

Cross-Border Pastoralism in a Losing Era: An Unbroken Practice in Peripherality?

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Abstract

The practices of Batuku pastoralists in the Semliki region at the Uganda-DRC border have been hampered by the militia activities in the eastern DRC, droughts, the state controls of the border. This has prompted a crisis that has led both privation and invention that oftentimes feed off and inform one another. People in this crisis utilise what is present to them for their survival. This ethnography reveals a shift from patrilineal and gerontocratic political tendencies to a more “resource ownership” driven societal perception. Drawing on my conversations and hangouts with women, youth and the elderly in the Batukuland, there is an upcoming “counter culture” that is bringing a shift from androcentrism (agnatic politics) and gerontocratic (eldership politics) tendencies. A new situation where young people and women are breaking into “independent” resource ownership is observable. Women, for instance, are in trading centres; trading in various Chinese merchandise; they are in markets selling food and beverages of all kinds; they are in jobs of teaching at pre- and primary school levels; while others have moved to towns to work in industries. Some women find themselves as the head of their families after their husbands run away, and their cows get completely depleted because of drought. These developments have had an unsettling effect on the once relatively stable social system of the Batuku pastoralists, a system that was anchored in labour allocation and status ascription that depended on age and sex. The decimation of cattle that once held this system together has exposed the Batuku pastoralist community to a state of precarity and peripherality.

Keywords

Cross-Border Pastoralism, Batuku, Uganda-DRC Border, Peripherality

1. Introduction

In this article, I examine the practices of Batuku pastoralists in the Semliki region

at the border between contemporary Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This is a region characterized by crisis provoked by a previously open border that was closed in 2018, due to drought, and militia activities. Here, I explore what the crisis produces rather than strictly what it has taken away or what is lost. The article also aims to examine the ways that in the current crisis, both privation and invention inform and feed off one another (Piot, 2010). I draw attention to peoples' inventiveness in response to a crisis and the new ways of earning a living that come with it. I illustrate that there is no systematic shift from one kind of livelihood opportunity to another, nor do people pick one from a range of choices. Rather, people take on whatever is available to them in their locality. Drawing on the experiences and stories of women, youth and the elderly from my ethnographic research in the Batukuland, I focus on the shift away from patrilineal and gerontocratic political tendencies that historically are typical among many pastoral communities. In so doing, I illustrate how a new situation is emerging that involves young people and women breaking into "independent" resource ownership. This is evidenced by the new ways women and young people are perceiving their roles in homesteads.

During my fieldwork, I found that women have increasingly moved out of their households in search of their own income sources. They are in trading centres; trading in various Chinese merchandise; they are in markets selling food and beverages of all kinds; they are in teaching jobs at pre- and primary school levels; while others have moved to towns to work in industries. Some women find themselves as the head of their families after their husbands have run away because their cattle became completely depleted due to drought. In Lesorogol's words "the fact that livestock die during drought and human populations survive means that there are many stockless pastoralists who are unable to recover their losses (Lesorogol, 2003)." As Hodgson asserts, early anthropological studies which addressed gender relations applied a synchronic model, analysing such relations in terms of either the pastoral model of production or pastoralist ideology. She writes that those anthropologists contended that, among East African pastoralists, men's control of livestock gave them control of women (Hodgson, 2000). Her research amongst the Maasai demonstrated that the much-emphasised patriarchal perspective is not inherent to pastoralism but a result of changing interactions and ideas and practices. Hodgson emphatically argues that it was during the early period of British colonial state formation that the parameters of male Maasai power expanded to embrace new modes of control and authority, becoming something she calls "patriarchal". I stretch this argument further to suggest that the parameters of contemporary male Batuku power are mutating into new modes of control and authority that are driven by the increasing significance of capital accumulation and property ownership irrespective of age, gender and position. These changes are further disrupting the interdependence of those who make up Batuku society. What is becoming more evident is who owns what in terms of land, cattle, money, shops, regardless of whether the owner is a man, woman, youth, or an elder, and irrespective of how the person acquired the resources.

This focus on ownership translates into a shift from a society whose relations were once anchored in complementarity and co-operation between generational patrimony, maternal support and the offspring that result from these social arrangements. In this paper, I argue that the changes on the Uganda-DRC border from a porous to a “hard” one have not only affected the Batuku transhumance patterns and routines but it also threatens to disrupt the most intimate domains of social structure and power dynamics of the Batuku community. I also suggest that this reduced on the role played by cattle in the social relations and structures of the Batuku pastoralists.

The border closing and the commodification of the cattle economy have disrupted earlier practices of sexually allocated rights and responsibilities, leaving women and young people in search of new sources of existence. The breakdown of complementary and interconnected responsibilities of men and women is leading to the disintegration of the socioeconomic structures within which social relations, both in domestic and public spheres, had previously been constituted, maintained and transformed. Age and sex continue to be the key axes of social organisation, which distinguish categories of persons in the Batukuland and structure their roles, rights, and responsibilities. Relations between men and women depend on age, kinship, and clan, but are generally based on mutual respect and relative autonomy. Although the Batuku traditionally depended on the milk and blood of their cattle and meat for subsistence, they had long supplemented their diet with other foodstuffs bartered or bought from neighbouring cultivators. Women always created and maintained the links with neighbouring cultivating groups that supported these practices. They traded surplus milk, hides, small stock, and even ghee, for foodstuffs. This trade was either brought to their homes by the non-Batuku cultivators or they moved to trading centres to sell and buy the products and foodstuffs.

I carried out an ethnography of Batuku pastoralists from November 2022 to June 2023. The initial visits were done in only the two sub-counties of Kanara and Rwebisengo. As Fife (2005) notes, “the goal of the ethnographic research is to formulate a pattern of analysis that makes reasonable sense out of human actions within the given context of a specific space and time”. Fife, also points out that long-term observations are necessary to gain some understanding of the unwritten “rules” that govern human interactions among a specific group of people. In accordance with his suggestions, I “hung out” with Batuku pastoralists and followed their lives, and examined their explanations as to when, how and why they crossed the border, as well as when and why they remained on one side.

2. Anthropological Perspective of Earlier Pastoralists in Eastern Africa

As Evans-Prichard, puts it, recovering from herd losses can force pastoralists to adopt new ways of living as the Nuer were forced to cultivate extensively when their herds were decimated by rinderpest (Evans-Prichard, 2008). In agreement

with Evans-Prichards' view, Comaroff & Comaroff, assert that the transformation of any society should be revealed by the changing relations of persons to objects within it. The changing salience of cattle among the Batuku youth is bringing in new sources of livelihood. Among the Batuku pastoralists youth, especially males, must maintain their good relations with elders be it their fathers, uncles, grandfathers or any other male elder promising to meet their social, ritual, and economic obligations on their behalf. This is due to the fact that they need resources to marry and have their own homesteads. With the decline in cattle resources, the power of the gerontocratic elders controlling access to land, cattle which provide social worth and recognition, seems to be waning.

With the demise of the Batuku pastoralists' means of livelihood, the young are becoming people who partake in what Janet Roitman (2005) describes as unregulated economic exchanges and financial activities. In her ethnographies of the Chad Basin, Roitman describes young people who became part of those groups that controlled and barricaded the roads as organised road bandits, and they have become a regional phenomenon linked to transnational flows. This border region has the potential to slide into a zone described by Roitman (2005) as a "military-commercial nexus" where the basis of livelihood for many people (i.e., state bureaucrats, the merchant elite, and the military, civilians and non-state militias) might connect in economic activities that are highly risky, criminal and unregulated in nature. With conflicts in DRC and South Sudan, this border region is a fertile ground for banditry and criminality, especially if young people's situations remain hopeless.

Along similar lines, Comaroff & Comaroff refer to the image of youth as "trouble", a label that has acquired an advanced capitalist twist as impatient adolescents go about "taking the waiting out of wanting" by developing remarkably diverse forms of illicit enterprise (2000). They also talk of the startling effects of neoliberal capitalism and its changing planetary order, where youth situations have become similar the world over. These similarities, according to Comaroff and Comaroff, seem to be founded on a contradictory process of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion. This segment of the population has gained unprecedented autonomy as a social category because of its relative marginalisation from normative work and wage; but these youth are also at risk and living precarious lives. As Comaroff & Comaroff put it, patrilineal politics, along with social bonds that are formed by marriage, make the world of pastoralists negotiable, a fluid, dynamic universe in which the practical efforts to construct identity, rank and relations are the stuff of social action (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). Social and cultural arrangements of the Batuku pastoralists are based primarily on the differences between sex and generation. The meaning ascribed by the Batuku pastoralists to human activity is particularly a conceptualisation of sex, age, and experience. Production is, therefore, a virtue of interdependence between man, woman, and child. Pastoral work is thus a creative process inherent in all of Batuku existence and is expressed in the making of self and the others in the course of everyday life. Cattle have historically been the source of dependability among the Batuku, as they have been

among other African pastoralists. They are self-reproducing and mobile in the face of drought and danger; they permit stable storage, exchange, and spontaneous growth of wealth. Anthropologists have long recognized that it is through cattle that the conception of time is articulated among the African pastoralists (Evans-Prichard). This means, for example, that time is conceptualised based on daily activities such as when cattle are milked; when they are taken out to graze; when they are watered; and when they are returning home for milking in the evening. Therefore, time in the Batuku community is not abstract, but a resource that exists as part of chains of events and actions. As Comaroff and Comaroff observe, in the absence of such activity there literally is no time. Yet, time is a critical dimension of the entire social calendar and, with it, the order which gives meaning and material form to the social world. It is on the basis of this “social calendar” that complimentary social relations through rights, responsibilities, and expectations of men, women and children, have emerged among the Batuku pastoralists. It is from the “cattle clock” in Evans Prichard’s sense that a system of who should do what, when, and why is built and transformed from generation to generation among the Batuku.

The above complexity of time needs to be understood in the context of the broader processes of economic commodification, kinship contractions, regional warfare, resource extraction and the encounter between the “global” and “local” forces of transformation (Hutchinson, 1996). These processes, according to Hutchinson, are “changing the relations of autonomy and dependence rooted in fundamental social connections created by cattle in relation to age, gender, wealth, and descent”. The role of cattle in creating and maintaining the socially augmented sense of self and other has subsequently weakened because of the emergent capitalistic and individualistic opportunities of cattle and other forms of wealth acquisition, which are prevalent at the Uganda-DRC border. In this region oil exploration has already commenced and the value of land has more than tripled. The elite group, which is powerful and connected with state machinery, is scrambling for land and resources in this region. The pastoralists find themselves unable to stand the commercial pressure from those dealers and the processes of capitalistic optimists.

3. From Cattle to Carcass

Pati, a 51-year-old man, has been a cross-border pastoralist since his youth. He reared his father’s cattle both in Uganda and DRC, which he later inherited and since that time he has lived with his cattle in the Semliki region. However, his cattle were depleted by the drought of 2016/2017. With drought persisting and militia activities in DRC, He chose to sell all the cattle that were still surviving and ventured into a business of buying those cattle that could not move or stand on their own, including the dead ones. “After buying the cattle I slaughter them and dry the meat which I sell to those in different surrounding trading and urban centres. This is my new source of livelihood”. Pati spoke to me about how this busi-

ness had helped him and his family earn a living amidst challenges that come with drought and a closing border. He made a profit from the dying cattle of his fellow Batuku and filled the void of the absence of a market for the cattle that died in large numbers during the dry season. Even though he buys at low prices, it is better than situations when we had to bury the carcasses said Moses a fellow resident of Semliki region. This small amount of money can buy water for the family, or maize meal. Pati's compound is full of drying hides, and flies attracted by fresh hides are a common visitor. Meat on the wooden trays being dried and salted is watched over to prevent flies from spoiling it. He pays a lot of attention to this meat and the dried one is packed in sacks waiting to be transported for sale to trading centres.

Pati is always called by the owners of the dying cattle to go and buy them. He sometimes takes carcasses on credit and pays later after he has sold the meat. However, Pati is stigmatised by his activities as he noted that "pastoralists look at him as their last resort for their dying cattle". Since all his cattle were completely depleted and he turned to this business, people have accused him of being a "sadist" because they view him as someone who derives happiness and survival from other "people's tears". Indeed, Pati's concerns are appropriate because being one who buys dying cattle can be perceived negatively by his own community members who may look at him as "unempathetic" to his own kin groups in Batukuland. In the past, the business he is engaged in was always done by non-pastoralists who lacked access to meat so this was their only way of getting meat. These non-pastoralists were never expected to have an emotional feeling for the cows and their owners. Now it is their own who are buying their cows, not only cheaply, but also sometimes by the owners first pleading with him to purchase the animals. It is as if he is doing them a favour. The whole point in this scenario is a shift from a "herdsman outlook" which Evans-Prichard, writes about in his studies among the Nuer of South Sudan (Evans-Prichard). Cattle herders have a world view that does not go beyond the well-being of their herds in terms of reproduction, size, and relations with other herdsman. So, when an individual who was once a herdsman finds himself in Pati's position, he faces the stigma of no longer being a herdsman. Moreover, for a former herdsman to be the one now slaughtering cattle that ought to be helped to live is not only an abomination but also unheard of in the pastoral context. It should be remembered that most pastoralists do not just slaughter their cattle. Cattle are slaughtered because they have failed to live. This is well captured in the Batuku saying that "*eyaremwa agayo ebaagwa*" (the cow that fails to live is ultimately slaughtered). Therefore, shifting from this complex thinking structured by one's relationship to one's living cattle, fundamentally changes social standing as well as one's sense of self.

The love for cattle by the Batuku pastoralists, as it is for other pastoralists, is so intense that shifting one's attitude to cattle can be complicated. The Batuku pastoralists' love for cattle drives them to areas that are sometimes risky to live in. They cross rivers with their cattle to search for fresh resources for their survival.

Moreover, given Pati's age and elder status, he should be giving young people wisdom and knowledge about how to better take care of their herds. But here he is buying dying cattle after his own cattle were completely depleted. As he revealed, this business positions him as a failure in the view of his fellow Batuku pastoralists especially elders. I observed the Batuku's love for their cattle through the energy and time they put in to caring for the cow that could not stand on its own. They lifted the cow every morning and collected fresh grass and carried water to it.

Pati's stigma is not surprising; it is well founded in the values of pastoralists whose herds get decimated. Yet, this stigma may be overcome as he succeeds in showing signs of capital accumulation from his business. This can be in the form of changing his living conditions in terms of a house, household appliances, and the conditions of his family members in terms of dress, food and their general well-being. The rate at which he is profiting from the sale of meat of the cattle, will change his life, and it will possibly change the perceptions his fellow Batuku pastoralists have for him. He may even attract others to join the business.

This is in view of the trajectory of herding in the whole East African region, where states are intensifying their drive to discourage migration and enforce settled herding activities; with the diversification of pastoral economies and reducing on the number of livestock pastoralists must look for new opportunities. East African regional governments are pushing pastoralists to the adoption of what they are calling "modern", commercial methods of agriculture and farming, by first acquiring private land and changing from their traditional types of cattle to exotic ones.

Pati's story reveals a change from "the herdsman outlook of the world". Pastoralists view the world in relation to their perspective of their herds. They have contempt for those who have no cattle or have fewer than themselves. They struggle to protect their herds in good and bad times. They do not slaughter them for food unless they die of natural causes. They aim at multiplying them and, where necessary, raid their neighbours' cattle in order to restock and restore their herd size after disasters such as droughts. They move with their animal across and astride international borders and beat all the rules and regulations for the well-being of their cattle. Therefore, the situation Pati finds himself in is one of a people whose source of livelihood is facing decimation amidst increasing demands of life. Like everyone in the region, Pati is faced with new and old demands of life, for instance, his children must be kept in school; they need food; they need health care and above that they need a roof on their heads. So, as a man faced with such demands, breaking the "herdsman outlook of the world" is what will keep him in a "manly" position in the Batukuland's sense of the word. That is being a husband to his wife; a father to his children and a shareholder of the social relations and networks of his neighbourhood, clan, and extended family. It is a way of "socially navigating" (Vigh, 2006) that can provide insights into the interplay between objective structures and subjective agency (cf. Vigh). As an analytical optic, social navigation (i.e., committing abominations to maintain social relations) enables to make sense

of the opportunistic, sometimes fatalistic, and tactical ways people in the periphery struggle to expand their horizons of possibility in situations of conflict, turmoil, and diminishing resources.

The move from cattle to carcass experienced by Pati needs also to be understood in the wider context of the complexity of the duties and obligations that revolve about cattle. Cattle in the Batuku pastoral society are a thread that ties together the beads of social relations. Social relations are knitted in the connections that start from cattle and end with cattle exchanges. Consanguineal, affinal, person to person relations are built on cattle transfers from clans to clans, families to families and individuals to individuals. Children are connected to their matrilineal as well as patrilineal through cattle connections. Brother-sister and brother-brother relations are established and maintained through the inherited cattle of their fathers and bridewealth paid to them by their in-laws. Therefore, the demise of cattle, if understood in the context of these relations, would mean the demise of the sociality and belonging of the Batuku as a group and elders' reactions toward Pati's move from his traditional roles looking after cattle to taking of the carcasses can never be without conflict.

4. Counter Culture Practices

Jessica is 43 years old, married and a mother of five children. I met Jessica when I went to Nyakasenyi livestock market. I reached at the market around midday and all the cattle had already been sold off. I then went to the food selling section of the market and sat in one of the houses of mud and wattle where Jessica and other women sell food and drinks. I asked for a cup of tea and sat down and slowly started conversing with Jessica. Jessica sells food and other beverages, including milk tea, in every livestock market. Jessica and other women move to every livestock market where they cook food and sell different kinds of beverages to those in the market. She rents a house from the market tender-holders and pays *empoza* (market dues) that is levied according to her sales. Jessica is a Mutuku woman who is expected to be taking care of her homestead; her children; her milk utensils; and the young calves that do not go for grazing. She is also meant to take care of all the milk requirement of her family members. These are the socially ascribed roles of all Batuku women. So, breaking away from these ascriptions can sometimes bring ridicule and disdain. She said that it has for long been shameful for pastoralists' wives to cook food and sell drinks in the marketplaces where many people see them. If one's husband owns cattle and she is cooking food in the marketplace, it would be perceived as a bad omen for the cattle. Jessica views herself as one who has broken through the contempt and superstitions that surround cooking food in the marketplace, and she has shown that it is possible for a woman to engage in other work other than those relating to pastoralism.

Jessica started the business at the time when her husband's cattle were dying in the dry season and she needed to do something to keep their family safe. It was hard for the husband to meet all the needs of the family (*ebyetaago by'omuuka*),

including her children's school fees. Her husband is fortunately supportive of the business. Jessica said that many women still castigate her for undermining what are perceived to be traditional cultural values. She is seen by some to be the one who has strayed from the norm. She is also referred to as a woman who turned herself into a market cook. She refers to herself as someone who has "left the house and the milk and its activities". To her, it is a breakthrough. She believes that men have less contempt for her work than women. She said that men are the ones who consume the food and drinks she sells after they have sold their livestock in the market. During the many times I sat in her room, I witnessed many more men come in to eat than women. Therefore, it would seem that most of them appreciate her work. But there are also many male traditionalists who regard women as being "flowers in the homestead" who are not meant to do any work other than handling milk. Jessica narrated how, if she had not broken the tradition, she would be witnessing some of her children dropping out of school and she would be helpless as her husband's cattle were dying. Jessica is one of the women working for money to supplement their husbands' incomes. She considered herself to be innovative in her capacity to develop alternative livelihood strategies. The kind of woman, who has transited beyond the societal expectations, is contributing towards changing the social and cultural worlds they inhabit.

The Batuku pastoralists' division of labour is based on gender, age and, as indicated above, generation. Men take care of and milk cattle since it is considered an abomination for a woman to milk a cow in Batukuland. Boys tend to cattle in the grazing area, and some families hire cattle caretakers (*abapakasi*). Also, boys are responsible for smearing ash mixed with water on the udders of the cows after milking in the morning to stop them from being hurt by thorns and bitten by insects in the bush as they graze. The young children herd the calves and women care for those calves that are still too young to follow others into the grazing areas. The work of herding cattle, as well as watering them, are exclusively the domain of men and youthful boys. Treating the sick cattle is also work that is done by men among the Batuku pastoralists. This is done to cure, prevent and promote the health of the animals by controlling ticks, tsetse flies, and other insects that cause damage to animals. They spray their cattle with Acaricide on a weekly basis. The Batuku pastoralists also apply medicines on the animals to control worms (*enjoka*) and this is once again done by men. Vaccination against contagious diseases is typically done by the district veterinary department officials, who must make sure that all people have turned up for vaccinating their animals. Men also draw blood from the animals (*okurasa*) in order to treat the animal or to extract blood for food. Some animals could be sick and when blood is drawn from them, they are cured of their illness. Batuku also draw blood from their cattle to supplement other types of food. This activity is not everyone's work, and it is usually done by those with the know-how and experience, or else the cow may die in the process.

Jimo is 28 years old and rides a motorcycle (Bodaboda, a term in the local dialect for a motorcycle that references the border). I transport people to and from

the trading centres. Bodaboda is the quickest means of transport available in this region where vehicles are rare, and roads are somehow in poor condition. This helps many young people of my age to earn a living. I earn a daily income and sustain my life and that of my mother whom I stay with, and my siblings in Rwebisengo sub-county. I started when I was hired as a rider by a businessperson at the Karugutu trading centre, and I would report every day the amount of money I collected from riding passengers the whole day. I kept on saving and learning the dynamics of the business, and now I have acquired my own motorcycle which I have almost paid off, and I continue to pay instalments every month. Jimo's normal day involves waking up early morning, preparing his motorcycle and himself and riding to the stage in the trading centre of Rwebisengo. He describes his work as "earning as you move". He starts earning money as soon as he steps out onto the road. This work gives him hope of one day building a house of his own, raising cattle, and increasing his ability to pay his bridewealth, marry, and have a family.

To Jimo, the income he gets from his transport business is far beyond the earnings of many youths who are involved in cattle herding. He acknowledges that many people in Rwebisengo community despise his job, but they always call him to take them wherever they want to go, and they pay. This ridicule comes from the fact that they expect him to be a prospective pastoralist by spending time looking after cattle and multiplying them. In his view, these days are different; he is looking at becoming a "modern" farmer. To him, farming now needs to change and a farmer needs to be settled in one's own land, build a permanent house, install a permanent source of water, and grow grass for use in times of drought. He proposes that the land that is owned communally by clans does not give the opportunity for the development of young people. The fact is that communally owned land cannot be sold or used as collateral in banks for loans. Jimo sees this kind of land use has been the source of "underdevelopment" in Rwebisengo sub-county. In Jimo's opinion the older people and especially politicians who fail to do their job of encouraging people to plan and excavate wells for a permanent source of water. At his age, Jimo is culturally expected to be looking for avenues for accumulating cattle and creating networks that can help him to become cattle-rich. But Jimo has defied all these socially ascribed expectations and responsibilities and acted contrary to the "Batuku culture". It is this defiance that I take to be "counter-culture". This is a moment at which the whole cultural complex of the Batuku pastoralists and their herdsman outlook is being reviewed by young people through livelihood innovations. Many young people in this region are looking for ways of leaving to go abroad to look for work; some have migrated to urban areas in search of new styles of living. The above story evidently shows what Comaroff & Comaroff describe as widespread anxiety about the production and reproduction of wealth, anxiety that frequently translates into bitter generational opposition. This anxiety is produced by the fact that the older generation controls the production and reproduction of cattle and other forms of wealth, keeping the youth under their control through the promise and hope of providing them with

bridewealth cattle. In Batukuland, young people must wait for their fathers, uncles, or sometimes paternal grandfathers to provide bridewealth that allows them to marry, and later, they must allocate cattle to them to run and manage their own homestead.

Contemporary scholars of African youth show how young people aspire to come of age in often volatile and precarious circumstances as well as how they have had to shape their lives and strategies accordingly in their attempt to generate meaningful lives for themselves. They illustrate that conditions in most places shape the possibilities, experiences, and fantasies of young Africans. These attempts by the youth can be viewed in Piot's sense of "passionate pleas to establish their rights to inclusion in the wider society". Jimo's story demonstrates the way young people move and shape the environments in which their lives are set by the struggles of their societies. These are the ways that the death of a tradition and the dissolution of the cattle complex system have disrupted the conditions by which life is lived. This is the way the young people in Africa reconfigure what Comaroff and Comaroff call "geographies of exclusion and inclusion." Jimo's story evidences the way young people may seek to escape confining structures and navigate economic, social and political turmoil. These strategies reveal how young people seek to inhabit, escape or move within difficult circumstances in ways that they find meaningful. Understanding the move from the way this pastoral society has traditionally positioned young people to how they now seek to position themselves is crucial for illuminating how the herdsman outlook of the Batuku pastoralists is being deconstructed and what counter-positions and new definitions are emerging. As Christiansen, Utas & Vigh. assert "the generational categories, such as childhood, youth and adulthood, are not neutral or natural but rather part of the struggle for influence and authority within almost every society" (Christiansen *et al.*, 2006). The movement from childhood to adulthood is not just a moment between developmental positions but between positions of power, authority and social worth.

Jimo's story also highlights young people's ease in adopting new techniques of learning, earning and communicating. Technological innovations such as mobile phones are always in the hands of young people and typically are beyond the reach of gerontocratic custodians in this pastoral society. This ability of young people is what Christiansen *et al.*, refer to as "youth (e)scapes". These authors consider the youth to represent social shifters that create the social configurations out of their efforts to redefine and change their living situations. For Batuku youth like Jimo, since cattle are the most cherished possession, being an essential food supplier and the most important social asset, living without them can be a problem both at personal, household and public levels.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have shown how a society that constructed itself and its livelihood through cross-border pastoralism, is now faced with the complex developments

that are playing out in the Semliki region. The Batuku pastoralists in this borderland developed a “cattle complex system” through cross-border networks, institutions, and local knowledge, which were transmitted from generation to generation. It would seem that this is now crumbling as a result of drought, the “hardening” of the border, and the privatisation and commodification of land along with the decimation of cattle. These developments have profoundly unsettled the once relatively stable social system of the Batuku pastoralists, a system that was reproduced through forms of labour allocation and status ascription that depended on age and sex. Consequently, women, men, children and youth have to participate in livelihood strategies that are increasingly squeezed by modes of competition and exclusion that are profoundly changing pastoralism and turning it into a highly precarious livelihood practice.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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