

2024



The Historical Roots of the Ateker People:

From a Troubled Past to a Meaningful,
Peaceful and, Prosperous Future

*Theme-2024: Celebrating a Shared Heritage, Forging a
Path Towards Peace, Prosperity, and Cultural Renaissance*



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Theme 2024:

*Celebrating a Shared Heritage, Forging a Path Towards Peace, Prosperity,
and Cultural Renaissance*

Contributing researchers:

Lead Researcher: Hon. David Pulkol

Hon. David Pulkol, is a respected as an elder statesman in Uganda. He is the Executive Director of the Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI). In addition, he serves as the Principal Advisor to General Caleb Akandwanaho Salim Saleh (rtd), the Chief Coordinator of Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), and Special Presidential Advisor on Defence in the Office of the President, Republic of Uganda. Hon. Pulkol graduated from Makerere University and the London School of Economics (LSE), University of London. He is a former Member of Parliament for the Matheniko constituency in Karamoja. He has held various cabinet ministerial positions and actively participated in the constituent assembly that promulgated the 1995 Uganda National Constitution. He served twice as the Director General for External Security (ESO) in the national security architecture of the government of Uganda. He also had a distinguished career in the United Nations, where he served as the Deputy Regional Director for UNICEF in the East and Southern Africa regional office in Nairobi, Kenya, contributing significantly to the development and implementation of UNICEF's programs in the region. Pulkol is a multi-skilled professional and versatile thinker with an extensive career in public life that spans academia, university teaching, applied research, evidence-based public policy-making, and advocacy. Pulkol trained in the human rights approach to programming, a skill he uses to support development programs across sectors and capacity building for diverse groups. He is grounded in the art of legislative practice, social development, and human security and has been involved in numerous cross-border peace and development initiatives in the Horn and East Africa regions. Currently, Hon. Pulkol serves on several NGO boards, including as the Chairman of the Advisory Board for the Citizens Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda (CCEDU). He is currently a member of the Executive Committee of the Africa Security Sector Network (ASSN) in Ghana.

Dr. Daniel Lumonya

PhD (Cornell University, USA).

Dr Daniel Lumonya is Currently a Senior Research and Policy Associate at Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI) that provides Think Tank Advisory Support to the Government of Uganda through Operation Wealth Creation (OWC). Daniel's research interests revolve around small scale farming systems and agrarian transitions, globalization, and state, civil society relations with a focus on rural Uganda. He is keenly interested in the sociology of small-scale farms, raising issues that could feature more prominently in Uganda's policy debates. His passion for understanding the social dynamics related to small scale farming has led him towards research agendas that raise questions regarding the ownership and control of the means of production and how these change over time, and their impacts on agro-ecology and agro-biodiversity. He has developed a digital application with which community level data entrants gather real time data on various socio-economic parameters in ways that will link local dynamics to key duty bearers in local government. Together with Duke University they are on a forty-year longitudinal panel data set that is tracking the triggers, drivers and maintainers of poverty and prosperity in rural Uganda. He has lectured at Makerere University, led an NGO, worked with local governments on various rural development projects, with a private not-for-profit University in the USA. His teaching at Makerere University, Cornell University, UTAMU University, has included courses in rural development theory and practice, organizational theory and management, human resource management, qualitative, participatory and action research, Strategic Planning, and Project Leadership and Management

Dr Beatrice Mpora Odongkara

(MD, ESPE Fellow; PhD - University of Bergen, Norway and Makerere University)

Dr. Beatrice Mpora Odongkara is a highly skilled specialist in pediatrics and child health, diabetes, and hormonal diseases. She holds a PhD focused on tiny newborn babies and is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Pediatrics and Child Health at Gulu University. Currently, she is a senior research and policy associate at the Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI), where she is involved in research and policy development related to herbal medicine. Dr. Odongkara founded Wise Women Uganda, a community-based organization comprising traditional healers, and collaborates with AFLI in Indigenous cross-border communities in Karamoja on reforestation initiatives. These efforts utilize medicinal and native trees to promote sustainable herbalism and global environmental health. A passionate believer in health being made at home, Dr. Mpora, as an ATEKER Niece, advocates for practices that reduce the need for hospital visits. Her dedication extends to safeguarding indigenous technical knowledge in preventive and curative health. She aims to expand the Wise Women initiative to benefit the greater ATEKER community, focusing on researching, documenting, and preserving the medical and health knowledge passed down through generations. Additionally, she seeks to enhance the value of their products for diversified income and wealth creation, ultimately improving the livelihoods of those who uphold these Indigenous knowledge systems. In addition to being a respected clinician and researcher with extensive clinical care experience, Dr. Odongkara is involved in building the capacity of pre-service and in-service healthcare providers in low-resource settings. She participates in various global multi- and trans-disciplinary research groups, working on the development and implementation of evidence-based clinical and policy guidelines. Notably, she recently led a team that prepared and submitted an evidence synthesis for WHO guidelines on the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of hypoglycemia in severely ill children. She is also engaged in training front-line health workers caring for patients with diabetes, hormonal diseases, preterm infants, and other health concerns across the lifespan in resource-limited environments. Her research interests encompass multidisciplinary clinical and community-based studies on non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including diabetes, tiny newborn babies, neonatal blood sugar abnormalities (dysglycaemia), and jaundice. As an alumna of the Higher Education Resource Services - East Africa (HERS EA) Academy 2024, a leadership training institute for women leaders in higher education, Dr. Odongkara is collaborating with AFLI's young leaders' mentorship program, Makerere University, and Michigan State University to develop a multi-country and multi-institutional program aimed at leadership training for young girls and women, along with their male allies.

Joyce Akello

Accomplished, solution-focused professional with over twenty (20) years' combined experience in Strategic planning, Policy formulation & analysis, performance management, organizational development, Conflict Resolution, projects management, coaching, research, stakeholder engagement, budget formulation & management, Administration and Procurement acquired through practice and consulting from public sector, private sector and not for profit institutions. Skilled in diverse areas including proven ability to successfully multi task in a dynamic, fast-paced environment while meeting deadlines.

Among others, Joyce has worked for Africa Leadership Institute (AFLI) (a think tank to the Government of Uganda through Operations Wealth Creation), Standard Gauge Railway Project - Ministry of Works and Transport, Housing Finance Bank and United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in the fields of Policy Analysis, Human Resources Management, Procurement and Administration.

Joyce holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Human Resources Management and a BA in Social Sciences

Dr Samuel Michael Etyang

Dr. Samuel Michael Etyang is a Graduate of Makerere University, writer, multi-skilled researcher, graphics designer, and an entrepreneur whose experience in publishing spans decades. Under his design and printing company - Some Graphics Limited, he has done a lot of work with leading organizations like Africa Leadership Institute (ALI), among others.

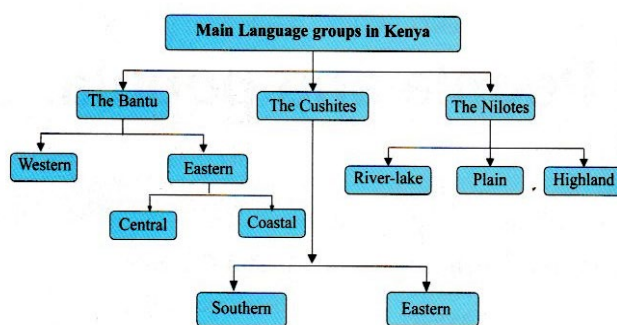
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Background

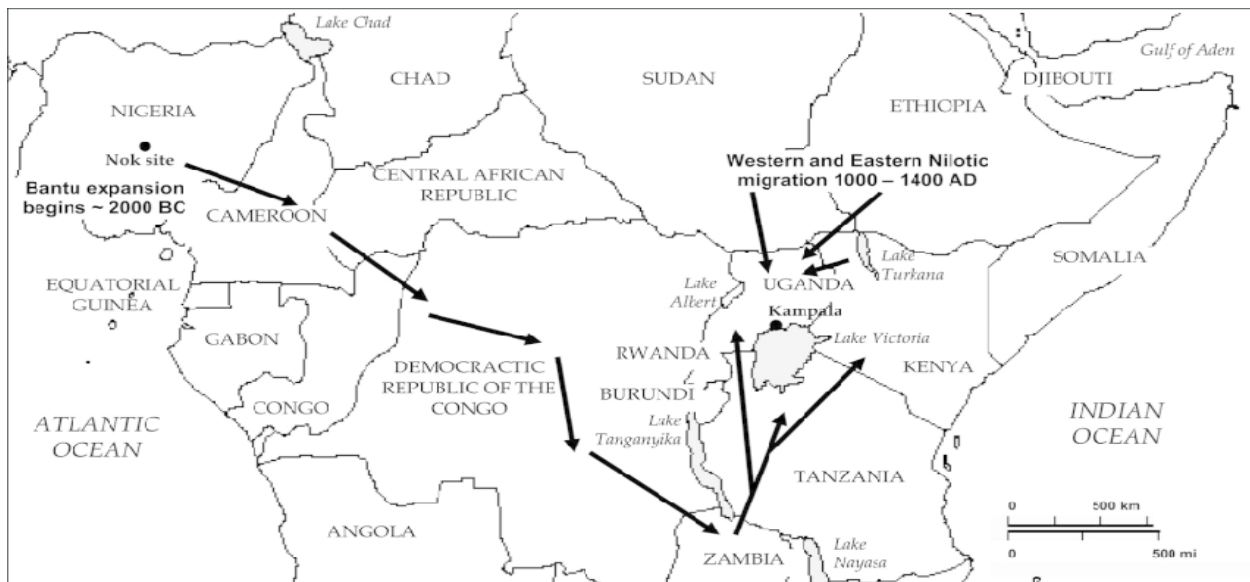
In this Paper, the historical roots, migratory routes, settlement and artificial separation of the *Ateker people* in the Horn and Great Lakes region of Africa will be examined within the context of historical expansion and migration of the Bantu, the Cushites and the Nilotes as distinct ethnic and language groups of Africa. The *Ateker people* are part of the larger sub-Saharan Nilotes of East Africa that include the River Lakes, Highland and Plain Nilotes as detailed in Figure 1 below:

Positioning ATEKER (Plain Nilotes) in the context of language groups of Africa



- **Nilotes** are believed to have originated from the **Nile Valley**.
- Mainly found in the Southern half of Sudan, Northern Uganda, the lake regions of Kenya and Tanzania.
- Divided into three sub-groups;
 1. The River Lake Nilotes – Luo
 2. The Highland Nilotes – Kalenjin
 3. The Plain Nilotes – Ateker
 - a. South Sudan
 - b. Ethiopia
 - c. Kenya
 - d. Uganda
 - e. Tanzania
 - f. DRC

The Nilotes and Bantu Expansions in Africa Between 2000 BC and 1500 AD



Bantu and Nilotic migrations into Uganda overlaid on a map of the present-day geography of Africa. The map is an oversimplification. The migrations are schematic and, in the case of the Bantu, leave out myriad bifurcations down the west and east coasts of Africa. In addition, waves of Bantus and Nilotes moved in and out of Uganda, marking the ebb and flow of the group's fortunes. Convergence zones are also marked at the east side of Lake Victoria (now Kenya and Tanzania), intermixing Bantu, Southern Nilotic, and Eastern Nilotic populations.

Figure 1 The Ateker people in the context of other African language groups

Historical Roots, Migration, Settlement and Artificial Separation of The ATEKER People

The '*Ateker*' people are the '*Itung'a*' speaking group of Plains Nilotes, whose history is traced to the Egyptian Nile Valley. Other accounts say that the people, similar to ATEKER people extracting blood from live cattle and mixing with milk, were, by early 1500 AD, sighted in Yemen (the Middle East) and later in the Ogden region of present-day Ethiopia. The historical accounts that place this group in the Egyptian Nile Valley state that the ATEKER people migrated southwards, occupying the land at the intersection point of the two rivers: the Blue Nile and White Nile of present-day Sudan.

The two historical narratives, however, agree that the ATEKER people came to occupy their current locations in the five countries of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) through Abyssinia in Ethiopia and Elimi Traingle (West of Lake Turkana).

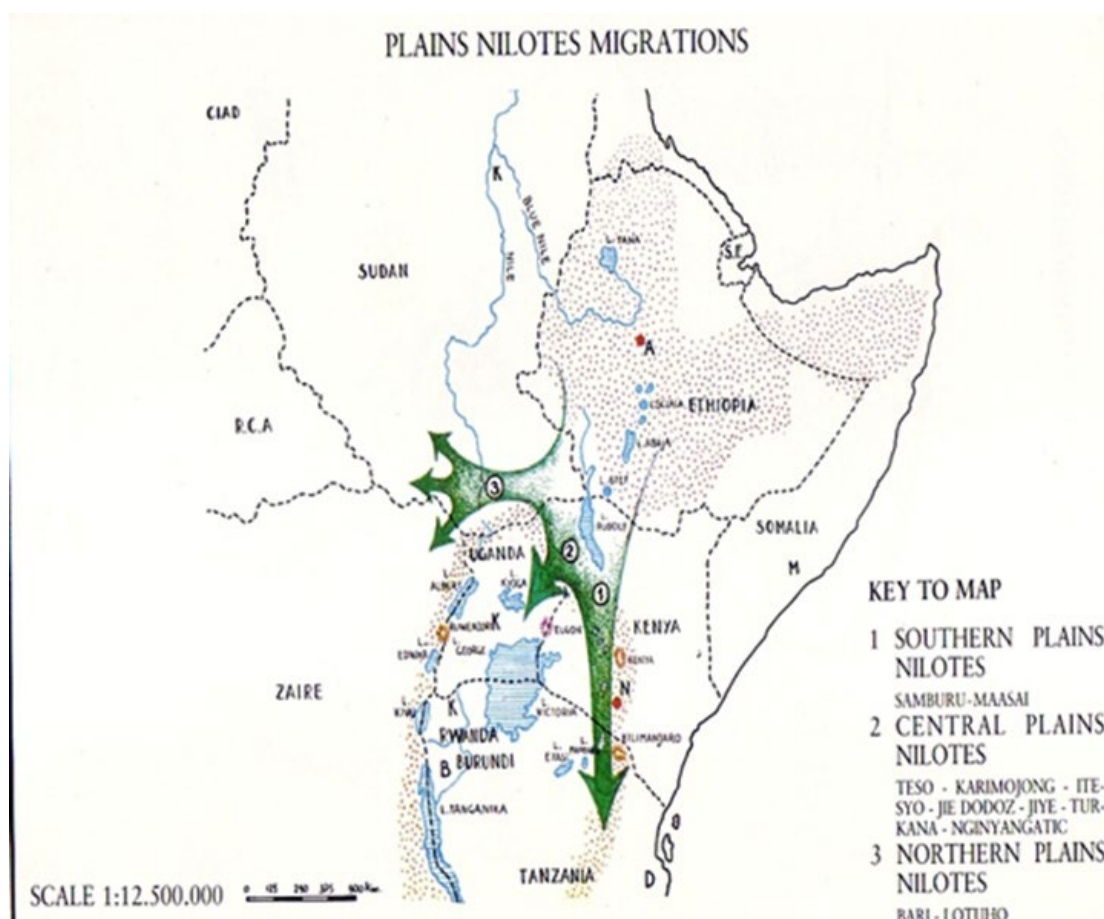


Figure 2 Migration of the Plains Nilotes

While the Luo (Nilotics) trekked southwards along the White Nile River, from their recorded cradle land in Barhel-Gazal to their respective current areas of settlements in the Eastern part of Africa, the ATEKER group walked eastwards along the Blue Nile to the Ethiopian Highlands. Descending further

southwards, on the escarpment of the eastern arm of the East African rift valley, to a land west of the present-day Lake Turkana (Lake Rudolf). Therefore, all the ATEKER people are recorded as having arrived through Abyssinia (Ethiopia) with many livestock and settled in the Eleme Triangle¹ - a land straddling across the plains of Lotikipi. Kenya recently discovered a massive underground water aquifer (lake) that can take an entire country 70 years to exhaust.

While at the Eleme triangle, both the livestock and human population grew. Droughts and famines intensified, coupled with a high disease burden. A debate arose on what we should do to secure a better place to guarantee a sustainable future. 'Spies' known in the Core ATEKER language as "Ngika'rebok" or "Ngi'rototin" (Arebok) were then dispatched in three different directions to "Are'bokin" or Arotun (to undertake long-range resource tracking and intelligence survey). This was to ascertain new places where water and pastures were plentiful. They were to locate some places that could sustain all the livestock and people of ATEKER. The first group went more southwards, following the eastern arm of the East African Rift Valley. Another went climbing the escarpment towards the Southwest into the present-day Karamoja region of Uganda. In contrast, the last group went westwards to the present-day border crossing point of Nadapal in present-day Southern Sudan.

As shown in the Map, Figure 2 above, the first group that went Southwards is now what has come to be known as ***Southern Plains Nilotes***. This group consists of the Samburu and Maasai-speaking communities of the larger ATEKER people. Motivated by a report of several lakes supported by a network of tributary river systems found along the Rift Valley, including one with rock salt for animal licks (Lake Magadi), thus making it an ideal place to occupy and an excellent direction to take. Today, the Maasai are settled in the Republics of Kenya and Tanzania, and the Samburu are only in Kenya.

The second group, called ***Central Plains Nilotes***, are those that climbed the escarpment into the northern part of the Apule River, Naitae, and Mogos-Kotein hills (Nakadanya) - a place well-watered by Nangolol Apolon river catchments of present-day Lotisan sub-county of Matheniko County, north-west Mt. Moroto - Uganda. They found the escarpment green and the Karamoja plateau with moderate temperatures modified by high altitude. This group, which today consists of the CORE-ATEKER, straddling across the two Tri-Junctions of the four countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda as shown, later dispersed from the Apule river catchment into their present-day locations shown by Figure 3 below.

¹ The Eleme triangle is a land located West of Lake Turkana (Rudolf). It covers the area between the two tri-points where the countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Sudan meet on the one hand and another where Uganda, Kenya, and South Sudan meet. Presently an area of contention among the governments of Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Kenya, the Eleme triangle is a place of excellent mineral wealth potential, currently abounding and teeming with wildlife and located closer to the Lotikipi area of substantial underground water discoveries

CENTRAL PLAINS NILOTES MIGRATIONS

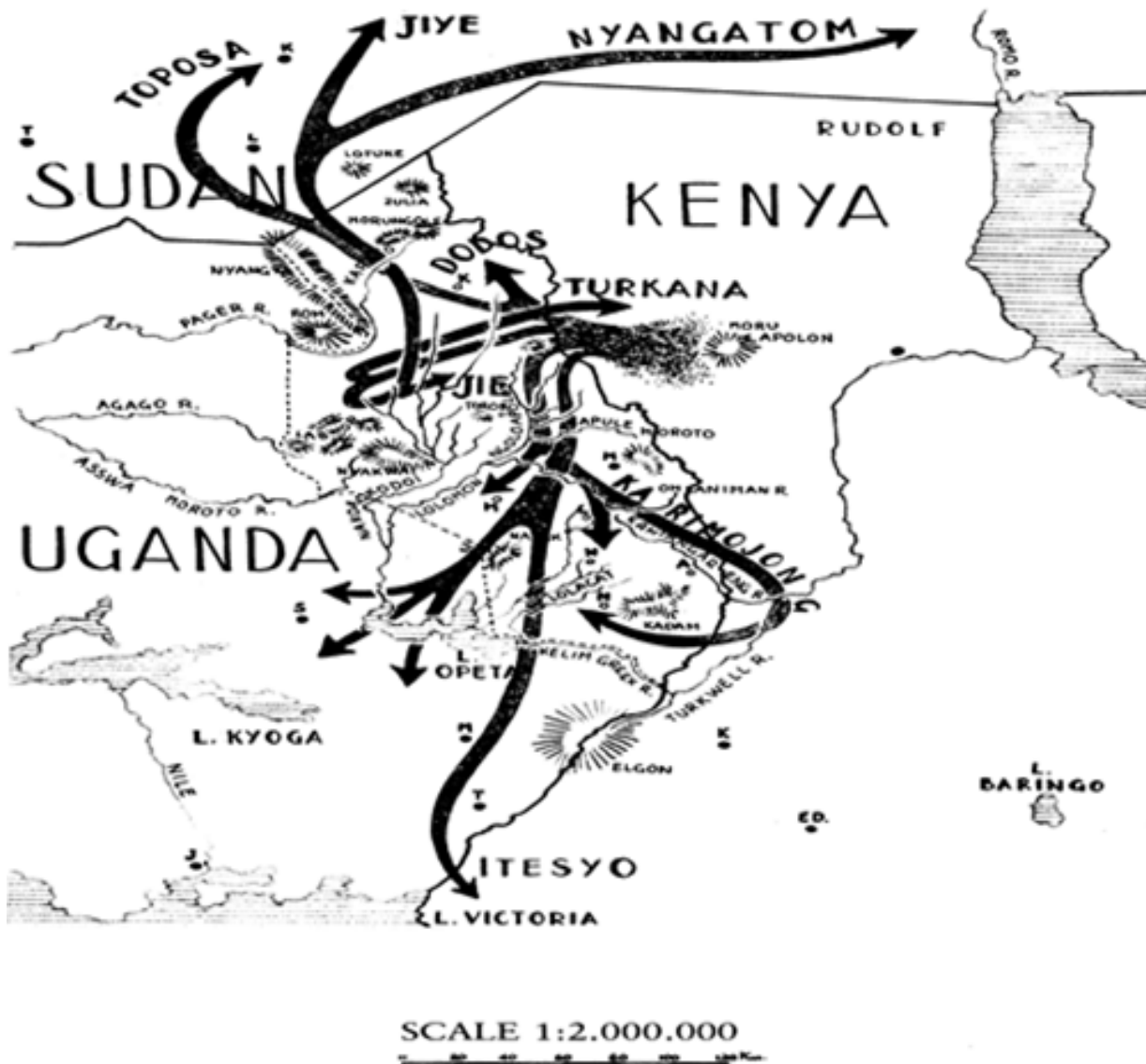


Figure 3 Migration of the Central Nilotes

The Jie moved westwards of Nangolol Apolon to the present areas of Kotido district, while the Dodoth moved northwards to their present areas of Kaabong and Karenga Districts. Other Jiye with Toposa and some Nyangatom, of South Sudan moved further northwards to their present locations. The Nyanga'tom continued and settled in the borderland areas of present-day South Sudan and Ethiopia, where they now neighbor and have, to a great extent, culturally influenced the Dassenach or Murle with whom they now inhabit the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples. Regional State (SNNPRS) of Ethiopia. The Nyanga'tom also borders the Toposa and Jiye of South Sudan and Turkana of Kenya.

The rest of the Karimojong (Matheniko, Pian, Bokora, et al.) spread out to the South, Southeast, and Southwest of the Karamoja plateau. At the same time, the Iteso and the Lango people proceeded to the present-day marshland regions of Lakes Bisina, Opeta, Awoja, and the Kyoga basin of Uganda.



Karimojong youths performing the Edonga traditional dance

Another group went East of Mt. Elgon and continued Southwards into what ATEKER oral traditions called Akare-Apa-Engura- meaning the water well of an old man called "Apa Engura"- now known as Kapenguria, spreading into areas of Kitale (neni etalere ngidwe) and spreading further south-westwards to the present day Iteso areas of Kenya, Tororo, Busia and Palisa in Uganda². This group continues to this present day, speaking a version of the Ateso dialect that is closer to the original Nga'karimojong and/or Nga'turukana than the Ateso of Teso.

Although previous scholars and administrators have advanced other conflict-ridden theories to explain and justify the long-lasting conflict between Iteso and the Karimojong, other positive explanations resonating within the ATEKER oral traditions and supported by Figure 3 above exist. The ATEKER Oral traditions assert that the Itesyio ancestors, while approaching Lake Turkana, were able to see Lakes Kyoga, Opet, and Bisina systems and the surrounding marshland of present-day Teso, Uganda, where they are reported to have said "Itesyio angina" - meaning, "We are seeing or eyeing there". The Lake Kyoga basin is finally where most of the Itesiyo people settled and became known as Teso.

The Lango also spread south-westwards into the center of the Lake Kyoga basin, straddling areas serviced by well water discharge rivers: Moroto, Aswa, and Arocha river catchment. Today, Uganda's Iteso and Lango people possess identical names of clans, names of people, and many words in speech with similar or nearer meanings to the rest of the core ATEKER groups. Of the two, the Iteso are more of the Core ATEKER while the Lango have intermarried with the Acholi (Luo) in the relative peripheral ATEKER groups.

Then lastly came the third group, referred to as *Northern Plains Nilotes* -who, at the Elemi triangle,

² My Oral interview with the Late Hon Joshua Akol, quoting from his oral interactions with several prominent Karimojong elders when he was growing up, including Ekasikout the late Zephania Akamu—a renowned Karimojong church worker of the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

were told there was a big river further to the West that could manage to water and sustain all their livestock. That river as we know it today is the White Nile (in present-day Juba). This group now includes, among others: the Baari-speaking groups in ATEKER language, known as Ngi'baari - meaning the wealthiest. The Ngi'baari include Baari, Pojulu, Kuku, Nyangwara, and the Kakwa in present-day Central Equatoria in South Sudan. The Kakwa people are also settled in the West Nile region of Uganda and the North Eastern corner of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The Lotukho people are settled on Imatong Mountain ranges Southwest of Torit while the Lango occupy Tertenya area to the south-Eastern slopes of the Imatong Mountains, stretching to the Tri-point east of the Madiopai border-crossing between the Acholi of Kitgum-Uganda, Chukdum county of South Sudan and Karenga District of north Karamoja in Uganda. Others in this group include the Lopit people, who settled in Ngangala, an area between Torit and Juba in South Sudan.



A Dance Group exhibiting Kakwa traditional dance on Saturday at Nyakuron Cultural Centre. Photo by Akol Madut Ngong



Kakwa girls performing a cultural dance



President William Ruto of the Republic of Kenya attends the 8th Tobong'u Lore cultural and tourism festival 2024 event in full Turkana elder's regalia while the Resident District Commissioner Moroto Jane Francness Amongin Okili, cheerfully ululates

The Interconnections, Relationships and Persistent Challenges faced by the 'Core' and 'Peripheral' ATEKER

The Core ATEKER group currently inhabits borderland areas, straddling four countries: South Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda, in the Eastern and Horn of Africa region. On the one hand, the CORE ATEKER Groups include the Toposa, Jiye, and Nyang'atom of South Sudan. On the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) of Ethiopia, they include the Nyang'atom. In the Republic of Kenya, they include the Ngi'turukana and Iteso, and finally, the Ngi'karimojong and Iteso of Uganda.

Among these Core Ateker groups of Itung'a-speaking Plains Nilotes, "Ateker" is a common word used to mean a clan. Most names of major clans among the CORE ATEKER groups are identical and cut across international borders and geographic territories. Usually, no linguistic translations are required for people of the Core ATEKER groups to communicate. Only slight variations exist in intonations and specific meanings.

The ATEKER people share a common origin, decent, and ethnolinguistic ties. They practice nomadic pastoralism and, in some cases, Agro-pastoralism as their main economic livelihood activity. Some have adopted other non-traditional economic complementary activities like fishing, rice and other crop growing, etc., besides keeping livestock.

On the other hand, others now referred hereto as: 'PERIPHERAL (BROADER) ATEKER' people, consist of people with the same ATEKER origin, culture, and decent, sharing similar ethnolinguistic ties with the Core ATEKER BUT are remotely located into more interland of their nation states in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These include the the Northern Plains Nilotes consisting among others: the Baari speaking groups (the Baari, Pojulu, Kuku, Mundari, Nyangwara, and the Kakwa in present-day Central Equatoria)³. The Lotukho, Lango, Lopit, Murile, and, to some extent, the Didinga in the Eastern Equatoria, together with the Samburu and Masaai of Kenya and Tanzania, are referred to as Southern Plains Nilotes. They also include the Kakwa in the DRC and the Masaai of Tanzania.

These peripheral groups, have encountered, integrated, and intermarried with people of other languages and cultures in the course of their outward migration. They have varyingly managed to retain only between approximately 30-50% of the ATEKER people's language, customs, and oral traditions. Whereas they have retained the essential ATEKER root words, the interconnecting words that join the root words in their speech differ. These have been acquired from other linguistic groups with whom they have inter-married or interacted. Therefore, to many among the core ATEKER groups, the peripheral ATEKER people sound like a familiar language. However, it is only understood when those from the peripheral group speak slowly or with some limited translation. The Core ATEKER groups are linked to the 'PERIPHERAL ATEKER' groups by the common ATEKER language, which constitutes the root words, with only variations in the interconnecting or joining words they seem to have picked from other ethnic groups with whom they must have come into contact or intermarried.

These groups of Core-ATEKER communities have for so long remained at the epicenter of conflict characterized by lawlessness, poverty, and marginalization. They have very low human development indices compared to other communities in their respective nation-states. They have remained minorities and live at the geographical peripheries of their national government politics and economy, as well as suffer glaring gaps in social service delivery.

Within the Core ATEKER communities, different accounts explain why specific names were acquired to identify each community⁴. We understand that the Nyanga'tom of Ethiopia were initially great hunters and were more known as Nginyamatom-a name derived from eating Elephants (Etom or Ngitome- words for Elephants), not the current attempts to link them to great expertise in the use and brandishing of yellowish guns-"Atom" -Nginyangatom. The acquisition of guns was more recent among the ATEKER people than the existence of these communities.

The Dodos-Karimojong of the Kaabong district of Uganda, on the other hand, are said to have not been very good at keeping livestock and were mainly hunters and gatherers who were known for eating birds and the yok of their eggs-"Edos"-the egg-yok. So, they acquired the name of Ngidoso and are now called the Dodos or the Dodoth. This theory says that the Dodos(th) acquisition of so many cattle is a more recent development than their existence after the dispersal from Apule.

The Turkana of Kenya, on the other hand, is said to be ATEKER people who are the offsprings of Ekasikout Lokolimoe and his sons who withdrew from the cradle land in Apule, in Karamoja back to the

³ The Kakwa people are today settled in land areas straddling Yei County in South Sudan, the West Nile region of Uganda, and the North Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The Pojulu live to the north West of Juba, while the Baari live in and around Juba. The Kuku people live in the Kajokeji area to the southern part of Central Equatoria and border Moyo and Adjumani districts of Northern Uganda.

⁴ Oral interviews with Ekasikout, the late Apathecha from present-day Abim District, Nyakwae Sub-county, Pupu-Kamuya parish quoting other Karimojong senior Elders who prepared him for the Karimojong traditional ritual of initiation or "Athapan" during Ekaru Angisomal in 1935.

Caves at the mighty Loyima ranges or Moru Apolon. The Oral Traditions further say Mama Nayeche (the great-great-grandmother who produced the modern-day Turkana nation) was a Jie girl who escaped forced early marriage or Gender-based violence in Napelimoru villages and ran into Turkana. She is said to have been cursed by Jie elders to suffer with her offspring until they return to the Jie elders to make peace, seek reconciliation, and perform rituals to cleanse the land and bless the people. The Turkana were known for living in caves or hiding in caves (ATURUKAN). These caves are common in the mountain ranges of Moru-apolon and other mountain ranges like Loyima and other parts of the Turkana escarpment.



Minister of States for Karamoja Affairs Hon. Aston Kajara and the Head of EU Delegation in Uganda at the ICGLR, Government of Uganda and the AFLI Conference on Ateker cross boarder initiatives for Peace, Security and Development 2009

The Artificial Separation (*Apetaret*) of the Core Ateker People by British Colonialism

For British colonialism to take control and monopoly of trade and establish a competition-free environment of unfettered resource exploitation and plunder, Karamoja, South Sudan Turkana, and the Ngangatom of Ethiopia regions of the core ATEKER cluster were declared and militarily administered as closed districts. But first, the British colonial administration had to out-maneuver other imperial European colonial competitors - the French and Belgians in the scramble to control the entire Nile watershed from Egypt to the source in Uganda and Tanganyika.

What really happened during the colonial contest, and how was it carried out? What broader colonial interests were involved? What specific decisions and actions were taken, and by whom, that led to the separation of the larger ATEKER communities, as well as the enslavement, marginalization, and impoverishment of the core ATEKER people who now reside across the three tri-junctions of Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, and Ethiopia?

This Scramble for ATEKER peoples' lands in the Horn, East, and Great Lakes region of Africa took center stage on February 28th, 1895, as a pricey jewel in the contest among European Britain, Belgium, and France, when the leading colonial proponent of France, Francois Deloncle rose in the chamber of deputies (parliament) to boldly declare that the British must be forced to settle the paramount Egyptian Question. Asserting that if Britain would not keep the promise of 1882 to evacuate Egypt once the internal order was restored, then France would take Britain in the rear⁵ by marching across Africa from the Atlantic into Bahr el Gazal and Upper Nile in the present South Sudan to force its rival-Britain, to the negotiating table.

However, one month later, Sir Edward Grey, the British under-secretary for Foreign Affairs, surprised most peers in the House of Commons with even more provocative declarations: "that from its mouth in Egyptian Delta to its source in Uganda-Tanganyika, the entire Nile watershed was British" and that any advance by French expedition into the Nile watershed would be an unfriendly act. With these counter proclamations in Paris and London, Fashoda, including the areas of most ATEKER communities, became the flash point in Africa's greatest imperial gamble and rivalry.⁶

The specific objective of France's 1896 Congo Nile expedition was to panic Britain into negotiating over Egypt, either by sharing it with France or, more likely, by sanctioning and supporting France's annexation of Morocco. The alarming threat the British perceived was the discomfort of having a string of French military outposts from West Africa to East Africa through the Nile Basin to Djibuti on the

⁵ Lewis, David Levering (1988, page 5). *The Race to Fashoda*. Suffolk: St. Edmundsbury Press Ltd

⁶ Oyai Deng Ajak (Winter 2016). *Self Determination and Territorial Integrity: The Case for Pre-emptive Diplomacy in the Ilemi Triangle of Eastern Africa*. Commonwealth Open University.

Red Sea. This would be a deadly achievement by France, bisecting the grand plan of British Empire architects of an uninterrupted rail and telegraph connection to run from the Cape of South Africa to Cairo in Egypt.⁷

The Fashoda scheme France and Britain were pushing for was openly ambitious and hypercritical in the colonization of ATEKER ZONE. This was, for certain, a brilliant ploy to determine the final European boundaries not only in Sub-Saharan Africa but also in Morocco and Egypt. The French even went to great lengths to secure success in their ambitious mission by calling upon the ruler of Ethiopia, whom they gave arms shipments, to help them allow another French expedition from Djibouti via Ethiopia to reinforce their planned hold on Fashoda in Upper Nile.

Unfortunately for France, however, almost everything went wrong due to some critical nine-month delay in their expedition's deployment in 1896. After the briefest wait for Major Marchand's expedition in 1898, which suffered a three-month delay in setting off the Western coast of Africa and another nine-month delay in cresting the Sue River in the last leg of that expedition, Ethiopian allies who had taken the arms gifts of the French and Russians, retreated to the highlands, with their army.

Besides, two weeks before the French Congo Nile expedition reached Fashoda, King Menelik of Ethiopia secretly agreed to aid France and quietly signed a treaty with the British, committing himself and Ethiopian forces to neutrality. At the same time, he clandestinely negotiated an alliance with the Khalifa of the Sudan. Furthermore, France's public opinion was decidedly lukewarm on going to war over Fashoda - there then, the Nile policy had become progressively unrealistic. The political defeat was staring France in the face.

However, with these odds, the French expedition under the command of Major Jean-Baptist Marchand, which was dispatched from the Atlantic into the heart of Africa with a force of eight French officers and 120 black soldiers from Niger district/Senegalese, possessing three steel boats fitted for sail or oars, and small steam launch - the adhere arrived to Fashoda on July 1898 and planted the tricolor flag of France, upon the upper Nile.

While this happened, Anglo-Ethiopian forces of thirty thousand led by Kitchener Herbert took Karari on 1/9/1898 and Omdurman on 7/9/1898. With this victory achieved, a light force of 500 men on two steamers

—Tewfikia and Sofia of the Arab dervish, on Khalifa's orders, were sent up to the White Nile to collect grain. On approaching the old garrison station of Fashoda, they came under intense fire from unknown forces and lost 40 combat men (a specific European power was on the upper Nile). After getting the telegraph wire, on 8/9/1898, the Sirdar Herbert Kitchener started up the White Nile for Fashoda with five steamers, the X1th and X111th battalions of Sudanese, two companies of the Cameron Highlanders, Peake's battery of artillery, and four maxim guns. They approached Fashoda on 18/9/1898 and then moored to the bank of the river for some hours to allow the message that Sirdar had sent to the mysterious European power to reach the station.

On the morning of September 19, 1898, French Major Marchand sent a message to the Sirdar, announcing the French occupation of Fashoda and welcoming the Anglo-Egyptian forces into the area in the name of France. In response, the British officers arrived, disembarked, politely disregarded the French flag, and raised the British and Egyptian flags without interfering with the French expedition.

⁷ Lewis, David Levering (opcit, 1988 page 7-8)

Following this, the Anglo-Egyptian forces were placed under the command of Colonel Jackson, who was appointed as the civil and military commander of the Fashoda district. On the same day, Sirdar Herbert Kitchener, leading the same forces, proceeded to the mouth of the Sobat River, which is sixty-two miles from Fashoda, and once again hoisted the Anglo-Egyptian flag. Sirdar Kitchener then returned north after stopping to subdue the small French unit stationed there.

Back home in the UK, the British were united in their agreement that "the French should evacuate Fashoda, or else all the might, majesty, dominion, and power of everything that could, by any stretch of the imagination, be called 'British' should be employed to make them go"⁸. (Churchill, p. 318). While diplomatic discussions took place between London and Paris, British and French troops lived in Fashoda for three months, maintaining a polite but tense rivalry.

The Fashoda incident led to the final partition of Sub-Saharan Africa—it was the next-to-last African partition before the powers ceded Morocco as a French sphere of influence— but it also led to the end of Europe established at the Congress of Vienna, the wrecking of the so-called Pax Britannica, and the demise of the European world hegemony.⁹

On 11th December 1898, the French officer received a telegram from their authorities instructing them to evacuate, lower their flag, and leave Fashoda through Abyssinia to the coast of Djibouti and return to their homeland that they had served so diligently¹⁰. The international disputes between France and England concerning the upper Nile region in Southern Sudan were finally resolved with an agreement signed in London on March 21, 1899, by Lord Salisbury and M. Cambon. At that time, Major Marchand and his men were still en route between Gore and Addis Ababa¹¹.

The addition to Article IV of the 1898 Niger Convention, characterized as harmless, effectively transferred the Nile Valley to British control. This settled the sixteen-year dispute over Egypt's occupation and clearly defined the border of Sudan with Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Congo—except for the Lado enclave—which remains unchanged today.

When Major Marchand and Kitchener were heading toward a confrontation in Fashoda, King Leopold II of Belgium was preparing his country to claim much of Sudan and the Red Sea littoral. He aimed to position himself advantageously between the British and the French, who sought to use Leopold in the Congo to hinder the other's expansion. Under pressure from Paris, Leopold II agreed to collaborate with France in its pursuits across Africa with the Congo-French convention of August 1894. However, he remained determined to play both powers against each other, maintaining his influence over Central and East Africa.

Meanwhile, a Belgian expedition - the largest European-commanded force to cross Central Africa - left its base in Northern Congo to advance toward the upper Nile before the British or French could send troops. On February 14 or 15, 1897, Belgian troops under Captain Leroi revolted at Dirfi village near the Yei River¹². Internal rebellion complicated the situation in Belgium. After twenty-one years, King Leopold II was finally pushed out of the scramble for Africa by Africans themselves. From 1902 to

⁸ Churchill p318

⁹ Opcit Lewis, David Levering (1988) page 229

¹⁰ Ibid Lewis p323.

¹¹ Balamoan, G Ayoub (1981). The people and economics in the Sudan 1884-1956, Cambridge: Harvard University Center for population studies p.432.

¹² Opcit Lewis-p95,

1906, fruitless negotiations took place between the British Foreign Office and representatives of King Leopold II, sovereign of the Congo Free State.

Finally, in 1906, the dispute was amicably resolved with the Anglo-Congolese agreement. King Leopold II relinquished his claims to southern Sudan in exchange for certain commercial concessions, guaranteed interest in a railway loan, and the retention of the Lado enclave under Belgian control for his reign.

Regrettably for Belgian interests in the Lado enclave—now comprising present-day West Nile in Uganda, Yei-Yambio in South Sudan, and northern Congo—King Leopold II died on December 17, 1909. Within a month, the Belgian Minister in London notified British authorities that the Belgian government was prepared to finalize the 1906 Anglo-Congolese agreement. A joint commission was established to facilitate the transfer, and on June 16, 1910, the Lado enclave was officially handed over to the Sudanese government¹³.

Sir Samuel Baker claimed Equatoria for Egypt in 1871, and in 1872, Baker annexed the kingdom of Bunyoro. In July 1878, after Gordon was appointed governor of Sudan/Khartoum, he appointed Emin, his emissary, to the Kabaka Mutesa of Buganda, who was holding captive troops sent into Buganda to expand the khedival sphere. While in Equatorial, Emin devoted the next few years to suppressing the slave traffic and founding a chain of Nile stations from Lado to Lake Albert, mapping the region for Sudan.¹⁴ This stretch of land remained part of Sudan until it was bartered with the Ilemi Triangle in 1914.

British influence in Sudan was established between 1896 and 1899, and both France and Belgium recognized the boundaries of Sudan in relation to their territories in 1898-1899 and 1894, respectively. The British established the Uganda Protectorate in 1894, while Sudan was jointly administered by the British and Egypt. In 1913, the Sudan-Uganda Boundary Commission was formed by the Governor-General of Sudan, Wingate. He appointed Captain Kelly, while the Governor of Uganda, F.J. Jackson, appointed Captain Tufnell.

The commission convened in Nimule on January 15, 1913, to begin its work. Significant consideration had been given to adjusting the Sudan-Uganda boundary months prior to the commission's establishment. The first detailed proposal was made by the Governor-General of Sudan to Viscount Kitchener in October 1911. This proposal involved transferring the Lado Enclave to Uganda and large tracts of northern Uganda, south of latitude 5°N, to Sudan. Several reasons were put forward for this adjustment, including the desire to reunite the Bari tribe, which was divided by the existing border, and to keep the Turkana tribe exclusively within Uganda. The Colonial Office agreed that the proposals from the Sudan government were acceptable, and the basis for the boundary delimitation between the Nile and Lake Rudolf/Turkana was as described by Wingate in October 1911 and reiterated in his letter to Kitchener dated November 5, 1912.

¹³ Collins Robert and Richard Herzog, (1961). *Journal of African History* Volume 2 No.1, p119-135.

¹⁴ Opcit Lewis p42

The Sudan government should take over that portion of Uganda lying between the present boundary (5 north latitude) and a line commencing at the junction of the river Unyama with the Nile south of Nimule, thence proceeding up the river Unyama to the point on the right bank 10 miles from its mouth, from that point running in a north-north easterly direction until it cuts four north latitudes, thence roughly following four latitudes taking the Dodinga and the Dabosa county, and finally turning up north-east to a point on the Sanderson gulf on lake Rudolf approximately where the shore of the gulf cuts 4 40 north latitude.

(fo 407/177f.48758)-kelly note (pxx)

In March 1912, the Ugandan governor responded by advocating for the inclusion of the Madi and Latuka tribes within Uganda, east of the Nile River, and the Kuku tribe within Uganda, west of the Nile. This proposal would have established a boundary along the Sanga River to the west of the Nile and along the Uma and upper Gomorro Rivers to the east. Notably, this adjustment would have kept Nimule and the navigable stretch of the Nile under Ugandan control. In addition to the boundary advantages highlighted by the Karhoum Governor, Mr. Wingate, the Governor of Uganda, Mr. Jackson, believed that Sudan's occupation of part of the shores of Lake Rudolf (now Lake Turkana) would help prevent the smuggling of large quantities of rifles from Abyssinia. However, Wingate firmly responded to Jackson's proposal, emphasizing that "unless Sudan had access to the navigable stretch of the Nile from Nimule to Lake Albert (which meant possession of Nimule), the territorial transfer would not proceed" (plate number 1/177F, 5th June 1912).

On 17th February 1913, both Tufnell and Kelly convened at Madial/Teretenya to compile their recommendations on the boundary after covering 120 miles out of the 400-mile stretch. Approximately 30% of the Sudan-Uganda border was surveyed by the joint commission, while the remaining 25% was covered by Kelly alone, stretching all the way up to Jabel Mogila, not far from the red line. The boundary commission did not reach Lake Rudolf, which was the final segment of their joint mission. From Jabel Mogila back to Nimule, Kelly felt confident about the boundary line; however, from Mogila to Lake Rudolf/Turkana, he recommended that "this should remain for further consideration when the limits of the Turkana and Toposa grazing grounds are accurately known." Additionally, west of the Nile, the Commission indicated that "their recommendations will require modifications and adjustments on the spot."

On 17th September 1926, at the order of the Secretary of State, a relatively small area of the Tertenya foothills was transferred from Sudan to Uganda to promote tribal unity and to facilitate the control of sleeping sickness. In the same year, the Rudolf (Turkana) province was transferred from Uganda to Kenya, which meant that a large area north of the Turkwell River went to Kenya, while approximately 140 miles of the boundary recommended in 1913 remained as the Sudan-Uganda border. Despite Kelly's warning that the proposed line from Jabel Harogo to Lake Rudolf/Turukana needed further examination of the grazing grounds, two critical mistakes occurred. First, the transfer of Turkana District to Kenya happened before a study of tribal grazing areas was conducted. Second, the council order inaccurately described the line starting from Jabel Mogila instead of Jabel Harogo, leaving the customary grazing grounds of the Turukana tribe in Uganda. The border remains unchanged at the lake, but the Turukana grazing areas were not identified. Consequently, the Sudan-Uganda boundary is about 270 miles (435 kilometers), while the Sudan-Kenya boundary is 140 miles (225 kilometers) long.

A more realistic make-up of the region is captured by Collins (2004):

British imperial officials had little interest in the "light soil" of Ilemi, mainly using it to further their territorial ambitions through arbitrary map lines. For the wandering Ateker, however, the area's wells and dry season pastures were crucial for survival. The nomadic Turkana live in the heart of Ilemi, moving between Sudan and Uganda. Surrounding them are the Didinga and Toposa from Sudan, who graze their livestock in Ilemi, as well as the Nyangatom from Sudan and Ethiopia, and the Dassanetch from Ethiopia, which had no imperial ambitions in the region..¹⁵



Turkana elders at a recent Ateker cross-border meeting in Turkana County



Toposa women at the recent Ateker cross-border meeting in Turkana County

¹⁵ Collines, R. (2004) 'The Ilemi Triangle' In *annalesd Ethiopie*, volume 20, annee' 2004 page 2

Kitgum Conference: 15-17th April 1924

The Kitgum Conference of 1924 aimed to address issues at the borders of Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan, particularly the frequent raids that caused loss of life, property damage, and livestock rustling (*see Figure 4 Below*). Held in Kitgum, Uganda, the conference included representatives from the three administrations and Ethiopia. While also discussing sleeping sickness, the main focus was on curbing inter-ethnic raids among communities (ATEKER) around the Ilemi region. Raiding had become a cultural institution, serving as a strategy for coping with disasters, a means of political competition, a rite of passage for young warriors, and a way to regulate livestock quality. Before colonial rule, raids were managed by the ATEKER council of elders. By the time of the conference, many tribes had armed themselves, with the Turkana expanding into non-traditional areas and the Merile and Inyanga'tom conducting armed raids against their neighbors.



On April 1, 1902, the process to transfer the Eastern Province of Uganda to the East African Protectorate (Kenya) was started.

Figure 4 The Political Context of the Sudan-Uganda Boundary Commission in 1913 16

¹⁶ When part of eastern Uganda was transferred to Kenya, <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/magazines/people-power/when-part-of-eastern-ugan>.
Source: Captain H. H Kelly

The porosity of the borders and poor administration were the major drivers of the challenges faced. The colonial administration saw two possible solutions: one, Sudan ceding the area under the Ilemi triangle to Uganda, or two, Sudan assuming full responsibility for administering the area. Should these two options fail, Uganda and Kenya secure the province.

Among the resolutions adopted, resolution (3) three was particularly instrumental in granting the cessation of the Ilemi triangle to either Uganda or Kenya if Sudan were to reconsider revising its boundary line. The Sudan delegation at the conference rejected any revision of the borderline as this was not part of their mandate. Resolution (5) captured Kenya's resistance to gaining control of the region, with the governor unwilling to take extra responsibility for administering the area.

"In Kitgum, the Ilemi Triangle was acknowledged as a recognized territorial area. Uganda and Kenya attempted to persuade Sudan to redraw the boundary in order to include the northern Turkana grazing grounds that extended beyond the 1914 line. This change would enable either Uganda or Kenya to support the Turkana people. This approach was considered logical due to Sudan's lack of interest in the remote region. However, the British faced challenges in unilaterally ceding Sudanese territory without Egypt's consent, which further complicated their already tense relations".¹⁷

One significant outcome of the Kitgum conference was the formal designation of Ilemi as a grazing ground accessible to all nomadic ethnic groups in the neighboring states. This decision aimed to minimize conflicts among African communities, particularly the ATEKER group, which frequently engaged in violent disputes over water and grazing rights, especially during droughts. However, due to logistical constraints and a lack of political will, Sudan failed to establish administrative outposts or adequate security infrastructures. The absence of sustainable socio-economic and security policies in South-Eastern Sudan ultimately limited the long-term effectiveness of British military efforts in the region. Subsequently, the conference decided that the Toposa, Merile/Dassanetch, Nyangatom, Tirma, and Turukana would graze and water their livestock under British supervision in Kenya...

¹⁷ Opcit Collines, R. (2004) page 4

The Negative Colonial Policies and their Effects on ATEKER People: Disunity, Marginalization, Insecurity and Poverty

By arbitrarily partitioning the ATEKER communities and placing them under the control of four different sovereign nation-states, British colonialism had a negative impact on the lives and socioeconomic development of their members. The ATEKER people became both subjects and objects of oppression, losing opportunities to maintain kinship ties, solidarity, and mutual support systems with their relatives who had migrated further inland within these nation-states. As previously noted, particularly in the case of the Ilemi Triangle, the British agents created more problems than they solved, disregarding the wishes of the ATEKER people.

The people and their regions were isolated from the rest of the world, with all contact and trade controlled by British colonial authorities. External influences were suppressed, requiring special permits from District colonial agents. Hon. Joshua Akol, the first Karimojong to graduate from university in 1963, experienced this firsthand. Karimojong students were not allowed beyond primary six, and he had to be smuggled out of Karamoja to attend Ngora Bishop Kitching College. Each term, he required permission from the District Commissioner of Soroti to return home and an exit permit from the DC of Moroto to leave for school. Akol later served as the East African Minister of Railways and Harbors, Chairman of Uganda Railways during the late 1970s, and Deputy Minister for Transport from 1981 to 1985. Fertile lands were designated as game and forest reserves, while traditional hunting was criminalized as 'poaching.' This led to the confiscation of resources that the ATEKER people had sustainably managed, forcing them and their livestock into arid areas.

Elders recount experiences from various locations in present-day Karamoja where the colonial administration and its agents planted even poisonous grasses to prevent people and their livestock from moving west and southward along the borders of Acholi, Lango, Teso, Sebei, and Bugisu, as well as into other conservation sanctuaries within Karamoja. They state that a network of security or feeder roads was constructed and maintained to facilitate police patrols. It was reported that if someone's cattle or livestock crossed these feeder or security roads (locally referred to as Amaire) or accidentally strayed into designated game or forest reserves, or even into neighboring districts, they would face the forceful confiscation of their cattle or livestock, including those that had not entered the restricted areas¹⁸.

Furthermore, the British colonial administrators forcefully excluded the fertile lands of the ATEKER people, restricting them to marginally productive areas. They claimed that the resulting soil erosion and degradation were due to overgrazing by the Karimojong. In response, they introduced a policy of compulsory de-stocking to reduce the number of livestock among the Karimojong families, in order to align livestock numbers with the available land area.¹⁹

This means militarily enforced destocking campaign in which the Karimojong and other ATEKER people in closed districts were forced to sell their bulls. The British military conducted cordon and search operations among the Karimojong kraals, confiscating livestock. As a result, the local population had no choice but to surrender their livestock wealth to colonial agents. The military used force to confiscate cattle, arrest the owners, and coerce them into accepting prices set by colonial government agents. In such circumstances, there was no freedom for a willing seller and willing buyer; instead, there was injustice and extortion. Furthermore, a poll tax was introduced and levied on every adult male. This tax had to be paid in cash, using a legal tender decreed solely by the colonial administration under emergency

¹⁸ Oral Interviews with Muzee Philip Icumar, Hellen Pulukol and Zakariah Ilukol from Namalu –South Karamoja and the late Muzee Adyaka -Apathecha from Nyakwae in Abim 2008

¹⁹ Karamoja: Colonial roots of famine in North-East Uganda; Mohamood Mamudani, Volume 9, Issue 25 1982

rules applicable in closed districts.

In the mid-1940s, forcefully confiscated livestock was taken to Kaagata, now part of Namalu in the Nakapiripirit District, where a British meat canning factory had been established. The canned beef supplied British military garrisons in Port Sudan and Port Aden during the Second World War²⁰. Furthermore, many Karimojong men, along with other communities in the ATEKER region, were conscripted to support British interests in places like Burma, with war booty from Karamoja also aiding the British war effort. Elders from Karamoja recount that colonial agents seized their livestock under the pretext of enforcing conservation area land ordinances. This de-stocking policy and the compulsory sales of livestock were imposed to supposedly prevent soil erosion and environmental degradation, which the colonial administration unfairly blamed on the overgrazing practices of the Karimojong people.

This way, it is clear that, through a combination of hostile and illegitimate policies and draconian actions aimed at serving and sustaining British colonial economic interests, the majority of Core ATEKER people from the then closed districts were forcefully cut off from the rest of their relatives, kith and kin (clansmen) of the broader ATEKER groups.

Not all is lost, there is still hope

The Ateker people face several development challenges, including persistent conflicts, insecurity, cattle rustling, unreliable water supplies, ill health, poor education, and limited access to essential services. Weak public administration, ineffective policies, and inadequate control over small arms contribute to widespread poverty and vulnerability at the edges of their nation-states.

Governments, cultural leaders, and civil society organizations have made various conflict prevention and peace-building efforts, including disarmament initiatives with mixed results have often. Anchoring on the respective government efforts, the Ateker people need to unite periodically, such as at annual events, to reflect on their situation, voice concerns, and reshape their shared history. They can work toward a peaceful and prosperous future by putting aside differences. Annual Cultural festivals like Tobong'u Lore among the Turkana, Karamoja Cultural Events (KCE), and Iteso Cultural Union (ICU)-Emorimor Coronation Anniversary Days should celebrate identity and foster collaboration for progress. These events should further inspire the Ateker people to advocate for regional integration, economic development, and increased investments to overcome conflict and poverty.

Lastly, understanding their identity and history is crucial for the Ateker people's future. The Ateker Reunion initiative promotes inclusive development, pride, and investment. By establishing a shared consensus and a clear road-map for actions and strategies, the Ateker people can strengthen partnerships across nations and the diaspora, moving from a troubled past to a meaningful future.

²⁰ Several Elders of Karamoja narrate how under the pretext of enforcing conservation areas land Ordinances; their livestock was grabbed by colonial agents and crashed in Namalu (Kagata) Meat factory, to feed British garrisons in Aden and Port Sudan during the Second World War. How the forceful de-stocking policy, arbitrary compulsory sales of livestock was brutally enforced under the pretext, to 'avoid soil erosion and environmental degradation' which the colonial administration unfairly blamed on Karimojong's over grazing and poor agricultural practices. That is blaming the victim of their artificially imposed restricted areas, which phenomena were themselves a result of confinement policies by governments and their law enforcement agencies

The Nexus of Insecurity, Marginalization and Poverty among the Core Ateker Communities:

The Strategic Significance and Opportunities on the Best way forward under the 'Ateker Reunion and Transformation Initiative'.

To unpack the nexus, we need to understand the underlying causes of conflicts and its relationship to under-development and poverty among the Core ATEKER communities and its implications for wider regional security and development, (Figure 5).

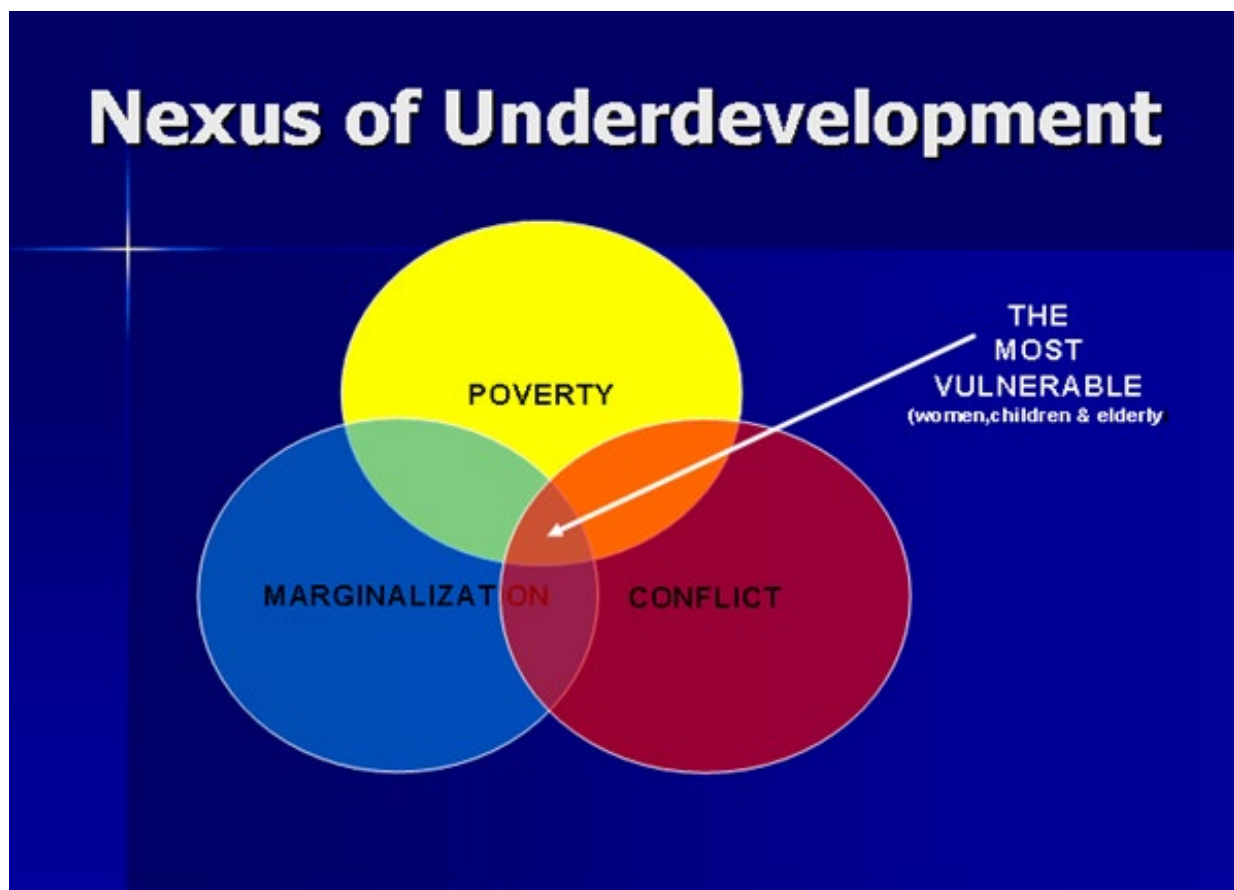


Figure 5 The interrelationship of insecurity, marginalization and poverty

The Problematic: The Core ATEKER communities, inhabit arid and semi-arid regions of the Horn and East of Africa sub-regions. These areas are usually where armed pastoralists live and are the most insecure and underdeveloped in each of the nation states. These cross-border communities have in particular had a history of marginalization and poverty. These sub-regions have over the years, become highly prone to conflict, primarily due to resource-based and ethnic identity disputes. The persistent insecurity and lawlessness coupled with the negative role of some customary and local leaders perpetuating these conflicts by sanctioning and blessing organized raids, and destruction of lives and property, constitute a governance and development challenge. These states of affairs have further

aggravated proliferation of illicit small arms, extreme poverty, chronic food insecurity, environmental degradation, restricted access to range-land for livestock grazing and contributed to limited access to essential services such as water, education, and healthcare. Furthermore, the chronic insecurity particularly across borders of nation states has pushed the Core Ateker people to the periphery of state governance, with resultant lack infrastructure, such as roads, bulk water storage facilities (Dams and Valley Tanks), telecommunications, and electricity. This has led to inadequate presence of law enforcement agencies, poor service delivery in-terms of education, healthcare, trade and other socioeconomic development. This has led to a vicious cycle of criminality, illiteracy, disease, and poverty that must be tackled.

In the communities of Core ATEKER, two distinct authority structures exist: one guided by customary elders (informal leaders) and the other comprising formal government structures at both local, county and central government levels. The traditional leadership system has shown remarkable resilience and greatly influences governance levels. Engaging these elders constructively and sustainably is crucial in addressing matters of peace and security. While local, county and central government structures are more effective in urban and settlements settings along major roads, but their presence in distant rural villages and kraals in grazing areas, should be more strengthened by establishing a workable early warning and early response mechanism linked to the informal and influential kraal and village leaders.

The traditional institutions, such as councils of elders, mobile kraals (ADAKAR and ALOMAR) leaders, and the cultural age-set system, which historically played a vital role in organizing significant community activities, have evolved to become more passive observers in the current efforts to promote peace and security in much of the Ateker regions. Some of these, play a negative role. It is essential to revitalize and strengthen these customary institutions along the former and current active cattle raiding routes or conflict-corridors. This effort should emphasize collaborative initiatives designed to enhance peace and security through an integrated approach aimed at transforming these conflict-affected zones into spaces for peace, increased productivity, trade, development, and mutual coexistence.

International influences have also notably impacted the challenges faced in the Ateker sub-regions. The legacy of colonialism remains a significant factor in these issues, as colonial powers established boundaries that did not respect the traditional communal range-land management systems critical for nomadic and agro-pastoralists shared heritage. Moreover, arbitrary alienation of pastoral lands for wildlife and forestry conservation, without prior consultations and appropriate arrangements for benefit sharing with local communities, has further limited resource availability for nomadic or Argo-pastoral Ateker groups.

Unfortunately, the lack of established mechanisms and institutional procedures for fostering peaceful coexistence and regulating the sharing of common property resources - such as water, pasture, salt licks, and social services - has increased tensions and criminality as community mobility has intensified. The ongoing challenges of environmental degradation and global climate change menace, contributing to variability in range-land resources, are likely to perpetuate resource-based conflicts. Therefore, the governments of member states are encouraged to lead the way in initiating bilateral agreements such as memorandum of understanding (MoUs) that ensure equitable resource access and orderly, safe and coordinated resources sharing agreements (RSAs), particularly in response to the current drought affecting the Core ATEKER communities.

The thriving trade in small arms across the Greater Horn of Africa, particularly from Sudan into Karamoja-Uganda and Turkana and West Pokot-Kenya, underscores the necessity for enhanced security arrangements by the governments of member states individually or collectively. It is vital for the military

and law enforcement teams in member states, along with civilian populations and development partners, to work in harmony to address the interconnected issues of demand and supply associated with the small arms trade through a comprehensive approach that prioritizes both peace, disarmament and sustainable development.

These different aspects of the nexus have highlighted the ineffective nation state presence, weak governance and ongoing challenges in maintaining security, law, and order among remote border zones of the Core Ateker communities.

In response, several peace initiatives are being implemented at national and decentralized county and local government levels, aiming to foster cooperation between governments, non-government actors and community leaders for peace and stability across international borders. In addition, present and future government policies and programs still need to establish functional government authority, particularly along cross-border areas of member states.

Recognizing that sustainable peace and security cannot exist without development and vice versa, the ATEKER people and their leaders should positively collaborate with central, local/and or county governments, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and development partners.

Forging a path towards Peace, Prosperity and Cultural Renaissance

Under the '*ATEKER Reunion and Transformation Initiative*', the Ateker leaders and other different stakeholders should aim to:

- a) Create a coherent and practical development road-map and undertake specific actions in partnerships with their respective national governments, regional bodies (EAC, IGAD, AU etc) and development partners, to ensure that peace acts as an incentive for development and, in turn, that development serves as an incentive for sustainable peace and prosperity.
- b) Evolve in each conflict Corridor, specific actions, responsibility lines, time frames and monitoring indicators for measuring progress or lack of it the common desire to transform these conflict corridors in to spaces for sustainable peace and development.
- c) Harmonize security agencies imperatives of enforcing sovereignty and establishing law and order with the local communities imperative for peace and resource access and sharing of opportunities and services for mutual cross-border coexistence.
- d) Increase Voice, representation, mobilize consensus, increase participation and build unity of purpose among the ATEKER peoples and strengthen their close work with respective national governments, net-working, policy and advocacy, trade and security in the region, we should establish and operationalize developmental networks. Some of these should include:
 - The ATEKER Parliamentary group network
 - The ATEKER wide Local Governments/Authorities forum and network
 - The ATEKER Civil Society Network
 - The ATEKER Business Community Forum or a network of Chamber of Commerce.
 - The ADAKAR Leaders Grazing Association per every cross-border Grazing corridor
 - The ATEKER Youth Network
 - The ATEKER Women's' Network
 - The ATEKER workers' network
 - ATEKER Professional Association of Lawyers, Medical practitioners, Miners etc.....
 - The Donor Group and Friends of ATEKER etc.
- e) Establish the *Ateker Community Development Trust* (ACODET) as a research, advocacy and development Think Tank with a joint secretariat and *Ateker* Zonal (Country) Chapters.