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Pokot social organization
structures, networks and ideology

Michael Bollig

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Pokot
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1. Introduction: The social structure paradigm in African anthropology

The social structure of traditional societies has been a major trajectory of anthropology since Radcliffe-Brown (1940), Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Fortes/Evans-Pritchard (1940). During its classic phase British Social Anthropology devoted most of its work to the social structure of traditional societies (Kuper 1972: 89ff).

Many important contributions to the analysis of social structure were based on research in African societies. Unilineal descent groups, age groups and neighbourhoods were interpreted as the major structural features of rural African societies. Social structure was then seen as a set of interdependent institutions guiding the behaviour of actors through norms, values, rights and obligations. The structure of a society was seen as an abstraction from actually observed rule-governed behaviour (Radcliffe Brown 1940). Nadel (1957) depicted social structure in the following way,

"We arrive at the structure of a society through abstracting from the concrete population and its behaviour the pattern of network [...] of relationships obtaining 'between actors in their capacity of playing roles relative to one another'." (quoted in Schweizer 1992: 19).

There social anthropologists found a handy formula describing what to do in order to find social structure: interview or observe a "concrete population and its behaviour", then abstract and find hidden structures!

Unfortunately Radcliffe-Brown did not mention how abstractions should be made in a controlled and systematic way, and his followers frequently do not give us a chance to learn *how* they abstracted from interview data or observed behaviour. Usually we only find the results of abstractions in their monographs. A generation of anthropologists became fascinated by such abstractions which were then called unilineal descent groups or age sets. Abstractions resulted in marvellous charts of segmentary systems (Evans Pritchard 1940, Bohannan/Bohannan 1962) or complex age set systems (Jacobs 1965). To this day these social structures are very attractive to the anthropological and lay audiences. They seem to show us a well ordered traditional system - Africa as it once had been before the ill-fated European involvement

in these societies. Cultural change is frequently seen as a development away from the highly structured past. The lack of social order is juxtaposed to a well ordered past. This image of the "traditional African society" is static and anti-individualistic (or over-socialized as individuals adhere to norms rather than act along individual rationality).

However, there are some methodological and theoretical flaws in the frequently copied approach of Radcliffe-Brown. From what kind of data do we abstract, how shall we abstract, and how shall these abstractions be represented? Evans Pritchard (1940: 1ff) offers some insight into the ethnographic process which leads to more abstract representations of the Nuer social organization. He repeatedly discussed with key informants rights and obligations of individuals and groups. Conflict behaviour, marriage and ritual were key variables of the discussions. The ethnographic process took place in a "long conversation" (Bloch 1977: 278) between Evans Pritchard and male Nuer informants, probably main actors in the arenas they described. Hence the ethnographic base on which later abstractions were built were data from interviews rather than direct observation of social exchange.

Recent theoretical strands criticized this structuralist approach to society as too narrowly (or even wrongly) defined. Bloch (1977) pointed out that the social structure we obtain in an ethnographic approach based primarily on interviews resembles the folk knowledge of a social system rather than an abstraction from actually observed behaviour. Granovetter (1985) described the structuralist approach as "over-socialized". He also pointed out that the approach has major disadvantages when it comes to predicting the behavioural choices of individual actors as it overemphasizes the institutional constraints for individual action. Frequently actors do not act along fixed standards, but rather according to their individual goals and rationality. They attempt to change institutions according to their personal interests. The "rational actor" approaches in economics (North 1991) and anthropology (Görlich 1992) have shown how institutions (and structures) may be interpreted as results of individual actions rather than as the framework governing individual rationality. Both strands of criticism - the network cum individual actor approach and the cognitive approach - are valuable in defining our position as social scientists towards the problem of social structure. While Bloch gives us a new perspective on what those structures we obtain in interviews could really be, Gra-

novetter and other social network specialists (Schweizer 1989) show us what controlled abstractions from the social network look like.

Based on one ethnographic example from northwestern Kenya this paper wants to explore the interrelations between social structure, individual action and ideology. First, the social structure of the pastoral Pokot as it was presented by mainly male informants is described. As in other nilotic groups, the social system represented here is based on descent groups and age grades. Then, data on social and economic exchange (two spheres which are hardly discernible) are represented. From 1987 to 1993 I gathered information on exchange in a local network of 37 nomadic households. After some time I learnt that for each herder, personal networks of livestock exchange are of considerable importance. Personal networks were formed according to the individual goal to accumulate relations in order to spread risk rather than by descent groups and age grades. This network data is then analysed by the formal tools of network analysis (Knoke/Kuklinski 1982; Schweizer 1989c). Controlled abstractions from the actually observed network which were achieved with the help of tools from formal network analysis *did not* show the cooperate groups about which the Pokot frequently talked. The social organization of everyday life was much less structured than Pokot informants made me at first believe. If the structure of these networks does not correspond to Pokot ideas on the corporateness of social groups, then one has to ask what do the structures Pokot talk about really represent, and in what settings do they become relevant?

2. Structures of the Pokot social system

Pokot herders make use of a semi-arid habitat by means of large herds of camels, cattle, goats, sheep and donkeys (cf. Schneider 1953; Dietz 1987; Bollig 1992). Against various risks (droughts, epidemics, raiding) the Pokot try to ensure themselves through herd diversification, dispersal of the household herd, flexible labour allocation, spatial mobility and through widespread exchange networks (for a longer discussion of risk minimizing strategies see Bollig forthcoming). While pasture and waterholes are communally owned, livestock is private property and there are considerable differences in the size of livestock herds. However, economic alternatives such as trade, handicrafts, and wage labour are of little importance, and rich herders rarely invest capital outside the livestock sector. Informal neighbourhood councils coordinate the

collective use of pastures and wells. There is up to now, and in contrast to other Kenyan pastoralist groups, no pastoral elite that dominates herders economically or politically. Absentee herd-ownership (Hogg 1986; Ensminger 1992) is practically non-existent. An egalitarian ideology permeates the discourse of age sets, descent groups and internal conflict regulation.

First ideas on Pokot social structure were developed in numerous discussions with key informants and through observations of age set and descent group rituals. According to informants the social structure of the pastoral Pokot was based on patrilineal descent groups and on age sets and generation sets. Both types of corporate groups could be mapped nicely: lineages were integrated into exogamous clans, several annual initiation sets formed larger age sets, and six generation sets with fixed names cycled in time (Bollig 1990a). I had obtained a lot of data on these social formations during the first months of my fieldwork. Informants, most of them male, were eager to give information on these points and I found the information I thought I should have obtained when asking for social structure. Being socialized as an anthropologist over several years gives one a (deceivably) clearcut picture what to look for, and among East African herders these are age sets and descent groups! A further proof that Pokot men obviously like to communicate these idea to outside observers are the numerous accounts of Pokot age sets and clans in reports of colonial officers (KNA 1907 - 1960, n.d.). It seems as if every incoming official took great pains to talk to Pokot elders to give an account on their clans and age grades. The following paragraphs outline what the structures of the Pokot social system looked like after about one year in the field.

2.1. Lineages, clans

Every person is member of a patrilineal descent group (*or*, pl. *ortin*) by birth. Women do not change the membership of their descent group after marriage. In Eastern Pokot there are about 200 patrilineages. The genealogical depth of these lineages is from three to seven generations. The size of lineages differs considerably from only several households to more than 50 households. The internal organization of a patrilineage is not very formal. There are no formally appointed lineage leaders. However, there are some elder men who are accepted for their ability to deal with matters of everyday life. These men may influence decision making to some degree, but they will find it hard to press for their goals. There are no regular meetings of lineage seniors, nor are there common goals regarding the protection or increase of their means of pro-

duction. All patrilineages are members of one patriclan (*lilö*). The lineages of one clan do not account for their membership by genealogy. There is no common ancestor, not even a fictitious one. Lineages are unified in one clan by a set of common symbols (*enwait*). To refer to the rules of clan exogamy, informants frequently referred to the symbols of the clans. They would make their point saying that "frog people" do not marry each other, or that "people of the monitor lizard" use the same property signs to mark their livestock.

Some clans are integrated into a unit of higher order, for example the Ngusur and Soliongot clans form the unit Terik (Fig. 1). However for this third layer of social order there is no generic term, and the assumption may be

Fig.1: The Terik moiety and Soliongot and Ngusur Clan

Terik (a unit of two clans)		
clan		clan
NGUSUR		SOLIONGOT
symbol: rain		symbol: thunder
lineages:		lineages:
Kachepkai		Kachepuny
Kaponot (adopted)		Kaparwas
Kamechin		Katoye
Katetirwa		Kamkan
Kasitim		Kasonch
Karapiny		Kamarmar
		Kachepawan
		Kakitiny
		Kaporet
		Kamwtyony

valid that this form of moiety organization stems from a pre-pastoral episode of Pokot history (Bollig 1990a). There is no hierarchy of clans; although there are many clans which were adopted into existing Pokot descent groups, all clans are regarded as equal. There are no decisions to be taken on clan level.

2.2. Age sets and Generation sets

While all Pokot, men and women alike, belong to one lineage and one clan, only men are members of age sets and generation sets. Amongst the pastoral Pokot, circumcisions only take place every 25 to 30 years. Each generation set consists of these men circumcised together. There are six generations

which are cycling in time (see Fig. 2). At any one time there are three generation sets "alive": the ritual elders, the political seniors and the juniors or warriors (I use these set names in accordance with Jacobs 1965). While Pokot classify the two senior sets together as *poy* (elders) and oppose them to the *mirön* (juniors), they draw a clear-cut distinction between both sets of elders in ritual. As soon as most members of the senior generation set have died a new generation will be initiated via circumcision. The juniors then become political seniors, the political seniors become ritual elders and the newly initiated group becomes "mirön". The initiation of a new generation set is enacted in a huge circumcision ritual (*tum*). Several rules are connected to generation set membership. Each generation set is exogamous, i.e. men of the same generation set may not marry each others daughters.

Membership in an age set (*asapantin*) is achieved by initiation (*sapana*) in one time interval. All young men do their *sapana*, between the age of 18 and 25. It is this initiation which qualifies them for marriage and for wearing the blue mudcap on their head (*siolip*) - and not circumcision as in other Kalenjin groups. All young men doing this ritual in one year form one named initiation set.

Fig. 2: Pokot Generation Sets (with approximate date of initiation)

	Koronkoro 1949-56	Kaplelach I ca. 1850 Kaplelach II 1988-	
Chumw 1916-20			Merkutw ca. 1840
	ca. 1890 Maina	ca. 1865 Nyongi	

The name of the set refers to an event happening during this year or during the initiation. For example the Ngirupe (lit.: constant rains) were initiated in a rainy year, while the Ngikanu were initiated in the year the ruling KANU party had a massive membership campaign. Several initiation sets are integrated into one age set at a later date. There is no clear-cut rule as to how many initiation sets one age set should have. Usually the age set takes the name of the largest initiation set entering it (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Pokot Age Sets and corresponding Generations

Generation: Chumw		Koronkoro	
1949			
Duration: ++++++/+++++			
Age sets: Ngidawal	Ditimong	Ngipurt	Chumalenyä
Duration: ++++++/+++++/+++++/+++++			
Koronkoro		Kapelach	
1988			
+++++/+++++/+++++/+++++			
Mamuk	Ngelomum	Watali	Ngisink
+++++/+++++/+++++/+++++			

There is no complete fit between both types of sets. Members of the Diti-mong age-set belong to two generation sets, Koronkoro and Chumw, and the Ngelomum age set belongs to the Kaplelach and Koronkoro generations. According to informants, age sets and generation sets form a complex gerontocratic system. Political and ritual power rests with the two senior generation sets. As corporate groups age sets and generation sets are promoted along fixed grades. The position of each set in the system is symbolized through the colours painted on the mudcap and ornaments on the headdress. While the mud cap of recently initiated young men is just painted blue, elders have specific other colours and may wear certain feathers. In rituals of promotion juniors have to ask seniors for the permission to wear certain feathers and paint special lines on their mud-cap.

In addition to membership in age sets and generation sets, all men belong to one of the alternations Ngetei or Ngimur. If the father of a man is Ngimur, he will be member of the Ngetei alternation. Alternation membership may be discerned by looking at the type of metal used for producing ear-rings, bracelets and rings. While the Ngimur wear ornaments made from iron and copper, the Ngetei wear brass.

Similar to descent groups leadership of age grades is not formalized. There are no age set or generation set leaders. Pokot age grades do not form locally bound units (like Maasai or Samburu *morän* do periodically). Only in

rituals do the sets act as corporate groups. In dances and speeches age grade identity and corporateness are emphasized and dramatically enacted.

3. Networks of livestock exchange

After hearing so much about descent and age grading, we would be tempted to think that these institutions permeate the entire social system and that the exchange system is structured according to the principles described above. However, after a closer look at exchange, we find that every household is connected by a dense network of livestock exchanges. Any form of livestock donation signifies long-term relations between two herders or two households. This includes the promise of further exchanges of livestock, the transfer of other commodities and strong emotional ties. Livestock may be exchanged at many occasions (e.g. rituals of the lifecycle and compensations). However, bridewealth exchange, bridewealth distribution, stockfriendships, and, to a lesser degree, within descent group distribution and exchanges between two fixed descent groups (either due to preferential marriage or adoption) are the major institutions of reciprocal exchange.

3.1. Institutions of exchange

Bridewealth Exchange: Marriages are legitimized through the exchange of animals (*kanyoy*). The bridewealth is paid in installments over a period of several years. The last payment, usually accompanied by the final marriage ceremony (*koyogh*), takes place after the woman has given birth to several children. The quantities of bridewealth payment are extensively debated at a formal meeting of bridegivers and bridgetakers. The average bridewealth is about 12 heads of cattle, 2 to 3 camels, 30 goats, and some sheep. A rich herd owner may pay considerably more, while a poor man's obligations may be reduced accordingly.

Bridewealth Distribution: Incoming bridewealth payments are distributed throughout the personal network of the person receiving the payment. The father of the bride or his jural successors will keep only some of the livestock they receive. Sons and brothers of the bridegivers receive the largest shares, but more remote patrilineal relatives, affines and friends receive their shares too. The distribution of bridewealth payments is essential in re-enforcing kinship networks of mutual obligation. By giving away shares of the brideprice, the bridegiver transfers the livestock he received as bridewealth into social

capital. By giving away his daughter he does not only gain a set of new affines, but at the same strengthens his own network. Livestock transferred in bridewealth payments and bridewealth distributions then, is only the medium for obtaining social capital. Given the various risks of livestock husbandry, the social capital is a more enduring form of capital than livestock itself.

Stockfriendship: Every man has a number of stockfriends (for the complex rules of engaging in formal stockfriendships see Bollig 1992, 1993). Friends see stock exchange as one expression of their emotional ties. Reciprocity is the base for any form of livestock exchange. Although we cannot call this form of reciprocity "generalized" in the strict sense of the word as both parties will remember very well what they have given and what they should be given back, both actors feel obliged to each other after an initial gift of livestock has been made. Mutual debts are not cancelled, but are seen as proofs of trust. Stockfriendship is inherited from father to son. It is not rare that debts resulting from a stockfriendship are carried over generations before being repaid.

Generalized reciprocal exchange between and within descent groups: Almost every lineage has strong affinal ties with one other lineage. On account of frequent mutual marriages over the last generations, legitimized by the exchange of numerous livestock, the relationship has been reinforced again and again. The ties between lineages created by adoption resemble this strong affinal relationship (for an account of lineage adoption see Bollig 1990a). The relationship between adopting and adopted lineage is so strong, that inter-marriage is prohibited. Between both lineages generalized reciprocity moulds transactions.

3.2. Rules, norms and values of reciprocal exchange

Pokot informants like to ponder about the intriguing complexity of livestock exchange. As we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, social institutions are geared to establish opportunities for making exchange partners. These institutional arrangements are accompanied by emotions, norms and values re-enforcing the obligations of exchange.

Emotive connotations: The individual network is structured by the concept *tilyai* (cf. Schneider 1953; Bollig 1992; 1993). The *tilyai* of one actor include those relatives and friends with whom he has exchange relations. It therefore denotes his personal network rather than abstract categories of kin. The

derived abstract *tilyontön* describes the set of norms and values guaranteeing mutual solidarity between exchange partners. However, *tilyontön* is more than just standards of proper behaviour; it actually has the connotation of intense emotional ties between two men. The exchange of livestock implies *kongityö* (friendship). If there is *tilyontön* between two people there must also be *chomnyogh* (affection, love), *kalya* (trust, peacefulness, easiness) and, in times of need, *kisyonöt* (mercy). The absence of exchange partners gives rise to *choykonöt* (loneliness) - a feeling every person fears. Also, if after a long dry season one goes to visit one's stockfriends in distant places one feels *emö* (a strong longing for close friends).

There are various ways to put pressure on a herder who is not willing to enter into exchange relations. Such a man might easily be accused of witchcraft (Bollig 1992: 162ff). Persons who have become sick frequently claim that the deeper reason for their disease is the bad will (*ghöityö*) and the envy (*ngatkong*) of others, to whom they have denied livestock presents. Hence, coordination of exchange is deeply rooted in the concepts of the emotional self.

Rules: The marriage system is one social institution (next to many others like neighbourhood based rituals, age set celebrations) that urges individuals to maximize the spread of affinal relatives. Next to lineage and clan exogamy, there are a number of other rules which enforce the distribution of affinal relationships. For example, a man may not marry any woman from the lineage of his mother, or women from the lineages that his brothers (of the same mother as himself) have married. In addition, a man should not marry into the lineages his half-brothers (different mothers, but the same father) have already married; nor should a man marry from the lineage of his paternal and maternal grandmothers, women from the lineage of his mother's mother's mother, women from lineages his sons have married from and finally women from lineages into which his sisters have been married. Ideally, therefore every marriage opens up a relation to a set of people with whom one's own descent group has not yet had any relations (the exemption to this rule is frequent intermarriage with *kapkoyogh* lineages). Next to marriage rules, numerous other institutions further the spread of exchange relations. For example, one should not engage in stockfriendship with in-laws because this prevents the doubling of affinal and friendship ties; stockfriends should come from different localities (for a discussion of marriage rules and other institutions of exchange see Bollig forthcoming).

Norms and Values: There is an obligation to distribute livestock to friends and relatives. Rich men especially are urged to give out livestock when they are asked. Misers are held in sharp contempt and are frequently confronted with witchcraft accusations. The distribution of livestock and the collecting of livestock debts are cornerstones of male identity. Herders who constantly invest into the exchange system are cherished. There are numerous songs about rich men giving away livestock generously to poor herders or sponsoring communal feasts with reknowned oxen. The colour and horn-shape of animals given away is vividly described. Men frequently open political speeches alluding to their livestock donations for feasts. They may then refer to celebrations which have taken place some thirty years ago, but it is still remembered that they gave for example a black oxen with whitish dots on its forehead and pending horns.

3.3. Exchange Networks in action

The network of exchange every actor is involved in guarantees support in periods of stress. Over a period of six years I took notes on the exchange network of 37 households. I mapped every transaction between these 37 households and many of those transactions which were conducted with people outside this local network. These 37 households belonged to 15 different descent groups, the more populous counting 6, 5 and 3 households. Only four descent groups were represented by just one household. The sample households may be divided into three generation groups: the ritual elders and the political elders counting eight households each and the juniors counting 21 households. The idea was that mapping single transactions meticulously should give a good idea of social and material exchange in Pokot society. It has to be noted that during the years 1987-1989 exchange took place under favourable conditions, there was plenty of rain and no inter-ethnic raiding. This is in contrast to the data gathering took place in 1991, 1992 and 1993 under extremely bad conditions - in addition to the effects of a longlasting drought, raiding between Pokot and Turkana had resumed. In good years bridewealth payments, bridewealth distributions, and contributions to feasts were the major forms of exchange. Whereas during the drought presents of food (usually in the form of goats or sheep) and ritual assistance on the one hand and livestock donations for communal meat feasts on the other hand were the dominant forms of transactions.

The network recorded for the fat years as well as that recorded for the lean years was immensely dense. A first impression of the density of livestock

transactions within this partial network is given by a plot representation (see Bollig 1992: 326) of stock exchanges between people classifying themselves as related and stockfriends (both categories are not mutually exclusive sets). This is the actually observed network of transactions from which by way of abstraction social structure should be obtained. The density of exchange relations foretells already that structures may be weak or hidden. However, one would hope to find clusters of very high density (i.e. a group of people wherein the exchange of each actor within the group is more intense than relations of one actor to the outside), or actors grouped together in a positional analysis (actors that show similar patterns of relations). UCINET (for an introduction to this programme for formal network analysis see Schweizer 1989b), a program for detecting structure in networks, was used to abstract in a controlled and systematic way from the empirical transaction data. In the analysis the network was first dissected into its original parts (transactions between patrilineal and affinal kin, transactions between stockfriends, transactions of food assistance etc.). These were handled first as separate nets and, at later stages, these "layers" of exchange were lumped together again. Cluster analysis and positional analysis took the dense network resulting from livestock exchange based on kinship or friendship as a basis. The analysis showed that no cluster is detectable in this network. Graphical representations (e.g. multi dimensional scalings) show that no meaningful groups can be cut out. Transactions between actors are too dense to allow for any cluster to arise. From this formal analysis we may deduce that within the network recorded there are no groups which try to restrict exchange to other groups, there is no tendency to channel transactions within specific sets of people, and there is an obvious trend to have exchanges with as many people as possible.

After the first step of analysis has shown that clusters of exchange are virtually non existent, we may look to see if actors form groups on account of similar transaction patterns. Here, too, we acknowledge that no clear-cut groups emerge on account of similar transaction patterns. Transactions are guided by individual rather than by interests by any group specific standards.

Further evidence for structures may be brought about in a correlational analysis of network layers. Here it is the main aim to discern whether any type of exchange has strong correlations with another type of exchange, or, to put it in another way, if any sort of exchange relation is conditioned by any other type of exchange. The correlational analysis is guided by different hypotheses.

This type of analysis has the major advantage that it does not only detect structure, but also brings us nearer to explanations. The correlational analysis was basically meant to compare exchange networks of 1987-89 with those of 1991-93. The basic idea between comparing these temporal units was that exchange under stress is conditioned by previous exchanges, for example that somebody who has exchanged livestock with a friend in good years may turn to just this friend for help in bad years. The analysis which is comparing the structures of networks was done by the Kwap module of UCINET. The structural analysis used the following hypothesis as orientational points:

- (1) Close kinship (Network M) as a precondition for exchange under stress (Network R): somebody will only get help from another herder in a crisis if he has a close patrilineal or affinal relation to the donator. It is assumed that close kinship accompanied by stock exchange (bridewealth exchange or bridewealth distribution) is a necessary condition for obtaining support under stress.
- (2) Extended kinship accompanied by livestock exchange (N) as a precondition for exchange under stress (R): somebody will get help if he has any type of kin relation strengthened by previous livestock exchanges to the potential donor.
- (3) Kinship with and without livestock exchange (O) as a precondition for exchange under stress (R): somebody will get help from another herder if he can trace some sort of kin relation to him. Livestock exchange is not a necessary precondition for seeking help successfully.

Fig. 4: Correlation between specific exchange networks in relation to a drought support network

Hypothesis	Observed r	Average random correlation	Statistical significance
(1) M → R	.078	.000	.010*
(2) N → R	.101	-.001	.002**
(3) O → R	.058	.001	.010*
(4) C → R	.044	-.001	.934
(5) P → R	.145	.000	.000**
(6) Q → R	.145	.000	.000**

* statistical significance high, ** statistical significance very high

- (4) Kinship without livestock exchange (C) as a precondition for exchange under stress (R): somebody will get help from another herder if he can trace

any sort of kin relation to the potential donor. This relation is not accompanied by livestock-exchange. Kinship alone is a sufficient precondition for support.

- (5) Stockfriendship (P) as a precondition for exchange under stress (R): somebody will get help from another herder if he has been engaged in a formal stockfriendship with him before.
- (6) Livestock exchange (Q) as a precondition for exchange under stress (R): somebody will get help from another herder if he has some sort of livestock exchange relation (kinship or friendship based) with him.

Hypotheses 1 - 6: The analysis shows that none of the hypotheses is verified by high correlation coefficients. However, the figures on the statistical significance of the correlation coefficients shows a wide variation. Hypothesis 4 can be dismissed outrightly. Kinship alone, not accompanied by livestock exchange, is not enough to guarantee support under stress. Hypotheses 1 and 3 show that as soon as a kinship relation is enforced by exchange of livestock gifts the probability of getting help gets better (however networks M and O still contain kinship relations without exchange of gifts!). If kinship networks are looked at, excluding any kinship relation without livestock exchange, the results of the correlation analysis are especially good. Similarly good results are obtained for hypotheses 5 and 6. In both cases the basic assumption was that a relationship had been created on the basis of stock exchange prior to the search for support in a moment of crisis.

Hence, the advice one could give to any Pokot herder in good times is: do not invest your livestock in only one type of kin or in friends alone, but rather invest livestock into many sets of people. Spread your livestock exchange partners and reenforce existing kinship relations through livestock exchange. As explained before, these ideas are an essential ingredient of Pokot ideology. Obviously, there is no single type of relation in which an actor can fully trust. He can never tell if his chances to obtain help are better with a patrilineal relative, an in-law, a distant affine, his mother's brother or a stockfriend. The only thing he may safely assume is that the probability that he will get help from one or two of his exchange partners is high (see Bollig forthcoming on the reliability of drought assistance).

While the first six hypotheses tried to trace the relation between kinship, friendship and drought assistance, the following four hypotheses ask if the assistance a herder is able to procure is dependent upon his wealth. In a wealth

ranking by five informants, all 37 households were ranked according to their relative wealth. The informants were allowed to divide the sample in as many wealth categories as they wanted. The results of the five rankings were fairly similar. For the correlational analysis I divided the 37 households into rich (10 households), medium (19 households) and poor herders (8 households). From these sets hypothetical exchange networks were produced by hypothesizing that exchange only happens between the rich (W1), and the other that exchange takes place only between rich and medium herders at the exclusion of poor herders (W2). Obviously the rich are the crucial factor in an economy of affection - as long as they participate in reciprocal exchange the system will work. If they withdraw from the economy of affection, for example in order to interact more closely with the market or national elites, the local network is drained of a substantial amount of resources. The hypotheses tested are as follows:

- (7) and (8) Rich actors exchange only amongst themselves ($W1 \rightarrow I$, $W1 \rightarrow R$): here it is assumed that the rich exchange livestock only with other rich herders. In hypothesis 7 the rich are assumed to be the donators, giving only to the rich; in hypothesis 8 they are assumed to be the only recipients receiving only from the rich.
- (9) and (10) Actors from rich and medium wealth categories protect their resources and only exchange with reliable (rich and medium) herders ($W2 \rightarrow I$, $W2 \rightarrow R$). In order to protect their capital, well to do herders only help people of the same status. The poor are excluded from exchange as the probability is high that an investment into them would have no returns. In the first hypothesis households from the two upper wealth categories are assumed to be the donators, giving only to equally wealthy herders. In the second they are hypothesized as the only recipients receiving only from equals.

Hypotheses 7 -10: wealth does not have a particular important impact on exchange during drought. Hypotheses 9 and 10 can be refuted: there is no cartel of well to do herders that tries to keep livestock exchange restricted amongst equally rich herders; the poor are well integrated into the drought exchange network. At first sight, nobody seems to be cut off from help on account of the size of his household's herd. Ethnographic observations support this idea. During the disaster ridden years of 1991 to 1993 only two herders were dropped from the exchange network - one had stolen from his neighbours

and was forced to leave the region subsequently, the other indulged in alcoholism and settled near a renowned beer brewing place. There seems to be a tendency that rich herders are more likely to interact with other rich herders than with households of other wealth categories. Here it has to be added that out of the ten households classified as rich, seven belong to the same senior generation set. Hence, a concentration of exchange in this group may show comradeship as well as reflect the fact that these elders attended the same rituals over decades.

Fig. 5: Correlation between specific exchange networks in relation to wealth categories

Hypothesis	Observed r	Average random correlation	Statistical significance
(7) W1 → I	.114	-.001	-.008**
(8) W1 → R	.114	.001	.002**
(9) W2 → I	.031	.002	.312
(10) W2 → R	.031	.001	.284

* statistical significance high, ** statistical significance very high

As far as we have seen, the drought assistance is conditioned by neither a certain type of kinship or friendship relation, nor wealth status. In a further set of hypotheses, I will test to what extent drought assistance is correlated to the subjective judgement of closeness between two actors. Pokot order their social environment into people with whom they have "heavy" (*nikis*) relations, those with whom they have "smooth" or "light" (*kuskus*) relations and those with whom they have no relation. Each actor was asked to sort all 36 other actors according to his subjective perception of closeness. The hypotheses tested were as follows:

- (11) Relations with actors classified as "heavy" (X1) are crucial to obtain help (R).
- (12) Relations with herders classified as "heavy" or "light" (X2) are crucial to obtain help (R). In other words, if I perceive an actor to be related to me, no matter how "heavy", I will support him in periods of stress.
- (13) Actors which are classified as "non-related" (X3) obtain help as often as others (R). If this hypothesis is confirmed, it would indicate that the subjective perception of closeness is of little importance for exchange under stress.

- (14) and (15) Relations with actors classified as "heavy" (X1) are strongly correlated with networks of bridewealth exchange or bridewealth distribution (M), or, more generally, with any form of kinship based livestock exchange (N).
- (16), (17) and (18) Relations with actors classified as "heavy" or "light" (X2) are strongly correlated with bridewealth exchange and bridewealth distribution (M), with kin-based livestock exchange in general (N), or with any form of livestock exchange - be it friendship or kinship based (Q). The hypothesis claims that any perception of closeness between actors is based on livestock exchange.

Fig. 6: Correlation between specific exchange networks in relation to perceptions of closeness

Hypothesis	Observed r	Average random correlation	Statistical significance
(11) X1 → R	.122	.002	.000**
(12) X2 → R	.081	.000	.000**
(13) X3 → R	-.112	-.002	1.000
(14) X1 → M	.220	.001	.000**
(15) X1 → N	.351	.001	.000**
(16) X2 → M	.119	-.001	.000**
(17) X2 → N	.260	-.001	.000**
(18) X2 → Q	.260	.002	.000**

* statistical significance high, ** statistical significance very high

All hypotheses, except 13, show a high statistical significance of correlation coefficients. As hypothesis 13 is the exception, let us first look here for an explanation. The hypothesis assumed that herders who are regarded as non-related have as good a chance to obtain help as anybody else with whom a relation is acknowledged. This is clearly not the case. A feeling of closeness seems to be a precondition for getting support. Those people with whom I feel I have especially close relations are those to whom I turn first for help. However, those with whom I acknowledge a "light" relation are also potential donors of assistance. The gap seems to be between perceptions of being related vs non-related, rather than between being closely related and vaguely related.

Hypotheses 14 to 18 all show good results. The perception of closeness is clearly related to kinship and friendship based livestock exchange. The affirmation of these hypotheses corroborates the ethnographic observation that livestock exchange is one expression of close emotional ties.

It seems necessary to summarize these somewhat lengthy attempts to detect structure in a local network. There is little structure in the form of clusters or corporate groups to be found in our exchange network. A positional analysis had similar results. There is hardly any base upon which people can be grouped together on account of similar transaction patterns. It is obvious that the rules of exchange and individual rationality effectively counter any form of emergent cohesive groups. It seems to be warranted to go one step further: if exchange would be channeled by corporate groups it would bring dangers to the individual actor because he has to rely on a large group of people and any restriction of access by group ideology would be a hindrance. Tentatively, I would like to suggest that the lack of structure may be a feature of societies that are continuously confronted with an unpredictably varying environment. The correlational analysis has shown that it is social exchange that guarantees support rather than membership in any group. The actors who could feel safest are those who had previously invested in their social networks; those who had turned economic capital into social capital.

4. Social structure as a cognitive system

The preceding paragraphs have shown that the social structure we are presented in interviews is *not* an abstraction from the network of social exchange. Whereas abstractions from the social network show a dense net with hardly any signs of clusters or positional patterns, the social system Pokot informants talk about is highly structured and seems to show clear signs of cohesive groups. In the following paragraph I would like to trace to what kind of structures Pokot are referring when speaking so vividly about descent and age grading. I found a key to this question in M. Bloch's ideas on structure and cognition. His argument is neatly summarized in the statement, "Social structure, far from being society, turns out to be a system of classification of human beings linked to other ritual cognitive systems ..." (Bloch 1977: 286). Pokot have their medicinal science (Nyamwaya 1987), their veterinary science (Bollig 1994) and an encompassing system of botanical classification (Timberlake 1987) - in the same sense they have developed their sociological system of classification. The accounts on descent and age grading are *their* theory of *their* society. This theory of society as Bloch predicts is intimately linked to ritual.

4.1. Descent in ritual context

Lineages operate as corporate groups in rituals of compensation and, though to a lesser extent, in the initiation rituals for young men. When a case of murder or manslaughter occurs, direct revenge is out of question. Instead, the lineage of the murdered man enters into a highly rule-governed and ritualized process of compensation. Some days after the death of their relative the lineage meets (*kokwö lapai*). Central persons of the meeting are classificatory fathers and brothers of the deceased. The deceased's mother's brothers play an important role, too, and his friends are also present. However, when talking about such gatherings, the informants speak about the *kokwö lapai* of lineage X or Y. They are the "owners of the *lapai*". The meeting is first of all for mourning the deceased person and then for planning how compensation will be found from the murderer's lineage. The virtues of the deceased person are recounted, and the way he was killed is described over and over again. Some speakers talk themselves into a frenzy during the three or four days of the gathering. Most of the talk is formulated in terms of descent: "A Kapchepkow man has killed a Kamadewa man. Why are Kachepkow killing our brothers?" Then the damaged lineage will walk off to take revenge. On the way to the culprit's homestead they wail and declaim the damage that the murderer's lineage has done to their lineage. They will then destroy the homestead of the murderer, perhaps those of his nearest patrilineal kin and take away livestock from these homesteads in large numbers. Although numerous people who are not patrilineally related take part in this ritualized raid, the affair is coated in terms of patrilineal descent. It is here that the descent group becomes visible. In the *kokwö lapai* they sit and wail together; when taking revenge, they act as a corporate group.

The initiation ritual, *sapana*, is another instance where the descent group becomes visible. Several days before the ritual, members of the descent group are invited. They gather one evening before the ritual takes place - this night is theirs. Divided by age and sex, they sit together in the huts of the homestead and chant songs. Many of these songs have clan-specific contents. The *kililyet* songs sung at such occasions represent the history of the initiate's clan in a short version (Bollig 1990a). For example, the one of the Katoka Lineage says, "This is the day of the East/ This is the day of Boran/ If not for the camel Chepkoikat/ We would still be at Mt. Nyiro." This song is used by all lineages of the Oro clan, of which the Katoka lineage is one member. All these groups

represent their rather dim ancient history in this clear-cut motto. United as a group they followed the camel *Chepkoikat* from Mt. Nyiro. United as a group they entered Pokot land, and, united as a group, they commemorate their history.

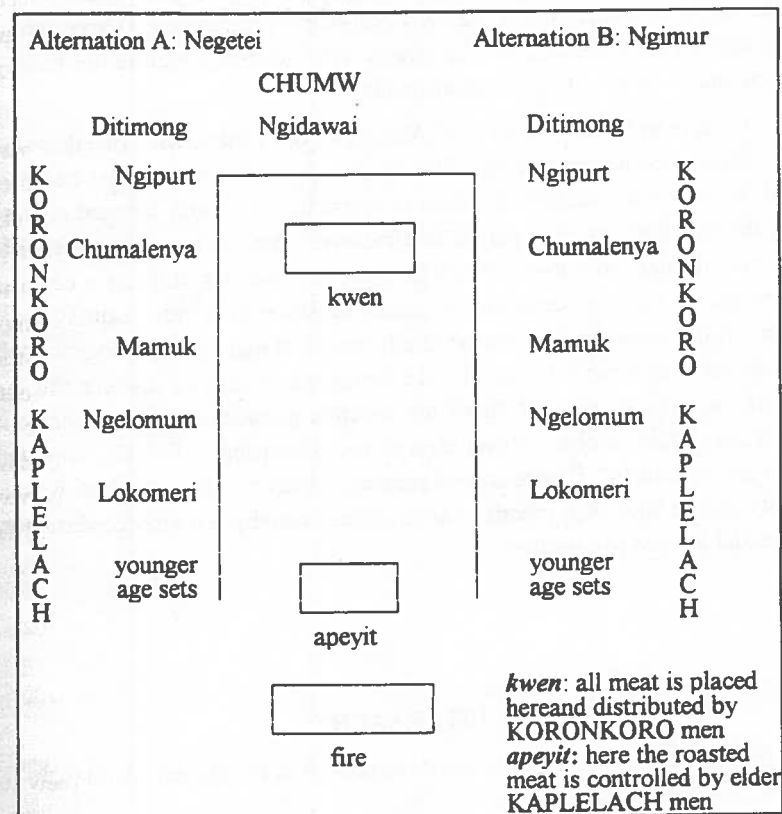
It is in the sphere of ritual and symbols that descent becomes an important category. Firstly, there is a common clan name and symbol (for example an animal or a natural phenomena), there are common songs (*kililyet*), specific ear-cuttings for goats, sheep and cattle, and ways of cauterization (*machey*). The symbols of the clan system order the hierarchy of the social universe. Therefore, people of the firesticks (*pighun*, the Koim clan) must light any fire to be lit on a ritual occasion; people of the buffalo (the Siwotoy clan) are the only ones who are allowed to play the lyre; prophets can only come from the Kasait lineage of Talai clan; good sooth sayers are to be found in the Kiptinkö clan. There are numerous symbolic equations between clan symbol and ritual activities, and the obligations of specific clans in relation to the entire society are frequently talked about in ritual contexts.

4.2 Age Sets: An ideological formation

As descent becomes most clearly visible in festivities, so age grading is best to be seen in rituals of initiation and promotion. The Pokot have a complex age grade system that links generation set cycles (typical for Kalenjin peoples) with an age set system (typical for Eastern Nilotic people like the Maasai and the Samburu). Each system has its specific rituals. Next to fulfilling functional needs (initiating and promoting age grades), these rituals offer a stage on which age set and generation set identities may be enacted. In order to pacify and cheer up the seniors, the juniors offer feathers and beads to senior sets. The seniors give out livestock for slaughter to show that they are good hosts of the celebration. Conflicts between sets are dramatically enacted, and it is not rare that different sets beat each other with sticks. While in celebrations of lesser ritual importance, these stick fights (*ametö*) are real competitions, in major rituals no real fights take place - the elders simply punish the juniors physically by beating them with twigs. All rituals of the age and generation set system turn into communal feasts when many goats and oxen are slaughtered. At this final stage of the ritual, which signifies the regained harmony between different sets, all men take their place at a certain point in the sacred U-shaped half circle of men (*kirket*). The physical position of the men at this final stage

of the ritual is governed by generation set membership, and further structured by membership in age sets and alternations (see Fig. 7).

Fig. 7: Spatial dimensions of age grades in ritual



Here, age sets and generation sets get a corporate reality in a physical sense. They can be seen and heard as groups (see photographs in Bollig 1990 b), however, their corporate life is restricted to such festivities.

5. Summary: Ideology as structure

It was shown that in the case of the pastoral Pokot, social structure - or better, what we are used to think of as structure - has little to do with individual action in everyday life. Descent groups and age sets, according to ethnographers on East African pastoralists like Peristiany (1951, 1954), Schneider

(1953), Spencer (1965) and Gulliver (1966) the pillars of social structure, could not be abstracted from exchange interactions as mapped in the social network. Social exchange adheres to other rules. So what is social structure then about? I argued that, in the case of the Pokot, social structure reflects their theory of society rather than any real-world transactions. Descent groups and age grades are cognitive phenomena; schemes that structure the realm of ritual and, by implication, political action.

What is to be learnt from this? Although I think that results like these may be culture specific, re-analysis of the actual relation between social structures and real world transactions seems to be warranted. This may demand re-thinking the role that structure played in africanist social anthropology. Definitely we may deduce from this that any analysis of social structure as a cognitive phenomenon must necessarily be gender sensitive. It is men, usually senior men - at the same time the preferred informants of male anthropologists - who invent and use these schemes in order to explain society to insiders and outsiders. In order to abstract "from the concrete population and its behaviour" the basis should be observational data of social exchange rather than interview data on "structures". If abstractions are based solely on interview data, we may easily end up with abstractions of abstractions, thereby seriously confusing the emic and the etic perspective.

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Quelques problèmes comparatifs de langues bantoues C10 des confins oubangiens:

le cas du mbati, du ngando et de l'aka

Luc Bouquiaux et Jacqueline M.C. Thomas

Situation socio-culturelle

Actuellement les populations forestières de Grands Noirs bantous ou oubangiens (Mbatì, Ngando/Ngbaka) sont des agriculteurs-chasseurs-cueilleurs, pratiquant également une petite culture de rapport, caféiers surtout et cacaoyers. Les Monzombo qui vivent le long de l'Oubangui (oubangiens) sont essentiellement pêcheurs. Traditionnellement, leurs installations faisaient d'eux des semi-nomades, ayant un habitat permanent, associé aux cultures de début de saison sèche, et une longue période de campements forestiers pour les expéditions de chasse-collecte "entomophagique" et végétale pendant les périodes de transition et de saison des pluies. Ils ont été fixés dans leurs villages actuels par l'administration coloniale dans les années cinquante.

La tradition orale et les documents administratifs des débuts de la colonisation donnent aux Mbatì une origine commune, aux XVII^{ème} et XVIII^{ème} siècles, avec les autres populations bantoues voisines, notamment les Ngando et les Bakota, ainsi qu'oubangiennes, Ngbaka et Monzombo. Tous sont arrivés dans le courant du XVIII^{ème} jusqu'au milieu du XIX^{ème} siècle dans leur territoire actuel. Une période de guerres indigènes, entre ethnies et intestines, a précédé l'arrivée des Européens, dans les années 1890-1900. Elle s'est poursuivie depuis la moitié du XIX^{ème} siècle et pendant le premier quart du XX^{ème} siècle, même après le début de la période coloniale, car dans cette région, après quelques tentatives de pacification, lorsque la première guerre mondiale éclata, les parties en présence sur le terrain, profitèrent de la situation pour dresser les uns contre les autres, à leur profit respectif, les rivalités entre factions, notamment Mbatì, contre Ngbaka.

Auparavant, il semble toutefois que l'arrivée puis l'installation en Lobaye avaient commencé pacifiquement, ensuite les relations se dégradèrent peu à peu lorsque l'espace disponible arriva à saturation; en effet tous étaient à cette époque plus chasseurs/pêcheurs-cueilleurs qu'agriculteurs et ce mode de vie nécessite des territoires fort étendus par rapport à l'importance de la population.

