and showed a lot about the environmental ethic of these people. He said that the trees' bark is stripped at times when babies in the community are diseased. This bark is then boiled as a remedy and given to the infants to drink like tea. It is very effective, and because of its great value to the community, they deem it very important not to destroy the trees by stripping off more than is needed from the trees' bark. They realize the grave importance of the sustainability of their use of this bark, as this is a rare tree and not easily found or replaced.

The indigenous knowledge of plants in the region of the Pokot's dwellings is also beginning to show great possibilities regarding sustainable development. The following example focuses on the Maasai, but it points to the possibilities contained in researching the indigenous knowledge of the African people with regards to sustainable development. The Pokot as such will surely be aware of many such treasures themselves which will benefit their area too.

“Used since time immemorial by the tribe of the Maasai in Kenya as a natural deodorant, the lelechwa is a shrub that can easily reach the height of 10/12 feet” (Africa Botanica, 2004). This shrub abounds in the Laikipia district and thrives by regular harvesting. It was scientifically proven that the roots do not die even if the plant is cut, and grows back to its original size in six months. This makes it extremely sustainable. “The dried roots have an exquisite grain that makes them suitable for carvings and crafts. The stems are first class firewood and slow burning, high grade charcoal are manufactured from it. This is an impressive discovery, since cheap wood as a renewable source of energy has long been Africa's dream” (Africa Botanica, 2004). Chemical analysis and practical tests have also proven that lelechwa is a very powerful insect repellent and antiseptic, which can heal most skin ailments, fungal infections, dandruff, etc. (Africa Botanica, 2004).

In Annexure G it is seen that many plants and their uses among the Pokot points to strong repellent qualities. Further research in this area may prove that similar plants may hold just as many advantages as that which were found with the use of the lelechwa shrub.

R.B. Lee (1999:511) speaks of the relationship with plants which pervades many areas in the lives of more “primitive” people. According to him, the Southern Paiute people say that plants need to “feel” a human presence, such as when people walk about them, or prune, burn, or harvest them. This is a consciousness I can easily relate to the Pokot and I can especially imagine herbal medicine women being of a similar inclination. The fact that the knowledge of herbal remedies is believed to have been divinely received by the Pokot people, adds a sacred aspect to their relationship with plants as well.

Acting ethically towards the environment, and especially to plants, is thus an automatic response because of the philosophy and way of thought of the Pokot. Because plants are seen as a medium for God to heal the people, it is naturally understood that the environment is a vehicle in which God can visit them. This creates a reverence for the natural environment and thus increases the respect and care that is awarded to it.

The principle in Deep Ecology that all things have value in themselves, resonates with this reverence for plants among the Pokot. The fact that the plants are seen as a vehicle for God to visit the people, increases its value exponentially, and adds to its sacred component. It thus also has “value in itself”, even before it is useful.

4.4.4 Totem animals

With regard to animals, we have previously seen that the Pokot do not have an enviable relationship with wild animals, and that they often cause a great deal of harm with regard to conservation. What is enviable though, is their concept of totem animals. We have seen that this belonging of a clan to a certain totem animal, serves as an important relational link between man and nature. It also encourages a deep seated sense of belonging to the world in which men live, and demonstrates that there are some spheres where man and animal can co-exist.

As was said, a totem animal reinforces a person’s belonging to a network of responsibility, as it unifies the clan under one totem animal. But it would be possible to argue further that this totem serves as a link to unify the clan that is “under his name” with all the rest of the animal kingdom, and thus also the natural environment. In this way totem animals play an important symbolical role with regards to the experience of interconnectedness among man and nature.

The example discussed in 3.1.13 of a woman squeezing her breast to produce milk, is also a beautiful example of the similarity or “oneness” that is found among the Pokot with animals. The message of this act is that the animal and the human both suckle on their mothers and that they should respect each other when in this same state of being expectant. Once again, “all things are the manifestation of one thing only” (Coelho,

1998:43). There thus exists an understanding of the “sameness” and “value” (as in the sense of Deep Ecology) in all of nature. From such an understanding an environmental ethic of reverence is easily extended into reverential and ethical environmental action.

Although the relationship among the Pokot with wild animals needs to be looked at, it is something which could easily be turned in the right direction. Because of a good underlying philosophical base, environmental ethical actions should be effortlessly cultivated among the people. The real difficulty in this case is how to convince cultures with a western, industrial mindset to act in environmental ethical ways and thus to adopt sustainable practices.

4.4.5 Sacred places

Sacred places are another concept among the Pokot which serves as a bridge between man and nature, and/or the physical and spiritual realms. It is not important whether a certain place or tree or river is really filled with spirit or whether the people’s beliefs that make it sacred in their eyes. What is important is that the people see these places as worthy of respect. It is as if the division between the spiritual and the physical are smaller in these places, almost non-existent. This concept is easily extended to a larger area and environment, even if not in the same intensity.

This same concept of increased spiritual value in certain places on earth is demonstrated by the words of John Mitchell (1975:63): “Rocks, trees, mountains, wells, and springs were recognized as receptacles for spirit, displaying in season their various properties, fertilizing, therapeutic and oracular.” Philip Heselton goes on to agree with this and shows how this concept ties in with the archaeological theory that the Earth’s force-field is being “concentrated at certain natural features such as waterfalls, springs and streams”. He argues that the “human aura could interact with this force-field at such places. An individual in a certain state of mind could fix a powerful emotion to a place. Similarly, sensitives could pick up such an emotion at places that were so charged” (1988: 36). It seems that the Pokot too have found that “God is closer to them” at certain places, particularly on the top of mountains, near water-bodies, as well as beneath the trees growing beside these water sources.

This concept of trees as sacred places is often found in other religious ways of thought as well. In Judaism, the Bible “begins with the tree of life, set in the midst of the Eden of origins ... It is referred to as the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Rasmussen, 1996:196). The same holds true for some eastern religions: “In early Japanese religion, both Shinto and pre-Shinto, the inspiring power of the sacred *Kami* pervaded all nature, yet certain trees and groves were singled out as places where the spirit of the *Kami* was intense and intimate. Places in the forest ‘where the trees grow thick,’ typically became the site of shrines” (Rasmussen, 1996:196).



Fig. 18 An important tree near Amaya village, often used as a meeting place.

In another western theory, called the GAIA theory, this concept is taken even further. James Lovelock played a definitive role in furthering this theory of the earth as being more “spiritually laden” in certain areas, or of possessing an “aura” in these areas, into the concept of the earth as a living being itself (Heselton, 1998:37). The earth as a living being was given “the name of the Greek goddess Gaia” by Lovelock, who is said to be “an independent scientist and thinker with a wide background of disciplines and experience ... He studied the conditions necessary for the continued existence of life and found that the Earth constituted a self-regulatory system whereby each of the many variable factors, such as temperature and the composition of air, sea and soil, had been kept within the narrow limits necessary for life to survive for the entire history of the planet. It had all the required characteristics of a living being and Lovelock concluded that this indeed was what it was” (Heselton, 1998:37).

The earth as a living being is a concept that my research never detected among the Pokot, but is a western theory which might find some point of reference in their world

as well. The earth as a living being has a far reaching impact for environmental and conservation policies and attitudes. But it is my opinion that the most important aspect here is reverence for the earth. This reverence for the earth as not only a holistic web (as with deep ecology), but of really being alive itself, will ask even more painful questions of western, industrially driven and human-centred actions.

It does seem, however, that the Pokot's reverence of water-bodies and trees finds an echo in holistic environmental theories. Although Deep Ecology would assign the same value to all things, the Pokot does seem to value their sacred places more than others. With the Pokot understanding and promoting a part of these theories already, it may be said that sacred places is one of the overlapping points found in both the indigenous environmental ethic of the Pokot and some western environmental ethic theories. A fruitful dialogue in this area is thus possible.

Among the Pokot, the belief in the sacred character of trees and water bodies has also lead to at least one noteworthy environmental ethical action: the curse that was laid on anybody who would dare to cut down any tree near the river area of Churo village. It is believed that the trees bring rain and that God withholds the rain when the people do not respect the environment – especially around sacred places. This shows to a deeper understanding of reverence for the relatedness of all things, as well as the daily, practical results which such beliefs may lead to.

Let us now consider Pokot rituals for further comparisons.

4.5 The environmental ethic found in Pokot Rituals

4.5.1 The giving of a name

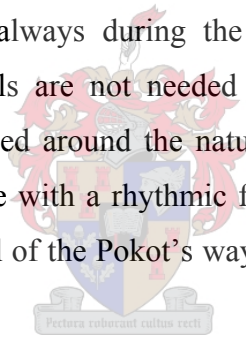
Very early on in life, already with the giving of a name, it seems that the Pokot place a very high value on a person's sense of place and proportion. The theory of Deep Ecology and holism, with every creature and living being existing in a preordained and worthy place, seems reflected in the Pokot's way of thought as well. As was mentioned earlier in 3.1.1, a person is born into an already existing set of social structures of family and responsibility. As was explained earlier, a person is tied by his name to his place of birth, the season, as well as the weather conditions. This

enables him/her to know a part of who he is by knowing how and where he came to be living in this natural world. I would be of the opinion that a person would subconsciously feel connected to his place in the cosmos and that it will provide a sense of belonging to him/her.

Although I could not find any confirmation that this ritual significantly influences their daily activities, it is telling of how aware the Pokot are of seasonal rhythms as well as of weather conditions. It is clear that they place a rather big importance on such phenomena. The ethic derived from this may thus point to a general importance that is accorded to nature, seasonal rhythms and the big role that natural phenomena play in their lives.

4.5.2 The initiation of girls

When looking at the initiation of girls as discussed in 3.2.3, it is interesting to note that the initiation months are always during the rainy season when there is an abundance of food and the girls are not needed to help with collecting food or harvesting. Life is thus organised around the natural ebb and flow of the seasons, which in turn provide the people with a rhythmic flow of their lives. This sense of connection is strong in almost all of the Pokot's ways. Their actions are thus built on environmental cues.



4.5.3 “Sapana”

A ritual among the Pokot that shows their attitude towards sustainability, is clear from the example of collecting blood from a bull for the ceremony of “sapana”. As was explained in 3.2.5, the bull doesn't need to be killed, but an arrow is only used to penetrate a large vein in its neck. The blood which is needed is then collected, and the bull can recover to provide more blood in the future. The people seem to understand the notion of “take only what you need, and leave the rest to provide for tomorrow”.

This is a concept which correlates strongly with the third principle of the Deep Ecology Platform which states that “humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity, except to satisfy vital needs”. The vital needs for this certain part of the

“sapana” ceremony surely is the collection of the bull’s blood to drink with milk. There is thus no need to slaughter the animal only to get hold of its blood.

4.5.4 “Kokwa”

When considering the ritual of “kokwa” or the sacred meeting places of elders beneath the shade of a dedicated few trees, we find another aspect of the interrelation with natural phenomena. Even though the dedicated meeting place is only randomly chosen trees, it became sacred through the people’s ceremony to award and “baptise” it as a special place (as was seen in 3.2.7). That natural place thus became sacred and worthy through the people that valued it, and they feel connected and drawn to that specific part of nature. It loses its worth when the people fail to integrate it into their lives, as for instance when it was not visited for more than three days. It seems that that specific area serves as a bridge between the natural and spiritual worlds in the people’s daily lives.

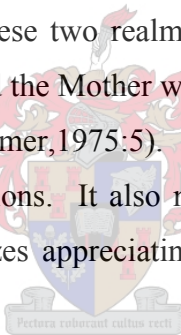
“In East-Africa, sacred trees are the meeting place with a powerful spirit and often the place of important community decisions” (Rasmussen, 1996:196). Their regular meeting and the emphasis placed on communality and solving the problems of their community, is considered special and in need of spiritual guidance. It is interesting to note that this place is not a place of worship and prayer as one finds in the more western notion of a *church*. In our western way of thought the places we go to in order to connect with what is spiritual, is often deeply religious places only. But in the Pokot way of life, the regular, daily activities are also regarded as involving God. In my opinion, this mindset once again enables the people to experience a deep sense of interconnection. It would seem that this way of thought is something deeply lacking in western societies that are basically dualistic, and one of the causes which leads to the over-exploitation of natural resources and damaging of the earth.

One of the ethical lessons found in the concept of “kokwa” is the fact that life is holistic – a web – and that every part of the web includes and involves every other part as well. The environment cannot be ill-treated or merely be used, without having grave effects on all other areas of life as well. Whatever affects one thread will influence the whole tapestry. The earth is sacred, and whether we treat it in this way or not, either way will have a definitive influence on human life.

One of the solutions to deal with the exponential boom of technology and development without sacrificing the earth, can be found in the following example.

4.5.5 The way God speaks

This sense of living with God and in close proximity to nature enables the Pokot to magnify their ability to receive messages. They do this by a sensitized and well developed spiritual awareness (Biko, 1988:30). It seems that “they inhabit a larger world than the sophisticated westerner who has magnified his physical senses through inverted gadgets at the price all too often of cutting out the dimension of the spiritual” (Biko, 1988:30). The messages that the Pokot find in nature and which they interpret as God speaking to them, has to be one of the clearest indications of their deep and intimate relationship with nature. As was often stated before, the African people do not clearly differentiate between the natural and spiritual worlds. The value or richness experienced in one is directly linked to the other. All of their lives are interlinked and are overlapping these two realms. “The earth remains our Mother, just as God remains our Father, and the Mother will only lay in the arms of the Father, those who remain true to her” (Cramer,1975:5). Such a view point thus involuntarily leads to environmental ethical actions. It also mirrors point number 7 of the Deep Ecology Platform which emphasizes appreciating life quality as opposed to a high material standard of living only.



Their knowledge of their natural surroundings was built up through centuries of living close to nature. The most telling instance of this is their ability to read messages in the intestines of an animal. The faculty of interpreting signs is seen as “a divinely given gift” (Bianco, 1996:29). Although this is regarded as a type of prophecy or message from God, possible medical explanations for this phenomenon point to their keen senses, deep understanding and immense knowledge of the natural world around them.

The complex and complicated process of small indications and signs that show on the intestines as a result of the quality of grazing, the weather, or the early indications of a disease, calls for a keen and aware eye for it to be interpreted successfully. As it has been explained earlier, it also points us to the extreme connectedness the Pokot have with their environment and the alert eye they have to observe the signals it is sending

them. The deep connectedness that is needed in order to receive these subtle messages from the earth, does in most cases lead involuntarily to acting in an environmental ethical way. This is something that Deep Ecology would most certainly propagate.

4.5.6 “Calling the fire”

Also with respect to “calling the fire”, the Pokot show a tendency to immerse themselves – body and soul – in nature. The act of literally softly singing and “calling the fire” whilst rubbing the two sticks horizontally against each other, shows us how deeply the Pokot believe that they are somehow connected with nature and natural phenomena. By immersing themselves in their activity and almost connecting to the “soul of the world”, they feel that they can make an impact on whether the sticks will catch fire or not. We find this attitude in many religions, either via prayer or meditation, and it is a beautiful manifestation of being connected with the larger cosmos. Whether this belief does actually influence the fire, does not matter so much. What is important is the attitude of respect, reverence and connectedness that this ritual leads a person into.

In this regard the Pokot seem to have a lot to teach western civilizations, especially those persons seeking a deeper and more meaningful connection with their world and natural surroundings. Some of their ways with wildlife may be considered as harmful to the environment, but their attitude of respect towards the environment leads the Pokot into mostly looking after their world as if it is part of their own lives and own well-being. The sacred and physical are so much interrelated, that it is almost impossible to act in one realm without influencing the other as well.

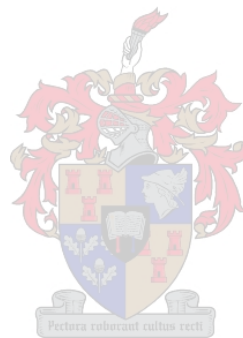
4.6 Conclusion

In Chapter 4 we have considered the environmental ethic of the radical western theory of Deep Ecology, and compared this with the environmental ethic of the Pokot tribe.

With the discussion on Deep Ecology it was seen that this theory departs from the concept of systemic thought, and builds on a theory of life existing as an interconnected web. It was seen that Deep Ecology opposes a mechanistic world

view of compartmentalized activity and supports notions of holism. The Deep Ecology Platform and the basic principles it advocates were discussed and some points of reference with thought among the Pokot tribe were pointed out.

The environmental ethic as found in Pokot folktales, riddles, cultural concepts and riddles was then discussed. From this part (which built on the discussions in Chapter 3) it was seen that many of the lessons contained in the Pokot environmental ethic find an echo in the principles of Deep Ecology. This proves the point that African and western environmental ethics have many areas of overlap, and that each can learn much from the other. This also has important consequences for finding practical solutions to development and conservation efforts in Africa, as will be seen in Chapter 5.



Chapter 5 The way forward for the Pokot regarding sustainable development and conservation

Coming now to Chapter 5, we will consider some of the practicalities of involving both western and African ways of thought for the benefit of conservation in Africa.

Firstly we will consider the role that African philosophical sages can play in the development and progress of Africa. It will be seen how these wise elders share rational ideas and thoughts, even if such thoughts oppose their own indigenous traditions. On the other hand, these sages are deeply embedded in their own communities, and thus able to provide an invaluable link between communities and western attempts at development and progress. In the same way that philosophers from the school of Deep Ecology seek a deeper understanding of certain problems and to find new solutions to those problems, African sages seek for such solutions too. Because of the strong influence that elders among the Pokot have on those around them in the communities, they have an invaluable role to play in solving some of the pressing issues and misunderstandings between African and western culture in the search of both development and conservation.

One example of development and progress which is very beneficial for conservation as well as for the Pokot of Laikipia (and which is advocated by these sages), is the creation of cultural conservancies. This is a concept strongly supported by the sages I found among the Pokot, and their views do have a far reaching effect on the rest of their communities. Cultural conservancies run on the principle that the wildlife of an area serves to attract tourists, and the tourists then bring an inflow of cash to the area. This cash is attracted by the goods, tours and traditional performances offered by the local villagers. Such activities are summed up as part of cultural conservancies.

In the second part of Chapter 5 we will thus look at the conception of conservation among the locals, the lessons to be learnt from other already established cultural

conservancies, as well as the specific positive and negative aspects of the proposed Lolkos Conservancy at Kaptuya village.

5.1 The role of sages in development and progress

During my interview with Didi, the elder from Amaya village, I was very much surprised at some of his views regarding development and progress. Many of his opinions and view points were different from what one would expect an elder from a very proud and traditional tribe to be. It will become clear in the next part just what an important role these original thinkers have to play in finding a middle ground between the African and western way of solving problems, especially with regard to problems found in Africa. This line of thought of these wise old elders which is based on reason, reflection and the seeking of wisdom, is called sage philosophy (Gutema, 2002:207). This kind of philosophy has an important role to play in environmental conservation.

In the next part we will look at sage philosophy as well as the way of thought that classifies Didi (a respected elder from Amaya village) as a philosophical sage. The best example explaining Didi's independent views was his reply on my questions regarding white people and missionaries.

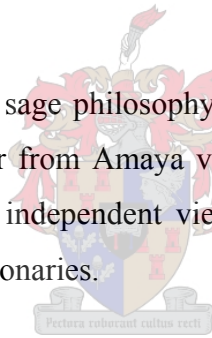


Fig. 19 Didi, the elder from Amaya village with the author (left) and with Pastor Musa (right).

From my background I always had the impression that the people of Africa (especially the traditional people) were very much offended by the colonialists coming in to take their land, as if everything was going well until these white settlers barged in. But Didi told me that the white man brought peace. They came during a

time when there was much fighting among the tribes, and when the Maasai was especially feared by other communities. The white man also abolished the slave trade of the Arabs, something that was a great threat to the indigenous people.

Regarding religion, Didi told me that they see the Christian faith as superior to their own, because this faith brought peace when the white people came. It also brought change, because in the time when they came the local people were very much involved in witchcraft and cursing and the people paid no respect to their dead. But the people who are successful in the world today, are those who went through the church and the Christian faith. He is of the opinion that Christianity is good because it keeps track with what is happening in the world, while the people like himself in the traditional villages do not even have proper medical attention.

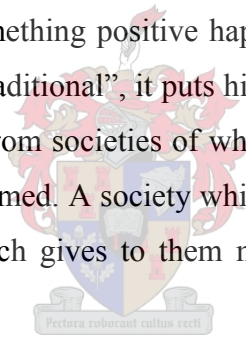
Didi has no knowledge of Jesus Christ or his teachings, though. For him Christianity is a good thing because it brought practical benefits to the people. He says that the people who go to church are the ones the community can depend on. They do not drink, they do not quarrel and they are morally good and fit. These views from a proud and very respected man in the community, shows that Didi falls in the category that Bekele Gutema calls a philosophical sage: “people with more or less considered critical and independent ideas on what are important aspects of human life and activity” (2002:207). His ideas are definitely independent, for more than once I got the impression that the local people are still very sceptical towards westerners coming into their land for reasons of “conservation”. They often fear that the people are tricking them into giving their land away for a conservancy, only in order for those people to take this land from them. A welcoming and trusting attitude is thus definitely not of the order of the day. And because elders like Didi are so very much respected in their communities, their opinions and advice will play a major role in the successful implementation and acceptance of cultural conservancies and other sustainable development projects.

Now what is sagacity then? “Sagacity basically is wisdom ... or the ensemble of fundamental knowledge and understanding that constitutes the habits, customs and experiences of a people” (Gutema, 2002:207). What is interesting here is that “among the various African communities exists individuals who, despite the fact that they

have not had the benefit of studying western philosophy, are nevertheless critical independent thinkers” (Gutema, 2002:208) and these are termed philosophical sages.

Gutema (2002:208) suggests that “Sage Philosophy can and should play a role in solving many of Africa’s crises. As we know Africa faces grave problems of development ... The grave problems of poverty, environmental degradation, increase in population and the like could only be properly tackled if the African people are in a position to resolve conflicts that are raging through the continent. This is important because it is the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully that will enable Africans to put all their efforts at the disposal of the development endeavour.”

There are also some merits of sages above academic philosophers, in the sense that they have both insight and ethical inspiration (Gutema, 2002:210). Their aim is to better society. From Didi’s answers we can say that his aim is the betterment of his own community: if he sees something positive happening and can reason about the worth of this, even if it is not “traditional”, it puts him in the position of a philosophic sage. Philosophic sages come from societies of which they are infinitely part of and to which they are deeply accustomed. A society which is the extension of themselves, of which they are part and which gives to them much of their sense of place and proportion.



Their involvement and concern is thus on a very deep level. They do not merely deal with concepts out of curiosity, but they want to use their knowledge for the betterment of their people. “By challenging individuals to improve themselves morally, they hope to improve society” (Gutema, 2002:212).

Regarding religion and missionaries I also received different opinions. During a personal interview with Daniel Lemoe, the community liaison officer of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum in March 2004, he told me that he was very much against the Christian missionaries and their teaching the people of Kenya to let go of their traditional ways. Daniel feels that the local people’s culture and ways are part of who they are, it is a beautiful thing and they should be proud of who they are. It is an attitude like this that I expected among the elders in the traditional villages too.

But Didi felt different about this too. He told me that the missionaries brought good things with them. They built hospitals, the death rate of babies decreased and they brought general medical attention (and the best thing about this was treatments for malaria that actually worked). Since then they have seen that the church is doing good things, bringing peace and stability in the community.

Although the elders are very fond and proud of their culture, it was clear from the conversation with Didi that sages like himself are not opposed to change. As was seen in the second chapter with the discussion of the origin of the Pokot, change is part of life and history and its consequences have since forever shaped and moulded their destiny as a tribe. It seems that now once again is a time of rapid change, maybe the most overwhelming the people ever had to face. But nonetheless, they accept the fact that change is part of life. The challenge will now be to adapt and change without letting go of that which was valuable and worthy in their own culture, and even to teach the west of these things as well.

The role of sages like Didi and the influence they can and do have on the other leaders of the community will play a very important role in conservation. Their minds are geared and ready to debate contemporary problems. “In issues that involve the relations of the people with one another, with nature, etc., sages are the ones who are able to deliver ideas that are based on long experience in life and a critical and fairly rational reflection” (Gutema, 2002:211). Let us hope that we can learn enough from these sages in order to find the ways which can make the concepts of cultural conservancies increasingly meaningful. “One should ... remember the saying in Africa that when an old man dies it is tantamount to the burning down of a library. But if we pay the necessary attention to unravelling the wisdom that some of our elders have, we save a considerable part of our heritage from disappearing and at the same time we can use it for practical purposes” (Gutema, 2002: 215).

5.2 Cultural conservancies

Through the process of researching in this field as well as through the close encounters and interviews with the Pokot people of Laikipia, I became very much convinced that the western notions of conservation cannot be duplicated in Africa

with the same amount of success as in the western world. In the words of Workineh Kelbessa: “In Africa, the young people have been alienated from their culture through the influences of missionaries, modern schooling and the mass media. Subsequently, the great majority of Africans now active in conservation were trained in the traditional western methods of wildlife management and have hindered the growth of an African conservation ethic by promoting European management systems” (Kelbessa, 2001:290).

Because of the very great difference in situations found in the western world and in Africa, especially regarding development, education, health care etc., western conservation and management systems will certainly not have the same success rate as in the west. In my opinion it is crucial that the indigenous knowledge of the local people be incorporated into all aspects of the conservation ethic that is applied. These tribes have been living in their environment for centuries and intimately know it, and they see the world from an African viewpoint. Their knowledge is thus important and valuable and should be heeded.

The Pokot is a very proud people and many of their traditional ways are still very much intact. But missionaries, modern schooling and the mass media did also influence them quite a lot (as was seen in 2.2 with the changes in their traditional dress). Thus it is also important in the case of the Pokot to listen to local elders who have not been influenced as much as the younger generation when creating new conservation concepts.

5.2.1 The elders’ and locals’ conception of conservation

In most cases and among most of the local people, conservation is being perceived as “The Solution.” And those involved with any aspect of the proposed cultural conservancy of Kaptuya village, do feel very important indeed. A good example of this was when I was approached by the village chief, a man dressed in western clothes. This man was also part of the village committee that form part of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, and he came to tell me that if I wanted to talk to him as well, I was welcome to. On discussing a time for our meeting, he told me he had to look in his diary. But we talked a bit and then decided upon a day, even though he did not

consult his diary. It soon became clear that this was a very important key to success in many of the conservation efforts in the area: the local people wanted to feel respected and important.

The people also wanted tangible benefits from conservation. From their viewpoints, the conservation of animals and plants should also be to their advantage, otherwise there is no reason for them to struggle to survive while the animals are being treated as treasures. Big and beautiful ideals and concepts of saving the last wildernesses and wild animals on earth, means absolutely nothing to them. They are a people still living very traditionally. They feel connected to their environment and the prospering of the environment should naturally make them prosper too. As was explained earlier in 1.2, 3.1.1, 4.1.4 and 4.4.4, all things are connected. A harsh divide between the state of their environment and their own well-being is simply unthinkable and confusing. The plight of the ozone layer is to them a story from outer space, and totally irrelevant to their existence and survival. Their world is the village and maybe the surrounding villages, and in extreme cases, the whole Laikipia district. Anything outside of that could just as well not even have existed. Their concerns are of the immediate sort: “Will we have food and water for the next month? Will the rains come this year? If not, what will we eat?” The benefits of conservation for them should thus be tangible, immediate and local.

5.2.2 Conservation as “The Solution”

5.2.2.1 Participation for respect

There are many reasons why conservation is at this stage becoming so acceptable and welcomed by the local village people. As was mentioned earlier, one of them is the respect the elders receive because they are actively trying to “solve the community’s problems”. This concept is also in line with their view of the “sense of a person” which widens in concentric circles into the community and also the environment: if a person is spending his energy on conservation efforts which they were told will bring income to the community, these people gain respect and honour in the community of which they are part.

When talking to local leaders like Julius Loremoi and David Amasilo, they would repeatedly tell me how the “local leaders” called together meetings and organised for elders to be taken to see other local/cultural conservancies of neighbouring tribes, and learn from these success stories (personal interview, April 2004). But I knew that all of the meetings were initiated by the Laikipia Wildlife Forum. The fact that the leaders feel important about the matter is crucial for the success of these projects, though, as they have an immense influence on the villagers’ thoughts and actions.

I was told by David Amasilo (April 2004) that the people are now thinking about wildlife as “part of us”. It is almost as if the wildlife is becoming their partners in solving their problems. Those villagers who were taken to the cultural conservancies of neighbouring tribes have seen the business, education fees and medicine that wildlife and tourism have brought to these people. Therefore they advocate the process, as it seems to be benefiting all of the community, as well as the environment.

5.2.2.2 Participation for survival

Another reason why conservation is becoming so alluring and seen as “The Solution” is because of the rapid changing of the world. And more specifically the rapid changing of the local people’s world, which is something they are deeply aware of. The changes of the last few decades left the people unprepared and unable to cope with their situation.

In earlier times, things looked different. The life of the Pokot would in short look like this: A man would marry, and pay dowry for his wife with his father’s cattle. They would have children, as many as possible, and these would be a very small expense. The children would drink milk from their mother and later eat a little maize porridge, like the rest of the family. They would not need clothes, and when they became older, they would wear pieces of cowhide – of cows which had to be slaughtered in any case for meat or a celebration ceremony. Thus children were only an asset. They worked the vegetable fields (*shambas*) and fetched wood and water. The small ones, from four years up, would look after the goats where they grazed during the day, and the older ones would look after the cattle. When children were at an age of about fifteen, when they started appreciating jewellery or weapons (which are expensive to trade) they were old enough to get married. With marriage came their own livestock and

income and they could then solve this need themselves. Thus the more children you had, the richer you felt, the more status you had and the more hands to help out with daily tasks.

But then a wave of change washed over Africa, like change has washed over the rest of the world as well. The white man brought with him things the Africans did not need, and created needs they did not have. And thus their whole way of life had to change in order to provide for these needs. In my opinion, no one should be blamed for any of this. The world changed. Europeans conquered the New World. Technology erupted. The scramble for Africa emerged. Things got more integrated. It is the way the world came to be and we all have to move forward. And in this regard conservation is often seen as a solution, paradoxical as it may seem.

The problem is that most of the parents in the villages are desperate to send their children to school in order to get an education. Education is a word I later felt was used as a sort of mantra. It popped up so often and it was adored with so much hope, I sometimes wondered if the people saw the attending of school as a magic wand. But somehow to them it was. They saw that those who went to college or university were the ones wearing tailored clothes and drove around in motor cars (both of which they didn't previously need, but which are becoming more and more part of their world and needs). The people are thus desperate to send their children to school and college as a way of developing and prospering.²

There is a double advantage for parents to send their children to school and college. Because of the nature of their culture, those who are in a benefited position, looks after all of those at home. Here the concept of an interrelatedness surfaces again: if one benefits, every one else is influenced and benefits as well. It is thus also a way for parents to provide for their own households when they are ploughing the little money they have into their children. They do this almost religiously. Instead of

² This is not something that an environmental ethic that is in search of a sustainable coexistence with nature will or can encourage. The aim in modern days should be to lessen motor cars and their damaging gases and not hold them up as things to strive for. In earlier times the Pokot's way of dressing and travelling was far more beneficial for the health of the planet. Motor cars are simply symbolic of success, though, and can easily be replaced by other things more worthy at a later stage. Hopefully the technology that the west is so much believing in, will also be used to find ways to travel long distances in short periods of time, which will not wreak havoc on the planet.

having 10 or 15 children who can ensure and provide for their future, they may now only have 2 or 3 children and use their resources to provide for the children's education. If education is a means for their children to become successful and earn money, it is also a way for parents to provide for their own future. But these benefits are also passed on to a large group of relatives and shared among all of them.

Patrick Koas told me how his father, Peter Maklap, would often not have food in the home, but still give his money for his children to stay in school. So the one thing that the parents at this stage need is cash. They are able to survive as they have done for millennia (as long as the rains come), but they do not have the excesses to sell in exchange for money. And thus conservation is alluring. Tourists visiting the conservancies in the area provide a market for their goods. Animals are no longer just the source of their frustration and losses, but the flourishing of these wild animals and plants are starting to become to them their beacons of hope. The slow transition is being made from wild animals = threat = loss of livestock, to wild animals = tourists = income. And these concepts make sense to the local people: if one part of nature is benefited, the positive influences should spread to all other aspects of life, the environment, and human beings as well. It should not be one sided.

This is in accordance with the Deep Ecology principles discussed in 4.1.3. If actions should benefit both humans and nature, it should surely also benefit the indigenous human beings of Africa too.

The best example of the progress that have already been made in this transition in views, are that of the wild dogs of Laikipia. The local people have been made aware of the exceptional value of these animals, and even though the wild dogs have killed over 100 goats in the 2 to 3 months before April 2004, the dogs have been left unharmed. This is a great achievement and shows the local people's dedication to and hope in their own proposed conservancy.

The commitment of the people was also very much encouraged by success stories in other areas in the region, which they have seen for themselves. The most prominent of these conservancies is Il Ng'wesi.

5.2.3 A blueprint for cultural conservation from Il Ng'wesi

In 2003 the EcoForum magazine reported on the success of the ecotourism project at Il Ng'wesi. This project consists of a cultural conservancy where the local people are involved in the sustaining of a conservation area and an ecolodge. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development, this project was one of 5 winners of the Equator Initiative Awards (Kontai, 2003:26). The reasons why Il Ng'wesi was considered so successful can be summed up in the following points (all of which serves as an example for projects like the one at Kaptuya village):

- CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURE/BIODIVERSITY

6500 acres of communal land was set aside for this project in which grazing was controlled. Because of this the fauna and flora showed a remarkable regeneration, which led to the return of wildlife to the area. This then attracted visitors to the lodge and thus income for the community was generated.

- PARTNERSHIPS

The partners consisted of the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Borana Ranch and the Il Ng'wesi community. Widespread community support led to the initial funding to build the eco-lodge. This lodge is now providing employment to many people and the income from the lodge supports 500 households. It thus provides direct benefits.

- CHANGES

Many positive changes took place because of the conservancy. The security in the area was improved through the community's own security team, which eliminated poaching and cattle rustling. The community also received a water supply, improved education opportunities, healthcare as well as more secure wildlife.

- INNOVATION AND TRANSFERABILITY

The eco-lodge is seen as a very innovative and sustainable way of achieving high standards of tourism hospitality. This concept is transferred by organising visits from other communities, in order for them to learn from and replicate this.

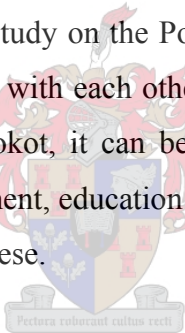
- **LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

The first step was that the elders of the communities learnt to understand conservation. As they became more knowledgeable about it they started to communicate and explain the concept to the community members until later on the community was in full support of the conservancy. This led to an all round involvement and establishment of a board of directors from the community.

- **GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**

The communities at Il Ng'wesi are Maasai and in this culture (as in the Pokot) women are traditionally less important in society. The Il Ng'wesi project thus encourages girl children to attend school and receive an education (Kontai, 2003: 26).

All of these important factors in the success story of Il Ng'wesi are very understandable in the light of the study on the Pokot. Many of the cultural concepts of African tribes correlate strongly with each other. In the light of previous chapters on the cultural concepts of the Pokot, it can be understood why concepts such as partnership, community empowerment, education and social inclusion are such sought after components in projects like these.



5.2.4 Further recommendations

The most important matter is that the people have to benefit directly. This cannot be emphasised enough. The enhancement of the natural environment and that of the people should be one and the same thing. During a conversation with Philip Ochieng Mbeke (April 2004), the education officer at the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, he confirmed that the conservation projects that are most successful are the ones where the people are benefited directly. Parselelo Kontai agreed with this, writing that “if the people benefit, it will work” (2003:22). “These structures must be centred on community participation, not the ... top-down affair you’re seeing now”, says David Nkedianye, quoted by Kontai (2003:22).

A problem that often arises is that the money received for cultural performances like dances are not evenly spread among the dancers. This leads to a lot of conflict and

unnecessary problems. An alternative that Philip Ochieng recommended was that *gifts* are given to the performers, instead of money. Traditional dancers from the neighbouring Kaptuya village are often asked to dance for visitors at the lodges of the Laikipia Nature Conservancy. They are then rewarded with gifts like hurricane lamps, blankets, cooking pots etc., instead of money.

Another option is to put the money gained into a bursary fund for secondary education and college. This can then be awarded to top scholars in the primary school. Philip Ochieng told me that the sense of community is so strong in the villages, that even if it is not your own child who is awarded the bursary, the fact that *someone* in the village was benefited will be enough compensation. This was confirmed by my Pokot translator Patrick Koas, who is also a resident of Kaptuya village. Their sense of social embeddedness discussed earlier should make this easy to understand. The possibility of a bursary will also serve to encourage youngsters to work harder, and will thus better the society at large.

5.2.5 Rationale for establishing the Lolkos Cultural Conservancy

At Kaptuya village (where the Lolkos Cultural Conservancy is proposed) the main attraction the community can offer tourists, is their culture. And from my six week stay close to them, I have experienced for myself the richness contained in this culture. A draft proposal has been drawn up for the “Lolkos Cultural and Nature Conservancy” next to Kaptuya village. It was spearheaded by the Laikipia Wildlife Forum and concerns the Kaptuya village and surrounding area. The stakeholders in this project included the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, the local village and community, and the neighbouring farms/conservancies. One of these neighbouring conservancies belongs to Mrs Kuki Gallmann, who is an international bestselling author. On her own, through her books and later through the movie “I dreamed of Africa” which was based on her autobiography and life in Kenya, she has played an immense part in the tourism of Kenya. Often paralleled with previous great spirits like Karen Blixen, she has, so to speak, put Kenya on the tourist map again.

The fact that she is the direct neighbour of Kaptuya village (and thus of the proposed Lolkos Conservancy) is a major benefiting factor for the project. Her own piece of

land, now the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, is a 100 000 acre treasure of wilderness, bordering directly on the Great Rift Valley and with a view of Lake Baringo. The Lolkos Conservancy will enlarge this area of hers and include all of the big five on Mrs Gallmann's Laikipia Nature Conservancy as well as zebras, impala, ostriches, warthog, hippopotamus, waterbuck, baboons, storks, pelicans, starlings etc. This whole situation creates a tourist's dream. The fact that Mrs Gallmann already has two well-established upmarket lodges, overlooking breathtaking valleys, gorges and hanging cliffs, makes the area so much more attractive. There are three landing strips in the Laikipia Nature Conservancy and flights are arranged directly from Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. Tourism attractions at the Laikipia Nature Conservancy are thus in abundance, and these can be extended to the proposed Lolkos Conservancy of Kaptuya village.

If the proposal is accepted and the necessary financing received, the fence between the Laikipia Nature Conservancy and Lolkos Conservancy will be taken down, and thus fill Lolkos with its wildlife abundance. The conservancy will however still mainly focus on culture.

A further contributing factor is that the whole area is privately or communally owned: almost no game parks and their sometimes inhibiting rules are involved. Guests are thus allowed the privilege of watching game by night and walking or riding horses in the bush.

Laikipia is one of the few areas in the world where wildlife numbers are increasing. This is due to the commitment to dynamic conservation of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum and its members. The Laikipia ecosystem is rivalled in size only by Tsavo, and in wildlife abundance only by the Maasai Mara. But Laikipia is pure wilderness, registering only a tiny percentage of the guests who visit the more commercial areas. Yet there are daily flights from Nairobi to Nanyuki, and some lodges have their own airstrips (from a brochure on Laikipia and East Africa).

5.2.6 The situation and possibilities at Kaptuya village

At Kaptuya village visitors would find life as it was mostly lived in all of the previous centuries in Africa. Houses are neatly made from branches, mud and thatched roofs. A homestead consists of three to seven of these little houses, with a branch enclosure in the centre where livestock are kept at night. The village lies between two hills which create a soft valley, and about six homesteads are spread out on both sides of this lengthy valley. As you descend the soft slope of the village, you are greeted by the bells around goats' necks, as they graze the surrounding hills. The middle of the valley consists of the vegetable fields (*shambas*) and the red earth seems rich and fertile.

Western influences can also be seen here and there, though. A little Primary School with six classrooms was donated by Kuki Gallmann, and built with corrugated iron. There is also a Christian church built from bricks and cement. The meeting place of the village is called the "Centre", which consists of four corrugated iron shacks where a few basic supplies in small quantities are being sold. These include bubblegum, tea, soft drinks, fat, sugar, a few pieces of fruit, etc. Apart from this, the buildings are all made from mud and thatch. The women mostly dress in linens wrapped around their waists and a piece around their heads. The men mostly dress in a thicker linen/kikoi, which they wrap around their waists. The younger generation dresses in western clothes though, and somehow I did feel sad about it, convinced as I was about the necessity of change. But all of these people still own traditional, richly beaded, cultural dress and ornaments. These are taken out for special ceremonies and feasts only. Thus all of these beautiful wear are not lost but just kept in a deep closet.



Fig. 20 Inside a traditional Pokot hut.

On my visit to the Cultural Boma at Lonyek village, about twenty women dressed in these spectacular festive robes of theirs. They performed their rain dance, and I was absolutely thrilled by the stunning show this combination of stamping beat and glittering beads produced. This is something which I am sure will be very popular at Lolkos Conservancy as well.

The elders and leaders at Kaptuya village have over and over again assured me that the whole village would dress in their ceremonial dress and go about their daily tasks this way, should visitors want to come by to view traditional Pokot way of life. A special boma would also be built (as has been done at Lonyek) and the huts would be decorated with all the most traditional and colourful handicraft. Guided walks would be arranged teaching visitors about the medicinal values of plants in the area. I was even told that visitors will be allowed to view or partake in their initiation ceremonies, which occur during August and September every year. During this time there is a lot of singing and dancing and it should surely be a treat for any visitor.

Further attractions would include horse riding in the surrounding hills, guided walks down to the breathtaking Mukutan Gorge, open camping under the tremendous stars, or sleeping over in one of the spacious caves. The list can further go on to include rock climbing, river rafting down the Mukutan river, fishing and cycling. Then obviously bird watching, game watching and salon treatments at the lodge. The list is really endless and the place is brimming with potential. But there are also many negative factors which may neutralize any improvements, if it is not managed properly.

5.2.7 Negative aspects regarding the conservancy

One of the negative conceptions about the Laikipia area is that it is unsafe. Because the local tribes are often still raiding cattle among each other, the area is viewed as dangerous. The communities are aware of this perception, and this is something which can only be changed through their commitment to peace as well as through long periods of non-violence. During an interview with Julius Loremoi, the assistant chief of Kaptuya village, he said that the community wants to change their image from cattle wrestlers to conservationists. He also noted the influence the media has

and how their portrayal of the people will play a large role in the conservancy's success.

Another negative aspect is the fact that during the rainy season, many animals flood into the conservancy area because of tsetse flies. Even the areas that are not prohibited for livestock are then full of dangerous game, and this poses a problem regarding the survival of the local people's livestock. The same holds for dry periods, when grazing are scarce. The fact that the people have to give up a piece of their land makes many of them uneasy. This is due to the fact that it is sometimes suspected that the conservancy is the white settlers' attempt to take away the local people's land. This is something for which they cannot be blamed, for it did happen like that in the past. In such cases, the role that philosophical sages can play is once again very important.

The leaders of the community, who are backing conservation, are sometimes accused by the local villagers of being cheeky and wanting gain out of the situation for themselves. Once again I am of the opinion that this happens when the people feel left behind and when they do not understand the changes taking place. To change this will need patience and the continual sensitization of the people towards conservation and its benefits, as well as the possible enhancement of their lives.

If the project is not managed well, problems like littering may also destroy that which is the areas greatest asset. Problems like prostitution also have to be considered, as this may degrade the morality in the community instead of developing its material sources.

5.3 Conclusion

Chapter 5 introduced the concept of cultural conservancies as a practical middle way between African and western ways of thought with regards to conservation and development.

The role of sages in this process was discussed and it was seen that their thought carries a lot of importance in the process of finding and establishing the middle way

between African and western paradigms. It was seen that the thoughts of sages are independent from the rest of their tribe's thoughts, but also that these sages are deeply embedded in the culture and ways of their own people. Their views are thus respected and valued among their people, even though their views do not reflect their tribal traditions. In changing times, such persons have invaluable roles to play with regard to the perception that their own people have about change, as well as for negotiations and finding new solutions to the problems being faced.

One of the roles in which sages have a major role to play at this time in history, is in that of the creation of cultural conservancies. These are considered as a middle way between the African and western way of thought – a concept from which both the local people and the environment benefit.

The second part of Chapter 5 considered how such conservancies are viewed among the people, what can be learnt from other cultural conservancies and what the place-specific positive and negative aspects are for the proposed Lolkos Conservancy at Kaptuya village.



Chapter 6 Conclusion

This thesis set out with three major objectives: In the first place, to research the culture and indigenous knowledge of the Pokot tribe of Laikipia, and to help preserve this for future generations. The second objective was to find the implicit wisdom contained in the cultural concepts of Pokot folktales, rituals, customs and beliefs and to search for the deeper lying environmental ethic it stems from. This ethic was then to be compared with the radical western theory of Deep Ecology, to search for areas of overlap between these two different philosophies. The third objective was to use the insight gained from the first two objectives, in order to find solutions for conservation issues in the area. The aim was to look at solutions that will benefit both the local communities as well as the natural surroundings in Laikipia – thus a solution that will honour the principle of interconnectedness and holism among all things.

In Chapter 1 we took a look at African thought and philosophy on a broad basis, in order to create a backdrop from which to interpret the present study. This was necessary in order to confirm the relevance of seeking African wisdom in the arena of environmental ethics. It was seen that Western science created the paradigm in which *only* scientifically proven facts were regarded as valuable. Speculation had to make way for empirical facts and science is believed to be able to solve all problems in all fields. This led to African thought being ignored for centuries, because it was not in written form and therefore not considered to be “scientific”.

It was shown later in the chapter that African thought and philosophy does exist, and in many cases, it contains more wisdom than western thought, which has brought along a lot of degradation to the earth and its resources. Much of African thought is an antidote against dehumanisation. And even if it is not scientifically proven, in the eyes of Africans it is proven. Many leading organisations are starting to acknowledge the deep understanding and knowledge that local people have of their respective areas, and that these people can be labelled the first conservationists, understanding the concept of holism and that the earth is essentially interconnected with all its beings. This knowledge and understanding were then later compared to the theory of Deep Ecology.

In Chapter 2 we considered the history and origin of the Pokot people of Laikipia. The creation myths were an early indication of the presence of the sacred in most of the areas of the Pokot's lives, and set the scene for the interconnectedness between the physical and spiritual realms in their world.

When looking at the Pokot's history and origin, it was clear that intermarriages, cultural influences, raids and cattle wrestling all played a distinct role in the formation of the tribe. There exists many influences from other tribes among them and they were forced to become both an agricultural as well as a pastoral people. As a people in themselves and apart from other tribes, they also have a clearly defined internal age set structure which developed over many years.

It was seen that the contact with Christianity was not welcomed and it took a miracle to turn things around. But after this remarkable happening, Christianity and missionaries were regarded as good people who brought good things to the Pokot.

Concerning their dress it was clear how this evolved from natural materials which fitted their lifestyle to more western clothes and decorations. Extending this it was seen that the most important current challenge for the people would be to develop in rhythm with the rest of the world, but at the same time keep track of and conserve their own culture and the wisdom it contains.

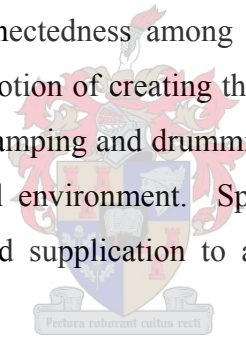
In Chapter 3 we considered the cultural concepts of the Pokot. These were considered as *expressions* of a deeper-lying environmental ethic, and necessarily had to be analyzed in order to learn of such an ethic.

A concept which lay a steady foundation for many of the other views of this African tribe is their sense of communality as, opposed to the western notion of individuality. Emphasis was placed on their sense of responsibility to the whole society and its welfare. Because of the differences with western culture, a few tricky situations was discussed which would still need a lot more sensitization in order to be constructively solved.

It was seen that respect and honour are fundamental aspects of Pokot society, and this increased with a person's age. The elders of a community are the most respected members of society and they have a lot of power and control in the villages. The small size of villages also helps the elders to maintain their control over the community.

Life in these communities are very much a life of being embedded in a social structure, in concentric circles which spans further and further away from each individual. It is thus clearly understood that you are connected to things around you, and that all your actions will have an effect on all those things. This embeddedness is then further extended into nature.

The African is thus very conscious of his relationship and connection with those around him as well as his surroundings. One of the ways in which the Pokot develop and maintain this sense of connectedness among all things, is through music and dance. Other than the western notion of creating the illusion of escaping gravity, the more African notion is that of stamping and drumming and generally creating a sense of becoming part of the natural environment. Special dances like the rain dance points to a deep spirituality and supplication to a higher being regarding natural phenomena.



Through music and dance the people also project their emotions, needs and longings, as well as foster the communality among all members in the community. Through movement and sound they thus express a common set of values, in which everybody is involved. One of the values in the Pokot tribe is that women have less value than men and that their tasks are mainly that of raising children and preparing food. They are also often and under many circumstances considered unclean, and this is derogatory to their sense of self-worth.

On the other hand women rather than men are usually the herbal doctors of a community, and this is a much respected role. Their knowledge of the value of different herbs and plants to act as remedies are vast and considered as sacred. The knowledge of the curing power of different plants is passed down in certain clans. It

is believed that God works through the herbal remedies to cure the people, and thus a spiritual dimension is ever present in this regard.

Although witchcraft is still a reality among the people, it is very much discouraged and answered with scorn. The dimension of the spiritual, be it positive or negative, points to the ontological balance between God and man, or the spiritual and the physical worlds. The two realms are in many instances considered to overlap. This dimension is further emphasised with their customs regarding burial. In line with the respect and honour a man enjoyed in his life, his burial would be treated in the same way. If unmarried and without a child, a man will not even receive a proper burial, but simply be left for scavengers. The spirit of a man treated like this is considered as angry, and should be avoided.

Another link with the natural world is found in totem animals. These serve as a symbolical link with the natural environment and create a sense of belonging, place and proportion. It is a relational link and an agreement of mutual cooperation and understanding. Another such connection with nature is via star signs, which is used mainly to interpret the changing of the seasons and the coming of rain.

Some of the ways of the Pokot on the other hand are very derogatory for conservation. Poaching to impress girls with bravery is a very common occurrence and result in many unnecessary killings. A lot of sensitization in this area has luckily already been done. The local people have a strong sense that rain is a blessing from God, and that the current drought is a result of their bad behaviour regarding the unnecessary killing of animals. The sense of interconnectedness is once again clear here, and is a very positive concept to get the messages of conservation across.

It was also seen how important the role of the local elders would be in any conservation effort, as it is fundamental for these people to feel respected and part of any process to better the community and the area.

In the second part of Chapter 3 the rituals of the Pokot were considered. We started with birth and the giving of a name and saw how these were a special connection between the person and the place where he entered into this world.

The initiation period of both boys and girls was seen to be a time of separation, in which the tasks and roles of both are clarified. After this period, the person is expected to be a responsible part of the community. With boys the ceremony of “sapana” symbolised this transition very strongly, and created a reason for celebration for the whole district. It was also shown how the ways of collecting blood from a bull is considered very sustainable.

With the discussion on “kokwa” it was shown that a very high value is placed on the communication between members of the society, and this meeting has sacred components. The boa game is another part of the people’s daily lives and leisure time. Even when relaxing, cattle are their pride and joy, much like property in the west. The rituals of “amuro” and “apsekit” showed how the little signs of respect and brotherhood among the people are considered important, and how it plays an important role in the strengthening of relationships of mutual respect.

The way God speaks showed very clearly how deeply aware and embedded the Pokot people are in their natural surroundings. The keen eye the people have for signals and messages the environment are sending them via the intestines of animals, is nothing less than amazing. This is the same as the spiritual awareness many of the people possess, and which enables them to translate messages from God. These messages were also compared with some western medical explanations.

In Chapter 4 the environmental ethic of the Pokot was compared to Deep Ecology. The reason for this was in order to compare African and western theories of environmental ethics, in order to find alternative ways of thought to solve the problems of the specific area in Laikipia. In looking at Deep Ecology it became clear that this theory evolved out of the insight that a mechanistic worldview is not sufficient to solve problems in physics. The trend thus became to move toward a more holistic, interconnected and interdependent view of life on the planet, much like that of an organism. The concept here is that the whole is greater than its parts and that every part of the web should be respected and treated as valuable. We have looked at the principles of the Deep Ecology Platform and have seen that this platform challenges many of the ways of thought contemporary western civilizations.

Moving on to the area of folktales and riddles it was found that these (among others) are used as a way to teach norms, beliefs and wisdom to younger generations. “They embody values, items of advice or warnings, orders or prohibitions which are useful to develop environmental consciousness” (Kelbessa, 2001:281). From a few of the folktales of the Pokot we extracted an environmental ethic which pointed to the Pokot’s belief that prospering is very much connected with the harmonious coexistence with wild animals. It was seen that “earlier times” are often longed for as “times of plenty” and are also linked with living with animals as comrades. This can be very well used as encouragement to heal broken relationships between man and nature, and thus encourage nature conservation.

By examining the Pokot’s riddles we found that they often see the patterns of nature mirrored in humankind, as well as the other way round. They thus see a pattern of interrelatedness that finds expression in different mediums. It is an environmental ethic that sees the connection and similarity in all things.

The chapter then moved further to investigate the environmental ethic contained in the cultural concepts and rituals of the Pokot. It was seen that the cultural concept of the sense of a person is reflected very clearly in the principles of Deep Ecology. Once again it was emphasised how every person’s influence expands in ever widening circles into all of society and the environment.

In accordance with Deep Ecology, music and dance serves as an influential ritual for man to reunite and become part of the greater whole of the cosmos. From the discussion it was concluded that ritual music and dance can also play an effective role for westerners seeking to reconnect to their environment and renew a sense of place and proportion in the cosmos. This is a concept that can receive a lot of further attention, and may be an effective way to practically convey the ethic of Deep Ecology.

The importance of plants in the culture of the Pokot has a lot to do with its healing properties. It is considered as almost sacred, because God works through the plants to heal them of illnesses. Their ethic is thus not purely human-centred in this case,

because even though the plants are benefiting them, it is also used by God and therefore a sacred tool of a sacred God.

It was seen how the traditional planting of crops and the traditional diet are much more sustainable than western modes of living. Because the Pokot are surrounded daily with the work of their hands and the production of the land, they are very aware of every action of theirs on the environment. Their ethic is thus benefiting themselves in most cases, but is also an ethic which was formed because of the sense of interrelatedness with the environment. They can see how the environment physically improve or degrade their immediate lives. The people in western civilisations are mostly cut off from the modes of production and therefore do not have any way of seeing the direct results of their derogatory actions.

Regarding totem animals it became clear that the Pokot embraced an environmental ethic in which a sense of interconnection between man and the natural environment is embraced as well as fostered through traditional rituals and concepts. The totem animal of a certain clan serves as a link between the physical and spiritual, and thus also as a connection. The totems thus not only have intrinsic value as Deep Ecology preaches that all living things have, but it has an enriched value in the sense of symbolic superiority, at least for the people of its own clan.

The same holds forth for an ethic derived from concepts such as sacred places. It is as if these places do not merely have the general value ascribed to all living things, but that the divide between the physical and the spiritual are much thinner there. This concept plays an important role to ease the transition of respect to all of the rest of nature, and not only that which is considered sacred.

Then in the last part of Chapter 4 the environmental ethic found in Pokot rituals were discussed. It was seen how the Pokot organise their lives around the natural ebb and flow of the seasons and their environment, in cases such as the initiation period of their girls. With ceremonies like “sapana” they conveyed a sense of sustainability, taking only what is needed. With the ceremony of “kokwa” we have seen that a normal place may receive sacred attributes because of its importance to social welfare. It was also concluded that the Pokot deem it important to connect spirituality

with their daily lives, and thus also their daily surroundings and environment. Any place can be spiritual and not only a church (as in the more western notion). This daily involvement of God and the spiritual realm in their lives enables a deep sense of interconnectedness with the environment. This is an ethic that is lacking in most of the western culture.

By examining the magnified spiritual awareness and ability of the tribe, it became clear that their environmental ethic is very much based on this connection with the spiritual. In the case of the reading of entrails, the environment serves as connection with the spiritual realm, which they believe to be sending them messages about coming disasters or peace. Their ethic in this regard also points to the value they place on their environment to help with their problems and survival, and the keen eye they have for its messages.

Another aspect in their relation and ethic towards nature, is the ability and effort they put in to immerse themselves body and soul into nature. Through the ritual of “calling the fire” it was seen how there is an attempt to connect to the soul of the world, in order to make a more effective attempt at being successful in the physical aspects of the world. The sense of holism is thus very strong here, as well as the belief that all things influence all others are fundamental once again.

Chapter 5 introduced sage philosophy. It was clearly seen what a fundamental role these sages have to play in finding the middle ground for Africa’s problems in a westernising world. A sage has critical and independent ideas, which aim to improve and uplift his society, even if some of his views are not in accord with it. What makes these sages so important and valuable, is that they are able to influence a society for the better. They were brought up and know all the customs and beliefs of their people intimately, but are able to rationally and critically oppose these. It was also seen how crucial it is to pay attention to these valuable sources of wisdom before they disappear.

One of the areas where sages are able to play a positive role is with regards to conservation and the influence they have on showing their people the benefits this can bring. It was seen how conservation is seen as “The Solution”, because their

traditional ways are not able to provide in their needs anymore. The advantages and income that conservation brings to the locals are mostly in the way of cash and this enables them to send their children to school. Conservation also brings respect to those leaders involved therein, as it is viewed as contributing to the whole of society.

It was seen that there are many contributing factors which would help make the proposed Lolkos Conservancy at Kaptuya village a success. Among these are the beautiful area on the Great Rift Valley it is situated in, the abundance of game from neighbouring conservancies and the colourful local village people and culture. The situation at Il Ng'wesi was used as a blueprint for a successful cultural conservancy, and much can be learnt from them. There does exist a few negative aspects to such a new cultural conservancy, but with enough sensitivity it should easily be overcome. The most important aspect in projects like these is that the local people have to benefit directly. The people have to receive tangible benefits, either in the way of goods, or cash, as long as it improves their lives in the long and the short term.

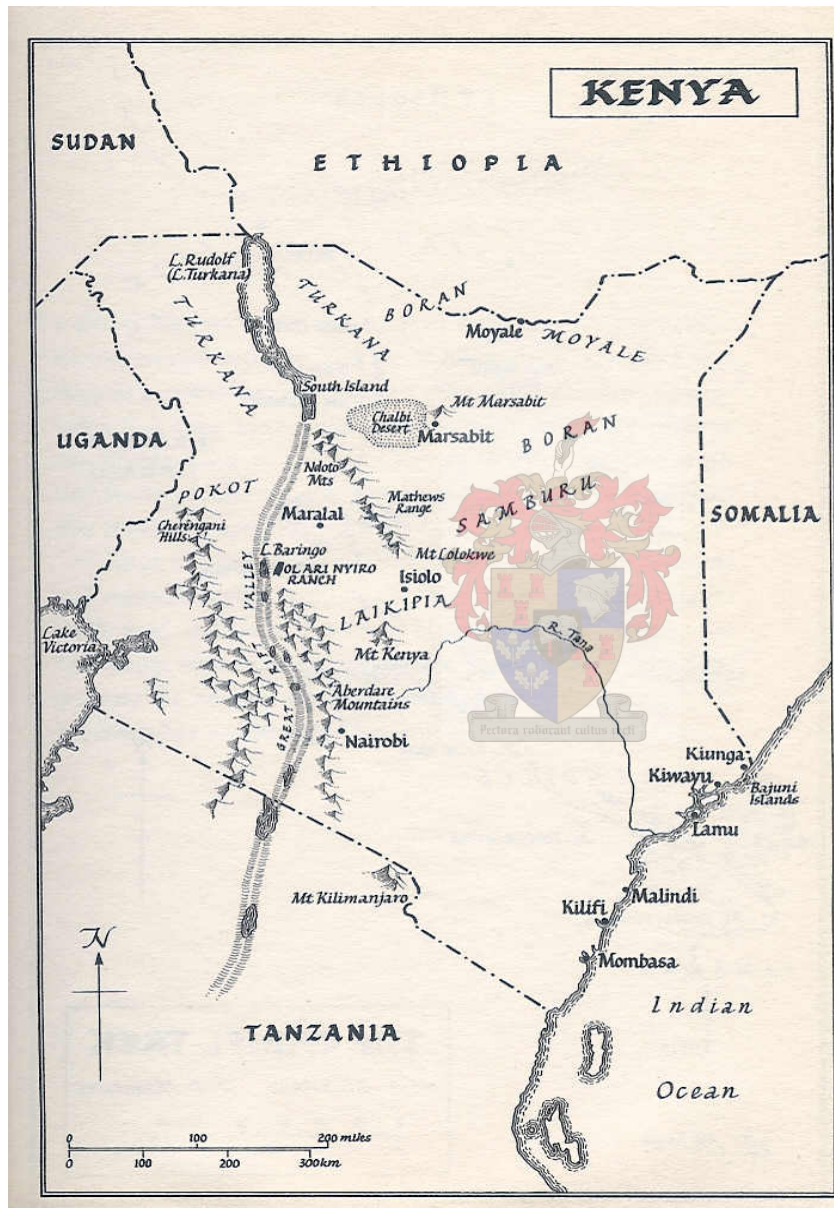
As a general conclusion my view is that the Pokot are a people very close to nature and their natural environment. They know it intimately and experience all of their surroundings as interrelated to their own lives. The spiritual dimension is connected to their physical realm, and God and the spirits are very much a part of their daily lives. Although most of their knowledge is not scientifically proven, it is time tested and mostly in accord with natural laws. Their customs and rituals are created around an environmental ethic that values a sense of interconnection among the whole society, and this extends into a connection with their entire natural environment. Many of the aspects of their culture thus correlates with the environmental ethics theory of Deep Ecology, which may provide for the creation of a beautiful middle way between African and western thought. The combination of these two theories should also play a beneficial role for solutions that are needed especially on the African continent. Their sense of the sharing of the benefit when one part of nature prospers must surely be the most important consequence for environmental ethics. It is thus crucial for conservationists to incorporate the prospering of the local people into their projects for the prospering of the environment, as these two are mutually interdependent.

Annexures

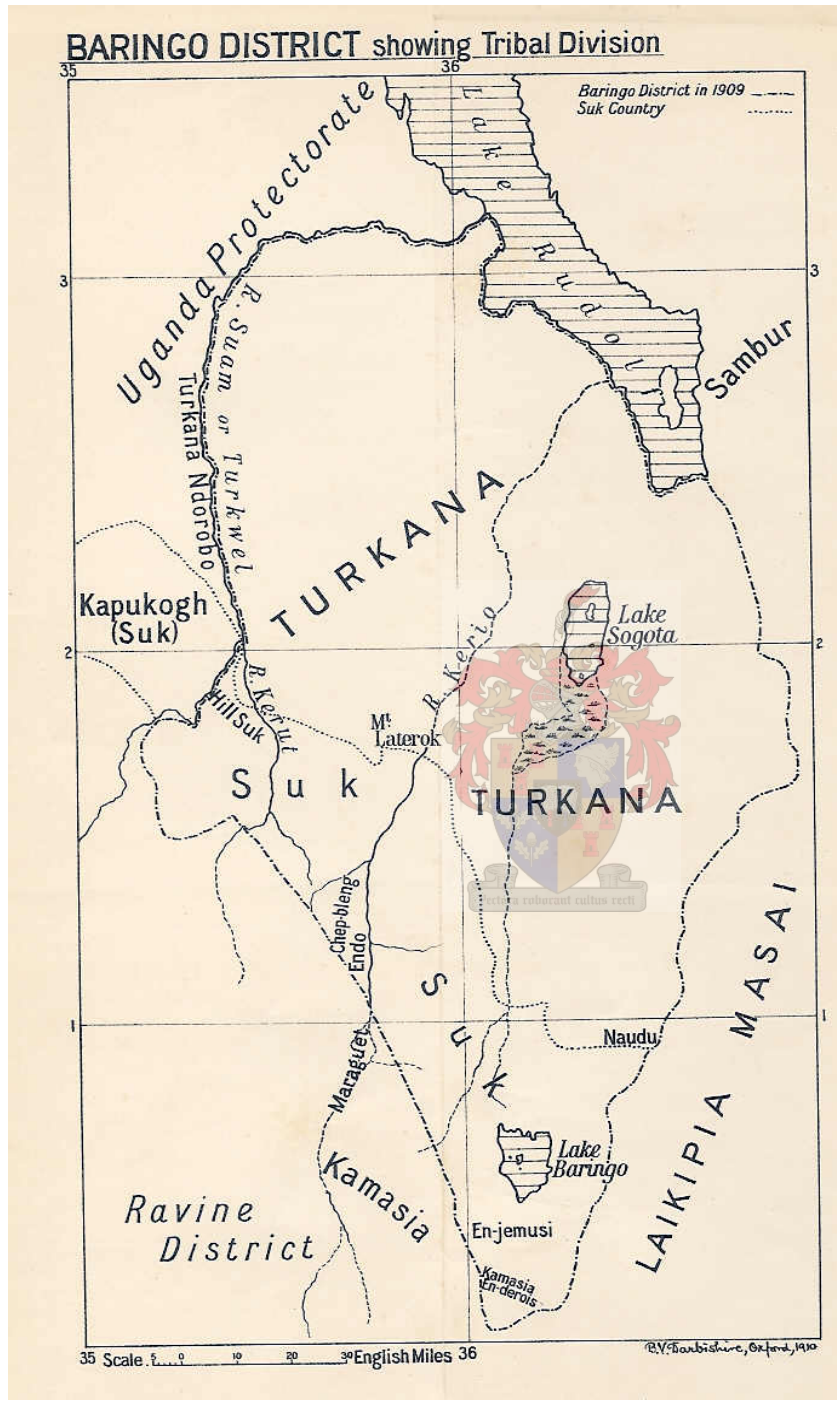
Annexure A Map of Kenya

(Gallmann, 1999)

Ol Ari Nyiro Ranch (South of Maralal) is today known as the Laikipia Nature Conservancy.



Annexure B
Map of Pokot (Suk) and other tribal areas in Baringo district
 (Beech, 1911:152)



Annexure C

Pokot uses of plant materials

During my six week stay among the Pokot of Laikipia, I have found many interesting concepts and ways of thought, and much to enrich and transform our Western mindsets. One of the aspects that stood out as an area of use is the Pokot's knowledge and use of plants.

1. Medicinal plants

The first and probably most important use of plants among the Pokot, is how it is used as herbal remedies. These remedies have guided them through many centuries, and may contain a lot of knowledge for use in the West. A study has been done on the ethnobotany of the Pokot of the Ol Ari Nyiro ranch (currently known as the Laikipia Nature Conservancy). Most of the information regarding the medicinal value, preparation and dosages of the plants was gathered from Mama Ringeta, which I have personally interviewed (Selale, 2004).

Among these finding there are 11 possible cures for malaria, among which 3 were recommend for chemical analysis. These are *cucumis aculeatus*, *turraea mombassana* and *pittosporum vivdiflorum*. If the chemical analysis of these plants can lead to some qualities tied to the scientific healing of malaria, it can thus possibly be combined with western chemical knowledge to produce more effective cures for this devastating illness.

Other plants of preference for chemical analysis are *toddalia asiatica* and *heteromapha trifoliata* (for fever); *scutia myrtina* and *gardenia terniflia* (for measles); and *aspilia mossabicencis* (to facilitate wound healing).

2. Plants as building material

The Pokot's intimate knowledge of the plants of their region enables them to use many of the special characteristics of these plants for their own benefit. Much of this knowledge would also be valuable to our western world, especially with regard to the building of EcoHomes or other similar projects aiming at using natural building material.

For the construction of the rounded walls of their huts, they use branches which are fastened to each other and covered over with mud. The trees which branches are used for this include (and I give some of the Pokot names): Tebelekwo, Kerelwa, Putoro, Komolwo and Yemit. I was told that the greatest benefit of these branches is that they do not get attacked by “weafle” insects (Kitilit, 2004).

Many of them are also used for their insect repellent agencies. The leaves of the croton didogamus is a good example. Philip Ondiyo, Education Officer of the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, told me that the Maasai started using its leaves in their houses after they realized that a lion often pulled the carcass of its prey into one of these bushes. Because the lion is usually stained with blood after indulging in its carcass, flies are a big irritation to him afterward. But the Maasai realized that when he had been eating inside one of these bushes and its scent covered him, he was not bothered by flies at all. They further realized that insects are repelled by this shrub when they saw how buffaloes would rub their noses into this bush in order to sneeze out maggots (Ondiyo, 2004). The branches of both of these trees are thus mostly used for their insect repellent agencies.

The “ropes” used to tie the branches together and strengthen the construction, are also natural. The ropes are made from the bark of a young nyalti (*phyllanthus sepialis*) tree. This material is very stringy and almost impossible to tear, or even bite through (Koas, 2004).

The foundation of the house does not receive any special attention - all rocks are simply removed to make it flat. The strengthening structure simply consists of a few bigger and stronger poles that are vertically planted in a circle and covered again with soil and rocks. The thinner branches are then tied onto and braided around these (Selale, 2004).

The plastering of the walls is done with a mixture of soil and cow dung. The ratios for this are as follows:

60% consists of the soil of an anthill (which is very firm because there is no humus or pieces of root and leaves contained in it);

20% consists of cow dung to make it sticky;
15% consists of water to make it into a paste
and the last 5% consists of ash in order to make the walls unwelcoming to termites (Deba, 2004).

The negative effect that the use of anthills for building materials can have on the existence of these colonies of ants, is something which has to be considered for further investigation. Questions that has to be asked is whether this practice puts ants under threat – at face value? The elders can also be questioned about this – did the number of anthills shrink significantly over the years?

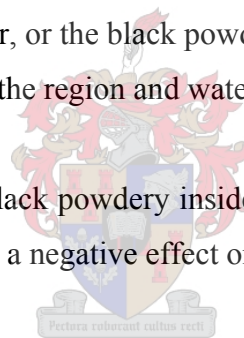
The different colours of paint for the patterns on the walls are made using the following ingredients:

White: ash and water.

Black: ground charcoal and water, or the black powdery insides of batteries.

Red: ground red stones found in the region and water (Deba, 2004).

The chemical substance of the black powdery insides of batteries should of course be examined to see whether this has a negative effect on the environment.



3. Plants as household utensils

The most common use of plants as household utensils, are gourds that are dried out to make calabashes.

The gourds are plucked from a tree, and then placed outside in the sun to dry. When dry, the top part is cut off about 5cm from the tip and a stick is used to remove the seed and substance. The bark of a tree is then used to grind the inside of the gourd even smoother. It then comes to resemble a calabash. The calabash is then filled with pieces of bark of the *mystroxylon acthiopicum* mixed with water, and left standing like that for a day. After that the calabash is stuffed with ground charcoal from the *acacia brevispica* mixed with water. It has to be left like this for two weeks, while being shaken every day. This procedure is said to take out the bitterness, as the bitter taste is absorbed by the charcoal. This charcoal layer on the inside also serves as a

protective layer, said to keep milk from turning sour for a whole week. Every time the calabash is used for new milk, the procedure has to be repeated to create a new layer of charcoal (Selale, 2004).

The “cap” of the gourd is made to seal effectively using a very thin strip of the root of the *asparagus africanus* plant. This thin strip of the root is used as thread and is painstakingly sewed into little holes made around the rim of the upper part of the calabash. This is also done around the rim of the “cap”. The thickened rim is covered with a layer of fat and serves as a good seal. The calabash is now rather air tight and thus keeps the contents fresher for longer (Selale, 2004).

The men, women and the children in the household all have their own calabashes, which differ in size and shape.

4. Plants for personal hygiene

The stem of the *phyllanthus sepialis* is used as a toothbrush and –paste in one. A 10cm piece of the stem is cut and one end is “loosened” to make it hairy and enable it to clean between the teeth. It is dipped in water and sometimes also in ash. This water and ash mixture serves as a further cleaning agent, somehow creating better toothpaste than just water (Lemoe, 2004).

5. Plants as jewellery and weapons

The most widely used plant with regard to making jewellery, is the young branches of the *asparagus africanus*. These branches grow very long and straight, with a diameter of about 0,5cm. The young branch is stripped of its soft bark (which has other uses) and chopped up diagonally to produce 1cm long beads. A little hole is made through each bead and these are meticulously beaded together in long strings with a needle and special kind of grass as thread. These strings are then fastened together to produce a type of hard, rounded necklace worn resting on the shoulders. It is covered and smeared with ochre and mud to make it appear more attractive (Lemoe, 2004).

Interesting to note is that these “lapels” which are made from *asparagus africanus* are only worn and made by young unmarried girls. Married women get money from their husbands with which to buy colourful china beads, and these they transform into brilliantly *coloured* “lapel” necklaces.

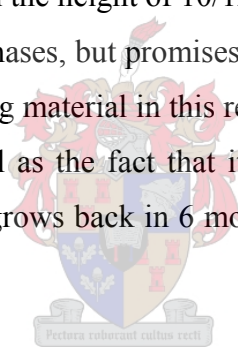
To make arrows, the men use the stem of the *psidia punctulata* and the *olea europea*. These are very flexible but strong as well (Lemoe, 2004).

6. Plants used in brick making

Because of the Pokot’s knowledge of the insect repellent qualities of the Leleshwa shrub, this knowledge has now been put into valuable use for contemporary times.

“Used since time immemorial by the tribe of Maasai in Kenya as a natural deodorant, leleshwa is a shrub that can reach the height of 10/12 feet” (Africa Botanica, 2004).

The project is still in its initial phases, but promises to fill an ever growing market for more natural and cheaper building material in this region. Its insect repellent qualities are a great selling point, as well as the fact that it is so resistant to weafle attacks. Once cut down, this shrub also grows back in 6 months, making it a very sustainable resource.



7. Plants used for oil

Another use of the Leleshwa plant that is effectively tapped these days is the wonderful effect its oil has on skin. This does not only include human skin, but the rhinos in the conservancy were found to have “great skin” as well. Although it does not form part of their diet, it walks around scrumming through the bush daily and the plant’s oil inevitably rubs off on their big bodies.

Its value for human skin is also notable. Mrs Gallmann, president of the Gallmann Memorial Foundation on the Laikipia Nature Conservancy, once used the oil of this plant when her daughter had a severe but unidentified skin ailment. By doctor’s orders her daughter was told to stay indoors in a dark room for at least 3 weeks, in order for the strange disease to pass. But upon Mrs Gallmann’s applying the oil to her daughter’s face, she was cured within a matter of days (Ondieng, 2004).

8. Plants used as firewood

Some of the preferred wood with which the Pokot make fire, include *olea europea*, *apiculatum molle*, and *tarchonanthus camphorates* (leleshwa), which are all considered to be hardwood and good as charcoal (Lemoe, 2004).

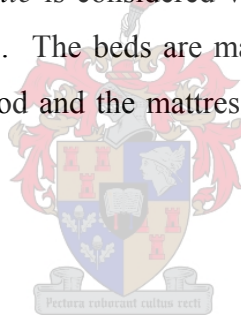
9. Plants with edible fruit

The fruit of the veldt mostly adds diversity to the Pokot's menu. It is more seen as a treat on the side, than as a staple, for it is a not very filling and only found in small quantities.

The edible fruit include those of *mystroxylon aethiopicum* (Lemoe, 2004).

10. Plants used as wood for furniture

The wood of the *apiculatum molle* is considered very strong and durable, and often used to make beds or little seats. The beds are made about 20cm from the ground, with the rim made from this wood and the mattress/flat part covered with reeds tied together (Lemoe, 2004).



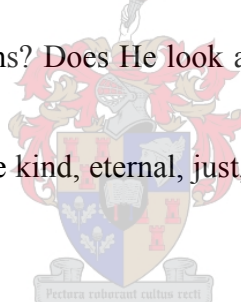
Annexure D
Interview guidelines 1 (as compiled in February 2003)

Research on the POKOT tribe of Kenya
March/April 2004

Guidelines for interviews

1. God

- 1.1 Who is God? How did He come to be God?
- 1.2 Where does He live? Is there a place like heaven? Who else except God is living where He is living?
- 1.3 Does God live on the Earth? Or if not, does He sometimes visit the earth?
- 1.4 Do you have different names for God? [Sky: Tororot; Rain: Ilat]
- 1.5 Does God care about humans? Does He look after them or does He only punish them?
- 1.6 What is God's nature? Is He kind, eternal, just, forgiving, loving, or is He angry, harsh and unforgiving?
- 1.7 When is God happy?
- 1.8 Should God be worshipped? Why? How does He expect this must be done?
- 1.9 What role does the ancestor spirits play in the worship of God?
- 1.10 Is God the same as the ancestor spirits?
- 1.11 Can you personally go to God with your prayers? If not, then who is worthy of doing this? Why?
- 1.12 Under which circumstances may God be personally approached?
- 1.13 Where can God be found?
- 1.14 How did the earth begin? How did it happen that humans are living on the earth?



2. Ancestor spirits

2.1 Do you believe that the spirits of your ancestors are still living among you in the tribe? If so, why do they come back to earth?

2.2 Can they have an influence on what happens to you in your life? Can they influence good or bad fortune?

2.3 Why is it necessary to pay respect to ancestor spirits? What will happen if you don't?

2.4 In what ways can the ancestor spirits be pleased or how does one pay respect to them?

2.5 Are you expected to pay respect to all of the ancestors of the tribe, or only those of your own family? How far does your own family extend?

2.6 What is the relationship between the ancestor spirits and God? Can they ask Him to favour or to disfavour their families that is still on earth? Can they mediate your questions to God?

3. Life and Death

3.1 What is life? Or the life force? Where does it come from?

3.2 Where does death come from? Who makes it happen?

3.2 Why do people die? Is death punishment?

3.3 What happens to a person when he dies? Is there a place where the dead go? Will they be seen again later?

3.4 Does it matter where a human is buried?

3.5 Can a human spirit visit the living after it has died?

3.6 And an animal?

3.7 Is there an Eternal Life? A life after death?

4. Nature

4.1 Should nature be respected or can it be used as man likes?

4.2 Which animals and or plants play an important role in the life of the Pokot? Are these animals sacred? Should they be worshipped?

4.3 Where does the rain come from? Does somebody send it? Does somebody make it?

4.4 Why does the rain sometimes stay away? What can be done to make it rain?

- 4.5 What is the sun? What is the moon? What are the stars?
- 4.6 How did they all get into the sky?
- 4.7 Is the forest important to the Pokot?
- 4.8 What will happen if the whole forest burns down?
- 4.9 Where should God or the spirits be worshipped?
- 4.10 Which places are sacred places? Mountains? Valleys? Rivers? Caves? Why?
- 4.11 May any person go to these sacred places? At any time?

5. Music and Dance

- 5.1 When does the Pokot sing and dance?
- 5.2 Why does the Pokot sing and dance? Is it only for celebration or is it part of daily life?
- 5.3 What is the aim of sing and dance? Is it only for entertainment or is it meant to portray a meaning and a message?



6. General Society

- 6.1 When is a man rich?
- 6.2 When is a man happy?
- 6.3 How does a man know which wife to take?
- 6.4 Who is the most important person in society?
- 6.5 Who is the most important person in the household? And second?
- 6.6 What is the job of men? Of women? Of children?
- 6.7 Who looks after the old?
- 6.8 What are the most important stages in a person's life? Birth, adulthood, marriage, death?

7. Knowledge of Christianity

- 7.1 Who is Jesus Christ? What did/does He do? What is the Holy Spirit?

Annexure E
Interview guidelines 2 (as compiled March 2004)

Kaptuya village: First visit - To ask elders

Animals

1. Why do clans have totem animals?
2. What is the benefit of having totem animals?
3. What is the difference in status between cattle, cows, goats, chickens, and camels?
4. What is the value of wild animals?
5. Are there some animals the people may hunt, and some not?
6. Are wild animals killed mainly for meat, or are their hides, or bones, or teeth, or tails, or feathers used for any particular purpose?
7. Why do wild animals exist? What is their role in nature?
8. What should man's relation to wild animals be?
9. Where did wild animals originally come from?
10. What is the purpose of animal wastes?
11. How is overstocking prevented or controlled?
12. What are the most important uses of domestic animals, except for meat, milk and blood? Are the hooves, hides and bones used for any particular purposes?



Nature and plants

1. Agriculture: how does the irrigation system of the Pokot work?
2. What are the special methods of preserving seed for the next season?
3. What are the main uses of vegetation? Medicinal? Construction? Durability?
4. What is the symbolic value of rain, clouds, floods, droughts, lightning and thunder? Are these special messengers from God?
5. Since the Pokot elders can now see how the environment has been destroyed, what will you suggest can be done to repair/rehabilitate the damage?
6. What will the elders tell the young children? How will they be taught?

Annexure F

Interview guidelines 3 (as compiled in March/April 2004)

Visit to Churo and Amaya villages

Farming

1. Is the Pokot in this village mainly agriculturalists or pastoralists? Percentages?
2. Which one is the main source of income? Are both used only for self-sufficiency? Does some products go to a market?
3. What is the use of donkeys?
4. Are all grazing grounds tribal property?
5. Are agricultural land tribal property? Or does every family have their own piece of land?
6. What is the principle crops? Millet? Eleusine? Tobacco? Maize? Potatoes?
7. Do you know of the Torokwa and Tumet trees, which are said to be put in the vegetable patches to ward of elephants with their strong smell?
8. In the instance of famine, how do the Pokot survive? What do they revert to?
9. Are there any solutions for insect pests?

Food

1. Which of the following will Pokot eat? Why or why not? Elephant? Antelopes? Tortoises? Rats? Beasts of prey like lion? Scavengers like hyena? Vultures? Guinea fowl eggs? Fish?
2. Do the Pokot people drink any wine or beer? How is this made? Who may drink of it? Women? Children?
3. Do men and women eat separately? Why?

Couples

1. Do premarital sexual relations occur before marriage? Is this encouraged by elders?
2. Brides wealth: How much dowry is the standard payment for a wife? Cattle? Goats?
3. What is the sign of marriage? A ring? A leather band?

4. May a wife marry after her husband has died? Should the marriage be to a brother of his?
5. What is the penalty when adultery was committed?
6. Under which circumstances may a couple divorce? When a wife is barren?

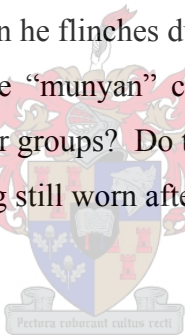
Childbearing

1. What is prohibited when a woman is pregnant? The taboos? To drink milk when there is a locust pest? To see a monkey?
2. May a woman use her hands to eat after birth?
3. How many days after birth is a child named?

Initiation

1. What does the ceremony of bathing in the river and shaving your head before circumcision entail?
2. What happens to a boy when he flinches during circumcision?
3. Do the Pokot still have the “munyan” ceremony after “sapana”, where the boys are initiated into colour groups? Do these colour groups have names?
4. Is the “siolip” head covering still worn after initiation?

Community organisation



1. Does the Pokot have a community chief? Or only a wise man (ki-ruwok-in) who is chosen as a kind of leader?
2. What is the penalty for murder?
3. What is the penalty for a serious injury?
4. What happens to a thief?

Uses of plants and honey

1. Does the Pokot have beehives?
2. How is the raw honey stored? In special containers?
3. What kind of trees and grass are used to build huts?

Death and the supernatural

1. Are only rich men buried? Women?
2. Are poor men left for scavengers?

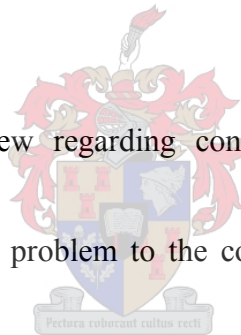
3. What is the covering for a grave? How deep is a grave?
4. Does a person have to be buried facing a certain direction?
5. Does witchcraft often occur in Pokot culture?
6. What can be done when someone is suspected to be a witch?
7. What powers does a witch have?
8. How can this be turned around?
9. Are some places, animals and plants considered as sacred? Why these?

Inheritance

1. What are the cultural rules regarding inheritance? What happens when the children are still uncircumcised when the father dies?
2. Does a wife receive any inheritance? Is she allowed to have her own belongings? If she does, how does the inheritance of these belongings work?
3. Do relatives also inherit, or does everything go to the children?

Conservation

1. What are the elders view regarding conservation? Does it benefit the community?
2. Are wild animals only a problem to the community, or is their any benefit from these animals?



Annexure G

Plants found around Kaptuya village: their values and uses

1. *Psidia punctulata*

The stem is used to make arrows.
Very flexible and does not easily break.

2. *Phyllanthus sepialis*

The stem is used to make a toothbrush and toothpaste in one.
The bark is very strong and used as rope to tie branches together.

3. *Asparagus africanus*

The stem is cut diagonally to make beads for young girls' decorations.
The root is very strong and used to make thread to strengthen gourds.

4. *Olea europea*

Used for building poles, firewood and as hardwood.
The stems are used to make bows and arrows.

5. *Mystroxilon aethiopicum*

The bark is used to extract the bitterness out of new gourds.
The fruit are edible.

6. *Podonea angustifolia*

The stems are used as building material.

7. *Lantana trifolia*

The stems are used as building material.
It has strong insect repellent qualities.



8. *Acacia brevispica*

The shrub is planted around a homestead as a “living” fence.
The charcoal of the plant is used to prepare gourds before it can store milk.

9. *Combretum apiculatum*

The wood is strong and hardy and used to make furniture like beds and chairs.
It is used to make charcoal.
There are often beehives found in these.

10. *Tarchonanthus camphoratus* (Leleshwa shrub)

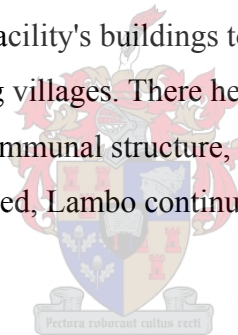
It has strong insect repellent qualities.
Often used as charcoal and firewood.
The wood is often used to make fences.

Annexure H

A practical dialogue between Africa and the west

The following online piece by Thomas Bass (2003) is a wonderful contemporary illustration of how African and western knowledge can co-exist. The “middle way” that is shown in this part is in my opinion better than either culture can propose on its own.

The rewards of recognizing and taking seriously Africa's indigenous knowledge are exemplified in the work of Thomas Adeoye Lambo, former deputy director general of the World Health Organization. Born in Abeokuta, Nigeria, in 1923 and one of 30 children fathered by a Yoruba chief with 12 wives. Lambo studied medicine at the University of Birmingham, England, and then earned advanced degrees from the University of London's Institute of Psychiatry. Lambo returned to his own country in 1950 to run the Aro Hospital for Nervous Diseases, Aro, Nigeria, Africa's first mental hospital. While waiting for that facility's buildings to be completed, Lambo decided to billet his patients in neighbouring villages. There he discovered that traditional African life with its close-knit communal structure, had therapeutic value of its own. Even after his hospital was finished, Lambo continued to place patients in the neighboring villages.



Lambo's next experiment- not supported by the British administrators who controlled his government hospital-was even more radical. Using his own money, he hired a dozen traditional healers to practice medicine alongside his regular clinical staff. After studying their techniques and filming them for 12 years, Lambo discovered that the healers, long dismissed by colonial administrators as witch doctors, were employing many of the same psychiatric techniques he had learned at the University of London. Independently of Sigmund Freud and his successors-and apparently long before them- Africa's traditional healers had invented the "talking cure," free association, group therapy, and behavioural modification. They also had an extensive pharmacopoeia of herbal remedies and psychotropic (mind-altering) drugs. "We found their techniques Lambo's observations included clinical histories such as the following:

A young man was brought to us with his hands and legs tied up after a schizophrenic episode. The healer said, "Take off his ropes, and we'll watch him." They unbound

him and the boy didn't do anything violent or aggressive. Then he was given a potion made of ground-up leaves. No Western drugs were used on the patients being treated by traditional healers. They were in charge from beginning to end. The young man slept for two days. Later, when I had these leaves analyzed, I found he had been given a strong dose of tranquilizers and psychotropic chemicals. While the patient slept the healer interviewed his parents. The boy stayed only nine days before he was completely recovered.

To Western psychiatrists, the diagnosis in this case looks simple. "The boy had a spontaneous remission." But I witnessed traditional healers handling hundreds of acute cases the same way. Their management was superb. The patients were usually discharged within a month. If I had admitted that boy into the ward, he wouldn't have been released in nine days. His illness would have been aggravated to such an extent that he would have been there six months.

Lambo devoted the rest of his career to developing a methodological syncretism," an approach that attempts to fuse Western and traditional medicines. He persuaded African healers to adopt such methods as the use of antibiotics. At the same time, he taught his hospital staff traditional methods, such as the incorporation of the family into psychotherapeutic sessions. Faster, more effective, and one-fifth the price of European-style psychotherapy, Lambo's village-based cure for mental illness already has been adopted in 60 countries around the world.

Lambo explained:

I arranged the marriage of traditional and western cultures. The Maasai were suturing blood vessels, removing appendixes, and practicing other sophisticated surgical techniques long before the British. Without a vast herbal pharmacopoeia, most of Africa's tribes would long ago have been wiped out. Rather than merely imitating the West, Africa should build on its indigenous strengths. Innovate, don't imitate, I tell people, because Westerners themselves are unhappy with what they have.

“It seems to be remarkably effective.” Lambo said. “Their psychotherapeutic sessions were vastly superior to ours. They showed us we hadn’t got it right.”



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