

Inscribing Identity and Agency on the Landscape: Of Pathways, Places, and the Transition of the Public Sphere in East Pokot, Kenya

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Abstract: Drawing upon the dynamic interrelationship between human agency and space, this article sheds light on the constitution of and relation between “place” and “path” among the pastoral Pokot of East Pokot District in the Kenyan North Rift Valley. It discusses the transformation from a more mobile pastoralist model of spatialization, which relies on a flexible network approach combining paths and places, toward a more “place-making,” postpastoralist model linked to increasing sedentarieness, privatization of land, a clearer definition of external and internal boundaries, and a rapid emergence of schools, churches, and other physical structures.

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Résumé: En s'appuyant sur la relation dynamique entre les espaces occupés par les hommes et l'activité qui s'y déroule, cet article met en lumière la constitution de la relation entre la notion de "lieu" et celle de "chemin transitoire" dans le contexte de la vie pastorale des Pokot du district Est "Pokot" dans la Vallée du Rift au nord du Kenya. Il étudie la transformation d'un modèle pastoral mobile d'utilisation de l'espace, reposant sur une approche de réseau flexible en combinant les chemins transitoires et les lieux, en un modèle "postpastoraliste" plus enclin à l'installation d'un lieu, lié à l'augmentation de la tendance sédentaire, de la privatisation des terres, à une définition plus claire des frontières internes et externes, et lié à l'émergence rapide d'écoles, d'églises et autres structures physiques permanentes.

Key Words: Pastoralism; East Africa; public sphere; cultural change; space and place

Introduction

In this article we trace changing practices of spatialization in a community that until recently emphasized a strongly pastoral nomadic lifestyle, but which in recent years has been shifting toward a more sedentary, agropastoral mode of existence. By *spatialization* we refer to the physical and conceptual location of social relations and social practices in social space (see Low 1996). We will draw connections between two distinct phenomena of spatialization: the making and the mutual constitution of places and paths in a pastoral community on the one hand, and transitions of the public sphere, on the other. We explore how these transformations affect local visions of the public sphere, that is, of spaces deemed appropriate for political discussions. While the pastoral mode of spatialization defined highly structured and ritually legitimated spaces for the discussion of community politics, the public sphere has now become more amorphous, and a fertile ground for more fluid forms of spatialization. In the pastoral system exclusionary operations controlling access to the public sphere were organized according to the categories of gender and age, while in the contemporary world ethnicity, religious affiliations, and formal education have become major factors determining access to such arenas. Based on three periods of extended fieldwork spaced over a twenty-five-year period (Bollig 1987–93, Österle 2003–05, and Greiner 2010–11), we describe the making of places, paths, and boundaries in a pastoralist context, and then show how spatialization changes in a period of sedentarization, diversification, politicization, and ethnicization of resource tenure.

There is a vast literature on "place" (e.g., Cresswell 2004; Feld & Basso 1996), which we will not touch upon in greater detail. In contrast, the concept of "path" is not widely discussed in academic discourses on spatialization. Deleuze and Guattari (1997) make it a key concept of their "nomadology" and claim that the making of paths (or *lines*, in their terminology), and the nonadherence to places, is characteristic of nomadic pastoralists; and by extension, that path-making is strongly linked to egalitarian

political systems, whereas place-making is connected to hierarchies and the state. A third concept guiding our analysis is that of the “public sphere,” another concept with a long pedigree in the humanities (see Weintraub 1997). Anthropology has not made much use of this concept, and there is ample ground to question whether it is suited to the description of rural communities in a non-Western and, to some extent, precapitalist setting. After all, the concept was developed to capture processes of political participation and political discourse in Western societies. Weintraub (1997:2) argues that distinguishing “public” from “private” is equivalent to establishing a boundary between the political and the private. For the purpose of this article, however, two approaches to the demarcation of the public–private divide are significant. In the pastoral context, the public sphere is a highly structured and well-defined arena where political decisions—often contrary to and critical of state politics—are made. In the postpastoral context, the public sphere is defined in a more fluid way. By deemphasizing exclusionary practices, the new definition allows for the penetration of state politics and national economics into the (local) public sphere.

A short note on the structure of our argument: after presenting the setting and the history of the pastoral Pokot community and providing a brief outline of the tremendous changes that have happened in the past two decades, we then describe place-making and path-making in a highly specialized pastoral context. In the second part of the article we highlight the changing definitions of places and paths, and the changing visions of the public sphere in today’s postpastoral setting. By way of conclusion we argue that traditional exclusionary practices are increasingly being reorganized along new lines (religion, education, political affiliation), and that in the process, public spaces that provide a legitimate forum for expressing dissent are disappearing.

The Framework: Pokot History, Economics, and Social Organization

East Pokot District is part of Baringo County, today the home of some estimated 133,000 Pokot, covering about 4,500 km². The topography of the area is rugged and characterized by semi-arid savanna plains and mountain ranges. Throughout the first eighty years of the twentieth century the Pokot of East Pokot were described as typical pastoral nomads, with a high degree of mobility and dependency on livestock, reliance on common pool resources, and so on (see Bollig 2006). But since the 1990s they have moved toward a more diversified economy and many have adopted a more sedentary lifestyle (Greiner 2012; Greiner et al. 2013; Österle 2008a, 2008b).

Oral accounts from elders (collected in the late 1980s) refer to events and processes constituting pastoral Pokot society that may tentatively be dated back to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. According to these accounts, the communities had diversified livelihoods incorporating a broad range of agrarian, pastoral, and hunter-gatherer strategies. From the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, mobile livestock husbandry

expanded rapidly and cattle became more and more important in communities that had previously relied mainly on small stock husbandry in combination with millet- and sorghum-based dryland farming (Bollig 2006; Bollig & Österle 2013). The emergence and expansion of specialized pastoralism, and the emergence of a bounded ethnic community well demarcated by an ethnicized code for, for example, jewelry, is chronologically and socially similar to processes of cultural evolution observed among other Nilotic pastoralists (see Lamphear 1998; Galaty 1993).

The British colonial empire established its administration in the former Baringo District in 1902. A few “big men” were instituted as chiefs and headmen of the pastoral Pokot, a group that numbered some six thousand to seven thousand individuals around 1920 (Bollig 2006). *Pax Britannica* brought four major changes for the Pokot: (1) Intertribal relations became less violent after 1920 due to the severe punishments for aggressors that were meted out by the colonial administration; (2) interregional trade increased as Somali traders began traveling the region from the early twentieth century, and beginning in the 1930s some of them became sedentary in the Pokot area; (3) “tribal areas” became gazetted and their boundaries were fixed by surveyors; and (4) administrative areas and ethnic communities became isomorphic, with the last pockets of Turkana living within the officially recognized Pokot area being resettled by colonial authorities to Turkana District in the late 1910s.

Independence brought little change for the Pokot. The Group Ranch Program of the 1970s, which brought so many changes for the Maasai (Galaty 1994) and the Samburu (Lesorogol 2005), was not implemented among the Pokot or Turkana. Major changes only came about during the 1970s and the 1980s. Despite the escalation of interethnic violence, a few markets were established, some schools were founded, and mission stations were set up. At the same time, the local population grew rapidly, numbering some forty thousand people in the late 1980s, while livestock numbers remained stable or even decreased due to losses brought about by droughts and raiding.

By the end of the 1990s the population in East Pokot had increased to about 63,000 people, and the most recent National Census provides a figure of 133,000 in 2009.¹ This extreme population growth brought about massive social-ecological transitions and was paralleled by a range of rapid and profound economic transformations. Within a period of less than two decades more than half of all households have started rain-fed cultivation, and in large parts of Pokot territory the majority of households have become sedentary (Greiner et al. 2013). Marketplaces have been established in the growing centers throughout the area, the influence of Christian churches has grown tremendously, and between 2007 and 2011 alone the number of primary schools in the district increased from thirty-four to one hundred. Gender relations are also undergoing a process of redefinition: on the male side, masculinities beyond the herder-warrior model have emerged; and on the female side, churches, women’s groups, and schools offer new

opportunities and new role models. Intercommunity violence has become a major feature of pastoral livelihoods in northern Kenya and is affecting the Pokot and their neighbors massively.² The livestock economy has become dominated by market-oriented small stock production, and cattle have lost their economic importance. This has occurred alongside profound shifts in both labor allocation and regimes of accumulation. Economic diversification rather than pastoralist specialization is a prominent feature in most households nowadays, and honey production, brewing, petty trade, and charcoal burning have become important sources of income generation (Bollig & Österle 2013; Österle 2008b). The progressive and unplanned dynamics of rangeland fragmentation by sedentarization, settlement densification and, in particular, the rapid transition to crop cultivation is exacerbated by the establishment of community-based wildlife conservancies. Processes of fragmentation have also partly contributed to the escalation, politicization, and brutalization of interethnic violence in the area, in which administrative boundaries and struggles for ethnically exclusive territories increasingly feature as bones of contention (Greiner 2012, 2013). Many of these dynamics find parallels in other pastoralist societies in East Africa.³ In the next sections we analyze how nomadic pastoralist Pokot inscribed places and paths on the landscape. We discuss the extent to which places were framed as platforms for public discourse. Observations described in this section refer to the late 1980s and early 1990s, when a pastoral specialization dominated.

Making Places in a Pastoral Community

In the pastoral context two types of places can be differentiated. The first is human settlements, which constituted places through being dwelt in. Homesteads (*keston*) and places for neighborhood councils (*kokwö*) were physically visible and conceptually marked. These places always had specific names. The homesteads were ephemeral and only rarely did a homestead stay in the same place for a number of years. Settlement sites were regarded as spoilt after a while, as accumulated dung brought increased numbers of ticks, making livestock sick and bothering the people. Places were left with little concern: there were no ancestral graves at the homesteads to be commemorated, nor were there any other sacred areas to be remembered. Nevertheless, households would often resettle in the same area in the next season, looking for a suitable space for the erection of the new homestead in the vicinity of the old one. Male members of the neighborhood frequently met at a meeting place, the *kokwö*. In contrast to the homesteads, the place of the *kokwö* was not relocated.

The second type of place is that of ritual sites (including the *kirket*), which rendered points for spatial orientation of another kind. While only minimal physical changes were made in these places and the remains of ritual practices were ephemeral, they were nevertheless important features of a mnemotope of memorable places.

Beyond the entanglement of places and paths, Pokot categorizations of various compartments of the landscape in which they dwelled and traveled showed a differentiation between centers of dwelling (*kor*) and outlying peripheries (*serim*). In the *serim* zones, places were rare as these were the zones of highly mobile livestock camps, and neither ritual sites nor settlement sites could be found there.

Kokwō—The Neighborhood Council

The neighborhood council, or *kokwō*, was made up of all the initiated men in a given neighborhood. Here the men met daily around noon and stayed together in a leisurely way until the afternoon hours. Only when cases were tried or conflicts needed to be solved did such councils meet formally. On most days, the men just gathered together, gossiping and dozing away the hottest hours of the day. Since households were mobile and flexible, the membership of neighborhood councils varied. Often such neighborhood councils were centered on one or only a few elders, and a council could be addressed as “the *kokwō* of so and so.” The term *kokwō* referred to the group of men constituting the council as well as to the place where these men met. Generally such a place was well known and was used as a reference point for orientation within a wider landscape. *Kokwō* places often had big trees or dense bushes to provide shade at noon and during early afternoon. Sometimes the men would place some branches on a bush to create more shade, and they would clear the ground of stones carefully since they spent much of the time at the *kokwō* lying or sitting on the ground. Often men referred to the *kokwō* as their “home,” and it was definitely a focal point for male sociability. Noninitiated men were generally excluded from the *kokwō* and women came only rarely in order to call upon a man, at which times they would remain at some distance and ask the person in question to “come out.” Given the sharp distinction between male and female spaces in pastoral Pokot culture, and the concomitant gendered concepts of purity and impurity, a woman “within” the *kokwō* would have endangered the purity of the place. While the *kokwō* was thus a purely male domain, women met daily at a secluded meeting place near the homestead called the *kokwō kor* to discuss issues among themselves. The *kokwō kor* was considered to be part of the homestead, however, and not a meeting place of the community.

The council was the most important decision-making body when it came to conflicts over resources or due to divorce, witchcraft accusations, and so on (see Conant 1965; Bollig 1992). In these cases the *kokwō* met more formally. It was common practice that both sides in a conflict should be heard and that each party should have the right to bring supporting voices to the fore. In this way, nonlocals were also introduced to the meetings. Every man present was required to give his opinion. Often men would stand up with a spear in their hand in order to underline their argument.

While the way in which discussions were organized was not exactly regulated, the *kokwō* clearly presented a public sphere. All initiated male members of the community had a right to be present and an obligation to speak. While elders may have been opinion leaders, every initiated male had the same right to be heard.

Kirket—The Ritual Semicircle of Men

Communal rituals involving a greater number of men demanded a specific setup. The *kirket*, a horseshoelike seating order, was an absolutely essential part of all communal rituals. Within the *kirket*, men dressed in full ornament and wearing the feathers and beads of their respective age groups were seated according to their age-set and generation-set affiliation. The more senior an age group, the closer its members sat to the apex of the horseshoe. This hierarchical seating order, a formal and symbolic representation of cultural spatiality (Dickhardt & Hauser-Schäublin 2003), was further structured according to alternating generations, of which there were two: the *Ngimur* and the *Ngetei*. Sons always belonged to a different alternation from their fathers. *Ngimur* and *Ngetei* always occupied opposite sides of the semicircle.

Men seated within the *kirket* usually acted as members of corporate groups. They talked proudly when referring to “we, the Koronkoro” or “they, the Kaplelach” and in the same vein would openly criticize “the Koronkoro who have spoilt the land” or the “Kapelelach who are disobedient.” Critique and consent were dramatically staged (Bollig 2000) and the *kirket* was presented as the embodiment of an essential part of Pokot social structure: gerontocracy made visible in an ordered pattern of seating (Ingold 2000). Songs and dances presented within the *kirket* emphasized unity, cooperation, and solidarity, but criticism was also ferociously expressed there, and it was amazing how freely young men could criticize elders in the *kirket*, given the near impossibility of expressing concern or irritation with the activities of seniors in everyday life. While respect (*tekotōn*) was praised as a hallmark of Pokotness, and readily demanded by the elders, such conventions did not apply to speakers within the *kirket*. The *kirket* thereby created a public sphere that was not so much an institution for reaching decisions on community matters as a forum for the discussion of major political issues.

When preparing for the ritual, Pokot men would carefully search for a suitable place for the *kirket* in the vicinity of the homestead hosting the ritual. Preferably, some shady trees were integrated into the setup. A shelter was built using branches in order to provide shade for all those seated in the *kirket*, especially for the elders. Directly in front of the shelter a row of stones was lined up; these stones were used as trays for the meat dished out to those seated. The places of such rituals were commemorated in various ways. In the case of an initiation ceremony, the individual undergoing the initiation would often refer to the place of his initiation in praise songs or in personal narratives. A wider community of men would vividly remember—at least for some time—who attacked whom (verbally) within

the kirket, and it was a matter of cheerful reminiscence to recall particularly telling verbal attacks. Finally, the remains of the celebration—the shelters and stones, as well as the cracked bones of the animals eaten—remained as visible markers in the landscape for some time afterward.

In contrast to the meetings of the neighborhood council, no real discussions took place in the kirket. It was a place to express critical opinions on political issues of general interest in a provocative manner. What was at stake was often the political constitution of the community: were egalitarian standards kept, did chiefs exert too much influence; were the raids of juniors endangering the community at large? Verbal attacks and heavy criticism were the order of the day, and not the attempt to find consensus. Many statements comprised fundamental critiques of state institutions. In contrast to the kokwō, which dealt with the day-to-day management of resources and social affairs, the kirket was concerned with big social and political issues.

Although women did not engage in the ferocious talks and verbal attacks of the kirket, the places where they were situated were not so far removed that they could not listen to what was said. Occasionally ululations by women would underline the statements uttered within the kirket, thereby stressing an overall agreement on the part of the women with positions stated, and an admiration for the manliness of specific speakers. While the meat consumed in the kirket was handled entirely by men, elderly women brought milk there during the *sapana* initiation ritual. This milk was mixed with the blood of the sacrificial animal and then drunk by the juniors and the newly initiated young men. During rituals the female sphere was well defined, and female participation in most rituals was of crucial importance. They cooked and boiled food and cooperated intensely to feed large assemblies, often of many hundreds of people.

Ritual Sites

While initiation rituals created an arena for expressing dissent and opposition publicly, there were other rituals that presented platforms for creating and cementing consensus. Such rituals were, on the one hand, more exclusionary than initiation rituals, as only senior men engaged in the discussions. On the other hand, men from a much wider area than those involved in the kokwō meetings, for example, were included in this public sphere in which concerns of the wider community were discussed.

While initiation rituals (*sapana*) were conducted near homesteads, places for generation-set and other communal rituals were often situated in remote and well-hidden places. However, such rituals were never conducted in areas deemed to be at the periphery, at the *serim*. We will illustrate this with the example of a rain-making ritual in which Bollig participated in September 1993.

According to Pokot explanations of disasters, drought is a consequence of social disorder (Bollig 2006). Consequently, rain-making rituals aim first

at the identification of social conflicts and then at the re-creation of peaceful internal relations.

The rainy season of 1993 had not been good, and by September it was feared that the dry conditions could turn into a drought. At that stage elders decided to conduct a ritual to ensure early rains. For the ceremony, a specific place, Nakurkur, was chosen, a small (only about 100 m in diameter) green spot in a landscape of solidified black lava at the foot of the extinguished volcano Mt. Paka. The sharp dark silhouettes of the rock stand out in magnificent contrast to the green grass and the high trees of Nakurkur itself. Nakurkur renders itself perfectly as a place of power, as discussed by Elisabeth Colson (1997), a place with natural grandeur loaded with the history of people coming there to seek contact with the supernatural. During their speeches the elders stressed that the ground and the rocks of Nakurkur had often been soaked with the blood of sacrificial oxen, hinting at the fact that generations of elders had prayed for rains in the very same place. The ritual of purification and the prayers for rain were conducted by a small group of men. Symbolically, social order and purity were restored (Bollig 2006).

In contrast to the kirket of the initiation ceremonies, arguments here were neither emotional nor confrontational. Unlike the neighborhood council, consensus was not the aim of discussions, but rather their starting point. In a highly consensual manner an interpretation of the social evils of the contemporary world was presented. Those discussing these problems comprised a rather small group of elderly and middle-aged men—an epistemic community in a narrow sense. The tone was private and suited to a situation in which everybody knew everybody else very well. The gerontocratic elite were gathered and found time and space to discuss their ideas about social ills in an atmosphere that was relaxed and filled with camaraderie.

Making Paths in a Pastoralist Community

Paths link places, and only through paths do places gain their meaning—this, perhaps, is the gist of the nomadic model. The place of the neighborhood council was at the convergence point of numerous paths coming from various households. History among the Pokot was organized along paths. While rituals made places, structured the landscape, and created a mnemotope for the community, personal histories and the histories of communities created paths. Both places and paths together structured a domesticated landscape and created a grid to which identities were tied and people belonged.

Paths of Origin

Historical paths are vividly remembered. Ancestors moved from different localities to the areas inhabited by the pastoral Pokot more recently,

and they raided other peoples' livestock in order to begin their pastoral existence. It was these paths that literally created the pastoral Pokot and their identity as a group.

The *kililyet* songs contain highly condensed lineage- and/or clan-specific information about such constitutive migrations. Many Pokot clans/lineages claim ancestry from distant locations: for example, from Turkana or from Rendille territories, from the Cherangani Mountains or from the Laikipia Plateau. The *kililyet* songs are sung by women during festivities. Early in the morning women "storm" onto the festive ground and loudly sing the *kililyet* of the descent group organizing the ritual. Here, for example, is the *kililyet* of the Kamadewa clan:

This is the day of the man from Nachi,
This is the day of the man from Kwelkwel,
This is the day of the man from Nayap,
This is the man coming from Dodoth,
If not for the woman Chepöchepunyö,
we would still live at Mt. Ima.⁴

Nachi, Kwelkwel, Nayap, and Mt. Ima are places in Turkana District. The song can be read like a route map describing how Kamadewa ancestors migrated from Dodoth territories in the Karamoja region in northeastern Uganda, through Turkanaland to the Baringo Plains, where they then became Pokot. The paths of the past were recalled with some fervor. If little was remembered of the early ancestors themselves, the paths of their migration were nevertheless intensely recalled. The genealogy of ancestors was linked to these paths.

Pokot historical paths establish a spatialized history—the group's history inscribed onto the landscape of northwestern Kenya and the adjoining regions of Uganda. In this respect the Pokot resemble neighboring Turkana, of whom Broch-Due (2000:65) says, "The Turkana path model . . . contains a spatial history, a calendar of memorable events linked to past generations of people and cattle inscribed in the paths through the landscape."

Paths of Cattle

Just as the history of the Pokot community is constituted by the migrations of its various units, so the presentations of individual biographies were organized along migratory paths and the social environment of an actor was described as the sum of paths created through exchange relations (Bollig 1992, 2006). While migratory paths create a basic identity structure to which other biographical details were attached, exchange paths signify sociability and embeddedness.

People move with their herds, but single animals are also often transferred from one household to the other. These animals are given in bride-wealth payments or as livestock presents and establish paths between people

and households. Pokot memorize these paths under the rubric *tilyai*, which is perhaps best translated as “group of partners acting in solidarity.” Among the pastoral Pokot most transfers of livestock are undertaken in order to initiate long-term relations between two households. This includes the promise of further exchanges of livestock and entails strong emotional ties and social support.

If bridewealth exchanges and bridewealth distributions mainly establish and reinforce kin relations, stock friendships create bonds between unrelated or only distantly related actors. Neighborhood-based rituals and celebrations of the age- and generation-sets were frequently the arenas in which stock friendships were initiated (see Bollig 2006). Rarely did a man enter into such a relationship with several men in one community; rather, stock friendships were deliberately distributed beyond the neighborhood. This was regarded as advantageous, as droughts and epidemics often only hit certain parts of Pokot territory. In cases of hazard or labor shortage, part of the household herd could be entrusted to a stock friend. While a clear majority of stock friendships were between Pokot herders, occasionally Pokot had stock friends among Turkana, IlChamus, and Samburu, too.

The coordination of exchanges was deeply rooted in the concepts of the emotional and moral self, and the distribution of livestock and collection of livestock debts—that is, path-making through livestock exchange—were cornerstones of male identity. These paths spelled out a network of trusted partners, with the number of linkages indicating the vitality and wealth of a herder.

Paths of the Future

Paths constitute representations of the past, but paths also read into the future. Intestines of livestock are read in order to diagnose the spiritual causes of problems or to forecast the future. This is a frequent form of divination, and every elder has some basic knowledge of how to read intestines—how to perform what Broch-Due (2000:61) has called “belly cartography.” The intestines are read like maps: there are rivers, mountains, and households; there is a home range (*kor*), a peripheral area (*serim*), and the land of enemies. The different regions are connected by blood vessels, which are interpreted as paths on which visitors (both welcome and unwelcome), raiders, and government vehicles move. The color and course of veins (that is, of paths) and their positions in relation to one another and to the dark and reddish spots on the different parts of the intestines are what is read. If, for example, the veins in the part of the intestines representing the Amaya River are reddish, this indicates an impending attack by enemies, and the “reddish path” indicates the way the raiders are likely to take.

The problems discussed via the inspection of intestines are, for example, livestock diseases and governmental taxation. They are read as if places were controlled by paths; that is, a “reddish path” leading to a specific point

on the intestines indicates hazard. While the neighborhood council serves to discuss the everyday conflicts in a community, and the *kirket* presents itself as a forum to discuss the major political issues at stake, the reading of intestines provides a platform for discussing the future in an egalitarian manner. When intestines are read, men usually stand around the entrails together. One or two specialist diviners usually took the lead, but many men would offer their interpretations. The people divining with entrails at a ceremony do not deliver solutions to future problems, but rather present future scenarios of likely hazards.

Paths and Places in Transition: Making New Places

The ecological, economic, and sociocultural conditions of Pokot pastoralism have been undergoing a process of fundamental reorganization for about two decades.⁵ Social organization—particularly in the case of gender roles, customary household structures, and gerontocratic governance—is in the midst of a profound transformation process (see Österle 2008a, 2008b). This has been induced by the market orientation of the livestock economy, the integration of agriculture, and increasing sedentarization. Other causes have been the growing influence of churches, formal education, and other drivers of change, like the ongoing violent conflicts with neighboring groups (Pike et al. 2010). Markets and farms have become prominent new places that are inscribed into the landscape with more permanence and more visibility than pastoral homesteads were. Within the rapidly growing villages, central places (which provide the stage for markets, political meetings, and the hearing of legal cases), as well as churches, schools, and administrative buildings are essential characteristics.

The Pokot of East Pokot District have been adopting a sedentary existence in large numbers, especially since the late 1990s (Österle 2008b; Österle & Bollig 2008), and in many areas rain-fed agriculture has become an important means of livelihood within an increasingly diversified pastoralist economy. Some parts of East Pokot are nowadays highly fragmented by fences and there is barely enough space for the grazing of larger livestock herds in these areas. Farming has attracted many families from the lowlands to the highland areas, rich and poor alike, where nowadays the population density is more than three times that of many lowland areas (65 persons/km² in Churo; 19 persons/km² in Nginyang). Today, even in agronomically less favorable areas with poor soils, more than half of all households have started cultivation (Greiner et al. 2013). Some neighborhoods, which became more stable through partial sedentarization, reintroduced exclusive calves' pastures in the vicinity of their settlements, while others established wildlife conservancies with the help of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from outside Pokot land (Greiner 2012). The implementation of wildlife conservancies (e.g., Ruko Conservancy, Kaptuya Conservancy) and the ongoing process of establishing geothermal power plants in Silale and Korossi areas (Achieng et al. 2012) demand a rapid

establishment of “village territories,” that is, territories with exclusive access rights for population groups defined as belonging to that area. The formalization of tenure and territorial belonging through the registration of village residents (e.g., by the Geothermal Development Cooperation) is therefore highly conflictive, but it will progressively take place alongside the implementation of governance models brought in by external agents such as NGOs, the Geothermal Development Cooperation, or Wildlife Conservation Organizations. Such governance models are usually based on the creation of formal institutions with defined responsibilities which imply a new kind of social sphere, usually based on democratic elections, rotation of board-committee members, financial accountability, and gender equality.

These transformations in land use have gone hand-in-hand with fundamental changes in people’s perceptions of and relation to land. While in the pastoralist model private ownership was hardly aspired to (and made little sense), the transition to farming is associated with a swift progression toward de facto privatization. Officially the land is owned communally and vested under the trusteeship of the Baringo County Council. By law, therefore, land sales and privatization are strictly illegal. However, the local administration has neither the executive powers nor the will to enforce this law, and land sales and conflicts over access and ownership are commonplace. Available arable land is becoming increasingly limited, and the price of land rose by more than 40 percent between 2007 and 2010. Lesorogol (2008) reports from neighboring Samburu District that the educated elite in particular is driving the privatization process. In East Pokot members of the elite are involved in pushing for privatization, but on a more general level the process is driven by both rich and poor families. Meanwhile, those highland Pokot who intend to maintain their pastoralist lifestyles move to the fringes of Pokot land and rich agropastoralists transfer their herds to the same areas, where they are maintained by relatives or hired herders.

Developing One’s Farm

In the highlands, and increasingly also in the lowlands, private homesteads and the surrounding *shamba* (Swahili: field) and pastures are fenced off by their owners. These fences are an important means for keeping wildlife and domestic livestock out of the maize fields, but they also serve as a way to stake claims to land. The quality of fences is a clear indicator of the owner’s wealth status. Hardwood poles connected by barbed wire and dense arrays of enmeshed sticks, often more than two meters in height, are the most sophisticated and sturdy solution. Expensive in material costs and labor input, these fences are increasingly also found around large areas of uncleared bushland. Rich Pokot families—often successful rural–urban migrants, soldiers, and businessmen, but also chiefs and local politicians—use this method to lay claim to areas of land. With increasing population density in the highland areas, patrilineal clans are gaining in importance as land-claiming units.⁶ These estates are used to cultivate several acres of

good land, establish a private ranch (in rare cases, even for European dairy cattle), and most important, to build solid, urbanlike stone houses. Some of these houses have large gateways for cars and tractors, are powered with solar panels, and are equipped with privately owned water supply systems connected to the nearest public pump. To engage in these activities—which are collectively referred to as “developing one’s shamba”—is the aspiration of many young and well-educated Pokot. Such processes, however, do not move ahead without becoming involved in major conflicts within the communities. Disputes over land, sometimes fought out violently between different clans, are almost the order of the day. Often the legitimacy of land sales is the central issue; in other cases the boundary between neighboring farms is disputed. New discourses of belonging are created, and possession of land is often legitimated through ancestral ties to an area, an idea that is not easily comprehensible in a nomadic pastoralist society and is often difficult to prove.

With increasing sedentarization, place-making, and the concomitant diversification of household economic activities, the role of the traditional domestic unit, with a polygynous male head of the homestead who distributes tasks to his co-wives and children, is diminishing. In sedentarized settlements women are typically the main income earners. They seek employment as household assistants, fetch water and firewood for money, or start petty businesses such as illegal breweries or local shops. Even in settings where pastoral livelihoods predominate, a transformation of household structures is taking place. Not only does polygyny appear to be on the decline in general, but in the areas where it still predominates its characteristics have changed. Contrary to traditional arrangements, co-wives usually no longer cohabit in one homestead. Rather, polygynous homesteads are divided into geographically scattered independent household units, with each consisting of a mother and her children, which are regularly visited by the homestead head. Often these units are spread strategically over the area in order to make use of different ecological conditions.

Changing Ritual Places: From Kokwö to Drinking Place

When doing fieldwork in 2004, Bollig asked one of his informants from the 1980s what he thought had changed most profoundly. The answer was swift: the man claimed that the most dramatic change was possibly that the kokwö had disappeared and had given way to the beer-drinking place (frequently called *kapkumin*, “the house of the beer”). The availability of alcohol throughout the area has increased rapidly over the past two decades (see Österle 2008a); nowadays alcohol is brewed not only in the few larger settlements of East Pokot District, but also in the rural hinterlands. Small dams where people converge during the dry season are attractive points for setting up brewing places. Alcohol is usually produced by women (see Holtzman 2005). While in the past men met at the kokwö on a more or less daily basis, the kapkumin is now visited almost as regularly in many areas.

In 2004–5 many informants told Österle that cases previously handled in the *kokwō* were now discussed at the beer-drinking place. Obviously such negotiations take place under less than ideal circumstances. Drinking places do not have a standard layout. Usually several drums (often old petrol or diesel drums) in which hard liquor (*chang'aa*) is distilled are placed in the shade of some trees along with jerry cans for *chang'aa* and beer (*busaa*). As the production of alcohol is illegal (albeit rarely prosecuted), the drums are often not in plain view, but rather hidden away in a bushy place. The serving area is arranged a few dozen meters away. Occasionally rough benches are set up, while at other times little more than a few stones to sit on are grouped together; rarely is any more permanent structure erected.

The men who give their opinion on a case in such places are often drunk, and discussions may end without a verdict. The general increase of internal conflicts and criminal acts directed at fellow Pokot cannot be contained, and there is no internal institution within which to discuss them meaningfully. Informants observed that many conflicts linger within a community for a considerable time period. A major difference between *kokwō* and *kapkumin* is the permanent presence of women at the latter. Whereas they had virtually no access to the *kokwō*, women regularly interact with men at the drinking place. Although women and men generally sit separately at such places, their gendered spheres overlap to a certain extent. Women both produce the beer and liquor and serve it to their customers. After giving out the drinks and collecting the money they do not necessarily retreat immediately, but often add their comments to an issue being discussed among the men. Of course, drinking places are also places that feature in the mental maps of local actors. However, they are generally not linked to a specific neighborhood, but rather to certain kinds of focal points of human activity, to places through which many people pass.

Two such focal points only came into existence within the past twenty years: first, small earthen dams were built in the late 1980s and early 1990s by development projects; and second, while major livestock markets were established in the region in the 1980s, a number of bush markets developed in the 1990s. Traders have cut roads through the bush to deliver consumables even to areas far from government-maintained roads. Dams and marketplaces usually have one or even more drinking places. While the points on the mental maps established by neighborhood councils were many, and fairly decentralized, the points established by drinking places, dams, and bush markets are smaller in number, are more focal, and attract more people. While neighborhood councils were predictably structured by the recruitment patterns of participants, and in their ways of discussing matters and of coming to decisions, such structures are lacking at drinking places. Drinking places and bush markets provide structures for exchanging goods, but not for the discussion of communal concerns.

In contrast to the neighborhood councils, initiation rituals and the *kirket* associated with them still provide space for the discussion of public concerns.

Except for some highland areas, *sapana* rituals are still celebrated throughout East Pokot. Youths criticize elders and elders reprimand juniors in this context. In this way, social structures are still staged and visualized. However, this visualization has gained additional connotations: it is not only a specific social structure that is staged, but increasingly also ethnic identity—that is, the “Pokot style” of doing things.

New Places: Markets, Schools, and Churches

A number of new kinds of place-making are evident: marketplaces, churches, schools, and the expansion of villages are cases in point. Here we will only depict the extent to which emerging bush-markets, churches, and schools establish new places and create new spaces in the public sphere. These “new” places are all part of larger hierarchies extending much further than the Pokot area.

While twenty years ago northern Baringo had only three weekly markets—in Nginyang, Tangulbei, and Yattya—a number of smaller markets have started operating within the past decade. In the past livestock producers brought their livestock to one of the three markets where they sold their animals to livestock traders. Nowadays producers often sell their animals at smaller bush markets to small-scale livestock traders who in turn drive the livestock to the major markets to sell them there to large-scale traders. These markets are usually far away from established villages and are frequently founded right in the bush. The emergence of a number of such bush markets is also connected to the improved availability of information on prices and goods: major parts of East Pokot are within reach of mobile phone networks, and buses and taxis now connect the centers with the hinterland.

Österle (2008a) describes how the Akwiachatis bush market sprang up: after a rich trader decided to build a shop there to sell maize, sugar, and tea, two more shops soon established themselves and local women started a number of *hoteli* that sold tea and chapattis, mainly on market days. Brewing then emerged in Akwiachatis, and occasionally guns and ammunition are sold in the place. Every Saturday the Akwiachatis bush market fills with people when livestock traders visit. Cattle and goats are sold and the money is turned into goods and/or alcohol. In 2004–5 the families living in and around Akwiachatis discussed how they might convince the administration to build a school in the place. Such bush-markets create new focal points for sociality. Here community life is vibrant on market days, when hundreds of people walk the paths of the dusty place. On these market days there is an immense amount of activity between the shops and food-selling *hoteli* and the drinking places in the near vicinity. The traditional pastoral society did not have any directly corresponding social space where so many people would meet outside the context of a ritual. While hundreds of people surely did meet in the major rituals of the age-set and generation-set system, they did so in a highly structured ritual

space. In contrast, the space of a bush market is apparently unstructured and chaotic: people hurry up and down, and elders and youths, women and men intermingle freely.

If there is any structure to the movement and interactions in the markets it is largely conditioned by market activities. The public sphere constituted in market places is relatively fluid, as access to the arena is open and the procedural rules of discussing and negotiating issues are not stipulated. Yet in the highland village of Churo the very center of the town, marked by a big tree with a surrounding set of benches, is the place where markets and informal meetings of village elders alternately take place. The centrality of Churo's marketplace, its position near the road, and its basic infrastructure all make it a popular space for informal meetings, but also an important venue for *barazas* (Swahili: community meetings), political campaigns, and the increasingly popular fundraisings. Such events are explicitly public and draw crowds from all over the area.⁷ Men and women participate in these events, and although men still dominate much of the scene and appear to be the spokespersons, women are increasingly involving themselves in public and political life. In 2007 Churo ward elected its first female councilor.

Schools have become another focal point of sociality. While the number of pupils increased throughout the 1990s, the 2003 governmental guarantee of cost-free education caused an upward leap in school attendance. Whereas in 1996 about 2,300 pupils attended primary schools, in 2004 the number had risen to circa 4,800 (with about a 2:1 ratio of boys to girls; see Österle 2007). Spurred by this trend, schools were established not only in villages, as in the past, but also in outlying areas. Several bush schools also maintain boarding facilities. While in the 1980s there was still no secondary school in the region, now four secondary schools, two of them sponsored by different churches, operate within the area. And whereas most pupils in primary schools originate from the immediate vicinity, in secondary schools there is a considerable influx of students from other regions of Kenya. Schools establish a new kind of public sphere: it is here that influences from outside—including global trends in music, clothing, and worldview—are discussed. Youths attending school often speak of themselves as the “dot-com-generation” (Österle 2008a) in order to underline their personal experience with a wider world.

Churches and church activities have also expanded in the last decade. New churches have been built in outlying areas and the number of baptized Pokot has increased. Church communities often spend quite some time, and sometimes also considerable amounts of money, in building and maintaining their churches. However, the major part of the budget for constructing a church usually comes from abroad. Besides the influential Catholic mission, it is especially Protestant fundamentalist churches with financial backing from the United States that have made major inroads into Pokot society. Churches are built in existing villages, but new villages also often emerge around churches; the smaller centers of Kositei and Kōkwōtoto

came into being because of mission stations set up there. The major churches in these social centers usually maintain a number of minor churches in the bush. The process of setting up such a church seems to be fairly established: after some time during which prayers have been held in the bush, perhaps under a big tree, a small wooden church is built at the site. This is then followed later on by a stone-built church.

Church congregations have a major impact on social life in Pokot; a significant number of the Protestant churches are strongly critical of what they perceive as “traditional” Pokot culture. Not only are polygamy and the participation in initiation rituals categorically prohibited, but taking part in the singing and dancing festivities of the youth (*adongo*) is also scorned. In this way church communities often perceive themselves as “antidotes” to the local culture. Churches constitute new public spheres and offer youth and women an arena in which to express their aspirations. It is here that fundamental opposition to local culture can be expressed; women can present their dislike of female circumcision and are supported by other church members; others may voice their opposition to polygamy and discuss their ideas with like-minded people. Local discourses about such contentious issues are linked with global discourses on female circumcision and gender equality.

Paths and Places in Transition: Making New Paths

Numerous roads crisscrossing the country and connecting newly founded marketplaces, villages, and fields are another emergent feature of the landscape. As with the instantiation of new modes of place-making, new kinds of mobility are created and old paths are also reevaluated. With increasing school attendance, personal and historical experiences of mobility are no longer shared by all young people. Livestock exchange networks have changed too, with preliminary observations suggesting that those networks are becoming less dense (due to increasing numbers of poor people, who cannot participate) and more centralized (due to more frequent patron–client relations). The paths that fascinate local people most, however, are those describing the journeys of community members to distant regions.

These journeys are increasingly facilitated by motorized transport. Members of the rural elite engage in transport businesses that move people between the rural centers, investing in lorries, buses, and—most notably—motorcycles, the numbers of which have increased significantly in the past years. Privately run bus services connecting Churo, in the East Pokot highlands, to the nearest larger transport hub in Marigat have increased in capacity from up to thirty persons daily in 2002 to up to eighty persons in 2011. Similar developments have taken place in other East Pokot towns like Ngingyang and Chemolingot.

Labor migration is also gaining in importance among the Pokot, although it is still not an option used by many. Only a few Pokot, especially those who

have a secondary education, choose this option and travel to seek jobs in Kenya's urban centers. This stands in striking contrast to neighboring Turkana, from where a large percentage of impoverished pastoralists have emigrated over the past decades (Broch-Due 1999; Dyson-Hudson & Meekers 1999). However, those individuals who have successfully opted for labor migration are role models for many other people, and pupils especially retell the success stories of Pokot labor migrants. At the same time, soldiers seconded to United Nations troops recount their paths to urban Kenya and the world beyond. Apart from these success stories, most labor outmigration from East Pokot gravitates toward rural areas, where (temporary) migrants, usually young men, try to find employment in agricultural activities or as guards. This tendency toward rural–rural outmigration is reflected in the Pokot terminology, in which a migrating person is usually addressed as *shambani* (from the Swahili word for field, *shamba*). Besides the rural–rural outmigration of individuals, larger family units and even whole clan segments have left the highland areas toward the east, into neighboring Laikipia. Many of them have opted to retain a pastoralist livelihood, escaping the increasing land shortages in the farming areas around Churo.

This development matches with the observation that Pokot have expanded their territory significantly in recent years, occupying territories that formerly belonged to other groups like Turkana and Samburu. While the permanent settlements in East Pokot district constantly grow and more people opt for permanent residence in one place, a considerable part of Pokot society adheres to a pastoralist way of life, which requires a certain kind of mobility and flexibility and of course quality pastures that sustain their livelihoods. The new paths chosen and created by the pastoralists are often risky and venture into territories of neighboring groups, creating new places and belonging there and thus justifying permanent claims to these territories. These claims are supported by the majority of Pokot—including politicians who seek to enlarge their sphere of influence—and are sustained by narratives that highlight the historic relation of Pokot and their ancestors to the contested spaces. There is a definite attempt to create places in border areas, thereby ascribing them to the *kor*, the core settlement area, and so laying exclusive political claim to them. With a strategic perspective in mind, the *kor* is expanded into the *serim*, and the *serim*, formerly a border area, shrinks and is increasingly presented as a boundary line (Greiner 2013).

Conclusion

In the former nomadic and highly specialized pastoral context, places were almost exclusively structured according to age and gender. In the current more sedentary, agropastoralist context places are structured along fundamentally different principles. Former principles like age and gender are often deemphasized and people now mix more freely.

In their “nomadology” Deleuze and Guattari (1997) assume that pastoralists create paths rather than places. They surmise that while the space of sedentary people (“state space”) is notched and homogeneous, “nomad space” is smooth and heterogeneous. While “state space” is characterized by enclosures, roads, and walls that show a constancy of perspective, orientation, and (metric) measurability, “nomad space” is occupied but not quantified. We surmise that Pokot herders make use of both categories, but that paths both establish and control places in the pastoral life world. The space in which a multitude of paths and a heterarchy of places were embedded was bounded but internally undifferentiated (free access, nonfragmented). Characteristic of the pastoral model was the nonhierarchical ranking of places: one neighborhood council was as important as any other council, and ritual places were likewise equally important. Ritual places also looked the same across East Pokot. The network of paths linking places (perhaps well captured in Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphor of “the rhizome”) was established through exchanges of livestock and the social exchanges of clearly defined subgroups (age-sets, lineages, etc.). The paths of the pastoral model reached far beyond Pokot land. The paths of Pokot ancestors came from other parts of northwestern Kenya and adjoining parts of eastern Uganda, and the raids supplying the emergent Pokot with livestock also led them far into the territories of Turkana and Maasai. Today myriad paths lead beyond the pastoral lifeworld to urban centers, to universities, and to employment. At the same time, ethnic boundaries are seemingly less porous than they were in the past, while political aspirations are now inscribed into border areas in a different way. Space is measured in many ways: borders with other ethnic communities as well as internal boundaries (e.g., of fields) are marked, visualized, and fenced. Landed property is measured, quantified, and occasionally traded. The physical and cultural landscape is increasingly structured by “a hardening of lines” (Watson 2010).

New strategies of place-making emerge, and others become more salient: new centers are developed, and within them churches, grassroots organizations, and NGOs working in close collaboration with local actors in turn create new places and new public spheres. Drinking places have replaced neighborhood councils in many areas and new kinds of ritual spaces are established and used. Places now tend to dominate paths, and places are part and parcel of ranked systems. Bush markets supply higher-ranked rural livestock markets, which in turn supply urban markets. Rural primary schools, which often are of low quality, are subordinate to missionary schools and elite government schools. These newly emerging places have also established new kinds of public spheres. In the pastoral model, the public sphere was clearly defined along the axes of gender and age. The way in which people acted and spoke, the topics they raised, whether they worked toward consensus or lamented the present conditions: all were spelled out clearly. In contrast, today’s drinking places and bush markets create a public sphere in a very different sense. A new kind of fluid sociability is characteristic within a “sphere of broad and largely unplanned encounter,

of fluid sociability among strangers and near strangers” (Weintraub 1997:17). Exclusionary practices have changed, with gender and age being deemphasized while categories like ethnicity are more enforced, and new categories based on novel concepts such as adherence to a political party or membership of a Christian church are introduced. Political decision-making and debates shift away from locally controlled and predictably structured contexts to take place within elite circles and their negotiations with national and international power brokers. While the pastoral model allowed for clearly defined public spheres and institutionalized discursive spaces beyond (or even contrary to) the state and the market, now the state and the market permeate local public spheres.

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Notes

1. Demographic data are based on National Census figures. Annual growth rates from 1979 to 1989 and from 1989 to 1999 were 4.1% and 4.5%, respectively. Such growth rates are high but may be natural. The census figures, however, are probably based on extrapolations and not on empirical data. Annual growth rates from 1999 to 2009 are given as 7.4%, which does not reflect a natural growth rate. We thank Hartmut Lang for assisting us with these population figures. We do not have a solid explanation for the 2009 growth rates, as there is no significant in-migration into East Pokot. We do, however, assume that the demographic growth in the area is tremendously high. Rural–urban migration remains remarkably absent as a “safety valve” for population pressure in Pokot. A further exploration of these trends is beyond the scope of this article.
2. See Bollig and Österle (2007); Greiner (2013); McCabe (2004); Pike et al. (2010); Schlee and Shongolo (2012).
3. See Fratkin and Roth (2004); Galvin (2009); Lesorogol (2008); McCabe et al. (2010); Schlee and Shongolo (2013).
4. See Bollig and Österle (2013:293). In the Pokot language the words of the song are: “Kayech chito Nachi, kayech chito Kwelkwel, kayech chito Nayap, kayech chito Dodos, anta mōkichepōchepunyōnye, tōkimitecha Ima.”

5. For similar trends in neighboring pastoral communities, see, e.g., Fratkin and Roth (2004); Lesorogol (2008); McCabe (1997); Spencer (1998).
6. See also Shipton (1984) for similar processes in western Kenya.
7. *Barazas* are usually initiated by chiefs or other government officials and often serve as venues for public announcements.