

# **Pokot and Western Christian Missions: A Postcolonial Story of Place and Perception**

By

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Julie Morris

M.A., University of Kansas, 2004

B.A., Baylor University, 1998

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Chair: Dr. Abel Chikanda

---

Dr. Stephen Egbert

---

Dr. J. Christopher Brown

---

Dr. Peter Ojiambo

---

Dr. Garth Myers

Date Defended: 27 April 2021

The dissertation committee for Julie Susanne Morris  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chair: Dr. Abel Chikanda

Date Approved: 27 April 2021

## **Abstract**

In 1931, after decades of British colonial control, the first Western Christian missionaries came to Pokot, the region inhabited by the pastoralist Pokot people in western Kenya and eastern Uganda. For the past ninety years, missionaries from England, Ireland, the United States, and other Western countries, have come to Pokot with a message of evangelism and initiatives for development. Throughout the decades, the mission organizations and missionaries working in Pokot have developed their own perceptions of Pokot, place and people, which in turn informed the strategies of missions they undertook: evangelism included translation projects and negotiations with Pokot culture, and development projects focused on education, community development, medical services, agriculture, emergency relief, and water provision. The Pokot people have responded with resistance, ambivalence, and hybridized acceptance to the message and mission of these outsiders. While change has been slow, in accordance with Pokot conservatism, the contact zone of missions and Pokot shows a gradual acceptance and increase of Christianity and development as negotiated by the Pokot population. A postcolonial reading of mission records and missionary texts supplemented with interviews with missionaries and local residents of the small village of Asilong in West Pokot County, Kenya reveals the influence of the dominant socio-cultural setting, the power of discourse, and the importance of perspective in place construction. The story of this contact zone (the place where Western Christian missionaries meet the Pokot people) is told through a geographical and historical perspective through the voices of the actors in place. The layers of perceptions, strategies, and responses have helped inform the multidimensional story, history, and sense of place of Pokot.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*No one knows for how many hundreds of years the Pokot have lived in their forbidden valley, cut off from the rest of the world by barriers made by nature and by man. But their long centuries of isolation are now ended, and their old way of life is doomed. What will their new life be like? Will they accept the values of Western materialism and adopt a new paganism in place of the old? Or will the little seed planted in [the Catholic mission] Ortum take root and spread throughout the valley? The missionaries have worked hard and long and selflessly. The result of their labors lies in the future and in the hands of God.*

*- Desmond Forristal (Radharc Films, 1966)*

In Western<sup>1</sup> imagination, Africa can be hot, dusty, and primitive. It can be inhabited by dark-skinned natives, scantily dressed, barefoot, and holding spears. Perhaps the natives are wrapped in bright cloths and draped with brightly colored beads. The African landscape can be dotted with brown huts with thatched roofs. It can be remotely located, devoid of modern conveniences like electricity, running water, and even paved roads. These reductive, stagnant, and essentializing images of Africa that might inhabit Western thought, while seemingly far from growing African metropolises like Nairobi, Kenya, are reinforced by an outsider's observation of the landscape and place of the Pokot people in western Kenya and eastern Uganda.

I visited Pokot for the first time in 2016. From the bustling and modernized environment of Nairobi that included flush toilets, cappuccinos, and easy transport to meet friends, exchange

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<sup>1</sup> While any term used to generalize and collectivize a large, supposedly culturally similar geographic unit is hugely problematic, I choose to use "Western" to label a cultural, economic, and geographic entity that, for the purposes of this study, refers most often to white, majority England and United States. I purposely choose not to use the more academically popular "Global North" and "Global South" because I find references to the "South" as culturally and geographically confusing (with possible racialized undertones) for an American audience, and I find more nonacademics are familiar with the term "Western." McEwan's (2008) description of the term shows its applicability to my study: "The West is less a geographical term... but refers more explicitly to particular cultures and systems of thought, originally centred in Europe and exported through colonialism to the Americas, Australia and New Zealand... What we define as western, for example, includes the Christian moral tradition and religious values alongside secular values..." (p. 14).



currency, or shop, our driver took us northwest out of the city and down into the Rift Valley. The road to the village of Asilong in West Pokot took us through Nakuru, north across the equator, up through Eldoret (known as the hub for running in the country) and then to the cool, high elevation of Kitale, the last major city before we sharply descended once more into the bottom of the Rift Valley. The temperature rose as the terrain abruptly dropped, and the wide, well-maintained highway became an uneven, partially paved pathway. The green foliage and grasses were soon replaced by red, sandy land, interspersed with shorter grasses and thorny bushes and trees. In the town of Kacheliba, the early colonial capital of West Pokot County (then West Suk), we crossed the Suam River, one of the few perennial rivers in the region that remains full year-round, and the poorly maintained pavement gave way entirely to something that resembled more of a dried creek bed than a road. The regression of the condition of the road was mirrored in the decrease of modern (Western?) conveniences. As my feet finally stepped onto the hard-packed red soil, my gaze<sup>2</sup> fell upon several clean and decorated mud huts (the guest quarters and kitchen) and a large, rectangular, cinderblock building (the church) (see Figure 1.1). A handful of goats milled about, and boys began to appear, some wrapped in the traditional-looking *shuka*<sup>3</sup> and some in shorts and t-shirts, carrying bows and arrows. And my Western, modernist mind might have easily jumped to the same unfounded conclusions that so many before me had—this place of the Pokot is something different, not like me, not a part of the modernizing world. The language is unintelligible; the people are not civilized like my people; they are untouched by the

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<sup>2</sup> In Pratt's 1992 book *Imperial Eyes*, she discusses a theme of colonial perspective, symbolized by the gaze. The gaze of the European male subject is "passive" and "possessive" (p. 7), located outside of the landscape as an objective observer with the intent to improve, order, and unify (p. 31) places that are seen as "uninhabited, unpossessed, unhistoricized, unoccupied even by the travelers themselves" (p. 51).

<sup>3</sup> The *shuka*, meaning sheet in Swahili, has the appearance of traditional dress to the Western eye; however, the brightly colored wraps are likely an influence from Maasai culture, replacing the goatskins that the Pokot used to wear. An interesting byproduct of globalization, the fabric used to make the Maasai *shuka* is usually made in Tanzania or China, and the style so equated with the Maasai possibly originated from Scottish tartans traded from colonists or missionaries in the late nineteenth century.

outside world, maybe both pristine and ignorant, beautiful and pitiable. My perception, communicated here with a flourish of outdated, paternalistic colonial language, was colored by my culture and my identity as an outsider.



*Figure 1.1: Asilong Africa Inland Church (AIC) and three guest huts. Asilong, West Pokot.*

*(Photo Credit: author, 2018)*

For about a century, the Pokot people have been the object of Western scrutiny and fascination, first through British colonialism, then through researchers and Western Christian mission endeavors (Beech, 1911; Davis, 1998; Dietz, 1987; Meyerhoff, 1981; Mutsotso, 2013; Ndegwah, 2007; Patterson, 1969; Peristiany, 1951 and 1954; Sanders, 2001; Schneider, 1955 and 1959). While the former paved the way for the latter in Pokot, a reversal from most places in Africa, the influence of Western Christian missions is written more deeply upon the Pokot landscape in the form of churches, schools, medical facilities, and water wells. Since the British colonial powers had little to gain economically in the region of the Pokot, their control of the

area was not as focused, transformative, or visually “modernizing” as in other parts of Kenya, particularly urban Kenya (Bollig & Österle, 2013). However, the political context, colonial and post-colonial, in Kenya and specifically Pokot sets the stage for the story of missions in Pokot. A brief understanding of the colonial, post-colonial, and missional historical legacy in Kenya and the distinctions of the colonial and missional perspectives is necessary to understand the layer of history that had settled over the place of the Pokot—however thin that layer—when the story of missions in Pokot began.

## **Historical Context**

### ***Colonial History***

Kenya’s colonial history began almost as a footnote. As the zone between the valued coast and Uganda, Kenya showed little economic future (Lesorogol, 2008). The land was and is mostly arid and semi-arid, making it poor farmland, and no significant mineral deposits had been discovered by the late 1800s. The land passed from the hands of the Imperial British East Africa Company to the British government in 1895, was known as the East Africa Protectorate, and would be renamed Kenya in 1920 (Myers, 2003; Sifuna & Otiende, 1994). Initially, Kenya found its colonial importance as a pass-through for rail from Mombasa to Lake Victoria, strengthening the British hold of the Nile headwaters (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994). Then, to recoup some of the cost of the railway, to further secure the area, and to make the colony self-sustaining, white settlement began to be encouraged in 1903 (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994).

White settlement meant land alienation. As land was stripped from native groups in Kenya, the margins of Pokot land were also indirectly affected by white settlement. Likewise, a

hut tax<sup>4</sup> was imposed in 1901 so that Africans would have to work, supplying needed labor to the new settlers (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994, pp. 192-3; Myers, 2003); however, the Pokot largely preferred to sell livestock rather than find wage work to meet this new requirement (Dietz, 1987). Farming was prioritized for settlers. (In the same way, native inhabitants were encouraged to abandon pastoralism and embrace cultivation). White settlers began to move into the highlands of Kenya's grazing areas in 1904, creating what would be known as the White Highlands, an area whose northwestern reaches stopped just south of West Pokot County (Waller, 2012). The highlands were cool and well-watered, making them ideal for dry season transhumance for the African pastoralist and for farming for the European settler. Between 1900 and 1938, the colonial government imposed tribal grazing boundaries to control human and stock movements, especially prohibiting entry to the White Highlands (Dietz, 1987). While the White Highlands existed outside of Pokot territory, the effects of territorial impingements to other groups would reverberate throughout pastoral lands. The colonial commandeering of land and establishment of "tribal grazing areas" seriously underestimated the land required for pastoralism; hence, the squeezing out of the pastoralists had begun (Waller, 2012, p. 5).

"The whole of northern Kenya, the 'Northern Frontier District' and the 'Turkana and Suk (or Pokot) Reserve', became a closed zone, with restricted movement" (Dietz, 1987, p. 52).

Pokot lands in Kenya were part of "closed districts" according to the 1902 Outlying Districts Act and the 1934 Special District Administration Act. The latter stated, "No person other than a tribesman or a public officer shall enter or remain in any district or area to which this Act

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<sup>4</sup> The Hut Tax Regulations of 1901 marked the first direct tax on Africans in the colony. A tax not to exceed two rupees on every African dwelling enabled the colony of Kenya to help meet its goal of self-sufficiency, a goal never quite reached. "Apart from its economic value, African taxation was considered by colonial powers to be the 'sacrament of submission' to colonial authority" (Tarus, 2004, p. 12)

applies, except under and in accordance with the terms and conditions of a permit issued in that behalf by a Provincial Commissioner or District Commissioner either under this Act or, under the Outlying Districts Act” (Special District Administration Act, 1934<sup>5</sup>). These districts were set up by colonial powers to act as a security buffer between Kenya and Ethiopia and effectually stalled education and other development initiatives that occurred in rest of the country (Lesorogol, 2008). Distinct pastoralist communities fared differently under these restrictions, but all were affected. Nangulu (2009) explains that Pokot’s restricted status was lifted in 1964, following Kenya’s independence in December of 1963, whereas Dietz (1987) claims the restrictions lasted until 1968.

Bollig and Österle (2013) outline four results of colonial governance of pastoral lands as they affected residents: inter-tribal conflict was policed and reduced; imposed ethnic boundaries limited tribe<sup>6</sup> mobility<sup>7</sup>; ethnic segregation resulted in “hardening of ethnic categories”; and while inter-regional trade of livestock flourished, the British increased controls over the trade (p. 300). Despite these infringements and the squeezing of their territory, the place of the Pokot resisted change throughout colonialism. The semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Pokot made them difficult to tax and their avoidance of colonial schools made them difficult to control (Patterson, 1969). Likewise, the overarching climate of colonial rule toward the western and northern regions that were dominated by pastoralist groups was one of economic and therefore political disinterest. This tone would largely continue after Kenya’s independence in 1963.

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<sup>5</sup> A copy of the legislation can be found through <http://kenyalaw.org>.

<sup>6</sup> Since it is an emotionally, racially, and politically charged word today, I will typically opt to use “ethnic group” instead of “tribe”; however, the word is commonly used in historical texts and should be viewed in provided quotes as out-of-date nomenclature rather than a pejorative term.

<sup>7</sup> The establishment of the colonial borders of West Suk (Pokot) District were not finalized by colonial powers until 1941 after originally being administered as part of Baringo District in 1902 and then lumped together with the Turkana in 1909. Boundaries would shift several times before the West Suk District became administered as its own entity in 1941 as part of the Rift Valley Province (Gregory, 1968).

British district officials assigned to Pokot were limited in number and frequently turned over. Each had their pet project, usually relating to agriculture or education, and attempted to pioneer innovations in the region. “The necessity of ‘developing’ Africa, whose ‘primitive’ patterns of land use were deemed inefficient, unproductive, and destructive to the soil, legitimized colonial rule, particularly during the 1930s depression years” (Shetler, 2007, p. 169). However, the projects showed limited success and scope, and consistent presence of colonialism was only felt in the capital of Kapenguria, where it moved in 1930 from the lowland and hot area of Kacheliba. Most officials would take “safaris,” by foot in earlier days and by Land Rover as time went on, to visit their areas of governance. The effectiveness of these trips was hampered by the spread-out nature and sparseness of the population of Pokot, the Pokot’s wariness of the colonial official’s motives (usually to collect taxes), and the language barrier (Denton, 1955).

### ***Post-colonial History***

Kenya gained its independence on December 12, 1963 after at least a decade of tension, protest, and fighting centered in areas far from Pokot. This resistance was felt in Pokot through two events. First, Jomo Kenyatta, who would become the first president of independent Kenya, was imprisoned there (Russell, 1994). Colonial powers felt the imprisoned revolutionary would cause little trouble in such a remote location, far from his *Mau Mau* supporters. Second, the movement, religion, or cult (depending on one’s perspective) of *Dini ya Msambwa* (discussed in detail in chapter 5) sprang up in the region, inspiring some comparisons with the anticolonial movement *Mau Mau* (Bianco, 1996). Regardless of these two incidents that connected Pokot with the wider realities in Kenya, Pokot was still considered by residents and outsiders as distinct from the country (or countries) that contained it. Likewise, with independence came little policy

change for the pastoralists. Controls on pastoral migration continued in the guise of modern science and improved management techniques<sup>8</sup>. After independence, development initiatives were largely left to nonprofits and mission organizations well into the new millennium. As its identity as a closed zone went the way of the colonists, Pokot became open to outsiders; missionaries began to arrive in force, increasing through the 1970s and 1980s.

### *History of Missions*

While priests and missionaries traveled with the early explorers who frequented the ports of present-day Kenya, the first “modern” missionary to Kenya is often cited as Anglican German Johann Ludwig Krapf in 1844 (Sanneh, 1989). Missionary work centered on the coastal areas; however, Krapf championed a “continent-wide vision” that encouraged mission expansion into the interior, a call that was embraced by the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) and echoed later in rhetoric from the Africa Inland Mission and the Anglican Bible Churchmen’s Mission Society (Strayer, 1978, p. 11). When the Imperial British East Africa Company took control of the region in 1889 and the rail from Mombasa to Lake Victoria began construction in 1896, travel inland became more plausible and somewhat safer<sup>9</sup>. It took three more decades for Western missionaries to first enter the region of Pokot by the road metaphorically and literally provided by colonialism. Prior to the 1970s, Christian missionary work in the place of the Pokot was scant (Dietz, 1987), and prior to independence, a government-issued permit was required of

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<sup>8</sup> Garrett Hardin’s 1968 theory of the “Tragedy of the Commons” furthered the colonial belief that traditional pastoral practices were causing land degradation and desertification of the arid and semi-arid regions in Kenya. The theory suggested that herdsmen sharing a common grazing area would try to maximize their use of the area through increasing their herd size. The result of this overstocking would clearly be environmentally disastrous (Fratkin, 1997, p. 240).

<sup>9</sup> Between 28 and 135 Indian and African railway workers, who lost their lives to two male lions, might take issue with my statement that the railway provided a safer journey inland (see John Henry Patterson’s book, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo* (1907)).

each incoming missionary. Lawrence Totty, later joined by Annette Tarr who would become his wife, became the first missionaries to reside in Pokot in 1931 as part of the Anglican Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS) (Hallihan, 2012; Dietz, 1987). They conducted religious, health, and educational services out of a building purchased in Kacheliba; however, three years later, they moved their mission to the highlands of Mnagei, near the current day county capital of Kapenguria. Around the same time, Tom Collins began to work with the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in East Pokot (now Baringo County) with the goal of evangelizing the Pokot people. He set up a mission station in Kinyang for that express purpose (Phillips & Collins, 2003). In 1943, the Roman Catholic Mill Hill Fathers established a mission at Tartar not far from the BCMS mission (Dietz, 1987).

Although the majority of Pokot lived in the lowlands as pastoralists, most early missions focused on the upland Pokot as the population was more sedentary and the weather more hospitable. In 1947, *Dini ya Msambwa*, a religious uprising that had strong anti-colonial overtones, reached Pokot. After the unrest caused by the uprising, the British District Commissioners requested that the Catholic Church take an interest in lowland areas (Dietz, 1987; Patterson, 1969). The Catholic Kiltegan Fathers, joined soon after by the Holy Rosary Sisters, pioneered a mission station in Ortum in 1953. Much of the lowland area would not be reached by missionaries until after independence.

West Pokot was split into Anglican and Catholic territories, and the Pokot-dominated areas of Baringo County were the province of the Africa Inland Mission. These three groups were joined after independence by a wider array of Protestant and Catholic organizations as well as an increase in missionaries who were unaffiliated with any particular denomination of Christianity. According to Dietz (1987), mission activities increased dramatically after 1973.



Mission stations, schools, and churches were started by groups from Italy, Ireland, England, the United States, Norway, and Sweden, to name a few, and these groups focused on the lowland Pokot (Dietz, 1987). Dietz (1987) explained, “Western Pokot was full of missionary zeal by 1985,” and “expansion is impressive. However, in terms of conversion, results were meager” (p. 206). My research supports this trend and presents two distinct “eras” of mission work, loosely based around the transition between the colonial and independent eras in Kenya’s history.

While missionaries were directly involved in establishing many if not most of the churches in Kenya through the 1920s and would continue to play a significant role in the religious sense of place of Pokot for much longer, “By the 1950s and continuing to the present, the vast majority of new churches [in Kenya] were founded by Africans with no missionary involvement. Only 15% of the churches in the AIC<sup>10</sup> had missionaries involved in their founding.” In the opinion of AIM historian Stephen Morad, “This is important evidence to help prove that those non-Christians who say that Christianity is the white-man’s religion imposed on the African by colonialism are wrong. This shows that Christianity was spread by Africans themselves” (Morad, 1996a, p. 10).

Despite this perspective, this study largely omits the influence of nonwestern missionaries and church planters that were significant players in the story of Christianity in Pokot due to lack of time available for the necessary extensive Pokot-based field work. As an example of the importance and prevalence of nonwestern missionaries in the spread of Christianity in Pokot, the village of Asilong in West Pokot did not have a regular Western missionary presence until 2008, but a Marakwet missionary, Emmy Chepkemoi, lived among the Pokot of Asilong from 2000 to 2009. Missionaries and church workers like Emmy were

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<sup>10</sup> The Africa Inland Church (AIC) is the denomination created by the Africa Inland Mission and is one of the largest Protestant churches in Kenya today.

prevalent in every stage of the story of missions in Pokot and are introduced at times as pivotal, supporting actors in this study. Even though most if not all of these Kenyan Christians were products of the larger Western Christian missionary story in Kenya, their stories are unique and significant. Their absence from my research leaves a void to be filled by a future study on the African missionary presence in Pokot. This study will focus on Western actors.

### ***Colonial and Missional Perspectives***

Colonial and missionary perspectives are often seen as analogous, indistinguishable from each other. Edward Said argued that the missionary could never stand apart from or resist the colonial powers as both were in the business of subordinating subaltern<sup>11</sup> people, places, and histories to the culture and idea of “white Christian Europe” (quoted in Carey, 2011, p. 15). And Said is not alone. Critics of missions and missionaries, who equate mission work with colonial indecencies, are abundant. Kalu (2010c) describes a few:

E.A. Ayandele castigates [missionaries] as ‘pathfinders for colonial boots’ and A.E. Afigbo, in *Ropes of Sand*, intones that ‘it was not one of the aims of the colonialists to preserve the cultural identity of subject peoples. In fact, the opposite was the case.’ James Ngugi in his novel, *The River Between*, paints Christianity as a dysfunctional, iconoclastic force that disrupted communities and robbed people of their self-identity... The chorus of the historians and novelists hark to a strain heard among the ‘Ethiopian’ nationalists of the 19th Century who felt that missionary Christianity was struggling too vigorously to install as pre-packaged hardware of Enlightenment agenda that would destroy the indigenous African religion and culture. (p. 441)

Although I do not write to refute these claims in their entirety, I do suggest that stereotyping missions under one banner fails to employ academic rigor. Said and others have the benefit of a contemporary view of the past, including the complex and intertwined stories of

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<sup>11</sup> Italian socialist Antonia Gramsci described subaltern as subordinated classes who have been excluded from history. Carey (2011) explains, “Generating a voice for the subaltern has been an important project for post-colonial critics whose main interest lies in the historiography of resistance to imperial rule from the point of view of indigenous and native subjects” (p. 16).

missions and colonialism. However, I argue that this complex relationship cannot and should not be essentialized into one unified discourse. Carey (2011) eloquently states the argument,

Where they are not left out altogether, religious figures are generally identified with the forces of racist colonial oppression. Missionaries continue to be defined as agents for the 'colonisation of the mind' who institutionalized and legitimated Western cultural hegemony through their control of missions, schools, bible translation and publishing houses. One study refers to missionaries as 'surrogate imperialists' whose writing was characterized by an obsession with gender, race and class, while they pursued opportunities for 'social advancement' and an 'exotic career' denied them at home. Such interpretations reflect contemporary Western concerns about the colonial past and its legacy, but they provide no more than a partial view of the Victorian missionary movement. (p. 22)

Likewise, such a perspective overlooks the agency of African response and negotiation of the mission message and the role some mission churches played in anticolonial movements.

Most African leaders for independence and post-colonial leaders were products of mission schools; likewise, a number of churches supported liberation and anticolonial struggles (Bassey, 1999; Maenzanise, 2008). Gambian scholar and theologian Lamin Sanneh (1989) credits mission work, especially translation, as the impetus for African national movements and indigenous pride post-colonialism. While missions and colonialism share similar perspectives, particularly within a heritage of Western civilization and culture, their motivation and historical trajectories differ enough that each one deserves a closer look. Historian Thomas Spear writes,

It has become commonplace to think of the Christian churches in Africa as alien institutions, the cultural agents of colonial and capitalist powers who helped subdue Africans to European domination. Christian missionaries brought, and enforced, specifically European cultural norms of religious, social, moral and economic behaviour and sought to mould African individuals and societies to them. Similarly, African conversion to Christianity has been seen largely in materialistic and instrumental terms as individuals sought to gain political allies, land, education, medicine and jobs in the new colonial order through the missions. Such views neglect the manifold ways Africans interpreted and appropriated Christian scriptures, practices and institutions for their own purposes within the contexts of their own values and needs. (Spear, 1999a, p. 3)

Missionaries were committed to their involvement in Pokot for different reasons than their Western colonial compatriots. While missionary interactions and the results of their labor often mimicked those of their colonial counterparts, Western missionaries were compelled by their message of salvation instead of economic and political gain. (Often this message was entwined with a “civilizing” message of Western modernity and development, which accounted for the similarities between the colonizers and the missionaries). Their religious motives made them more devoted (and increasingly more numerous) to the place and to the people of Pokot. Chapter 2 will take a closer look at colonial and missional perspective as they converge and diverge, leading up to and during early mission endeavors in Pokot. As the dominant outside voice in the contact zone of Pokot, Western Christian missions have had a profound impact on place-making in conjunction with locals and through influencing outsiders’ understanding of the place of the Pokot.

### **Research Focus and Questions**

At the same time missionaries were spreading their message and mission, they were forming their own perspective of the place of the Pokot, the same way I had done. For about a hundred years, they have been writing and speaking about this place, giving it meaning to themselves—fleshed out through their mission strategies—and to their readers and listeners, most of whom would never have the opportunity to experience the place of the Pokot firsthand. Likewise, their perception of placeness in Pokot would be communicated to and negotiated by the Pokot people in their place. Looking back through missionary texts and through interviews with missionaries and Pokot individuals, I aim to reveal the ambivalence and dynamic nature of meaning of place in Pokot.

My research addresses the following questions:

- How did the Western Christian missionaries perceive the place of the Pokot? How have Western missionaries (through the mission discourse) (re)produced the place of Pokot for Western audiences since the advent of foreign missionary work in the region until now?
- How has the perspective of Christian missionaries been enacted upon the place of the Pokot through mission strategies? How and why has the landscape of Pokot been directed, developed, and influenced by Christian missionaries?
- How did the Pokot view the missionaries' presence, perception, and strategies? To what extent have Pokot negotiations with the mission endeavor affected the sense of place in Pokot? How do the Pokot people of Asilong village view their place today as it relates to the contact zone?

The story of place is a layered and textural experience. This study traces the contact zone (discussed later) between Western Christian missions and the Pokot to reveal the shifting and dynamic sense of history and culture that make up the place of Pokot. Due to “contemporary Western concerns about the colonial past and its legacy” (Carey, 2011, p. 22), the missionary movement only receives a passing glance by postcolonial scholars, and while seminary students continue to study missions, they tend to examine mission work piecemeal from the perspective of their own religious confession (Ward, 1975; Morad, 1996a and 1996b; Birdling, 2009; Matwetwe, 2017). My work seeks to fill the gap in scholarship by looking at the entirety of the mission story in Pokot, including the many different confessional traditions, starting with (and

dominated by) Anglican, Catholic, and the Africa Inland Mission, followed later by the Reformed Church and many nondenominational groups. This study reveals how a British-centric historical setting (Chapter 2) influences differing missionary perspectives (Chapter 3) and those perspectives give shape to a variety of mission strategies and interactions in a place (Chapter 4). In response, the residents of that place negotiate the meanings and value of the perceptions about and strategies employed within their place (Chapter 5). That place is Pokot.

### **Study Area**

The Pokot are found in the literature by the name of Pokot (Pökot), Pökoot, Pakot, Pakoot, Sook, and Suk; an individual is called a Pochon or Pachon. The name of Suk was “officially replaced” in 1961 since the Pokot had complained that the term was derogatory<sup>12</sup> (Patterson, 1969). “Pokot” can refer to the region of the Pokot people, the people themselves, or the language they speak<sup>13</sup>. For the purpose of this study, I will embrace the ambiguity of the term by often leaving it unmodified to emphasize the connection of a people, their geography, and their language. The Pokot are part of the Kalenjin ethnic group, which includes “seven major dialectic groups, viz, Kipsigis, Keiyo, Merkwet (Marakwet), Nandi, Tugen, and Sabeii (Elgon Kalenjin) and Pokot” (Chesaina, 1991, p. 1). The seven groups share similar languages and “occupational and economic culture” based first on pastoralism, then agriculture and bee keeping (Chesaina, 1991, p. 3). The name “Kalenjin,” meaning “I tell you,” was supposedly coined by a radio announcer in the 1940s. A group of fourteen high school students who wanted to unite

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<sup>12</sup> Patterson (1969) claims that no one was quite sure why the name Suk was considered derogatory; however, it could have been an ethnic slur used by the Maasai against farming, possibly indicating the Pokot’s agricultural history prior to the development of the group’s pastoralist livelihood (Mutsotso, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> The language of Pokot is a Kalenjin language, previously classified as a Nilo-Hamitic language.

politically, enlarging their voice, adopted the name for their group, and by the 1950s, the Kalenjin were a politically recognized ethnic group<sup>14</sup> (Karega-Munene 2010; Chesaina, 1991).

Found in the East African Rift Valley, the landscape of the Pokot is arid to semi-arid, and the climate varies with the elevation that changes from flat lowland areas to mountainous escarpments and highlands. In West Pokot County, “The southeast section of the district is situated in the Cherangani Hills with altitudes over 3000 meters above sea level. The northern and northeastern part of the district on the other hand stretches towards the hot, dry plains of Turkana at altitudes of less than 900 meters above sea level” (Hendrix, 1985). The Weiwei, Muruny, Kerio, and Suam Rivers run perennially through Pokot. The Suam River is an important lifeline for lowland Pokot, flowing from Mt. Elgon in Uganda northeast toward Lake Turkana. As it approaches Turkana County, the river becomes known as Turkwel. In the early 1990s, the Suam/Turkwel River was dammed, creating the Turkwel Gorge Reservoir and the Turkwel Hydroelectric Power Station.

Since colonialism, most Pokot reside in West Pokot County along the western border of Kenya with Uganda; however, Baringo County in Kenya as well as eastern Uganda are home to a sizeable Pokot population as well. My case study village, Asilong, is located on the Kenya-Uganda border in Kacheliba constituency within West Pokot County. The political boundaries of the Pokot lands typify the characteristics of a borderland region. In fact, nearly half of current day West Pokot County flip flopped from being part of Kenya to Uganda to Kenya again. From 1922 to 1970, the area of West Pokot north of the Suam River, currently Alale, Kasei, and

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<sup>14</sup> A publication of a monthly paper called *Kalenjin* further solidified the political unity of the group. The colonial officials supported the group and the paper as they were seen as an anti-Mau Mau tool and furthered the colonial ruling strategy of “tribalization” (Karega-Munene, 2010, p. 44).

Kacheliba districts (formerly Karapokot or Karasuk), was administrated by Uganda, and current residents have dual citizenship with Uganda and Kenya (Nangulu, 2009).

The Pokot's borderland identity matters little in day-to-day activities but is negotiated or ignored to the benefit of self or community. The border is crossed daily by pastoralists looking for water and grazing for their herds and by individuals looking for active markets in which to buy or sell. Petty criminals take advantage of the border and their dual citizenship to avoid the law. When caught a criminal may decide to only produce their identification for the country they are not in (Julius Sawe, personal communication, 4 Dec. 2020). Likewise, the newly appointed Chief of Asilong sublocation lives on the Uganda side of the border even though he now holds a government job with the Republic of Kenya. To the Pokot, the place of the Pokot is not marginal or remote but geographically central based on their identity and concept of territory. Life will continue regardless of a line drawn on a British colonial piece of paper, arbitrarily connecting the dots of the peaks rising out of the plains of the Rift Valley.

Filippello (2017) explains that for the occupants of borderlands, "Their sense of collective identity does not correlate neatly with prevailing definitions of nationality" or "what Frederick Cooper refers to as a 'colonial fiction of territorial particularity'" (p. 21). While borderlands flout the idea of contained places with defining cultures, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) point out that it is these "marginal zones" that possess a strong conceptualization of "the postmodern subject," defying the limits, physically and metaphorically, that modern colonialism imposed (p. 48). The Pokot, therefore, constantly negotiate imposed borders with a historical view of their place as geographically and conceptually unified, porous, and central. Likewise, as I refer to Pokot or the place of the Pokot, I mean the geographic extent of where the Pokot reside, disregarding national and county boundaries (see Figure 1.2). This study, while reliant on the



categories available and centered on West Pokot County, has no clearly defined geographical edges or limits, instead applying the ambiguous term Pokot to identify the study area.

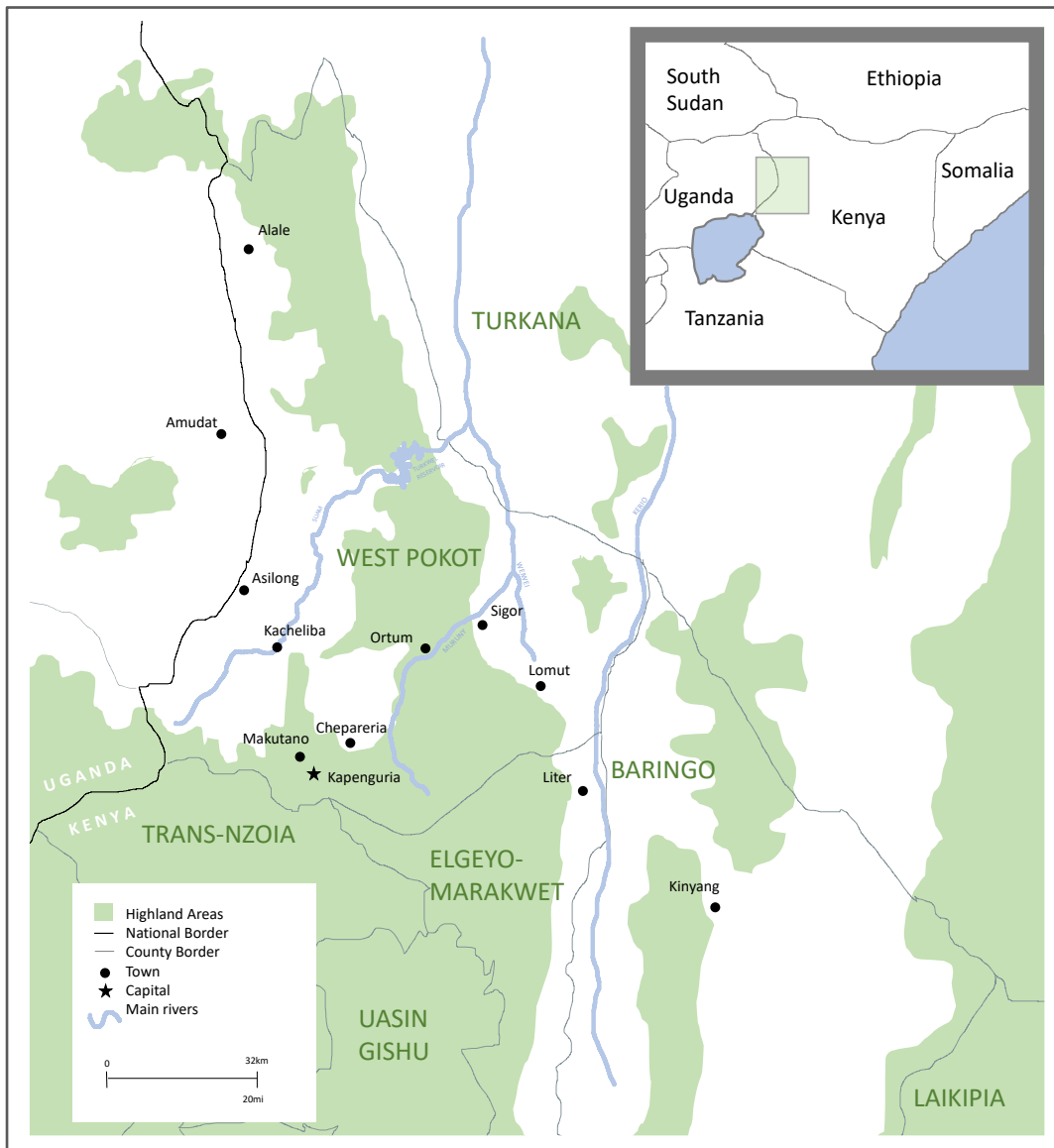


Figure 1.2: Map of the Pokot region and surrounding areas in western Kenya and eastern Uganda

The Pokot are split between the upland mixed agriculturalists and the lowland pastoralists, who make up the majority of the “tribe” (Patterson, 1969). Historically, lowland Pokot were “not bound by economic necessity or by strong political bonds to any specific

portion of their environment;” however, the upland Pokot were dependent on the produce of their fields, a system that required “corporate activities... [and thus] institutionalized social relations” (Peristiany, 1954, p. 17). Since at least the late 1800s, economic life has been centered on herding, especially for the lowland Pokot but also for the upland Pokot to some extent. Farming continues to be an important economic activity but is secondary in social and cultural significance (Beech, 1911; Schneider, 1959; Sanders 2001). Cattle are seen as especially important, garnering admiration and affection. Pokot fits into the “cattle complex” defined by anthropologist Melville Herskovits in 1926, a 2,700-mile-long expanse in East Africa dominated by pastoralists. Cattle figure into daily and seasonal activities (caring for the cattle and transhumance), important life events (marriage dowry), relationships with outsiders (cattle raiding), and more. Even today, cattle continue to be the source of wealth and status<sup>15</sup> as the Pokot proverb states: “A Pachon without cattle is considered as a dead one” (Sanders, 2001, p. 14).

As recent as the 1990s, anthropologist Barbara Bianco (1996) describes the Pokot as “East African cattle-keepers seemingly untouched by modernity and colonial rule” (p. 25). Throughout much of their history, the Pokot have responded to outside pressures by strengthening traditions, unity, and cultural distinctiveness. “West Suk remained, as the Pokot preferred, a backwater of empire” (Patterson, 1969, p. 7). American anthropologist and student of Melville Herskovits, Harold Schneider, summed up the Pokot’s resistance to modernity this way in the 1950s: “The Pakot’s determined resistance to British pressure is based upon their satisfaction with their traditional culture and their feeling that it is superior to and more desirable

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<sup>15</sup> In the vein of the dynamic nature of culture, it is significant to note that the importance of the pastoral lifestyle increased around the turn of the nineteenth century while agriculture declined due to an extended drought (Bollig et al., 2014).

than Euro-American civilization... The core of this conservatism is the feeling that they are inferior to no one and superior to all” (quoted by Patterson, 1969).

While most ethnographies about the Pokot are over twenty years old, the basis of culture remains as the region advances in Western development. Ngeiywo’s recently completed thesis (2018) explores the religion and worldview of the Pokot in great detail, concluding that while development approaches, the worldview of the Pokot has remained consistent for a sizeable portion of the population, particularly the elderly. Although the Pokot people have historically been a conservative people resistant to change, the contact zone (discussed below) of Pokot shows increasingly prevalent indications of the hybridity of material culture through increased Western-style dress and buildings amongst men’s *shukas* and beads and traditional circular huts; likewise, the Pokot are increasingly educated in Western-styled schools, treated in Western-styled hospitals and clinics, and open to economic diversity, including cultivation.

### ***Religion and Morality***

The Pokot religious system surrounds the high god and creator, Tororut, who anthropologist Schneider (1959) described as “manifest[ing] himself in the sun, the stars, the rain and thunder, and other natural phenomena” (p. 157). Religion scholar Ndegweh (2020) corrects the presumption of animism implicit in Schneider’s description by explaining Tororut is believed to live “in the sky” but comes to “Mtelo (the highest mountain in Pökotland) to reveal his will to the people” (p. 124). The belief that Tororut requires the preservation of tradition and equilibrium is in keeping with the Pokot’s conservative culture. Likewise, pastoralist culture is based on personal independence and practicality, which typically de-emphasizes death and life after death (Ndegwah, 2007). In the Pokot religious system, ancestors do not play an important

role in religious beliefs, and only some Pokot men and a few women are thought to exist after death, generally as “malevolent, irritable, and vindictive” spirits who intervene in the lives of the living (Schneider, 1959, p. 157). Likewise, mentioning the names of the deceased is considered a breach of etiquette. Schneider’s description of the Pokot’s belief system explained that people can disturb the equilibrium of society through evil deeds but be brought right by going through certain rituals: magic “is probably the most effective means of social control” for the Pokot (1959, p. 158; see also Ngeiywo, 2018).

Pokot society is considered stateless, not organized around a single leader, but instead managed by community leadership, typically older men. In his 2018 dissertation, Ngeiywo explains that the *Werkoi* or prophets are the most highly regarded due to their responsibility to “foresee the future using dreams” (Ngeiywo, 2018, p. 52). The *Kiruokin* or community elders are “old men who have wisdom and skill, and have the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of the community, solving marital conflicts, addressing the needs of those who are in difficulty and punishing those who commit serious crimes” (Ngeiywo, 2018, p. 53). Morality and order are protected through “imposed sanctions against wrong doers” (Ngeiywo, 2018, p. 52).

Christianity runs at odds with many Pokot religious beliefs and cultural norms because it comes across as a religion of rule-following and heavy consideration of life after death. Likewise, “the Pokot are more magically inclined than religious: theirs is a mechanical way of relating to supernatural” (Ndegwah, 2007, p. 68). While mission organizations tend to be highly patriarchal, women missionaries, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, had greater power in mission settings than at home, and both male and female missionaries focused appeals to local women with messages of Christian freedom and empowerment. Despite resistance to Christianity, Ndegwah (2007) notes that Christianity has appealed more to women due to the

hard living conditions for women, including bearing the brunt of the day to day chores and at times enduring beatings. Likewise, women were largely excluded from political and religious leadership and decision making, leaving them more open to inclusion in a new religious system.

In keeping with the Pokot's conservatism, missions had little effect on the culture for decades. Missionaries found the Pokot to be largely apathetic about Christianity and disinclined to conversion because, Patterson (1969) surmised, converts had to submit to the strict rules of the missionaries: wear clothes, attend school, abandon polygamy, cease circumcision rituals, and relinquish a nomadic lifestyle for a sedentary one. They remained "happy with their high god<sup>16</sup> Tororut" and their practice of appeasing "malevolent ancestor spirits" (Patterson, 1969, p. 24). While the trends that Patterson points out are largely indisputable, his picture of mission success in Pokot is bleak and lacks substantiated proof. Patterson notes that in 1957, the first official convert was recognized by the Tottys; however, the Tottys themselves refer to converts made throughout their time among the Pokot, beginning with five young Pokot men who accepted the message of Christianity within the first years of their tenure (sometime between 1931 and 1934) (Totty, 1980). Likewise, Patterson suggests that no Catholic converts existed by 1962 (1969, p. 31) without discussing the increased interest and participation of the locals in the religious, educational, and medical provisions of the mission station in Ortum. Patterson's perspective is largely colored by the timing of his research that just preceded a change in the religious sense of place in Pokot.

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<sup>16</sup> The use of capitalization or lack thereof in reference to God/god is an interesting topic, rife with colonial baggage. If a local god is referred to in lower case, it communicates a sense that the god is false, separate from the Christian god, and worthy of anthropological study but not reverence (see Mbiti, 1970). Other than in quotes, my approach will be to use a lowercase 'g' when the word is modified and used as general terminology—their god, his god, a god, the Christian god—and a capital 'G' when the god is referred to as a being or name—prayed to God, God called them.

Ngeiywo (2018) and Shingledecker (1982) explain that a shift in Pokot religious belief occurred in the 1960s, leading up to the East African Revival movement in 1970. “It was from this year that the denominations that were doing mission work in West Pokot County began to experience some breakthrough... ‘Many new denominations have begun to work among the Pokot within the last decade. With increasing pressure for development and modernization, the traditional Pokot way of life is breaking down and the people are becoming open to new ideas, including Christianity’” (Shingledecker, 1982, p. 18 quoted in Ngeiywo, 2018, p. 137-8). The Pokot youth who were products of the mission-led education system began to embrace the message of Christianity in greater numbers. While Shingledecker (1982) found that only a little over 10% of the population of West Pokot attended church regularly in the early 1980s, by 2009 the *Socio-Economic Atlas of Kenya* reported that 83% of the population<sup>17</sup> of West Pokot identified themselves as Catholic, Protestant, or another type of Christian (2016, p. 56).

## **Research Context and Literature Review**

### ***Pokot People***

Much has been written since the 1980s concerning the Pokot people with reference to needs perceived by outsiders. For instance, poverty alleviation, attempts at modernization and development, educational needs, and environmental blight and desertification caused by climate change and overgrazing are common themes in the literature, particularly in the disciplines of geography and anthropology (Andiema et al., 2008; Chepleting et. al, 2013; Dietz & van Haastrecht, 1983; Fratkin, 2001; Fratkin & Roth, 1990; Opschoor, 2001). Likewise, numerous

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<sup>17</sup> The *Socio-Economic Atlas of Kenya* reports the population of West Pokot in 2016 at 509,700 (2016, p. 34). The percentage of Catholics in West Pokot was 38% and Protestants and “other Christians” made up 45% of the population.

ethnographies about the Pokot people have been compiled and written by anthropologists (Bianco, 1991; Meyerhoff, 1981; Peristiany, 1951, 1954; Schneider, 1955, 1959).

The subject of Pokot does not have a wide breadth in geographical scholarship. However, Ton Dietz, a human geographer at the University of Amsterdam (now retired), has written extensively on the Pokot people and the region they inhabit along the Kenya-Uganda border (Dietz & van Haastrecht, 1983; Dietz, 1987, 1991, 1993). His research proliferated in the 1980s, much of which was followed up in the early 2000s. Dietz has created an invaluable repository of geographical data on the Pokot people. His 1987 work, *Pastoralists in Dire Straits*, is a thorough geographical study of the Pokot, starting with an explanation of the physical geography and a detailed description of the colonial history and continuing to survival and developmental strategies employed by the Pokot. His research includes climate and soil data for the region as well as documentation of outbreaks of animal diseases and periods of warfare and instability. His work documents the interactions between some international aid and development organizations, particularly the ASAL (arid and semi-arid lands) development program developed by the Dutch government to address needs in West Pokot, an area adopted<sup>18</sup> by the Netherlands in 1981 (Dietz, 1987). His descriptions of the physical geography of the region are balanced by his discussion of related human geography. His work adds to the growing discourse on the decline of pastoralism (Fratkin, 2001; Sperling & Galaty, 1990), a phenomenon that has a profound effect on the landscape and place of the Pokot. Although Dietz does not focus on religious topics in his writing, he chronicles church membership as an aspect of human geography and assesses the value of the development work of Western missions and missionaries in the region and how the Pokot perceive this work (Dietz & van Haastrecht, 1983; Andiema et al., 2008). My research will

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<sup>18</sup> The Kenyan government requested select donor countries to adopt ASAL regions as part of their “District Focus for Rural Development, the Kenyan form of decentralization” (Andiema et al., 2008, p. 119).

build on Dietz's by describing the influence of missionary development work on the sense of place and landscape of Pokot. Outside of Dietz and his cohort of researchers, few geographers have studied the region of the Pokot people, and none with such breadth. Although not a geographer, Kenyan historian Anne Kisaka Nangulu (2009) describes Pokot colonial history in detail, helping provide a political, historical, and physical geographic understanding of my study area.

Anthropologists, conversely, have long studied and described the Pokot people in Kenya and Uganda. Notable anthropologists J.G. Peristiany (1951, 1954) and Harold Schneider (1955, 1959) dominated the anthropological and cultural scholarly understanding of the Pokot people in the 1950s. They describe the Pokot as proud and conservative people, (usually) passively resistant to British colonialism. Peristiany and Schneider's work continues to be cited extensively in relation to research on the Pokot. Prior to the 1950s, district commissioners working for the British colonial powers wrote as amateur anthropologists, describing the social and cultural habits of the Pokot (see Beech, 1911 and a summary of district commissioner reports in Patterson, 1969). Social anthropologists, Barbara Bianco (1991) and Elizabeth Meyerhoff (1981), studied women's roles in Pokot pastoralist society. Meyerhoff particularly discusses the male bias in research as many anthropologists who have focused their research on the Pokot are male (see Beech, 1911; Conant, 1965; Edgerton & Conant, 1964 and 1971; Peristiany, 1951 and 1954; and Schneider, 1957 and 1959). Likewise, cultural anthropologists who have conducted more recent research, Fratkin (1990 and 2001) and Bollig et al. (2013), have written on the effects of environmental strain and colonial and postcolonial strictures on Kenyan pastoralists' way of life.



It is important to note that anthropology, particularly ethnographic anthropology, is often criticized by postcolonial scholars for its allegiance to the colonial mission and for essentialism, defining discrete cultures that exist in bounded spaces. James Sidaway (2002) explains how anthropologists (as well as geographers) functioned alongside the British Foreign and Colonial Office to develop “elaborate notions of cultural and racial difference, masculine heroism... and colonial administration, to be applied in Africa and Asia with a mixture of ‘civilising mission’... and brute force” (Sidaway, 2002, p. 10). Likewise, anthropologists, according to Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, were prone to simplifying and packaging cultures. “This assumed isomorphism of space, place, and culture results in some significant problems” (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p. 34), including the problem of those who live along borders and cross them, the increasing hybridity of cultures, and the reality that culture is not a static phenomenon with an original or nostalgically “pure” base (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997).

It is easy to default to pre-packaged terms of ethnicity or defined geographies found within, particularly older, social science literature. This study employs a flexible view of both, which is especially important when looking at the Pokot, a people group who live along a national boundary and have had strongly ambivalent relationships with those boundaries and their neighbors. The Pokot, who have at times been portrayed as static, not only have had to negotiate increasingly with (post)colonialism, imperialism, and globalization but have engaged in cultural exchanges with their neighbors, crossing perceived boundaries and negotiating with “outsiders,” throughout their history (Beech, 1911). The very existence of the Kalenjin category, newly minted in the mid-1900s as an ethnic identity for the Pokot and their pastoralist neighbors, is an excellent example of how cultural identity is constructed and negotiated, typically to secure more power.

## *Missions*

More than anthropology and geography, the field of history, particularly through Africanist historians, has contributed much to the study of missions in Africa and can be directly applied to the place of Pokot. Historians Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo edited a volume called *East African Expressions of Christianity* (1999). In its introduction, Spear writes that despite the rarity of research covering mission histories and biographies and practices of early converts, “Christianity may well be the most important single legacy of colonialism and, far from dying with it, has gone on to become one of the most dynamic social movements in Africa today” (Spear, 1999a, p. 3-4). Historian Robert Strayer (1978) concurred with Spear’s emphasis on the importance of studying mission history: “The profound loyalties and vehement antipathies which mission communities generated are ample testimony to their central position in the history of twentieth-century Kenya” (p. 2-3).

Like Spear and Strayer, historians Gregory Maddox (1999) and Patrick Harries (2007) make space in their work for Christianity to stand apart from missions and missions to stand apart from colonialism while acknowledging and tracing their intersections and overlap within an African context. Each historian juxtaposes missionary perspective with the reality of Christianity for African converts, explaining the historical trajectory of the contact zone. Spear (1999) also explains the difficulty of studying religion from an academic perspective:

Questions of religious belief pose problems for academic social scientists, many of whom are made uncomfortable, for example, by Sanneh’s conclusion that, while the missionaries themselves may have failed, God’s mission (*missio Dei*) in Africa succeeded. We need to cross the boundaries between academic and religious scholarly discourses if we are to understand those converts who say that, while they were initially attracted by schools and jobs, they were captured by ‘the poetry of the religion.’ (Spear, 1999a, p. 19)

Maddox (1999) describes that “both secular and theological writing on the issue of the adaptation of Christianity to African cultures has continued to postulate a duality between African cultures and Christianity” (Maddox, 1999, p. 28), but, again citing Sanneh, this duality is an unnecessary if not harmful focus that obscures the agency of African converts in their “cultural transcendentalism” (Maddox, 1999, p. 29).

The works of Spear and Maddox, particularly, speak to methodological frameworks (see below) to engage with the topic of Western Christian missions in Africa. Spear (1999) highlights the importance of identifying the unique and individual influence of missions and missionaries and response of locals. Maddox (1999) calls the researcher away from linear, modern models of description toward a multidimensional understanding of the dynamism of culture and cultural interactions. By virtue of being historians, Spear, Maddox, Harries, and Strayer focus on the processes of history that, in the hands of a geographer, help define place.

### ***Pokot and Missions***

Literature about the Pokot and about missions comes together with the works of three African scholars. The works of theologians David Ndegwah (2007) and John Mondri (2016) and religion scholar Tom Keiyo Ngeiywo (2017, 2018) have had the greatest impact on my research. Ndegwah, Mondri, and Ngeiywo (and associates) have written extensively on Pokot culture and Christianity. Each critically examines the influence of Western Christian missions in light of religious identity and economic development in Pokot, focusing on flawed missionary perception and strategies. The voice of African scholars is particularly important in my research as they highlight a decolonial perspective, adding dimension to an otherwise Western-dominated scholarly perspective.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In addition to the academic discourse on the Pokot and missions in Africa provided by a wide array of scholars in the social sciences and humanities, my research will draw from and position itself within the theoretical frameworks of postcolonialism, decolonialism (with a caveat explained below), and place. All are key concepts in human geography that position my research both theoretically and methodologically within the scholarship of the discipline.

### ***Postcolonial Theory***

As a framework, postcolonialism requires an understanding of and a response to colonialism. As the Pokot reside in Kenya and Uganda, they were subject to decades of British colonialism, which had its own distinct style and approach for the Pokot. The Pokot, in turn, responded to the British intrusion in unique ways and with dynamic attitudes toward outsiders that did not start with British colonialism and would continue after independence.

Geographer Joanne Sharp's (2009) definition of postcolonialism is paramount for the purpose of this study: "Postcolonialism is an analysis and critique of the ways in which western knowledge systems have come to dominate" (p. 5). Postcolonialism is an ambiguous concept as it recognizes both a break with what preceded it and continuities that linger from colonialism (Sharp, 2009). Approaching geography with a postcolonial lens means that texts, landscapes, and places are reread to draw out voices, perspectives, and meaning that might question Western hegemony. In this process, a geographer must understand the hallmarks of Western thought in order to tease new meaning from old texts. For instance, the binaries explained through Edward Said's concept of Orientalism describe an imagined geography of us and them or "the other"

(Said, 1978; Sharp, 2009). Likewise, Western portrayals of colonial landscapes and people often contain generalizations and simplifications of realities that overlook meaning and significance because the meaning and significance do not comply with colonial objectives or perspectives (Said, 1997).

The postcolonial geographer is concerned with memory of the past. “Postcolonial critique must not only counter amnesiac histories of colonialism but also stage ‘a return of the repressed’ to resist the seductions of nostalgic histories of colonialism” (Gregory, 2004, p. 9). Colonialism in this context is not just the time before independence; it is also the continuation of colonial action and thought described by Derek Gregory in *The Colonial Present* (2004). (Like Sharp (2009), I will use a hyphen to distinguish the era of post-colonialism from the theory of postcolonialism.) Processes of Western hegemony are not something we look back to, as the name “postcolonial” might imply. Colonialism is still present if we consider the power and social structures at play today through educational systems, appointed national boundaries, systems of government, and even religious systems. The postcolonial geographer must be willing to uncover ambivalence, complexities, and hybridity where two cultures intersect.

Bill Ashcroft’s (2001) discussion of hybridity and resistance are particularly useful in the final section of this study. Hybridity holds to the idea that no culture comes away from an interaction with another culture unaffected. Despite colonial thought<sup>19</sup> that the colonizer is the agent of change and the colonized are mere receivers, an exchange of ideas, knowledge, and perspective is inevitable and multidimensional. Likewise, for a people group like the Pokot who have been described as conservative bordering on static—never changing, living in a perpetual

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<sup>19</sup> Although I often essentialize colonial thought into a one-dimensional discourse, it is important to recognize the nuances within the discourse. The Reverend Joseph Oldham explained in his 1931 treatise on mission education that Africans “are not passive clay to be moulded according to the pattern desired by their present rulers. They are growing persons, with power to assimilate and to reject” (p. 12).

state of tradition—exploring the concept of hybridity is particularly meaningful and discourse-changing. Conversely, the culture of the missionary is affected by its interactions with another culture. The narrative and counternarrative reverberate between the cultures, showing an exchange of ideas and an impact on both cultures throughout time.

Resistance is an ambiguous term that both reacts against and toward hybridity. Ashcroft (2001) puts it like this: “the most fascinating feature of post-colonial societies is a ‘resistance’ that manifests itself as a refusal to be absorbed, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being” (p. 20). Similarly, ambivalence recognizes the diverse and multidimensional response in colonized or post-colonized people. “Ambivalence is not merely the sign of the failure of colonial discourse to make the colonial subject conform, it is the sign of the agency of the colonized – the two-way gaze, the dual orientation, the ability to appropriate colonial technology without being absorbed by it – which disrupts the monologic impetus of the colonizing process” (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 23). Examining resistance and ambivalence is a postcolonial strategy for giving a voice to the subaltern (Sharp, 2009). The Pokot embody resistance, ambivalence, and hybrid acceptance in their relationship to outsiders, colonial and missionary alike. A sense of place study must address resistance, ambivalence, and hybridity as tools used by the Pokot in their interaction with Westerners, particularly Western Christian missionaries, and vice versa.

Cheryl McEwan’s book, *Postcolonialism and Development* (2008), brings the theory of postcolonialism together with the precepts of development and development theory. Since colonialism and, by extension and association, missions sought to bring civilization (an outdated term for development) to Africa, McEwan’s discussion is of great significance to this study.

Postcolonialism and development theory have been at odds with each other largely because the former charges the latter with being “the dominant, universalizing, and arrogant discourse of the North” (McEwan, 2008, p. 27) while the latter views the former as purely theoretical at best and nihilistic at worst. As Sylvester puts it, “Development studies do not tend to listen to subalterns and postcolonial studies do not tend to concern itself with whether the subaltern is eating” (quoted in McEwan, 2008, p. 77). A respectful approach to development through the lens of postcolonialism is necessary in understanding the resistance, ambivalence, and hybridity in the place of the Pokot. While development theory is not a significant part of this study, a postcolonial dismissal of all things related to development would place this study at a disadvantage at the start by dismissing all attempts at development as colonial arrogance and misuse of power. As McEwan (2008) proposes, I instead balance a challenge against the dominant colonial discourse that can be present in development with a respect for the tenor and intentions behind missionary development projects in Pokot, recognizing when development becomes a place of hybridity and exchange in the contact zone.

### ***Decolonial Theory***

While a postcolonial approach to the missionary discourse is, I would argue, an appropriate lens through which to describe and understand the religious context of place in relation to the contact zone of missionaries and the Pokot, to examine the Pokot narrative or counternarrative of the mission story requires a decolonial lens. Postcolonialism seeks to “destabilize the dominant discourses of imperial Europe” found in history, philosophy, development, etc. and challenge “the unacknowledged and unexamined assumptions” at the heart of Western academia, always with colonialism and Western norms in the rearview mirror

(McEwan, 2008, p. 25-26). To best understand the Pokot response to the place of the contact zone, the story must center not on a reaction to Western intrusion but on a recognition of Pokot power, initiative, and above all perspective. “According to Western researchers, the ‘post’ component of postcolonial refers to striving against colonialism, not just to the time following the arrival of the colonists. However, indigenous scholars have written that colonialism continues and that research needs to not only describe the effects of colonialism but also to contribute to decolonization, by supporting the self-determination of Indigenous peoples (Grande, 2000; Smith, 2005)” (Getty, 2010, p. 7).

Like Pratt in her work *Imperial Eyes* (1992), I seek to decolonize knowledge. The Pokot have been thoroughly scrutinized and proselytized over the past ninety years of foreign missionary involvement in the region. I recast this scrutiny in the light of current postcolonial theory to reveal biases, reductions, and inaccuracies while highlighting the voice and perspective of the subaltern in the contact zone of Pokot. The multidimensionality of my approach combats colonial amnesia and nostalgia (see Gregory, 2004, p. 9). Through postcolonial theory, I draw attention to the spread of Western hegemonic thought, and through extending a decolonial approach, my study seeks to identify new and beneficial ways of knowing, interacting, and seeing through the interplay of resistance and hybridity in the contact zone of Pokot.

Since I am a Western scholar myself, it is arguable whether I can successfully engage with decolonial theory in a way that sets it apart from the postcolonial lens I already employ. The geographical center of my research perspective, in alignment with Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2015) description of postcoloniality, “revolves within a Euro-North American-centric modernist discursive, historical, and structural terrain” (p. 491). While my research cannot and does not fully answer the call of decoloniality for “democratization of knowledge, de-hegemonization of



knowledge, de-westernization of knowledge, and de-Europeanization of knowledge” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 492), it does highlight voices of the subaltern and nonwestern scholars.

Likewise, my research seeks to flout essentialism and binary thought in its portrayal of both mission history and Pokot culture in an attempt to bridge what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) describes as the postcolonial horizons of “universalism and cosmopolitanism” and that of decolonial theory’s “pluriversality” (p. 491). This study relies heavily on primary texts and discourse to illustrate the story of perspectives—missionary and Pokot—to walk the reader through the creation of the place of Pokot, exposing perspective as a vital ingredient to place-making.

### ***Sense of Place Theory***

Analyzing a location’s sense of place is a highly geographical way to look at the intersection of space with meaning, time, and culture. The study of place in geography was pioneered by Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph in the 1970s. They began to examine place not as a study of the particular but as a theoretic stance that drew from European philosophy. They sought to understand place as an idea. Both Tuan and Relph drew heavily from phenomenology, a philosophy that would guide their study of place and inform place studies to the present, including this one (see Tuan, 1974; Relph, 1976; Entrikin, 1991; Casey, 1996; Cresswell, 2004; Escobar, 2001 and Massey, 1994 for examples of phenomenological studies of place). Franz Brentano and Edmund Husserl developed the philosophy of phenomenology in the 1800s to illuminate the power and purpose of consciousness (Cresswell, 2004). Consciousness hinges on perception, and both consciousness and perception must be in *place*. Places are not only perceived by the senses (the term *sense of place* reoccurs in the academic discussion of place), but our inability to escape places creates a “primordial depth” of understanding between place

and our consciousness (Merleau-Ponty quoted in Casey, 1996, p. 16). All that is sensed or perceived has a place that concurrently contains the perceiver, which in this study is the Western missionary and the Pokot people. The basic understanding that one who studies place is also in place, not an objective outside observer (see the discussion about the colonial gaze in footnote 2), puts place studies squarely in postcolonial scholarship. As Lukerman (1964) observes, “The study of place is the subject matter of geography because consciousness of place is an immediately apparent part of reality, not a sophisticated thesis; knowledge of place is a simple fact of experience” (quoted in Cresswell, 2004, p. 23).

By definition through a phenomenological lens, place is experience; it is dynamic and existentially full of tension. Tim Cresswell begins his book, *Place: A Short Introduction* (2004), by pointing out some dualities inherent to place: it is both “familiar” and “slippery” as a subject; it is both “simple” and “complicated” (p. 1); and it is both “an object” and “a way of looking” (p. 15). Nicholas Entrikin (1991) adds that “place is both a center of meaning and the external context of our actions” (p. 7); it includes “natural elements and human constructions, both material and ideal” (p. 6); and place is understood both subjectively and objectively (p. 7). Tuan (1996) even divides place into two categories: “public symbols” are places the meaning of which are readily apparent through one’s gaze, but “fields of care” are places that can only be known after “prolonged experience” (p. 447). These dualities set the stage to begin to understand the wide breadth of theory about the identity of place and how it applies to the interaction of Western missionaries and Pokot (as a place and a people).

The theoretical perception of place, according to Cresswell’s analysis of Edward Soja, is a response to “binaries of spatiality which have been at the center of geographical discourse:” objectivity and subjectivity, material and mental, real and imagined (2004, p. 38). As a challenge

to these binaries, Soja discusses something he calls “thirdspace” that he defines as lived space. This thirdspace adds dimension to place beyond firstspace, space that is measurable and mappable, and secondspace, “a felt and cared for center of meaning” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 38). (Secondspace is similar to Tuan’s “fields of care” (1996)). Place becomes an event, “an unstable stage for performance” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 39). Place is an event, challenging ideas of boundedness and stasis. Casey (1996) puts it this way: “Rather than being one definite sort of thing—for example, physical, spiritual, cultural, social—a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they *happen*” (p. 27). Places contain, are defined by, and help define constantly changing social interactions that occur within and through subjective boundary lines. “Places do not have single, unique ‘identities,’ ... [and] the specificity of place is continually reproduced” (Massey quoted in Cresswell, 2004, p. 70). The dynamism of place is explained by Casey (1996) through the “generation and regeneration” of place following its own timing (1996, p. 26). Bill Ashcroft (2001) adds a sense of history to place while reiterating its boundless, dynamic nature:

As well as the palimpsestic process of inscription and erasure by which place comes into being, there is a rhizomic network by which place maintains its dynamic, emergent identity.... The rhizome of place is increasingly global and this makes the interactions of global and local an imperative aspect of the construction of place. ‘Thinking of places in this way’, says Massey, ‘implies that they are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations’ (121). (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 161)

The places described in my research are what Mary Louise Pratt (1992) described as contact zones. As a specific type of place, contact zones are, as Pratt (1992) describes, “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (p. 4). Pratt uses contact zones to place colonial encounters geographically and historically, focusing on the power dynamic and conflict.

My approach to the contact zones of Christian mission and Pokot interaction is descriptive of mission perception and strategy and Pokot response.

A continuum for studying place exists between two approaches—the purely theoretical and the purely illustrative—with most scholars, myself included, falling somewhere in between. Cresswell (2004) surmises that each scholar engages in three “levels” of approach to place: first, a mere description of a location or locale focused on the peculiarity and particularity of a place (the approach used by regional geographers and possibly travel writers); second, an examination of the social construction of place and the interaction of place and culture (embraced by feminist theorists, conflict theorists, and post-structuralists); and third, the universality of place as a concept, the phenomenon of place, and the placeness of consciousness (a thoroughly phenomenological approach). These levels are by no means mutually exclusive nor necessarily comprehensive; however, I will engage each of Cresswell’s levels as I describe the sense of place at the contact zone of missions and Pokot. Practically speaking, a study of the sense of place of the Pokot will require an objective understanding of the physical, historical, and cultural geography and built environment as well as a subjective analysis of the meaning of place as described by Western missionaries and Pokot people.

Likewise, reflecting on Soja’s concept of “thirdspace,” my study of place seeks to engage in the nuances of place, seen through change and experience of change over time. This is achieved through a focus on history, tracing missionary perceptions and strategies over ninety years in Pokot as they form and change and change again. Likewise, as the missionary actors on the stage of place change through time, the event of place changes, reflecting those who interact at the contact zone of missions and Pokot (Casey, 1996). The historical aspect of this study allows for a place description that reflects Ashcroft’s (2001) palimpsestic view of place, adding

the fourth dimension to the three-dimensional geographical understanding of the place of the Pokot.

## **Data Resources and Research Methods**

### ***Positionality***

As a postmodern scholar, employing a feminist, qualitative methodology, it is important to situate myself within my research (see Butler, 2001; Leung, 2015; Said, 1978; Skelton, 2001; Snow et al., 2016). I am, after all, a white, middle class, American woman, physically and metaphorically distant from the place of the Pokot. However, this distance, I believe, allows me a unique place of perception to learn about Pokot, particularly the sense of place of Pokot as described by Western missionaries and understood by their Western audience, and to situate and contextualize information, data, and texts into a wider academic geographical context; conversely, I have a subjectivity of my perspective that will both help and hinder me in my pursuit for knowledge and my ability to describe and analyze. In fact, Spivak goes as far as to suggest that a “privileged,” Western perspective disables an understanding of some experiences and perspectives, which is only resolved by “learning to learn – having unlearned one’s privileges as loss<sup>20</sup>, one has to learn to learn anew, which opens up the possibility of gaining knowledge of other” (paraphrasing by McEwan, 2008, p. 70). In the same way, by employing critical reflexivity within the methodologies mentioned below and to my perspective and research, I aim to help balance my subjectivity and potential power imbalances (Dowling, 2016;

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Spivak alludes to a biblical reference here where Paul “consider[s] everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things” (Philippians 3:8, NIV).

Mansvelt & Berg, 2016). Since I am describing Western notions of place in Pokot, I acknowledge my background to help the reader understand my potential biases.

Like African scholar and theologian Lamin Sanneh (1989), I approach missions with a belief in the transcendence of the Christian message, in accord with historians Spear (1999) and Maddox (1999). A scholar's viewpoint concerning the legitimacy of Christianity will inevitably affect their description of mission work. Someone who views Christianity solely as a hegemonic device of the West will likely view every activity of a Western missionary through that lens—as a messenger of “truth” that serves the colonial and imperial mission of the West. Spear (1999) contrasts the manner with which scholars and Christians view history. The former “see history as simply the unfolding of human events through time, with no teleological implications” while the latter “see history as the unfolding of God’s plan for the world to the end of Time.” He continues by explaining Sanneh’s perspective that employs both views “when he contrasts the very human faults that caused Christian missions in Africa to fail in historical times with the success of God’s Mission in universal Time” (Spear, 1999a, p. 20). My situatedness or personal belief systems make me uniquely qualified to examine and describe missionary activity in Pokot through the lens prescribed by Sanneh (1989) and Spear (1999a). “Academic historians have struggled to make sense of people’s faith as it influences their actions. But the world of religious faith and practice is a very difficult and mysterious world to explore; we can only do so with empathy for the beliefs of those whose experiences we seek to understand” (Spear, 1999a, p. 20).

My perspective as a scholar and Christian is further articulated by anthropologist and missiologist Paul Hiebert (1994) through his description of critical realism, a reaction to both positivism and anticolonialism—the former empowering colonial thought, the unwavering reliance on objectivity, and Western hegemony and the latter acting as a “necessary corrective”

but leaving us “as separate islands of subjective being” (Hiebert, 1994, p. 63). “Critical realists fall between the extremes of strict absolutes and relativism.... [T]hey hold to truth and to absolutes and reject religious relativism.... They also recognize that... conversions [to Christianity] take place within cultural and historical settings” (Hiebert, 1994, p. 49). My background and critical realist perspective enable me to separate the colonial, mission, and Christian mindsets. I emphasize that missionaries and churches (or the Church) often do not act, in fact, are incapable of acting entirely outside of the context of their cultures. Since this study is a sense of place study, I do not intend to parse out what is good and bad theology, only to use more precise terminology when analyzing missionary texts; my personal situatedness will allow me to better ascribe colonial, imperial, cultural, religious, and/or Christian meaning to descriptions of the place of the Pokot.

In this study, I am both an insider and an outsider to the research. As a former short-term missionary and a participant in my church’s work in West Pokot, I am an insider to how missionaries work and think, making “both the information [I] collect and [my] interpretations of it... more valid than those of an outsider” (Dowling, 2016, p.40). At the same time, as I conduct interviews among the Pokot and piece together their view of place through the influence of Western Christian missions, I am an outsider. The benefits of being an outsider are that people may “make more of an effort to clearly articulate events, circumstances, and feelings to the researcher” (Dowling, 2016, p. 40) depending on the interviewee’s perspective and relationship with the researcher. My position as both an insider and outsider gives me a unique perspective as a cultural geographer interested in meaning and place. Garth Myers (2005) adeptly describes this perspective:

The study of place meaning entails a sometimes uncomfortable or even muddled mixing of emotional and scientific understandings. Writers of this sort of cultural geography are

inevitably situated in between—they cannot step outside of the picture, nor can they fully immerse themselves within. Even from within such a partial perspective, however, it is conceivable to draw out valuable reasons for saying that places matters. (p. 21-2)

### ***Methodology***

The methodology or system of methods employed in this research follows a qualitative approach to the study of place and human geography. For each part of my study, a variety of methods will be employed to reveal the development and dynamic process of the place of the Pokot at the contact zone between Western missionaries and the Pokot people. The layers of methods used to theoretically base my research, identify samples, collect data, and analyze that data reflect the objective of this study to tell the story of place as outlined above by the research questions.

In addition to the theory described above that grounds my research, I employ theoretical lenses to the process of research and the methods described below. In this study, postcolonialism is both a theory and a method. Postcolonial theory provides the lens through which I will approach the missionary and Pokot discourse around Western Christian missions in Pokot. My research is a postcolonial critique and historical description of the contact zone between outsiders (Western missionaries) and insiders (the Pokot people) from the advent of missionary involvement in Pokot in 1931 until the present. I show how this interaction directly influences the perception of place for both outsiders and insiders. Throughout my research, I follow Spear's (1999) recommendations: "The study of mission must thus take careful account of the historical specificity of each mission, including the beliefs, practices and strategies of the missionaries; their individual backgrounds and personalities; the colonial context in which they found themselves; their relations with the colonial authorities on one hand and local people on the other; their cultural and linguistic proficiency; and the length of time they spent in the field"



(Spear, 1999a, p. 5). A postcolonial lens allows me to tell the story of Pokot and missions while seeking to reveal assumptions and generalizations of colonial thought, focus on perception as a molder of history and place, and celebrate the “particular and the marginal” (McEwan, 2008, p. 27).

In association with the methodological lens provided by postcolonial theory, feminist methods will also be employed in this study. Feminist methodology, rising out of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, sought to question positivist truth claims and to highlight the importance of perspectives and power dynamics in research (Butler, 2001; Mohammad, 2001; Skelton, 2001). “Feminists have shown that... truth claims are not necessarily universal, while objectivity and neutrality are myths. All knowledges, they insist, are embedded, situated, specific and hence partial, with an inevitable bias” (Mohammad, 2001, p 103). The relativity of feminism is tempered by my use of a critical realist lens; however, I espouse feminist theory’s prioritization of positionality and suspicion of objectivity. The researcher is part of the social world, so it is through situating him or herself that he or she exposes the fallacy of objectivity, revealing what positivism keeps hidden (see a discussion of “positioned subjectivity” in Dunn, 2016 and Baxter & Eyles, 1997). In my research, I keep my role as the researcher visible to uphold the tenets of feminist methodology. At the same time, I highlight the voices of both the missionaries and the Pokot through quotations, allowing their perspectives to be heard. In so doing, I highlight the story of place as told in the words and from the perspectives of those negotiating place at the contact zone. Likewise, I seek to maintain a balance of power (or at least expose power imbalances) between a Western view, way of knowing, and representation of place with a nonwestern perspective (Butler, 2001). Like Pratt and Said, my goal, strongly rooted in discourse analysis and feminist theory, is not merely historical accuracy but a greater

examination of perceptions and the power of perceptions. “The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original” (Said, 1978, p. 21).

Mary Louise Pratt’s approach in her book *Imperial Eyes* (1992) is an important model of postcolonial and feminist discourse analysis (discussed more below), specifically textual analysis, for my approach to my research. In her book, Pratt mines the texts of European travel writers who visited nonwestern locations around the world to identify “redundancy, discontinuity, and unreality” in attempt to “decolonize knowledge” (p. 2). Like Pratt, I uncover how Western missionaries have “produced” the place of the Pokot for their readers through “representational practices” (p. 5) and modified the landscape of Pokot to reflect their vision for its placeness. I focus on the multidimensionality of this production of place. The Pokot are not static subjects of colonial or missional dominance. The contact zone here reveals a discourse of resistance, negotiations of meaning, and hybridity of cultures.

**Identifying data sources.** A key objective in my research is to tell the story of missions in Pokot, a comprehensive, historically-focused story. To meet this objective, I prioritized identifying as many of the missionary actors as possible and subsequently collecting as much written on the subject of their experiences as missionaries in Pokot as possible. Presently, short-term mission work in the Pokot area is common; however, this study focuses on Western-led missions with a sustained<sup>21</sup> presence in Pokot.

Finding the first missionaries, Lawrence and Annette Totty, was the result of a few simple searches into Pokot colonial history. The subsequent Anglican missionaries were

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<sup>21</sup> I purposely use the ambiguous term “sustained” instead of a specified time of engagement. Increasingly, for the past few decades, a relative ease of transportation allows for missionaries to go back and forth between Pokot and their home in Europe or the U.S. At least two of the missions discussed in this study have been involved in Pokot for over five years and spend at least three months per year in Pokot, but do not live there permanently.

uncovered through a snowball sampling method (Waite, 2005), a method of slow but frequently surprising identification of missionaries and subsequent data collection that would continue throughout my research. Even as I began writing, I kept looking through the larger discourse for previously obscured missionaries or groups of missionaries in order to keep my research as representative as possible. For example, I did not find Mary Ita Malone's memoir (2018) until after beginning writing; nevertheless, I was able to revisit written sections to include data from her memoir, which filled a gaping hole in my research—the female, Catholic, missionary voice. Reading the texts of Anglican BCMS missionaries helped connect me to other missionaries, notably AIM missionary Tom Collins. Likewise, internet searches led me to a wide array of unaffiliated and more recent missionaries in Pokot, many of whom published frequent prayer letters and updates online. In keeping with the snowball method, reading texts from or interviewing one missionary would often lead to discovering a name of another missionary or mission organization.

The Catholic presence, which I knew to be significant from my reading, at first remained elusive. The names of priests were often truncated in the Protestant written record, and the Comboni order, active in Pokot at least since the early 1960s, was based in Italy, meaning the records were in Italian. Finally, after I placed an inquiry through the Irish Kiltegan order's web site, I heard back from Father Tom O'Connor who not only connected me with several priests who had been missionaries in Pokot but also arranged for digitally archived, Kiltegan-published magazines to be sorted for pertinence and emailed to me. Through this connection, I collected both textual and interview data.

My approach to gathering texts written by Pokot was similar to the method used with missionary texts: I allowed snowball sampling to guide me to the most texts I could find. My

sampling method for interviewing Pokot individuals in Asilong was different, reflecting the different objective of chapter 5 of my study. For the missionary section of the study, the objective was to be comprehensive, whereas in the Pokot response to missions, the objective was a localized consensus. Explaining my desire to have a variety of respondents of different ages, sexes, and association with the church, I allowed my guide and translator to select individuals to meet this need and who he considered to be open, willing, and informative. Due to my inexperience within the culture and ignorance of the language of the place, relying on the knowledge of a resident was invaluable for my study. It allowed for a strategic and informed selection of interviewees, and my association with my guide affirmed a level of trustworthiness with my interviewees that I would not have on my own.

While the sample size of missionaries and mission organization was representational of the historical and geographic extent of this study and reflected a natural end to my own ability to discover more, the sample size of Pokot interviewees and members of focus groups reflected saturation of emerging “themes or constructs” in the geographically limited case study village of Asilong (Baxter & Eyles, 1997, p. 512). Most of the interviewees shared similar perspectives, leading me to feel I had reached “the point at which the data collection process no longer offers any new or relevant data” (Dworkin, 2012, p.1319). I had plans to return to West Pokot in the summer of 2020 to conduct a few more interviews (I hoped to talk to more women as they, in my limited experience, tended to be less political and more transparent in sharing their perspectives) and to visit mission contact zones outside of Asilong; however, the Covid-19 pandemic made that follow-up trip impossible. To fill this gap, I was able to access dozens of interviews conducted with Asilong residents by the son of Friends of Asilong missionary Andy DuPont.

One important caveat of the sampling and data collection process in this study relates to limitations caused by language. The data I collected for this study was limited to English language sources. While a general weakness for data collection, because of its history as a British colony, a significant majority of missionaries working in Kenya were and are English speakers, predominantly from England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the United States. One exception, Reformed Church of East Africa missionary Johannes Visser hailed from the Netherlands but wrote in English. A weakness of relying only on English sources means a minority of missionaries were never identified and data from these sources are missing from this study. For example, some Comboni missionary texts that likely exist, written in Italian, are not represented. BCMS missionary David Webster wrote in his memoir of two Verona (Comboni) priests who worked in Amudat at the same time as he did; however, I could find no record of them, likely due to the language barrier. Likewise, I found evidence of missionaries from Finland and Norway working among the East Pokot in Baringo Country (Mondi, 2016) but was never able to find names or data for these individuals. Language difficulties also affected my interviews with Pokot individuals. I required a Pokot interpreter and English translation, which added the potential for additional bias and miscommunication.

**Data collection: Missionary texts, archives, and interviews.** In addition to the time covered and historical nature of my study, I focused my data search on texts for two reasons. First, many of the missionaries who worked in Pokot are now very old or deceased. Second, textual data allows for a snapshot of perspective from past years of mission work, whereas data from interviews of past missionaries would be subject to the shifts and colorations of memory. To trace changes in the construction of place over time, perceptions at the time they were conceived (or soon after) were needed.

Texts, particularly letters, from early missionaries in Pokot were held in archival collections. In September 2018 I visited the BCMS (renamed Crosslinks) head office in London, where I was given access to archived letters from the Totties and the Housdens to the mission office and to supporters. Through my connection with the BCMS archives, I was able to visit with, interview, and attain Annette Totty's unpublished memoirs from the Totty's second daughter, Ann Attwood. In March 2019, a visit to the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center Archives in Wheaton, Illinois gave me access to some AIM archives, including undated AIM radio programs, letters from pioneer missionary Tom Collins, mission videos of Ray and Jill Davis, and records of requests for materials from Gospel Recordings Network. Additionally, from the records of the RCA mission office, I was emailed the missionary newsletters of Larry and Linda McAuley.

Primary textual sources also came in the way of published memoirs and missionary and organizational newsletters. BCMS missionaries Ruth Stranex Deeth, Peter Cox<sup>22</sup>, Philip Price, and David Webster; AIM missionaries Tom Collins<sup>23</sup> and Art Davis; Catholic missionary Mary Ita Malone; and unaffiliated missionary Jane Hamilton published memoirs about their experiences as missionaries in Pokot. Likewise, RCA missionary Morrell Swart wrote a history of RCA missions that also contained her experience as a missionary in Pokot. The Kiltegan or St. Patrick Missionaries publish a magazine called Africa out of their home base in Kiltegan, Ireland. Several articles in this magazine discussed the work of Kiltegan missionaries in Pokot. More recent newsletters and organizational materials, such as those of COPE, Jim and Kathy Tierney, and Friends of Asilong, were easily accessible online.

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Cox's memoir was available in a digital format online.

<sup>23</sup> Tom Collins of Kenya: Son of Valour is actually a biography written by a close friend and fellow missionary, Kenneth Phillips, and edited and retold by Tom's son, Malcolm Collins. The book contains many quotes from Tom, so I still consider among the important primary sources of this study.

Interviews were conducted primarily to fill data voids concerning missionary perspective and strategies that were not covered in textual data, particularly with recent missionaries, and secondarily to explore possible holes in the timeline or cast of characters in the story of the contact zone. The interviews were semi-structured around themes of mission and personal history, personal perceptions, and the contact zone of cultures (see Appendix A for specific questions). The largest series of interviews occurred with the Kiltegan missionaries about whom I only had access to articles written in the Kiltegan published magazine. I interviewed Father Michael Dillon over the phone, and my interview with Father Tom McDonnell was a series of email exchanges over a few months. Through these email exchanges came the most wonderful and noteworthy breakthrough in my research. Fr. Tom offered to interview Fr. Leo Staples, a pioneering Catholic missionary who, at the age of 94, still lives in Kenya and works with the Pokot. Due to his “remote” location and hearing impairment, I would not have opportunity to interview him myself. During a visit to Kiltegan from his home in Kitale, Kenya, Leo agreed to what I call a third-party interview with me via Tom, who also graciously transcribed the three-part interview and emailed me the script. Interviews were also conducted with David Webster via email, Kathy Tierney via email, and Andy and Olivia DuPont in person. I was also able to interview over the phone two mission coordinators involved with the RCA and an unaffiliated organization working in Pokot, Derrick Jones and Wayne Jacobsen.

**Data collection: Pokot texts, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation.**

To collect data about Pokot perspective, I employed four distinct methods. First, like missionary sources mentioned above, I sought textual data. Pokot-written texts are limited but include John Mondì’s dissertation (2016), Pokot testimonies written for BCMS missionaries (Tumkou & Payne, 1981), and quotes in scholarly works (such as Bianco, 1992). Second, because historical

texts written by Pokot individuals are scarce, I revisited missionary texts for descriptions of Pokot responses. I inferred Pokot perspective through missionary perspective to augment my description of the Pokot response to Western Christian missions, a method employed by history and American culture scholar Michael Witgen (Wise, 2018). In the context of studying historical colonial texts to understand Native American perspective, Witgen explained “that even texts produced with a naked cultural bias can still contain enough information to allow scholars to imagine the Native perspective of the encounter between the people of empire and the people of Native North America” (Wise, 2018).

Third, to add to and complement the limited number of Pokot-written sources on the subject of Western Christian missions and to prioritize the voice of the Pokot per postcolonial theory and feminist methodology, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were necessary (see Appendix B for questions). I conducted interviews and focus groups in the village of Asilong in West Pokot in English with translation to Pokot by Julius Sawe, the pastor of the local church. I had arranged for another translator to reduce bias in the context of the interviews; however, after meeting me, he never returned to conduct the interviews. I surmised that his English was not sufficient for the process. I conducted interviews with sisters-in-law Naomi and Helen, both members of the local AIC church; Rebecca, church leader and fifth wife of community elder; William, a community elder who does not attend church; and Nicholas, the politically appointed chief of Asilong area (the only interview conducted entirely in English and not requiring a translator). Focus groups grew out of interviews in two occasions. I interviewed Jacob, community and church elder, along with his wife Rebecca and two Pokot men: one was a local friend of Jacob, and the other was a pastor from a small church in Uganda. Likewise, I spoke with a group of men under a tree, most of whom were not church goers. My interviews



were augmented by interview footage conducted by Friends of Asilong associate Paul DuPont in 2017 and held in the personal archives of Andy DuPont. While the footage was extensive, interviews with seven locals (and one interview with Andy) were directly applicable to this study.

Fourth, I employed the method of participant observation during my two one-week-long visits to Asilong in 2016 and 2018. I attended church services; I observed the interactions of the Asilong community in and around the church and school, both centers of the contact zone in Asilong; and I attended an Asilong community meeting in 2018 on the topics of land needs for the mission-built secondary school and interactions between the school and the community. The meeting was mostly conducted in Pokot and translated into English by Chief Nicholas.

**Discourse Analysis.** The qualitative analysis of this research draws heavily on ideas within discourse analysis. Discourse analysis pays attention to the context—historical, geographical, and spiritual—of the many data sources that make up the missionary and Pokot discourse. Waitt (2005) explains the importance of a comprehensive collection of data within discourse analysis and the study of place:

The meaning of... a place... is fashioned through a pattern of discursive structures repeated across a number of statements, pictures, books, and magazines (texts), including sets of ideas, practices, rules, subject positions, processes, and attitudes. In the context of discourse, meanings cannot only be confined to a single word, sentences, or particular text, but depend on the outcome of relationships between texts, intertextuality. Individually, texts are not meaningful. Texts are made meaningful through their interconnections with other texts, their different discourses, consumption, circulation, and production. Accordingly discourse analysis must refer to collections of texts. (Waitt, 2005, p. 171)

All data collected through the above-mentioned texts, letters, recordings, interviews, focus groups, etc. was transcribed, examined, and analyzed for content that focused on historical events, perceptions, and strategies. Waitt (2005) describes strategies for discourse analysis,

starting with suspending “pre-existing categories” and familiarizing oneself with the texts. Following Waitt’s (2005) strategies, I coded the texts by identifying themes “to reveal how the producer is embedded within particular discursive structures” (p. 180). The themes common amongst the various texts guided the organization and focus of the study. In the missionary discourse, I looked for truth claims, inconsistencies, and “mechanisms that silence” through the missionary portrayal of mission work, outside systems and institutions at work in and around Pokot, and the place and people of Pokot (Waitt, 2005, p. 180). The language employed by missionaries reflects a production of knowledge and a building of place in both the imagination of Western hearers/readers and the missionaries themselves. In the Pokot discourse, I sought to (re)create and expose themes of resistance against, ambivalence toward, or hybrid acceptance of the missionary discourse.

Allowing voices, particularly nonwestern voices, speak for themselves is a hallmark of postcolonial theory and decoloniality. As I analyzed the texts for themes and subtext, I relayed the subject’s words, as they were spoken or written, to equip the readers to follow my analysis and make conclusions for themselves. “Language is fundamental to the way we order, understand and intervene in the world and to how we justify those interventions” (McEwan, 2008, p. 143). In the case of letters from the archives or interviews, whether written over email or spoken over the phone or in person, I attempt to keep true to the words, phrasing, and spelling (if correct in the American or British system) used by the writer or interviewee while correcting for grammatical errors that might distract from the message. In published works, many written with British spelling and syntax, I preserve the wording and spelling as published. Preserving the original texts is a way to allow the reader to hear the voices and personalities of the individuals, resisting an essentialized depiction of the missionaries and Pokot within the postcolonial pursuit

of place. Likewise, as Waitt (2005) reiterates, “Discourse analysis is a process of unravelling how the producer of a particular text is woven into this [social] fabric” (p. 176).

To help the reader differentiate scholarly or other secondary sources from primary source data, I employ two stylistic devices as indications of source identity. First, I include an in-text citation of the relevant date directly after the name of a scholar or secondary source writer. For missionary and Pokot primary data, whether published or unpublished, I include the date of the citation at the end of the passage. Second, due to the preponderance of some last names among the missionaries and to preserve a sense of anonymity among my Pokot interviewees, I refer to missionaries (after using their full name) and Asilong Pokot residents by their first names and scholars and secondary source authors by their last. For African missionaries, I will use full names when available before shortening to first names. Unfortunately, the last names of some African missionaries and church workers have not been recorded in the historical record. There are two individuals who are both primary and secondary sources: John Mondri (2016), who is both a Pochon and theological scholar, and Johannes Visser (1989), who was both a missionary to Pokot and an anthropologist. In these cases, I prioritize the individual’s identity as a scholar, including the date of their citation directly after their name, and when repeated, I truncate their name to their surname.

Through a wide sampling of missionary texts and interviews that proportionally represent the decades of missionary involvement, the geographic dispersal of mission sites in Pokot, and the type of Christian organizations present in the region, I piece together a longitudinal study of place of the Pokot as described by and through the discourse from the past ninety years. The response from the Pokot is described through the discourse found in a rereading of mission texts,

Pokot written accounts, and interviews within the case study area of Asilong, West Pokot. The discourse surrounding missions in Pokot is analyzed with methods defined by discourse analysis (Waitt, 2005), postcolonialism (Ashcroft, 2001; Gregory, 2004; McEwan, 2008), and feminist methods (Butler, 2001; Mohammad, 2001; Skelton, 2001).

### ***Chapter Summaries***

Chapter 2 of my dissertation sets the stage for the rest, outlining a historical understanding of Africa's placeness as viewed by a Western audience. This chapter traces a timeline of contact between the Western imagination and Africa, beginning in the mid- to late-1800s and focusing on Western missionaries and mission societies. Many authors have touched on or covered in detail this topic in their work (Carey, 2011; Davis, 1998; Hiebert, 1994; Hiebert, 1999; Kalu et al., 2010; Ndegwah, 2007; Ngeiywo et. al., 2017; Patterson, 1969). I synthesize their findings with an eye on place, particularly as it relates to East Africa and Pokot, and how place is constructed, emphasized, and promoted for the Western imagination.

Chapter 3 focuses on the place of the Pokot as it is produced by the perspective of Western missionaries. This chapter analyzes and synthesizes data from the missionary discourse, revealing missionaries' perceptions of self, other outsiders, and the place and people of Pokot. These perceptions help legitimize and clarify the place of the missionary in Pokot, describe the place of the Pokot, and lead to the strategies employed by the missionaries described in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 moves from perception to strategy. The missionary perspective of place, described in the previous chapter, directly influenced the strategy of mission in which each missionary and mission organization engaged. The same data sources used in chapter 3 were

mined for examples of the missionaries' engagement with the place and people of Pokot. Themes of mission strategy based on evangelism and development were exposed, examined, and compared.

Chapter 5 examines the discourse produced by the Pokot about the contact zone with missionaries. The response of the Pokot to missions varies from resistance to ambivalence to hybridized acceptance, revealing Pokot agency in negotiating Pokot's sense of place at the contact zone. This chapter underscores Spear's (1999) observation: "If Christianity was selectively transmitted by missionaries, it was also selectively received by Africans as they listened to the Christian message, interpreted it, and imbued it with meaning within the context of their own values and experience" (p. 5).

## **Conclusion**

This study describes the connection between perceptions and place through time, telling the story of Pokot through the history of the contact zone between Western Christian missions and the Pokot. The field of geography has neglected the importance of missions in the development of place in colonial and post-colonial landscapes; however, this study begins to fill the void by untangling the missionary perspective from the colonial/imperial one. Pokot has developed religiously, culturally, and economically within global networks due to the influence and exchanges provided through Western Christian missions in ways as significant if not more significant than the imprint left by British colonial rule. This study takes a geographical, place-based look at the intersection of mission perceptions and strategies and Pokot response as the palimpsest of place is negotiated.

## Chapter 2: Background

To understand the perspective of missionaries entering Pokot in the 1930s and 1940s, we must first set the stage. The story of a modern Western presence in Africa, and particularly within colonial Kenya, had been decades in the making. The British had planted their flag in Kenya and other parts of Eastern and Southern Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in return the colonizing forces communicated to their citizens and even to a broader Western audience what Africa was like. In addition to ascribing a perspective of place to a continent, writers, journalists, poets, politicians along with churchmen and theologians described and offered an apologetic of British colonialism in conjunction with expanding Christianity. Why was colonialism viewed to be, if not necessary, at least justified? What part did Christianity have to play in British colonialism of Africa? How had the church responded to this role? The images and descriptions used to describe Africa fit into Said's concept of orientalism (1978), highlighting colonial themes and perspectives that built the colonial landscape and influenced the perceptions of place of the "Dark Continent"<sup>24</sup> (Conrad, 1899).

While mission work preceded British colonialism in many places in Africa, the two became easy bedfellows by the end of the nineteenth century. The Western missionary and church discourse mirrored the colonial one in many ways as both systems wittingly and unwittingly relied on each other for expansion and justification; however, this symbiosis showed some weaknesses and belied an undercurrent of divergence in meaning and intention even prior to the start of mission work in Pokot. The discourse, both colonial and missionary, that

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<sup>24</sup> Anthropologist James Ferguson (2006) explained Conrad's terminology for Africa "as a metaphor of absence—a 'dark continent' against which the lightness and whiteness of 'Western civilization' can be pictured. It is in this sense that Africa, as a category, enters Western knowledge and imagination first of all, as Mbembe says, as 'an absent object,' set always in relation to the full presence of the West" (p. 2)

prescribed a certain perception of place for Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sets the stage for early British and American missionaries as they began their work among the Pokot.

### **Colonial Perspective**

As the scramble for Africa came to a head at the end of the nineteenth century, Europeans felt the need to justify colonialism (Keim, 2009). Britain was no exception. While education and scientific discovery were among the many reasons given for colonial exploits, a widening gap of the perceived differences between the colonizer and the colonized dominated the discourse. As the Industrial Revolution continued, powering the increasing need for new markets and new suppliers of raw materials, the colonial rhetoric focused instead on the moral need to help the common African, the portrayal of whom became increasingly negative throughout the prior century (Keim, 2009). Enlightenment<sup>25</sup> philosophy helped prove this perspective through scientific study of the colonized population. “Virtually every Western academic discipline worked out classifications that connected African culture to biological inferiority” (Keim, 2009, p. 54). Likewise, new scientific theories linked race and culture like never before. Physiognomy, or the study of a person’s face to ascertain his or her character, found brief popularity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was often used to “prove” the superiority or inferiority of certain racial facial features. “The greater the perceived physical and cultural difference from European culture, the less developed the race” (Keim, 2009, p. 43). This process, which Edward Said (1978) describes

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<sup>25</sup> The Enlightenment paradigm has been so central to our thinking in the West that even this study is a product of it. As I dissect the religious placeness of the Pokot, I am embracing the Enlightenment philosophy that “The emphasis was no longer on the whole, but on the parts, which were assigned priority over the whole” (Bosch, 1991, p. 264).

as “othering” in his seminal work, set up an us-versus-them dynamic, an application of binary thinking that was championed in modern, Enlightenment thought.

With a perspective of superiority built upon hard scientific “truths,” the discourse of the colonial justification was filled with visions of responsibility in view of primitive and backward cultures of what was perceived as the Dark Continent. Paternalism naturally translated to a view of Africans as children<sup>26</sup>. Colonial logic followed that if Africans were like permanent children, then, naturally, “the more ‘advanced’ nations should become permanent guardians” (McEwan, 2008, p. 136). In the same vein, Social Darwinism, popular at this same time, applied Darwin’s theories of the survival of the fittest and natural selection to society. Europe’s military strength and ability to colonize Africa was, according to the Social Darwinists, not only inevitable but also a reflection of their cultural and intellectual superiority. In keeping with this superiority was a moral responsibility that must be met by “uplifting” the inferior populations of the colonized world.

With a proverbial self-pat on the back, Britain colonized Africa with a sense of responsibility, authority, and duty. In his description of British colonist and colonial city founder Eric Dutton, Garth Myers (2003) explains, “To his dying day, Dutton, like many British colonial servants, genuinely believed in colonialism as a morally and economically right system for Africa: ‘The rule those days bestowed on all a greater measure of happiness and security than had ever before been known’” (p. 87). While the justification of colonialism drew from a modern view of the world that relied heavily on binaries of good and bad and strong and weak, colonial

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<sup>26</sup> This sentiment was echoed across the pond by President Theodore Roosevelt, “Like all savages and most children, [Africans] have their limitations, and in dealing with them firmness is even more necessary than kindness; but the man is a poor creature who does not treat them with kindness also, and I am rather sorry for him if he does not grow to feel for them, and to make them in return feel for him, a real and friendly liking” (Roosevelt, 1910, p. 104). Roosevelt felt that Africans had “cheerful but mercurial dispositions” (Roosevelt, 1910, p. 104).



supporters buoyed up their justifications with further moral “proof” of this viewpoint: Britain was God’s Empire—thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in Africa as it is in England.

A nationalist zeal had overtaken Britain as it proved (as much to itself as the world) its military and cultural hegemony. At times, patriotism reflected the same religious fervor that Christianity might. And because Christianity was an identifying feature of British culture, the government in its colonial endeavors often mixed its religious and military metaphors. Rudyard Kipling, for example, published a poem<sup>27</sup> in several journals in 1900 that “combined the white militarism and religious conviction in propaganda for the Boer War” in South Africa (Carey, 2011, p. 34). While it will be important to tease out the differences between the colonial and missionary perspective, it is not infrequent that these perspectives are in synch. The very existence of the Church of England as a government sponsored entity made the ties between church activities, in this case missions to African colonies<sup>28</sup>, and government rule, in this case colonial rule, profound, complex, and ambiguous. The constitutional support of churches, particularly the Church of England, ensured that the British value of Christianity, with a priority on Protestantism, carried strongly into the colonies (Carey, 2011). Even secular colonists, who justified their pursuits through the science of Social Darwinian, often highlighted the moral imperative of donning the mantle of “trusteeship on behalf of civilization” (Keim, 2009, p. 46). Whether religious or not, Christian symbolism and meaning reflected in the colonial rhetoric at home and abroad, revealing ambivalence between devout commitment to God’s plans, a self-

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<sup>27</sup> Now is the faith that the White Men hold  
When they build their home afar –  
Freedom for ourselves and freedom for our sons  
And, failing freedom, War. (“Song of the White Men” (1899) quoted in Carey, 2011, p. 34)

<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, better educated and highly trained missionaries were sent to India and China where a “more sophisticated paganism” apparently demanded it (Strayer, 1978, p. 5).

serving reliance on the moral imperative, and opportunist abuses of an altruistic, albeit ethnocentric, rhetoric.

This ambivalence, in conjunction with an Enlightenment worldview, shaped the colonial perspective about Africa and eventually Pokot as well. To the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Briton, the Dark Continent was just that. It was unknown, unseen by the Western eye (Pratt, 1992). It had only been a few decades since David Livingstone, the great missionary and explorer, had died while exploring the inland of Eastern and Southern Africa. European maps of Africa were still largely blank, waiting for the ordering, gathering, and scientific gaze of the white man to fill it in. The landscape, like the map, was empty (Myers, 2003). Britain viewed its colonies as a metaphorical countryside, like an untended garden waiting to be ordered and enjoyed. “In the imperial European conceptual map of the world, Europe was culture and the colonies were nature” (Neumann, 1998, p. 32). Nature was viewed as free from the impact and influence of people, packaged and preserved for humans to enjoy from the outside. The colonial bifurcation of land into natural (devoid of humans) and productive (controlled by humans) stood in stark contrast to the African perspective that considered humans as part of the natural landscape. A further justification of colonialism was the industrial, capitalist imperative to regulate, classify, control, and manage the landscape after “‘primitive’ patterns of land use were deemed inefficient, unproductive, and destructive” (Shetler, 2007, p. 169). The landscape of the contact zone, where colonists and Africans met each other, became the first of many areas of negotiation and often resistance.

The colonial perspective of the landscape led to another duality. Consistent in colonial literature is the image of Africa as both “forbidding wasteland or Edenic paradise” (Neumann, 1998, p. 17). Africa was at once seen as dangerous, forbidding, dark, mysterious, perilous, and

inhospitable and also pristine and untouched, romantic and natural. Clear in the frontier mentality of the American West, frontiers offered excitement and conquest from a Western point of view, a call to be discovered, an adventure waiting to be realized (by colonial officials and missionaries alike). The European continent had been civilized, burned, chopped, and annexed for hundreds of years, and Africa promised a frontier of both an Edenic paradise and a perilous desert. Africa was seen as a step back in time, a glimpse of maybe what primitive Europe was once like (Harries, 2007). Patrick Harries (2007) suggests that colonists found in the landscape both “freedom and fear” as well as a sense that Africans represented a “more authentic stage of human development” (p. 201). If the landscape of Africa was seen as primal, both in good and bad ways, so were the inhabitants.

Incorporated in the Eden myth is the myth of the noble savage. The noble savage, being closer to nature than civilization, could, hypothetically, be protected as a vital part of the natural landscape. To protect the primitive, the savage, was to preserve something of Europe’s own origins, a remnant of the natural state of humanity that we gave up to take the path of civilization and cultural advancement.... The primitive is picturesque. (Neumann, 1998, p. 18)

This discourse would dominate in the region of Pokot with the establishment of a variety of closed districts, created, in part, to preserve the most “primitive” of Kenya’s tribes.

Even though the Edenic myth of the landscape could be seen in the discourse of the time<sup>29</sup>, the perspective of Africa as primitive often won out in the day-to-day goings on in colonial administered Africa. The British colonists, themselves, were faced with the duality of reality and what to do with it. Coming from England, colonists had to negotiate a place in Africa that bridged the duality of the developed metropolitan homeland and the new landscape they found themselves within. Colonial impact on Africa was varied and ambivalent. Local

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<sup>29</sup> This was particularly true in the development of Africa’s national parks. See Rod Neumann’s *Imposing Wilderness* (1998).

knowledge was at times championed and at times denied. “Because Europeans assumed that their view was universal,” they sought to educate the people “essentially to make them see the landscape in the same way” (Shetler, 2007, p. 15). As Europe colonized Africa, a complex, multilayered contact zone was born.

The place and landscape of Pokot was perceived with a similar colonial lens. Mervyn W.H. Beech, a colonial District Commissioner (DC) working among the Pokot in the early twentieth century, published a book describing the language and the folklore of the people with whom he worked (1911). While not uncommon at the time, Beech’s study preserves a snapshot of colonial perspective and a rare description of the culture of a small ethnic group, the Pokot. Modeling his work after that of A.C. Hollis’s work about the neighboring tribe, the Nandi, Beech approached the culture and landscape of the Pokot like a novice anthropologist but with a typical colonial perspective. Unlike most of his successors, he was keen on observing and learning the language and customs of the Pokot (at the time called the Suk) and empowered by modernist compulsion to record and preserve. Beech’s work is supplemented by a descriptive introduction by his colleague, Sir Charles Eliot, a commissioner of British East Africa (now Kenya) and botanist.

In keeping with the themes justifying colonialization discussed above, Beech identified the many benefits brought to the Pokot people by British colonial rule. “The natural course of Suk history was interrupted by the establishment of European rule, which tends to protect weak tribes and check the violence—and consequently the predominance—of the strong” (Eliot, 1911, p. xv). The protection of these weak tribes came in the way of demarcating and periodically adjusting international and interdistrict boundaries, resulting in the reduction of pastureland. By 1920, the government had stabilized these boundaries largely based on tribal identification and

outlawed travel between them (Bianco, 1996). According to Beech, the Pokot, a “weak tribe,” were often on the losing end of cattle raids conducted by the nearby Maasai. However, the colonial government had cracked down on these raids, making them illegal while protecting the new tribal boundaries they had assigned. Beech discussed that these protections resulted in the livestock of the Pokot growing so numerous that he feared that pastureland would soon be insufficient to meet the growing demand. However, Beech wrote that disease had righted this surplus, killing as much as fifty percent of the cattle. “The calamity is born with Stoicism,” declares Beech (1911, p. 8). While raids continued between the Pokot and their neighbors, the colonial overseers, trying to parse out the truths in each case, received a “confused account of quarrels” from participating groups (Beech, 1911, p. 5). Even though the British were not entirely successful in their attempt to squelch violence from cattle raiding, Beech reiterated the place of superiority and thus the paternal rights the colonists hold: “The British occupation has not yet succeeded in entirely repressing the raids of these rival tribes, although each offence is dealt with severely” (Beech, 1911, p. 5).

In addition to the peace and order that Beech attributed to colonial efforts in Pokot, implementation of indirect rule and western-style development were hallmarks of colonial presence and accomplishments. To better organize and oversee the Pokot, Juxon Barton who had become DC in 1918 instigated indirect rule among the Pokot for the first time by appointing a headman who would later be called a chief (Patterson, 1969, p. 16). This technique lasted throughout colonialism and beyond but proved to be a weak ruling model as the Pokot traditionally do not recognize a chief. The individuals chosen to act in this role were typically sympathetic to the colonial powers or at least to the benefits they could supply, and because of this sympathy, they lost the respect of their fellow Pokot and made poor leaders.

Under colonial leadership, the government built roads, started schools, and planned new agricultural schemes. Roads played an important role in colonial West Pokot. “Existing roads inspired inventories of the cultural changes accompanying the transition from center to periphery” (Bianco, 1996, p. 33). Building roads would increase “the efficient transport of goods to the market [and] would ensure ‘the increased taxable capacity’ of the Pokot and hence the revenue of the local authority charged with financing the tribe’s betterment” (Bianco, 1996, p. 33). Roads physically and metaphorically led to other limited development schemes. Colonial powers, particularly through the role of the District Commissioners<sup>30</sup>, attempted changes in education and agriculture in the region with little overall effect. Initiatives tended to be small-scale and short-lived, and the region remained similarly undeveloped throughout the colonial period due to the sense of place ascribed to it by colonial powers and its geography in British colonial Africa.

Pokot resided in a colonial-created restricted region similar and adjacent to the Northern Frontier District, which by design was largely inaccessible by Europeans, government officials, settlers, and missionaries alike. The climate and terrain underscored this inaccessibility, viewed by the government as worthless land occupied by difficult and primitive people that was a nuisance to oversee (Bianco, 1996). Beech (1911) and Eliot (1911) championed a similar perspective of the Pokot. Beech began his book by describing the Pokot as a mix of other nearby

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<sup>30</sup> For example, in 1911, James R. Orr, who started the department of education in what was then British East Africa, targeted the Pokot among other Kalenjin tribes as a group not yet reached by missionaries. He began a meager initiative to establish government schools in the region, a plan that was later greatly supplemented by missionary work. A.A. Sheldon, DC in 1924, was an avid proponent for agriculture despite that 80% of Pokot relied exclusively on pastoralism. In response to his failing schemes, Sheldon declared the Pokot to be “disinclined to progress” and that they “seek only cows” (Patterson, 1969, p. 17). Responding to hunger caused from drought, in 1929 DC E.G. Tisdall called for more agricultural development through lifting the quarantine that prevented Pokot cattle sales in Uganda and Trans-Nzoia, bettering the schooling, and instituting agricultural instruction and aid (Patterson, 1969, p. 19). Likewise, an agricultural school was established in 1929 in Kapenguria to help produce more food for the region and for the labor reserves (Bogonko, 1992).

pastoralist groups, based on their “cranial and nasal indices,” harkening to the pseudo-science of physiognomy described above. Eliot continued this line of thought by suggesting the Pokot, while accepted by both Africans and Europeans as a separate tribe, had forged much of their culture from others<sup>31</sup>. The language chosen by Beech but especially by Eliot shows a condescension for Pokot culture: the construction of their houses show “carelessness” and their stools seem “laughably” small (Eliot, 1911, p. xiv). Beech called the lowland Pokot “lazy” (1911, p. 23) while their agricultural counterparts in the highlands are “far more useful to the general community” (1911, p. 15); their practices are often described as “weird” (1911, p. 8 and p. 24) or “obscene” (1911, p. 24). Beech remarked with surprise when he finds admirable qualities among the Pokot but states the negative ones with an authority not meant to be questioned. For example, “It is a curious fact that the hill Suk, who are so timid and cowardly in their dealings with men, prefer the more daring methods of hunting the elephant” (Beech, 1911, p. 24). At another time, Beech called the upland Pokot “*absurdly* timid and cowardly” (1911, p. 3; emphasis mine). Beech finished his essentializing description of the culture and character of the entire people group with a definitive flourish: “In conclusion, I found the Suk on the whole to be an unintelligent but surprisingly honest people, exceptionally vain and exceptionally generous. Suspicious of one's motives?—yes, and selfish and without affection; but how could it be otherwise with a savage and uncivilized people to whom death is the highest evil and who have but a short span of life wherein each man may get as much pleasure as he can?” (Beech, 1911, p. 26).

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<sup>31</sup> Eliot (1911) declared, “Their language resembles Nandi so strongly that it should probably be regarded as borrowed; that many of their customs are imitated from those of the Turkana and other tribes, and that they have not attained to the moderate degree of political and military organization found among the Nandi and Masai” (p. xii).

In his ethnography, Beech also described the religion of the Pokot while embracing the role of Christianity in the colonizing effort. While he wisely relied on the description of Pokot religious beliefs given by “one of the oldest of Suk now living, and one renowned for his knowledge of folklore,” Beech’s use of the word “folklore” affirms his attitude about the religion (1911, p. 19). He stated, “Nothing could be more delightfully vague than the religious ideas of the Suk” (1911, p. 19). While Beech’s description of the Pokot religion is indeed “delightfully vague,” anthropologist and missionary Johannes Visser (1989) argued that Beech’s perspective was based on a misunderstanding of how the Pokot both understand and communicate about God. On the other hand, Beech did draw on his own religious knowledge in his reference to Acts 17 in the Christian Bible: “The Suk, indeed, are somewhat like the Athenians of the Bible and worship an ‘Unknown God’, and, possibly, it remains for some intelligent and broad-minded missionary to ‘declare Him unto’ them” (1911, p. 20). Beech’s book leaves the reader with the taste of colonial superiority in her mouth, a sense that while Beech believes this weak and primitive tribe deserves his short study of them, there is nothing of value to preserve. The message is that perhaps the missionaries can make something of them.

### **Missionary Perspective**

An examination of the discourse of early missions in Africa might be at times indistinguishable from the colonial discourse; however, the priorities and perspectives of the missionaries are inverted versions of the colonial ones. For missions, moral duty and good come first even if this moral duty is colored by ethnocentric nationalism. Robert Strayer (1978) explained, “The ‘scramble for Africa’ was a religious as well as a political phenomenon for, paralleling the imperial partition of the continent, a variety of European and American



missionary groups competed intensely to divide and occupy Africa for their respective churches” (p. 30). Strayer described the similar goal of the colonist and missionary, occupation and possession, but to what end?

The expansion of missionary endeavors in the late nineteenth century had its roots in the evangelical revival a century prior, led by John Wesley. “This revival created a new and growing Methodist Church and an increasingly powerful evangelical party within the established Anglican Church. It affected all Protestants in Europe and North America with a new fervor and zeal in religious matters which resulted in the foundations of various societies in the last decade of the 18th century” (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994, p. 176). Along with revival came “religious enthusiasm” and church constitutional reform in nearly all expressions of Christianity in England, Anglican, Catholic, and nonconformist alike (Carey, 2011). Abolitionist movements, led by the churches, came on the heels of revival, and turned the churches’ attention to the atrocities championed by their own governments against the people of Africa (Kalu, 2010a). British and American abolitionists became the most outspoken against the practice of slavery, which eventually led to their governments’ strong and fervent support of emancipation, governments that, arguably, could be identified as the worst perpetrators.

The long campaign against the trade had produced in many Christians a deep sense of guilt, because of the gross injustice through commerce to the peoples of Africa. Those who later became involved in the first missionary endeavor to Africa had become concerned, implicated, and educated through the long agitation for emancipation in England and the abolition of the trade.... The leaders of the anti-slave movement, therefore, became the same people who concerned themselves with the Christian mission in Africa. (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994, p. 175)

David Livingstone proved to be the example of Christian missions and abolition that the British church-going population was clambering for. Livingstone proclaimed the three Cs, commerce, Christianity, and civilization, as the salve for what ailed Africa, which in his

estimation was the Arab slave trade active in central and eastern Africa. His final recorded words, which were immortalized on his grave, were, in fact, a call to action: “All I can add in my solitude, is, may heaven’s rich blessing come down on every one, American, English, or Turk, who will help to heal this open sore of the world.” After his death in 1873, his example was heralded from church to church, and his message was taken to heart by many, resulting in the increase of both giving and in the number of missionary recruits (Strayer, 1978). “In most missionary circles, talk was largely upon the suffering and neglected Africans” (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994, p. 179). The British government was likewise empowered to “intensify its anti-slave activities” while justifying its increased presence in East Africa (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994, p. 179). Interestingly, Livingstone’s own mission differed from the one he would inspire. While he saw the great benefit of legitimate commerce as a replacement for the slave trade, he never advocated for white settlement in Africa (Carey, 2011). Lamin Sanneh contrasts the perspectives of the prototypical missionary, Livingstone, with the prototypical colonial expansionist, Cecil Rhodes: unlike Rhodes who saw Britain as superior to Africa in every way, Livingstone understood that “all cultures performed an equally necessary, though inadequate, function in mediating the mystery of God” (1989, p. 109). Livingstone, himself, built nothing and lived voluntarily in a nomadic life of deprivation while traversing much of eastern, central, and southern Africa, but he surmised that Christianity could not take root among uncivilized people. He saw no alternatives to Western culture—i.e. civilization—as the foundation needed to bring about freedom, both bodily and spiritually (Sheffield, 1973).

In keeping with Livingstone’s three Cs, early missionaries prioritized the civilizing mission in their pursuit of abolition and proselytizing.

While missionaries had been instrumental in abolishing slavery in Kenya from the 1840s to the 1880s, they also paved the way for the enslavement of Kenyans to Western culture.

They preached assimilation, hence leading to the undermining of African culture. Churches, hospitals and schools were all established but they too were crucial agents in introducing the African to the ways of the Western world. The notion of cultural relativism was anathema to missionaries. Urch notes that ‘as the leading exponent of the western way of life the missionary... was often antagonistic toward African culture, for it was accepted by him that western culture was superior to the indigenous traditional society.’ (Bale & Sang, 1996, p. 72)

Sifuna and Otiende (1994) describe missionaries as “victims of their own propaganda” (p. 188).

Convincing their peers at home of the need in Africa resulted in convincing themselves of the spiritual and cultural poverty of the African mission field. This perspective would have direct effects on the strategies employed by missionaries. In keeping with the colonial perspective of superiority, missionaries generally felt that the root of degeneracy of Africa was found in culture which would need to be civilized. “Clothe the savage, topple the pagan idols, silence the drumming, break up the extended family, encourage individualism, and abolish polygamy. These were some of the basic elements of evangelical Christianity” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century according to Sifuna and Otiende (1994, p. 188).

Nineteenth century missionaries to Africa echoed their Puritan predecessors in seventeenth century North America. Conversion would not be finished with a religious change; civilizing the new Christian converts into English Puritans was imperative (Hiebert, 1994). This perspective continued into the late nineteenth century with a shift of order—the civilizing process would precede and pave the way for religious conversion. Regardless, missionaries largely shared the perspective of their earlier North American counterparts and the colonial powers that would follow them to the Dark Continent: the things of the African were inferior. The culture and civilization, as it was, needed an overhaul. Missionaries were constantly battling with the place of Christianity in culture. Could one be both African and Christian? “The attitudes and practices of most nineteenth-century missionaries and mission organizations seem at odds

with the message of Christianity as a universal religion in which all people are God's children. Mission churches generally locked African adherents in subordinate positions both institutionally and spiritually" (Maddox, 1999, p. 27-8). Convinced that their belief systems were true, early missionaries were largely unable to differentiate their culture from the message of their faith (Hiebert, 1994). Following the lead of the academic and political ideology of the day, missionaries advanced the idea that all aspects of African culture related to biological inferiority. "Missionaries returning from Africa often communicate to churches in the West that non-Christian Africans need fundamental change because they are culturally, if not biologically, primitive" (Keim, 2009, p. 31). African religious beliefs that relied heavily on witchcraft, polytheism, and magic were considered "not only backward but irrational" (Keim, 2009, p. 54). In keeping with the culture of the day, the Social Darwinism and scientific racism that influenced colonial thought also seeped into missionary perspective (Maddox, 1999). "Although many missionaries continued to insist on the perfectability of the Africans amongst whom they labored, many more shared the racist vision of Africans as semi-barbarians incapable of attaining European standards" (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994, p. 188).

Because of this, many missionaries felt that even converted Africans did not have the capacity to continue as lifelong Christians much less be trusted to run the Christian church in Africa without missionary assistance. Missionaries' perspective not only justified their presence but legitimized it for years to come. Interestingly, this perspective began to fade first in the missionaries on the field. Missionaries who worked first-hand with locals began to understand the prejudices in their own perspective. It would take longer for the message to be communicated back home to the sending agencies and general population. Mission organizations needed to market the idea that Africa was as the stereotypes portrayed. After all, if the need on the ground

was not dire, if the people were not poor in every way, why support the missionary endeavor with one's prayers, presence, and gifts?

While early missionary thought often mirrored colonial thought in its assessment of Africans as primitive and, as logic led them, inferior, the prospect of civilization brought a Christian-based utopian dream to some missionaries who sought not to repeat the mistakes they saw in their own homeland. While it was clear to them that civilization had improved some aspects of life in Europe, industry, development, and scientific advancement also brought out new and complex levels of depravity. Missionaries saw Africa as “untrammelled by the constraints of a degenerate civilization” (Harries, 2007, p. 215). Africa provided a glimpse into Europe's past, showing missionaries the “dark savagery from which Europeans had escaped; and outlined the pathway to perfectibility” (Harries, 2007, p. 219). Africa was the perfect laboratory—in some ways a clean slate—where theories of science and social sciences could be put to the test while controlling for certain religious ideas that might be outside the norms of Christianity. Henri-Alexandre Junod, Swiss missionary and anthropologist, believed that Africans could more easily accept Christianity because of the uncomplicated nature of their existence (Harries, 2007). “Europeans not only brought colonial wars and debilitating liquor to Africa; their civilization was afflicted with ‘vices’, ‘curses’, ‘debasing influences’, wrote Junod; and with ‘immoral customs that paganism itself had never known, unbridled luxury, sometimes crying injustices and almost everywhere a selfishness without pity’” (Harries, 2007, p. 214). To avoid such evils, many missionaries drew from idealized visions of Europe of the Middle Ages, “including an emphasis on the wholesomeness of rural communities, the religious integration of life and the centrality of the church in the social order” (Strayer, 1978, p. 90). This viewpoint led many missionaries, in keeping with their colonial counterparts, to emphasize farming and the

formation of sedentary, village-like communities, while, in contrast to colonial pressures, discouraging migration from native reserves to work on white settlements or train for careers in growing urban-based industries.

Western missions and colonial powers have had a (sometimes uncomfortable) symbiotic relationship. Most parts of tropical Africa hosted Western Christian missionaries before colonial powers. Likewise, the beginning and strengthening of colonial holds on tropical Africa led to an increasing missionary presence. “Missionary societies of every denomination experienced a boom in recruitment and in financial support with the result that missions all over tropical Africa were greatly strengthened during the years between 1890 and 1914. European rule following the partition began to provide an umbrella of law and order for missionary activities” (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994, p. 187). Even by 1914, rural areas boasted far more missionaries than colonial government officials. At the same time, missions provided ideological support for colonial activities whether overtly or by mere association. Churches generally viewed the British colonial empire as a force for good, expanding all that was best in British culture: “its language, morality, system of law and constitution, the love of justice and religious and political liberty (Carey, 2011, p. 8). While early missions paved the way for colonial presence and, in absentia, control of more remote areas of colonized Africa, the British Empire in return opened the door for safer, more unified mission work. Churches were happy to take advantage of British safeguards and provisions in order to respond to their greater call of the Great Commission<sup>32</sup>. However, the relationship between missions and colonial powers, as we shall see, waffles between mutually beneficial, Machiavellian, and subversively hostile.

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<sup>32</sup> The Great Commission refers to Jesus’s final commandment before his ascension to his disciples in Matthew 28:16-20 to “go and make disciples of all nations.”

While colonial perspective was and is still often equated with mission perspective, sometimes rightly, fractures with the colonial enterprise and related thought could be found even in early mission writings and activities. While resistance to colonialism rarely resulted in political activism, it was espoused in a deliberate distancing of identity. Andrew Porter (2004) states that “although missions could not avoid empire, they were determined to put it in its place” (p. 330). The same churches who identified the depravity that accompanied development and Western civilization were likewise dismayed at the excesses and self-serving policies of imperialism (Carey, 2011). Additionally, some missions and missionaries attempted to trailblaze a respect of local culture. “In 1909, in fact, the protestant missions jointly resolved to ‘sympathetically respect’ African religious customs and use them as a basis for teaching where possible” (Strayer, 1978, p. 83). In his treatise on mission education, the Reverend Joseph Oldham (1931) espoused a certain respect for African culture, language, and expertise, balancing an assumption of Western supremacy with African self-determinism: “While the help of western Christians is needed for a long time to come, it is in the African Church and its African leadership that the hope of Africa lies.... The true relationship is a comradeship in which Africans and those from the West seek together a growing understanding of life in the light of the Gospel” (Oldham, 1931, p. 145-6). Unfortunately, research and training did not often back up these lofty goals. German missiologist Bruno Gutmann, who wrote in the early twentieth century, explained the view of protecting “local identities from global processes,” further described by professor of church history Ogbu Uke Kalu: “Primal cultures served as points of contact, containers and the soil in which the spirit of God works. Primal ties must be redeemed but not destroyed, replaced or ignored; those ties should be converted and received into the new reality of Christ’s body” (2010a, p. 13). Likewise, missions resisted colonial powers by lobbying

for African interests in London, at times standing against the prevailing racist and demeaning perspective of Africans. “In 1921, the Reverend J.H. Oldham of the International Missionary Council... urged that the Government pursue a policy to ‘maintain tribal life... and to develop by education the industry and intelligence of the population’” (Sheffield, 1973, p. 8). By the time of Pokot’s entry into the mission story, a shift had occurred in mission culture:

Between the 1930s and 1950s, at least, much church practice shifted formally to ‘adaptationism’, adapting the faith to local cultural conditions. This shift in nomenclature, although the practice goes back to the origins of most missions, came in part because Africans had begun to move into positions of responsibility within churches. Mission theology also began to reflect this shift... Yet... much writing from within churches remains more or less locked in a mode that celebrates mission. (Maddox, 1999, p. 28)

Early missionaries in Pokot exemplify the tension between the eras of mission culture. As a new mission field, Pokot did not possess locals in leadership positions who might stress “adaptionism” until decades later; however, the culture of mission work was shifting and, likewise, influencing the perspective and strategies of early Anglican, AIM, and Catholic missionaries at work in Pokot.

In a more practical way, missionaries needed to separate themselves from the colonial government to appeal to the local population. Local people felt a disdain for colonial officials who collected taxes, limited their mobility, and interfered in local politics. Western missionaries who were physically indistinguishable from their colonial counterparts had to develop strategies to communicate a difference between church work and government impingement. As we will see later, learning the local language was a key strategy for early missionaries in Pokot; likewise, providing services like education and medical assistance helped build trust between missions and locals. Interestingly, colonial constrictions drew local tribes to missions as a way to survive in the new system. For some groups in Kenya, like the Kikuyu, Western education held an appeal, enabling them to both understand and take advantage of the development happening around



them. For others, like many pastoralist groups, the pressure to conform to Western systems was based more on survival. “Once bereft of their immense herds and forbidden to raid for more, they would have to ‘turn their spears into spades and their swords into reaping hooks<sup>33</sup> – or starve’” (Waller, 1999, p. 86). Missionaries used these opportunities to proselytize and teach about Christianity.

### ***The Culture and Perspective of Three Mission Organizations***

Early mission history among the Pokot takes us to 1931. Unlike other places in Kenya, colonialism paved the way for missions here, not the other way around; however, the impact of colonial culture and political power was limited in Pokot, leaving three Western Christian missions to define the outsiders’ voice of the contact zone in Pokot until well after independence. Not surprisingly, the first missionary group was British. The conservative branch of the Anglican missionary endeavor, the Bible Churchmen’s Mission Society, first came to Pokot in 1931. The American-founded nondenominational Africa Inland Mission followed, arriving in 1934. And in 1953 the Irish Roman Catholic St. Patrick’s Missionary Society also known as the Kiltegan Fathers replaced the British Mill Hill Missionaries (St. Joseph’s Missionary Society), who first came in 1943. In addition to the wider societal, religious, and cultural messages about Africa, each early missionary represented a mission organization with its own culture, history, and message about missions.

**Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society (BCMS).** In their exposition, *The First Twenty-Five Years of the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society (1922-47)* (1947), W.S. Hooton and J.

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<sup>33</sup> This statement refers to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 when God’s kingdom will lead to peace among the nations. The reference here draws a link between God’s will and the British government’s ability to fulfill it.

Stafford Wright chronicle the beginnings of this mission organization of the Church of England. Hooton and Wright sheepishly admit that the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society (BCMS) came about through disunity in the church. The BCMS was formed in 1922 as a break from the well-established Church Missionary Society (CMS). The "Conservative Evangelicals" of the BCMS disagreed with the "Liberal Evangelicals" of the CMS over the inerrancy and authority of the Holy Scriptures. Hooton and Wright further explain that the BCMS had done the Church of England a great service by providing a church mission which conservative Anglicans could continue to support rather than reallocating their gifts and services to "interdenominational societies" (1947, p. 15). Likewise, the BCMS functioned to further limit the influence of Roman Catholic missionaries, competing for souls in mission fields around the world. The newly formed organization grew quickly, having a presence in four countries through six mission fields within two and half years of its initiation.

Not wanting to rely on mission training programs run by the CMS or by more conservative interdenominational groups, in 1925, what would become Tyndale College was opened in Bristol, England for male missionary candidates and theological students, followed in 1930 by the opening of Dalton House to train women for missionary work. Characteristic of Anglican culture, the BCMS set itself apart, prioritizing its authority and perspective in missions. Tyndale equipped male students with Biblical knowledge, understanding of "the conservative and Protestant case," as well as "some knowledge of the views of the other side" (Hooton & Wright, 1947, p. 47). The training at Dalton House was less rigorous as "there was no necessity to work for anything like the General Ordination Examination" like in the men's college (Hooton & Wright, 1947, p. 52). However, the women arguably had better training for the mission field outside of general theological training as the women's college invited furloughed women

missionaries to “to lecture on their particular fields and the religious systems involved” (Hooton & Wright, 1947, p. 53).

Hooton and Wright (1947) continue the story of the BCMS with its entry into Africa: “The year 1929<sup>34</sup> marks a definite turning-point, in that during its course plans were set on foot for entering two separate fields in that Dark Continent in the east, around Lake Rudolf [now Lake Turkana], and in the north-west, in Morocco,” followed soon by Ethiopia (p. 55). The BCMS’s presence in Pokot started with a man named Alfred Buxton, whom Hooton and Wright (1947) describe as possessing the gift “of seeing visions and bringing evangelistic dreams to immediate practical effect so far as was humanly possible” (p. 58). It was Buxton’s vision that led him to entreat the BCMS to send missionaries to the Lake Turkana area, and it was his testimony and charisma that brought in missionaries like Lawrence Totty to Pokot. Buxton and his friend Hamilton Paget Wilkes described the Lake Turkana area:

Different tribes with different languages inhabit the region, but in most respects the problem is one and the conditions throughout are similar.

Lake Rudolf is surrounded by dry arid country consisting of both plains and hills, and populated by nomadic tribes. Of these only the Karamojong, to some extent the Taposi, and the people on Marsabit Mountain make any villages or plant at all. Even these only plant millet and a little maize, making up the rest of their menu with what is the sole diet of the other tribes—milk, blood, and meat.

The people keep large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats. Donkeys and camels act as beasts of burden. Due to the scanty rain, and to the sandy soil which quickly absorbs what does fall, there are virtually no flowing streams. We have river beds but not rivers. This scarcity of water dictates the mode of living, and the people are forced to wander<sup>35</sup> everywhere in search of water and pasture for their flocks.

The problem of their evangelization, therefore, is similar to that which confronts those who attempt to reach the tribes of Arabia. Sand, mirages, thirst, thorns, camels, and wandering tribes—we have them all. (quoted in Hooton & Wright, 1947, p. 59)

Because of the geography and culture, Buxton relayed that mission strategy would need to be adjusted. Missionaries would need to be willing to conduct lengthy “safaris” to go where the

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<sup>34</sup> In the following five years, thirty-six missionaries would represent the BCMS in Africa.

<sup>35</sup> The theme of wandering, as a recurring descriptor of the Pokot, will be discussed further in later chapters.

people were, particularly focusing on water holes. However, in keeping with general mission practice, a district mission center would be constructed, and after trust was built, hopefully, successful schools and medical centers could be established. After going through the proper channels, gaining approval from the Anglican bishops in charge of the area and the British government, the BCMS was free to begin its mission work among the Pokot and their neighbors, the Turkana and Karamojong.

**Africa Inland Mission (AIM).** In every way the BCMS was structured, organized, established, and supported, the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) was not. Stephen Morad, in his unpublished history of the AIM called *The Spreading Tree: A History of the Africa Inland Church in Kenya, 1895-1995* (1996b), describes the story, strategy, and people of the AIM throughout its history. The AIM grew out of one man's vision and calling to share the message of Jesus to people in the world who had not heard. His vision centered on Africa. Peter Cameron Scott was born in 1867 and would spend his childhood near Glasgow, Scotland and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After dropping out of New York Missionary Training School, he took his first trip to Africa. In January 1891, Peter landed at the mouth of the Congo River, later met by his brother John Scott. Soon after, John succumbed to malaria, leaving his brother to dig his grave. Peter Scott left Africa shortly after, also severely weakened by malaria. Despite this tragedy, Peter, even more determined to return to Africa, committed himself to study and prayer. In London, he attended a prayer meeting of the China Inland Mission and visited the tomb of David Livingstone at Westminster Cathedral. Morad (1996b) explained Peter's epiphany:

The words written on Livingstone's tomb burned into Peter's soul, 'Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring.' Suddenly the hours of study about Africa came together in Scott's mind in a vision of a chain of mission stations across the highlands of east and central Africa from Mombasa to Lake Chad. Here the climate was

cool enough that European missionaries could live free of malaria, and they could evangelize the unreached tribes for Christ and at the same time stem the tide of Islam advancing from the north. (Morad, 1996b, p. 3)

The concept and founding principles for the Africa Inland Mission were simple. While many churches and mission organizations already existed, they had financial, personnel, and practical limitations. Peter supported the work of other missions and, not wanting to “sheep steal,” would travel to areas as yet unreached. In finding missionaries for these areas, he likewise did not want to step on the toes of other mission groups. Peter felt that “scattered throughout this great land of ours are many men and women whose lives are surrendered to God for his service” (quoted in Morad, 1996b, p. 5) but who did not have the time and money required for formal theological and mission training required by other missions. He declared,

‘On the other side of the globe lies such a field as the Soudan [African interior]. The conditions that environ it are utterly different from those that call for the learning and culture of a Paul or an Apollos, but do call for the devotion and zeal of both. Here there is no Mars Hill with its philosophy, no Ephesus with its learning; but only sin, darkness, ignorance and barbarism. To meet these, men need not so much specific scholastic and theological knowledge as that wisdom, energy, zeal, devotion, and close walk with God that make great a man that is no scholar, and make greater the man that is.’ Though Scott underestimated the intellectual skills needed to take the Gospel faithfully from the western culture to the cultures of Africa, what he was proposing was new movement of lay Christians to take the Gospel to the unsaved of Africa. (Morad, 1996b, p. 5)

The same source for one’s calling and training that would be required of AIM missionaries was relied on for funding. Peter believed strongly that if God called someone to the mission field, He would also supply their needs.

In 1895, the first group of AIM missionaries, made up of eight British and American men and women, including Peter and his sister, found themselves briefly in Freretown, Kenya, hosted by the Anglican Church Mission Society. There they preached and sought permission from the colonial British government to head inland. The coast was already home to several mission groups, so Peter took his group 250 miles inland, eventually settling in Nzai, part of current

Makueni County, about 80 miles southeast of Nairobi. Later, this group gained more missionaries, including Peter's parents, and spread out north of Nzau, founding three more missions (Omulokoli, 1995). Each group of AIM missionaries sought to first learn the language, build European-style houses to replace temporary huts, increase their own gardens to lessen their reliance on European imports, and gain trust with the locals often through the provision of medical attention. Then, educational work would begin with the expressed purpose of conversion and to train "native evangelists" who Peter and his companions viewed would be "the best propagators of the Gospel among their own people" (Morad, 1996b, p. 19). From the beginning, "AIM missionaries did not come to Kenya to be doctors or educators, as worthy as those tasks are. They came to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the people of Africa" (Morad, 1996b, p. 19).

After Peter Cameron Scott's untimely death<sup>36</sup> in 1896, AIM floundered. However, more recruits and a new headquarters in Kijabe (where it is still located) gave the AIM new life to expand into new mission fields at the turn of the century. As the mission began to grow and flesh out its principles and bylaws, it was still an interdenominational mission, drawing missionaries from various backgrounds; however, these backgrounds were predominantly conservative Protestant American denominations. Since AIM was not backed by a specific church and believed strongly in the individual leadership, led by God, of each missionary, individual missionaries could establish or encourage the establishment of churches in their mission area from whatever tradition they saw fit (until the official AIM constitution was ratified in 1942 and that law changed). In keeping with the founder's ideals of Christian unity, the AIM worked closely with other church and mission groups working in Kenya. In fact, at the 1908 Annual

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Cameron Scott died of black water fever (Omulokoli, 1995), a complication of malaria (Morad, 1996b), soon followed by the deaths and departures of all but one AIM missionary.

Conference, the AIM “adopted the idea of seeking to form a single African church, which all of the missions in Kenya would plant together, rather than each mission establishing its own denomination” (Morad, 1996b, p. 78). While other mission groups joined and were supported by enthusiastic international praise for this “great step in Christian unity,” the Anglican church was less pleased and brought the idea of a unified Kenyan Protestant church to a halt (Morad, 1996b, p. 78-9).

Other AIM policies created friction at the contact zone of the missions:

The baptismal policy that AIM accepted, especially the vow ‘to abstain from all custom contrary to the Word of God,’ guaranteed that the African converts would have to live outside of their communities. The reason is that the missionaries viewed almost the entire African culture as ‘contrary to the Word of God.’ Some customs such as sacrifices to the ancestors and spirits and the use of charms were obviously unchristian. Others, such as drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking tobacco, and dancing were practices that missionaries had condemned as unhealthy or leading to immorality in their own cultures. Then many other things such as African clothing and ornamentation, cutting the body, and even the shape of African houses were condemned as uncivilized. Often in the minds of the missionaries unchristian, unhealthy, and uncivilized all amounted to the same thing. (Morad, 1996b, p. 76)

Due to the emphasis on the individual, problems and disappointments on the mission field were often attributed to “failures of personal faith or to the wiles of Satan” (Waller, 1999, p. 85-6).

According to Waller, AIM foundational principles and perspective “meant that missionary attitudes towards their converts would be rigid and authoritarian, rather than simply paternalistic, and their interactions simultaneously highly charged and personalized and yet curiously detached and insensitive” (Waller, 1999, p. 85-6). With AIM perspective and policies developed and developing among the AIM, the group expanded its influence into Pokot in 1934, retaining a sparse but constant and growing presence in East Pokot (now Baringo county) through the present.

**Mill Hill Missionaries and Kiltegan Missionaries.** The final group of missionaries in Pokot's early mission history was the Roman Catholic Church, represented by three missionary societies in the faith. First, the British-based St. Joseph's Missionary Society, known as the Mill Hill Missionaries, came to Pokot in 1943. The St. Joseph's Missionary Society was formed slowly and sometimes haphazardly by Herbert Vaughan in 1866, beginning with "one priest, one student, and one servant" (Nemer, 1980, p. 38). Vaughan felt a burden for the "heathen" that would take nearly fifteen years to realize<sup>37</sup>. While Vaughan was known to emphasize the power and authority of Rome, he was likewise bound by it, having to rely on the slow, bureaucratic machine of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Congregatio de Propaganda Fide) for the "disposition both of individual missionaries and of mission fields" (Nemer, 1980, p. 53).

The Mill Hill Missionaries were sent to Africa in 1895 to help Uganda recover from a bitter "civil war" between British Protestant missions and French Catholic Missions. Exemplifying the "tribalism" of mission groups, witnessed by the Africans they came to serve, "The Mill Hill missionaries, as a British society, was invited to correct the balance in Uganda" (Mill Hill Missionaries, n.d.). The French missionaries agreed to stay west of Kampala while the Mill Hill missionaries worked their way east, eventually expanding into Kenya. In 1943, the Mill Hill Fathers opened a small school in Tartar, West Pokot for students interested in the faith. The Mill Hill influence stayed small and limited: "their impact was not great; hardly any students or converts were established in the first decade. The western style of the missions might have

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<sup>37</sup> The English Catholic Church was lacking in numbers and leadership due to the previous years of persecution, and Rome thought it foolhardy to focus attention on foreign missions when the English Catholic Church was in such a weakened state. In fact, despite permission granted in 1866 to form a mission college to educate priests and eventually non-priests for the mission field, it was not until 1871 that the Society was assigned its first mission field. Likewise, Vaughan continued to petition Rome for a mission field that Mill Hill could run independently, a request that would finally be answered in 1879.



contributed to these poor ‘results’. In Tartar the church language was Latin, while in Nasokol [the Anglican mission] it was Swahili” (Visser, 1989, p. 37). However, in 1953, the Kiltegan Fathers took over the mission, expanding their activities “with considerable vigour” (Bianco, 1992, p. 124).

The St. Patrick Missionary Society of Kiltegan, Ireland (known also as the Kiltegan Fathers), and the Missionary Sisters of our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Killeshandra, Ireland, (known as the Holy Rosary Sisters) who would join the fathers in Pokot three years later, were created out of the “missionary impulse” that swept Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century (Bianco, 1992, p. 124). Both groups owe their existence and their “missionary zeal” to Irish missionary Father Joseph Shanahan, a Holy Ghost Father who worked in Nigeria. In the 1920s, as a bishop of a huge diocese in Nigeria with only twenty-three priests to help him, Fr. Joseph Shanahan appealed to new graduates of the National Seminary in Ireland to spend their first five years of their priesthood in Nigeria. The first volunteer, Fr. PJ Whitney, would go on to lead a new society, St. Patrick’s Missionary Society, officially established on St. Patrick’s Day in 1932<sup>38</sup>. “Because Catholic religious congregations trace their spirit and style to the particular ‘charism’ of their founders, Bishop Shanahan's evangelical strategy in the Nigerian mission field at the turn of the century provided a template for the Irish nuns and priests who worked in the Suk 50 years later” (Bianco, 1992, p. 125).

Father Shanahan modeled his mission in Nigeria after St. Patrick, traveling the length and breadth of his diocese to establish up to 800 schools, his “spiritual power-houses” in the vein of Patrick’s mission of establishing monastic centers (Bianco, 1992, p. 126). Shanahan is remembered for his faith and vision, believing that God’s love must be revealed through the

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<sup>38</sup> The full history of the Kiltigans can be found on their web site: <https://www.spms.org/history>.

provision of a message and services that are needed, understood, and appreciated—a model of mission strategy that would be duplicated in Pokot by the missionary orders he helped form<sup>39</sup>. When the hospital in Ortum, West Pokot was established in 1956 by the Kiltegan missionaries, the Holy Rosary Sisters came to help run it, a job they would hold until the early 2010s when the hospital and convent were taken over by a group of Kenyan sisters (Malone, 2018). “Shanahan's ‘missionary children’ emulated his tactics, but in West Pokot they were unable to duplicate his phenomenal success... [T]he Irish nuns and priests in the Suk encountered wariness and suspicion from the people they had come to succor” (Bianco, 1992, p. 127).

Ninety years of Western mission activity in and among the Pokot found its foothold in the popular, political, and religious culture that preceded it. While the exact number of Western missionaries who have made Pokot their mission field is unknown, this study highlights the experiences, perspectives, and strategies of at least two dozen missionaries and five broad groups—the Anglicans, Catholics, Africa Inland Mission, Reformed Church, and unaffiliated missionaries—and brief references to a sixth, the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster. Despite their background, affiliation (or lack thereof), or place in history, each missionary began with a sense of calling.

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<sup>39</sup> Having much success attracting converts in Nigeria, Fr. Shanahan saw an urgent need to evangelize women. He helped form the Holy Rosary Sisters, who first came to Nigeria in 1928 but were not officially recognized as a religious order by Pope Pius XI until 1938 (<https://www.mshr.org/history/>). Similarly, the St. Patrick Society of Missionaries was officially opened in Kiltegan, Ireland on St. Patrick’s Day in 1932 to ensure a “steady supply” of missionary priests to the continent of Africa, first to Nigeria and then to Kenya (Bianco, 1992, p. 127).

### ***The Beginning: The Call of the Pioneers***

Missionaries often refer to the idea of calling in two ways. The first is the general call in the Bible to share the story of Jesus Christ with others. This calling is most commonly based on “The Great Commission” or the final instruction of Jesus relayed in Matthew 28:19 to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (ESV). The general call of the pioneering Protestant and Catholic missionaries to the Pokot was augmented by how they felt the general, biblical call applied to themselves specifically. The concept of the call, both general and specific, is the first layer of justification for missions’ and missionaries’ presence and indeed a foundation of future place-making at the contact zone with the Pokot.

In their letters home, missionaries aim to assure their supporters that at the core of the mission project is a missionary chosen by God to not only fulfill the general call given to all believers but as a response to a specific, personal, life-affirming call. Early missionaries saw this call as a lifelong, irrevocable purpose, entrusted to each missionary. The call of the early missionaries to Pokot, as BCMS missionary Lawrence Totty stated emphatically to the mission board, was for life. In the words of Hooton and Wright (1947), a call should be “sufficiently deep to be lasting, as the foundation of life-long dedication to an appointed task” (p. 43). Travel was difficult, lengthy, and expensive, so missionaries’ lifelong commitment was a necessary assurance to themselves, their sending agencies, and those to whom they were ministering. The reality of this call varied from missionary to missionary in degree of specificity and immediacy. Most felt a call to go to “people who had not heard,” metaphorically people in darkness, and left the specifics of location to the mission agency.

In addition to their call as a justification of identity and vocation, missionaries to Pokot were further vetted by dual gatekeepers. First, the colonial government kept Pokot as a native reserve and restricted movement into and out of the area. Missionaries, as well as other outsiders, were required to apply for a permit for entry and residency. Second, mission sending agencies, particularly Anglican and Catholic, acted as gatekeepers to the mission field. The callings of individual missionaries were legitimized by the sending agencies, and the missionaries were required to meet standards of education, training, and proven personal commitment. For example, before Annette (Tarr) Totty headed to the mission field, her “worth” was assessed by the BCMS:

PRINCIPAL’S REPORT – Has made good progress in studies and practical work during this term. She has been commended by an experienced Christian worker for her messages given in the sick wards at the Infirmary. Has gained in conviction and personal experience of spiritual things, and has proved herself humble and willing to serve others. Somewhat awkward and shy in manner it was difficult at first to estimate her worth. She is a quiet earnest Christian and believes in being practical in the expression of her faith in Christ. Possesses tact and plenty of good sense, and works happily with others. Will prove a conscientious and faithful worker on the Field. (BCMS, 1931)

For the AIM, the organizational vision was built on the idea that God Himself was the gatekeeper; however, by the 1930s, the structure of the mission society had become more organized and bureaucratic, its requirements similar to the Anglican BCMS and Catholic Kiltegan Missionaries.

The following section introduces the main characters<sup>40</sup>, both organizationally and personally, of the Western Christian missionary story in Pokot (see Figure 3). While this list is by no means exhaustive and no story can contain all relevant details, I trace the main missionary actors through history, introducing both the missionary sending agents and the missionaries. The

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<sup>40</sup> I use this word in relation to this very specific story about Western Christian missions. The true main characters in the story of place in Pokot are, of course, the Pokot people themselves.

beginning of each mission endeavor, missionary journey, and calling sets the stage for place-making at the contact zones of Western Christian missions and Pokot.

**The BCMS.** The story of mission work in Pokot began in earnest in the late 1920s with Anglican Alfred Buxton visiting East Africa and looking for a way to strategically penetrate the interior of Africa (seen as the darkness) with the message (or light) of Jesus Christ. After retiring from his own missionary career in the Congo, Englishman Alfred Buxton, called A.B., turned his sights in 1928 to “the cattle tribes of the ‘Horn of Africa’ that were completely unevangelized” (Totty<sup>41</sup>, 1981, p. 1). His strategy involved establishing a chain of missions around Lake Turkana (at the time Lake Rudolf) where the “four frontiers” of Ethiopia, (South) Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya met. As a fledgling mission organization, the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society “gladly consented” to the opportunity to expand its ministry and be a part of A.B.’s vision. A.B. presented his vision to the young men training at the BCMS theological college and found willing missionaries to pioneer mission stations in Ethiopia; in Lotome, Uganda among the Karamojong people; in current South Sudan among the Taposa (or Toposa); and in Kenya among the Marsabit and Samburu people. Wanting two more men to begin a mission among the Pokot, A.B. spoke again at the college. Cyril Punt volunteered and asked his friend Lawrence Totty to join him. Lawrence’s plans were originally to finish his ordination before entering the mission field, but A.B. assured him there would be time for that later. After attending A.B.’s Mission

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<sup>41</sup> The foundation story of the Pokot mission relayed here comes from two unpublished memoirs, written by Lawrence and Annette Totty. The first was part of 1981 booklet, “Sounding the Call: 50 years of sharing the Gospel of Christ in Pokot,” put together to celebrate the Totty’s jubilee, a celebration that took the Tottys back to Nasokol in West Pokot for the fiftieth anniversary of the start of their mission work. The second booklet, “Those we have loved,” is undated but was written by Annette as a more comprehensive description of her and Lawrie’s experiences as missionaries. These sources will be referenced throughout the dissertation. Copies of these sources were obtained from the Tottys’ elder daughter, Ann Attwood, and are held in my private collection.

Training Colony<sup>42</sup>, Cyril and Lawrence were released by the BCMS to first go to the new mission in Lotome before entering West Pokot. A.B. applied for a permit from the colonial government to begin a mission among the Pokot, as was required by law. The government had originally established its district headquarters in the “burning plain” of Kacheliba<sup>43</sup> but had moved up the escarpment 70km (~45mi) due south to Kapenguria to enjoy the cooler weather. A.B. “applied for a site in Suk country and the Government offered to sell to the Mission Kacheliba for £400. This would then be a jumping off place for the Mission. The Mission bought Kacheliba” (Totty, n.d., p. 9). A.B. traveled with Cyril and Lawrence by foot from Lotome to Kacheliba, a distance of more than 110km (70mi). With porters and donkeys laden down with their supplies, the men reached Kacheliba on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1931, which coincidentally was also Lawrence’s twenty-fourth birthday. A.B. then left them to begin their work, returning often over the next few years as he traveled from mission to mission; however, Cyril was soon called back to Lotome, leaving Lawrence alone.

Lawrence Totty approached his work with pragmatism, focusing in his writings home on the practical aspects of mission work. Most of his letters home to the BCMS head office concerned money shortages, the need for more workers, or how time and money was being spent. However, near the end of his thirty-four-year tenure in Pokot, when the BCMS mission board was calling for Lawrence’s retirement, he resisted by using the fact of his call as legitimate and irrevocable proof that he and his wife should stay in Pokot. He wrote to Mr. Houghton in the BCMS office in London, “You have always rightly stressed that such a calling of God ought to

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<sup>42</sup> Alfred Buxton and his brother founded the Mission Training Colony that trained nearly 300 young men between 1920 and 1939 (Anderson, 1999). “Alfred Buxton saw the need for a place of training which as much as possible resembled the conditions on the field, with all teaching geared to missionary service... [T]he trainees lived in army huts. Lectures dealt with general missionary methods, how to present the Gospel on the field, and how to prepare national workers for their pastoral duties” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 18-19).

<sup>43</sup> Kacheliba means “Place where tax defaulters are detained” and comes from a distortion of the Kiswahili word Hajalipa (Hendrix, 1985).

be for a life time” (Totty, April 26, 1963). My interview with the Tottys’ oldest daughter Ann Attwood shed some more light on Lawrence’s calling. While Ann’s stories intermixed her parents’ call to Christianity with their call to missions, Ann described an interaction with a “spinster” woman in Lawrence’s hometown of Cheltenham that illustrated her father’s early intentions to be a missionary. One afternoon, the woman invited Lawrence and his future wife Annette to tea. In his conversation with the “spinster,” Lawrence “said he’d like to go to Africa... And she said, ‘well, maybe God is calling you to go there.’ And he said, ‘Oh yes, I suspect that is right. You’re right.’ So then that was it, really. And my mom was obviously called when she was quite young in the crusaders,” a Christian youth organization (Ann Attwood, personal communication, 29 Sept. 2018). In 1942, Lawrence underscored his commitment to Pokot in a letter to the home office, “I can only add that as far as I am consciously aware I have given myself wholly to the Lord for the sake of the Suk” (Totty, 1942).

Soon after Lawrence’s arrival in Kacheliba, A.B. arranged for Lawrence to be joined by experienced missionary couple Stanley and Annie Housden. The Housdens interpreted their invitation to go to Pokot as a divine calling. In a prayer letter before their departure, Stanley explained his call to his readers and supporters: “Then came the call of the Lake Rudolph District in East Africa, which the Society opened up as a Pioneer Evangelistic Field nearly two years ago, and where B.C.M.S. has sent eight men already. Would we go there if the door opened? Again prayer was focused on the matter, and then on the 30th January came word that East Africa was an Open Door. We immediately felt that God’s will had been revealed to us, and we busily set to work” (Housden, 21 March 1931). Likewise, after their arrival, Stanley spoke of his assurance in the call to go to Pokot: “We are confident that this new work is the Lord’s choice for us” (Housden, 7 October 1931). The Housdens only stayed in Kacheliba working directly with the

Tottys for three years; however, their move to the nearby urban center Kitale kept them engaged in mission activities with the Pokot as well as with other groups.

Following the Housdens, Annette Tarr (Totty) and Jessie Bryden arrived by ship in Kenya in 1932, accompanied by three other women missionaries who would disperse to the other missions pioneered by A.B. All five women were trained at Dalton, the BCMS's Women's Training College. Once Annette arrived at the mission in Pokot, Lawrence had to depart, spending time on what he called safaris (the word for trip or journey in Kiswahili) to minister to outlying areas. In keeping with conservative mission propriety, Lawrence and Annette were not permitted to live near each other as unmarried people. Once deemed appropriate "by the powers that be," Lawrence and Annette were allowed to marry. After several years in "the burning plain" of Kacheliba and continual illness, particularly felt by Lawrence and Jessie, the Tottys petitioned the BCMS mission office and the colonial government in Kenya to give them permission to move to a site on the escarpment "where it was cool and green and free from malaria" (Totty, nd., p. 39). In 1934 the Tottys established their mission in Nasokol (see Figure 2.1), located not far from the government headquarters in Kapenguria, West Pokot, which were similarly relocated in reaction to the "unhealthy" environment of Kacheliba.

The Tottys would base out of Nasokol as their home until 1965, the year they were asked to retire from mission work with the Pokot. The BCMS, which felt the Pokot would be better served by a younger guard going into independence and beyond, questioned and challenged the continued legitimacy of the Tottys' callings. By doing so, the BCMS fulfilled its role as the gatekeeper to the mission field. In 1964, Annette responded to their forced retirement and return to England by reiterating their belief in their God-given call: "We have no impulse from the Lord to leave our beloved Pokot people" (Totty, 1964). Lawrence raised the bar even higher: "My



belief is that if the Bishop insists in removing us he will be doing irreparable harm to the church and the tribe as a whole” (Totty, L., 1963). Regardless of the Tottys’ pleas concerning their vital roles in Pokot, in 1965, they were replaced by Philip and Grace Price.

At the age of ten, Philip Price felt “the call of God on my young life to seek His will for future service with BCMS (which He graciously honoured). A couple of months later I was soundly converted!” or so he stated in his self-written obituary (Price, 1970, p. 112). Nearly twenty years later, Philip Price came to Pokot in 1953 after the obligatory stint at the BCMS mission training college Tyndale and a year of training at the Missionary School of Medicine in London. After some time spent with the Tottys in Nasokol, Philip was to conduct safaris to Psigor for a couple of weeks at a time. From there, Philip would visit outstations in Lomut, Chesigon, Kali, Tamkal, Kokwatendwa, and other villages. By 1955, Philip had settled semi-permanently in Tamkal with his Pokot companion and helper, Daudi Kasiwatoi, and after much persuading, he was given the required permission by the BCMS and the colonial government to live permanently in Tamkal to establish a mission center that would begin to take shape in 1957 (see Figure 2.1). Only access to land was required, which would have to be granted by the local Pokot elders. “But the more we prayed, the more sure we became that this was God’s Will, and how grateful we were one day when the elders agreed to give us the former school site, a plot of about two acres” (Price, 1970, p. 31).

In the meantime and despite the companionship of Daudi, the Tottys felt that Philip should not be “alone” in Tamkal. Having made the acquaintance of Grace Marsh while at Tyndale, Philip could imagine no better helper and wife than she. Once again, the BCMS acted as the gatekeeper for the budding romance. The two would only marry after Grace “proved her worth on the mission field” and was accepted as a BCMS missionary. “Grace would join the

Society on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1958 and our wedding was set for the first Saturday January 4<sup>th</sup>” (Price, 1970, p. 36). Due to the Tottys’ furlough and the Prices’ subsequent extended furlough that included the birth of a son and daughter, the Prices were not free to return to Tamkal until 1961, where they would stay until the Tottys’ retirement in 1964. The Prices worked in Nasokol until 1974, at which time they returned to England.

Philip marked his transition from Tamkal to Nasokol with a hike to the top of a nearby peak to survey of his mission field below. While colonial officials are often critiqued in postcolonial scholarship for their surveillance of the colonized (see Pratt, 1992), Philip reappropriates the concept in his farewell to the Tamkal area: “On the last day but one before we returned to Nasokol, I climbed Mount Koghow, the ‘policeman-like’ mountain defending the entrance to the Mwino Valley. Over ten thousand feet above sea-level, it took us just over four hours to climb from Tamkal. As we stood there on the flat peak, looking down upon the Mwino Valley far below, I just thanked God from my heart for the privilege which had been ours” (Price, 1970, p. 58). While Philip uses the practice and the language of the colonizer, his surveillance resulted in gratitude rather than control.

**Africa Inland Mission.** While BCMS missionaries were settling along the southern edge of West Pokot County, the AIM began to work with pastoralist tribes in Elgeyo-Marakwet and Baringo (previously known as East Pokot and, prior to that, East Suk) Counties, in the early-1930s. The first AIM missionaries in the region focused on the Marakwet, Tugen, and Nandi people; however, missionary Tom Collins felt consistently and specifically called to the Pokot<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Baringo County, unlike West Pokot, is home to a substantial mix of ethnicities, including Pokot, Tugens, Endorois, Ilchamus, and others. The East Pokot, as this group is sometimes called, are considered part of the Pokot people group but their dialect is slightly different than the Pokot of West Pokot.

throughout his missionary career, stating, “the Suk... are much on my heart” (Collins, 1944). Additionally, Tom’s sense of calling was based on the general biblical call, for which he quoted Romans 10:14<sup>45</sup>, to go to people who have not had a chance to hear the message of Jesus: “And although many missionaries get put where conditions are otherwise, there are still such who have never heard on the changing world map” (Collins, 1939).

Tom was born in South Africa to expatriate parents, but he attended boarding school and then Cambridge University in England. He suffered from cataracts as a baby that left his sight impaired and rheumatic fever as a child, which would lead to ongoing health issues as an adult. After a chance encounter with an AIM missionary couple on a voyage back to visit his parents in South Africa, Tom concluded, “I want to be a missionary and join the A.I.M.” (quoted in Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 11). He felt he had enough knowledge, biblical and practical, and toughness to head to Kenya after receiving his agricultural degree from Cambridge; however, the AIM and BCMS, as he applied to both, disagreed. Tom then took “a six weeks’ course in tropical medicine and hygiene at the Cambridge Missionary School, and completed a further ten weeks of practical work in the casualty and dental departments of the Croydon General Hospital” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 12), followed by a year at the immersive Missionary Training Colony, attended a few years earlier by Lawrence Totty. While the AIM<sup>46</sup> was still reticent to endorse Tom fully, based on his need for more Bible training, Tom was tired of waiting and decided to head to Kenya on his own in January 1934. Like Lawrence Totty, Tom Collins was twenty-four when he first set foot in Pokot. Although he immediately began to work with the

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<sup>45</sup> “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (ESV)

<sup>46</sup> While the AIM had been established around the premise that missionary training was optional and bureaucracy stifled the missionary call, the AIM had since established a much more hands-on gatekeeping process.

AIM, his acceptance to the AIM as a missionary did not come until a year after his arrival in Kenya.

Tom spent much of his early missionary career in established AIM mission centers in the villages of Kapsowar (with the missionaries he had met previously on the ship) and Kabartonjo in Baringo County, spending as much time as possible on safaris to reach the surrounding Pokot population. However, in 1938, four years after his first safari to the area, he began to establish a small mission center among the Pokot in Kinyang, Baringo County (see Figure 2.1), partnering with “Torus, a Pokot evangelist, and Laban, a Kikuyu teacher” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 85). Not long after, he was asked to leave his mission station by the colonial government who refused to grant him a permit to stay unless he was accompanied by another male British missionary (Mondi, 2016).

In 1944, Tom married Ruth Barnett<sup>47</sup>, and soon after, the Collinses began to make plans to return to work with the Pokot in Baringo. Their reflection on Tom’s previous expulsion from the area reveals a common ambivalence in colonial thought often espoused by missionaries—a respect for qualified, hard-working Africans while simultaneously feeling a distinct difference from nonwhites:

The East Suk have had no European Missionary since 1938, when Tom, being alone, was asked by Government to leave, as the Authorities then felt that a person should not stay in that country alone. There have been a Kikuyu couple from Kijabe there, though, who are African missionaries to a strange tribe. Their names are Laban and Sarah, and they have built their home down in the hot Suk plains for the sake of preaching the Gospel to these people. They have learnt the language and are carrying on a small school and church work. (Collins, 1945)

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<sup>47</sup> The Barnetts were a prominent AIM missionary family in Kenya. Ruth had the distinction of being baptized by Rev. Charles Hulburt, the successor of AIM founder, Peter Cameron Scott (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 119).

In other letters, Tom respectfully and complimentarily discussed working with Laban, but regardless, he and the colonial government still considered him very “alone” in the Baringo mission station.

Returning to the Pokot, Tom and Ruth express their calling in a 1946 prayer letter:

As regards the work which we shall be entering upon when we arrive; we desire, as you know, to go to preach the Gospel to those people of the East Suk and Turkana tribes who have never heard... We would ask that you pray, therefore, the Lord of the Harvest that He would thrust us forth as labourers into that part of the harvest field to which, we believe, He has called us. (Collins, 1946)

Despite their call, the Collinses stayed on with the mission to the Tugen in Kabartonjo through 1947, making safaris to reach the Pokot. After finally settling in Kinyang in 1948, Tom’s health problems, the rise of the anti-colonial movement *Dini ya Msambwa*, and drought increasingly make Kinyang an unsustainable center of missions for the Collins family. In 1955, the Collinses with the help of AIM mission officials began a search for a new mission location that would be “low enough in altitude to accommodate Tom’s health needs, and would provide a setting for continued ministry to the Pokot and their unreached neighbours to the north” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 173). The officials stopped to speak with a local chief who told them about an unoccupied area that was likely a marginal space between Marakwet and Pokot lands (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 175). The place was called Liter, “settled at the base of the majestic hills on the west side of the Kerio Valley, with lots of vegetation, a spring nearby from which water could be pumped” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 175) and located in the northeast corner of Elgeyo-Marakwet County, strategically near the borders with West Pokot and Baringo (see Figure 2.1). Tom would spend the remainder of his life there, working with the Pokot and Turkana while continuing his translation work with the Tottys (discussed later). In 1964, he died

from heart issues that had plagued him throughout most of his life. Ruth continued his work at the mission station they had established in Liter for seven more years.

**Kiltegan Missionaries.** Approximately a decade after the Tottys pioneered the Anglican mission in West Pokot and Tom Collins began his mission work to the East Pokot, the Catholic Mill Hill Missionaries began a small school in Tartar, barely inside the southern border of West Pokot County with Trans-Nzoia County and not far from the BCMS mission station in Nasokol. The Catholic mission society agreed that “For a central mission, Tartar is curiously situated, for it is almost at the extreme southern tip of a very long parish whose area is something over 4,000 square miles. The reason for this is that the south is the most populous part of the parish, and since the number of priests is inadequate, those available must live within reach of the greater number of people” (Safari in Suk, 1955, p. 5-6). (In actuality, the reason for the mission location probably had more to do with climate and accessibility.) The Catholic presence in Pokot was not significant until the Kiltegan Missionaries came to the area another decade later, in 1953, under the pioneering leadership of Leo Staples. In an interview conducted on my behalf by his friend and fellow Kiltegan priest and missionary, Leo, now in his early 90s, described his call to the priesthood and then to his work in Pokot.

Leo pointed to early influences and exposure as directing his choice to enter the priesthood: two of Leo’s brothers were priests, Leo’s secondary school was next to a seminary, and a Kiltegan priest came to discuss and encourage a vocation in missions. “His appeal touched my heart. I think by my nature, I was an adventurous young fellow who always liked to be challenged... There were many other options I could have followed but the call to go to Africa was my priority, so I joined St. Patrick’s Missionary Society in 1945” (Leo Staples, personal

communication, 23 July 2019). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the desire for adventure in an unknown frontier motivated colonial and missionary exploits alike.

Unlike the AIM, the Catholic gatekeepers took into account physical as well as spiritual fitness in their prospective missionaries. Leo was originally judged medically unfit for the mission field, but when the Kiltegens expanded their mission field from Nigeria to also include Kenya, the doctor declared Leo fit to serve in this country, viewed to have a healthier climate. After a seven-year education and training program, mostly at Kiltegan, which included a spiritual year and significant teaching in theology, Leo was ordained on April 13, 1952. Leo's departure to Kenya was delayed by the violence and threat of violence of the Mau Mau Uprising. However, by October of the same year, Leo was in Kenya. After eight months with the Marakwet people, Leo was notified he was to go to West Pokot. Leo described his reaction to his placement:

I considered it a terrible notification... I suppose I was tricked into going to West Pokot because there were two Priests already in Tartar – one was a Mill Hill and one was a Kiltegan Father - Fr. Kemper and Fr. Dinny Newman... Denis Newman, sent a message to me. He knew what was going to happen in the future, but he didn't tell me. 'Leo, please come over to our place and see what this place is like.'... I came back in the evening, and at supper Dinny asked me, 'Well Leo, what do you think of the place?' 'Well, Dinny,' I said, I said without hesitation, 'I never want to see the place again!' I didn't know that he knew that I was going to be appointed there when I said that. Three weeks later I got a letter of appointment! (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 July 2019).

Leo explored West Pokot by motorbike from the mission station in Tartar, finally deciding on Ortum as the location of the hospital and mission station he would help found (see Figure 2.1). Since Tartar was in the highlands, very near the southern border of West Pokot, Leo was looking for a lowland area to reach the lowland Pokot. The mission at Ortum, located in a valley roughly 40km (~25mi) northeast of Tartar, was established on August 15, 1955. Within the next couple of years, sisters from the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary joined Leo to help establish and grow the mission station. From Ortum, outstations were established as far

away as Sigor, Chepareria, and back toward Tartar in Kapenguria (Michael Dillon, personal communication, 5 April 2019). In 1972, Leo left Ortum to start a new, permanent mission in Sigor, twenty miles away (32km), giving him more opportunity to “serve the people of the lower regions of the valley, including Lomut” (Malone, 2018, p. 321). More recently, Leo established a school in Kitale, just south of the West Pokot border, for Pokot children with mental and physical challenges.

Leo’s call to mission work was a commitment to the church based on the personal call Leo felt in his heart from God and a desire for adventure. At the time of writing, Leo continues to live among the Pokot and is the oldest living Kiltegan missionary currently in the society. His calling and his subsequent voluntary response to the calling have sustained him for sixty-eight years as a missionary to the Pokot. His description reiterated his free choice to follow his calling:

And I say again, that if I were given a choice of choosing again, no way would I have chosen anything other than what I have chosen. My life is my joy. And when I look back and see that I am still associated with the people of Pokot, I could not have been blessed with more happiness. So I thank God... And I want to enjoy whatever time is left for me. I have no other intention than that of laying my bones anywhere except but in West Pokot... That is where I have chosen to be buried. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 24 July 2019).

### ***The End of the Colonial Era: The Next Wave of Missionaries***

By the 1960s, missions in Africa had changed, even in “remote and primitive” Pokot. When she arrived in Pokot in 1965, missionary Ruth Stranex noted in her memoir, “Gone was the era when missionaries were indisputable mini-dictators of their ‘mission station’ kingdoms” (1977, p. 10). Mission stations had been established by trailblazers like the Tottys, the Collinses, and Leo Staples. Those who came after were largely joining a structure already established and a process already put in place. Most missions grew naturally, emanating from the original station, as word spread and missionaries helped to establish or equip new believers to pioneer outstations



or outschools. Likewise, as African countries began to gain their independence after years of internal struggle against the colonial powers, the perception and strategy of the missionary had shifted as well, a shift that will be discussed in detail below.

**BCMS.** In 1958, the BCMS mission to the Pokot expanded to Amudat, Uganda, just on the other side of the border from West Pokot County in Kenya, where the colonial government was anxious to start a hospital (discussed in Chapter 4). The BCMS sent Dr. Peter Cox and his fiancée Elizabeth (Liza) Fisher to Nasokol to get acquainted with the area and learn the Pokot language. Similar to the Tottys, the BCMS would not permit Peter and Liza to marry for a year while they acclimated to their new surroundings. Later that same year, Peter moved to Amudat and began to conduct a medical clinic under a tree while awaiting the government to build a hospital. After Amudat Hospital was built, BCMS missionary Lillian Singleton would join the Coxes in the early 1960s as a nurse, followed by Ruth Stranex (Deeth)<sup>48</sup> in 1965.

In her memoir, *Miss Rush-Rush: Where Love Led Her* (2017), Ruth discussed her call to the mission field even as the title of her memoir alludes to it. She grew up in South Africa, the daughter of British parents, who strongly supported Christian missions, often housing visiting missionaries. Ruth explained, “Lady missionaries often had to share my room, and I pestered them to tell me their stories... Soon I began to feel that I too should be a missionary when I grew up” (Deeth, 2017, p. xvii). The wife of the minister of the church Ruth’s family attended suggested that Ruth train to be a nurse/midwife to be “more useful as a missionary... So, at the age of nine, I decided that I would do just that – train to be a nurse/midwife and then be a missionary!” (Deeth, 2017, p. xvii). Ruth became a trained nurse but experienced a setback when

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<sup>48</sup> Ruth Stranex married later in life, becoming Ruth Stranex Deeth in 2001. I use her maiden name and married name interchangeably.

she contracted a virus that temporarily paralyzed her legs. She viewed her healing as God's provision to enable her to "continue my calling" (p. xviii). Ruth spent two years studying at a women's Bible College in Oxford, England, at which time, "God nudged me to apply to a Missionary Society and offer to go anywhere in the world they wanted to send me" (p. xviii). She applied to the BCMS, which would send her to join Dr. Peter Cox and nurse Lillian Singleton in Amudat to work with the Pokot. Ruth would work in Amudat for a decade until her incarceration as an enemy of the state under Idi Amin and subsequent deportation in 1975.

The Coxes were compelled to leave the heat of Amudat in the late 1960s on orders from Peter's doctor, concerned for his health. Liza and Peter were to move to the cooler elevations of Marsabit, a move they embraced with reservation. "Liza was fluent in Pokot. Peter's heart and soul was with the Pokot people, and the hospital that he had established... But the medical advice was incontrovertible – Peter must leave Amudat for a healthier climate" (Webster, 2013, p. 81). This move would affect more than the Coxes. Dr. David Webster and his wife Rosemary were originally destined to fill the position of doctor and missionary in Marsabit, but at the last minute, the two doctors' positions were switched for the good of Peter's health.

David Webster's call, like Ruth's, Leo Staples' and others', was strongly linked to his family and upbringing. His father was one of the first fifteen missionaries inspired by Alfred Buxton to fulfill Buxton's vision. Eric Webster was stationed in Marsabit where David would subsequently grow up. David's godfather was Lawrence Totty. Not entirely content to follow in his father's and godfather's footsteps into a life characterized by a "struggle to live on a pittance" (Webster, 2013, p. 59), David first considered government work. However, after listening to a missionary talk by his soon-to-be predecessor, Peter Cox, "I felt a growing conviction that this was what God wanted of me – to work in a rural hospital, as a missionary doctor. A 'calling' is

difficult to explain. It was a deep, inner sense of purpose; of having been shown the way ahead; of having been spoken to by God. It was accompanied by an inner excitement and yet of peace” (Webster, 2013, p. 59). David’s excitement was not shared by his in-laws, who for many years would begrudge David for taking their daughter and baby grandson to Africa.

Like his father before him, David took courses at Tyndale Hall, the BCMS theological college in Bristol, England, and Rosemary concurrently attended Dalton House, the BCMS women’s training college (David Webster, personal communication, 5 May 2019). While the Websters were originally dismayed by their last-minute placement in Amudat, planning as they were to return to David’s childhood home, they fell back on their call when times were hard: “And then we had to remember that mutual calling from God” (Webster, 2013, p. 115). After six years in Amudat, “the way was opening up for us to move” to Marsabit, where the Websters would live for another three years, returning to England in 1976 (Webster, 2013, p. 217). The Websters were replaced at the mission hospital in Amudat by Dr. John and Libby Wattis.

**Africa Inland Mission.** After the departure of the AIM missionaries Tom and Ruth Collins, Tim Davis helped temporarily fill the void of missionary work to the East Pokot. While he worked in Baringo County as an AIM missionary in 1969, his work with the Pokot people did not begin until a friend told him about an “unreached” group of Pokot “hidden away in the hills west of the Laikipia plains” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 233). A safari took him to a small village called Churo; unbeknownst to him, this was the same area Tom Collins had declared as the “only good and by far the best site” for a mission station in Baringo in 1936 (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 233). The colonial government refused Tom’s proposal to build a mission station in Churo; Tim, however, was welcomed to the site and began monthly safaris there until

1973. Before Tim’s departure from the area, he passed his role onto Art and Mary Ellen Davis (no relation).

In his youth, Art longed to be a famous game hunter<sup>49</sup>, but “God blocked that path and led me instead in the footsteps of my grandparents, parents and [other] missionaries” (Davis, 2011, p. 94). Mission work was a “strong conviction” he shared with his wife when the two met at Bible College. Art then graduated with a journalism degree from the University of Syracuse, always with an eye on how his education could benefit mission work. He and Mary Ellen were required by the AIM to attend a nine-month missionary internship training program before heading to Kenya in 1973. Art and Mary Ellen continued Tim’s pattern of safari visits to Churo. In 1976, they set up a mission station in nearby Amaya in Baringo County, where they stayed until 1982 when they passed the mantle to Art’s brother, Ray Davis, and his wife Jill.

Like Art, Ray felt called to remain in the family business, so to speak. In keeping with the legacy of early missionaries in his family, Ray inherited a belief that mission work was a lifelong career and calling. With that in mind, Ray decided to study engineering to help his mission efforts with the Turkana people. Soon after, the AIM encouraged him to attend the School of World Mission to attain graduate-level training in cross-cultural ministry. While there, he met Jill. While Jill felt called to missions as a child, her response to Ray’s self-described lifelong commitment to missions was, “It was good knowing you.” At Ray’s suggestion, she began to pray about her future, and seven months later the couple was married and on their way to Africa. While their work began in Turkana (the county just north of Baringo) in 1973, when Art and

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<sup>49</sup> The topic of African game hunting as symbolic of the colonial perspective is hard to overstate. To read further on the topic, see Angela Thomsell’s chapter, “Real Men/Savage Nature: The Rise of African Big Game Hunting, 1870–1914,” in the 2015 book *Hunting Africa. Britain and the World* Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Mary Ellen left their mission to the Pokot in 1982, Ray and Jill moved to Amaya, where they would live and work until 1997 (Delorenzo, 2015). In keeping with his view of lifelong mission work, Ray and Jill spent 45 years as missionaries with the AIM, retiring in 2018 (Davis, J, 2017).

**Catholic Missionaries: Kiltegan and Comboni.** Kiltegan missionary Fr. Tom McDonnell, who joined Fr. Leo Staples in Ortum in 1971, had a similar call experience and training as Leo. Tom attended Catholic boarding school and was aware of the options of priesthood and a life of missions offered by St. Patrick's Kiltegan: "During my last year in secondary school I had a strong feeling that I wanted to be a missionary priest" (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019). Like Leo, Tom underwent seven years of training and education, beginning at Kiltegan with a "spiritual year." Through his description of that year, Tom reiterated the mission society's function as a gatekeeper to those who are called to the mission field. "I would describe the spiritual year as a 'discerning' year, reflective, scriptural and prayerful. We followed a formation programme inspired by St. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits. During this year, I was aware that I was free to leave and also, that the Society was free to send me away if I was deemed unfit for the challenging task ahead on the mission field" (personal communication, 19 May 2019). Having no preference or specific call to a particular mission field, the mission society assigned Tom to Kenya. After his ordination on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1971, Tom would work in Ortum until 1983 when he was asked to go to South Sudan. As of 2019, twenty-six Kiltegan missionaries "have spent some time in evangelising work in West Pokot. But the two longest serving members of St. Patrick's to stay for most of their lives were Fr. Michael Dillon and Fr. Leo Staples" (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 23 July 2019).

For Mary Ita (Marita) Malone in pre-Vatican II<sup>50</sup> Ireland, her adult options, as she saw them, were limited to becoming wife or a nun. In her memoir, she rarely spoke of calling in spiritual terms:

The young Irish men and women who flocked to missionary congregations in the 1950s did not necessarily have a fervor for converting people to Catholicism. Many of us saw our mission as improving the early lives of African, Asian, and South American people through education, medical care, and the tools of economic development, regardless of whether they embraced Christianity. (Malone, 2018, p. 74)

However, she remembered when she was nine and “my heart was set on fire by listening to a recently returned missionary sister who visited our school and told us that many babies in Africa were dying from lack of food and health care. From that moment onward, I decided that when I grew up, I was going to spend my life trying to save ‘the black babies’” (Malone, 2018, p. 73-4).

While most other mission societies vetted their potential missionaries physically and spiritually, Marita remembered no such inquiries, “There was no interview, nor was I asked to provide testimonials as to my suitability” (Malone, 2018, p. 78); “How to deal with the cultural realities of the situation was left to osmosis” (Malone, 2018, p. 194). Her preparation for joining the religious order was dominated by “studying the Latin crash course in preparation to take the examination” (Malone, 2018, p. 79). Marita joined the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary (called MSHR or the Holy Rosary Sisters) in 1949, two weeks after her eighteenth birthday. Based on her perceived intelligence and capabilities but without her input, Marita was selected by her superiors to study as a doctor, an endeavor she dutifully accepted and pursued. Marita’s extensive training included three and a half years in monastic training, six years in medical

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<sup>50</sup> Coinciding with social movements around the globe, Vatican II, beginning in 1962, relaxed many of the more austere practices in the Catholic Church in order to make the religion more relevant to modern life and more accessible to common people. Marita’s experience in monastic life evolved along with the Catholic Church that included relaxed rules on wardrobe and even the vow of obedience. “We were transitioning from an authoritarian form of government to a more democratic one. It was no longer only the mother superior who defined the will of God for us. That will was meant to be discerned after prayer and dialogue in community” (Malone, 2018, p. 319).

school with an additional one-year internship, followed by a five-month postgraduate course to qualify for a diploma in tropical disease and hygiene. In 1960 Marita finally headed to Kenya, first to Thika, not far from Nairobi, and then Ortum, where she would spend the next twelve years as the only doctor in Ortum Hospital. She, along with three other nuns who worked as nurses or teachers, and Fr. Leo Staples would be the Western missionary staff in charge of Ortum mission for those years. In 1972, Marita left for the United States to attain a public health degree at Johns Hopkins University. Her thesis, *Maternal and Child Health Services for the Kerio-Weiwei Valley*, described her plan for a new approach to medicine in Pokot, but again without her input, and this time to her great regret, she was barred by her superiors<sup>51</sup> from returning to Pokot (Malone, 2018).

Even though the ministries led by the Anglicans through the BCMS, the African Inland Mission, and the Catholic Church through the Kiltegan Fathers and Holy Rosary Sisters were growing and expanding, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that missionaries began to reach more northern areas of Pokot. In 1964, West Pokot was no longer a restricted district, but it was not highly accessible. “When the Kitale-Lodwar A1 road that passes through the district to Turkana district was tarmacked between 1976 and 1983, this was a big step towards opening the district to the rest of the country” (Nangulu, 2009, p. 9). As the 1970s dawned, David Webster stated that while seemingly isolated, Pokot “is accessible by any reasonably sturdy motor vehicle” (Webster, 2013, p. 137). As travel was increasingly easier and less expensive both inter- and intra-nationally, the call expanded to a larger and more diverse set of Western missionaries,

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<sup>51</sup> While the reasoning behind the decision was never fully explained to Marita, she was told that “the sisters presently assigned to Ortum did not wish for my return” (Malone, 2018, p. 348). Likewise, a communication breakdown in the chain of command and a view that a doctor focused on public health initiatives was a poor use of limited resources seemed to be the causes for Marita’s sabbatical research to never be put to use. This experience started a chain of events within Marita that would eventually end in her denouncing her vows and leaving the Holy Rosary Sisters.

including the Catholic Comboni Missionaries, Reformed Church of America, and various free-agents from nondenominational churches or mission societies. Lifelong commitment was no longer imperative, and a distinct shift in attitude toward and for African leadership became the norm.

The Catholic presence in Pokot expanded beyond the Kiltegan and Holy Rosary Missionaries to include the Italian religious order, the Comboni Missionaries, also known as the Verona Fathers. The Comboni Missionaries follow the lead of their founder, Daniele Comboni (1831-1881), whose “heart beats only for Africa” (Arinze, n.d.). Daniele’s mission involved a commitment to East Africa through the abolition of slavery, helping “break the silence” for a continent regularly ignored and victimized by outsiders, and “saving Africa with Africa” by ensuring that the “Church in Africa was born autochthonous” (Arinze, n.d.). The Veronas had had a presence in Uganda from the 1910s<sup>52</sup> and in Amudat alongside the BCMS beginning in the 1960s. The order expanded into West Pokot, Kenya in 1973, establishing missions in Kacheliba, Kapenguria, and Tartar (West Pokot, 2007). Brother Dario Laurencig was the first Comboni missionary in northern West Pokot, pioneering a mission in Amakuriat, very near Alale. A Slovenian from northeast Italy, Bro. Dario felt that his calling originated as desire to help people in a missional environment. As he sought training to answer his calling, he first found disappointment through “his local shrine run by the Franciscans” who could “not guarantee that he would go to the mission if he joined them” (Bwalya, 2018). A friend introduced him to the Comboni missionaries. “Dario fell in love with the Combonis and started his formation journey as a brother. During his school day, he did classical studies and then switched to industrial

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<sup>52</sup> The Comboni missionaries’ presence in Uganda was the realization of its founder’s initial plan and calling. Daniele Comboni (1831-1881) had met with H.M. Stanley for practical and political help in accessing the area. In the end, the White Fathers were entrusted with the area instead, and it was not until thirty years after Comboni’s death that his successor managed to establish Comboni missions in Uganda (Uganda, 2017).



mechanics. Additionally, he studied electricity, electronics, building design and architecture among others” (Bwalya, 2018). Comboni missionaries, particularly in Amakuriat and Amudat, sought to meet the needs of the local population, challenged by cattle raiding, famine, and poverty (Uganda, 2017).

**The Reformed Church of America.** In addition to the Dario Laurencig’s Comboni mission, the Reformed Church of America (RCA) also established a presence in the northern reaches of West Pokot. As a part of the Reformed branch of Protestantism, the RCA officially formed in New Amsterdam in 1628. Its early missionary efforts focused on North American Native American groups, but by 1820, RCA missionaries could also be found in China, India, and Africa<sup>53</sup>. The RCA began to support the mission initiatives of the Africa Inland Church—the denomination formed out of the AIM—in the mid-1940s, first in (South) Sudan and then Kenya. The mission strategy of the RCA was not to “perpetuate its own organization or institutions” but to help “build a church rooted in the land and suited to the culture of the people... The main emphasis will be on the contribution of personnel, consecrated, trained missionary recruits. They will be named and trained by our church but serve in the Sudan Mission already at work” (Swart, 1998, p. 6). This partnership eventually led to a new mission center in the town of Alale in the northern reaches of West Pokot County in the 1980s. The involvement of missionaries Bob and Morrell Swart with RCA and AIC began much earlier and would end with Morell Swart penning a history of the RCA’s mission work in sub-Saharan Africa (Swart, 1998).

Bob and Morrell Swart’s callings to missions were similar to Ruth Stranex’s. Both grew up in churches in the 1920s and 1930s that supported missions, and missionaries would visit and

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<sup>53</sup> More about the history of the RCA and its mission program can be found on the RCA website: <https://www.rca.org/about/history/>.

share their stories. For Bob, many of these visiting missionaries stayed at his house. For Morrell, “Each one [of the church’s missionaries] in some way left an imprint on my life. Collectively, the quiet influence of their obvious joy in serving Christ overseas compelled me to consider a similar commitment” (Swart, 1998, p. 2). A minister at Bob’s church spoke often about the need for evangelists to go overseas: “‘A doctor can help people temporarily,’ he [Rev. Theodore Schaap] would say. ‘But a pastor can help people for eternity.’ This was persuasive talk. I began to lean away from medicine and toward a pastoral calling” (Swart, 1998, p. 3).

While both of the Swarts felt called to mission life, Morrell was resistant to go to Africa due to the messages she had received and the place it formed in her mind: “How thankful I was that the Reformed Church had no mission work in Africa; there was no danger of being sent there! ‘I’ll go to China, Lord, or Japan, or India, or Arabia, but I’m so glad I’ll not have to set foot on the soil of the mysterious Dark Continent. Whatever its charms, I am blind to them; whatever hand beckons, I’ll turn my back” (Swart, 1998, p. 4). Even as the RCA-AIC partnership got off the ground, and Morrell knew Africa was now a potential mission field, she was reticent about taking her family, which now included a toddler and baby, to Africa, but her sense of calling was expanded. “I couldn’t imagine taking our lovely little daughter [Valerie] to Africa. Oh, how ignorant I was. How fearful... In 1947 Valerie’s sister, Gayle Elizabeth, was born, and the Lord gave me perfect peace about taking two beautiful little girls across the seas. We were commissioned that fall” (Swart, 1998, p. 8-9). The Swarts spent thirty-three years working in a similar area to that explored by Alfred Buxton only a couple of decades before. The Swarts worked in South Sudan, Ethiopia, and eventually Kenya.

The AIC felt a call to start work with an “unreached, remote section of the Pokot tribe” (Swart, 1998, p. 292). The Swarts would pioneer this mission under the auspices of the

AIC/RCA Joint Projects program in 1980. A Pokot couple, both Bible school graduates, and their daughter would soon join the Swarts in the northern village of Alale. After about a year of getting the mission off the ground, the Swarts' work was taken over by a variety of American missionaries, including Larry and Linda McAuley, Molly Beaver, Emery and Sharon Blanksma, Marvin and Shirley Brandt, and Bill and Carolyn Overway. The increasing ease of travel in the 1980s and 1990s was evident in the way these missionaries would come and go. Most were committed to Alale for many years but had the freedom to leave for extended furloughs or for health reasons and return later (Swart, 1998).

For example, the McAuleys' story in Pokot started with a fifteen-year commitment between 1981 and 1996, but the RCA called the couple back to Alale from 2012-2016 to oversee a new initiative. Their original call began with the Swarts in 1981. Larry and Linda McAuley "had become disenchanted with life in the United States and were hoping that spending a month in Ileret [in Marsabit County, northern Kenya] would give them some direction, perhaps hearing God speak to them in no uncertain terms; but it didn't happen. Once back in the United States, though, God continued to nudge them, bringing missions to their minds until they couldn't have ignored his will if they had tried" (Swart, 1998, p. 307). They were considering signing up with AIM in the Democratic Republic of Congo,

when they received a letter from Bob Swart with an invitation to join the ranks at Alale, to bring the good news of Christ to the Pokot through the ministry of agriculture and community development. Larry remembers how thrilled they were to receive that letter: 'suddenly we were on our way! AFRICA! This is where God wants us! What a joy to know that we were smack-dab in the center of his will' (Larry McAuley in a letter to the author, October 19, 1995). (Swart, 1998, p. 307)

**The Unaffiliated.** The increased ease of travel compounded with globalization opened the door to missions in Pokot, particularly for a new kind of missionary, the unaffiliated. Since

the number of nondenominational Protestant churches has been on the rise since the mid-1970s, the result has been both a “reshaping [of] the religious landscape” (Stetzer, 2015) and the way missions are “done.” More missionaries have been coming from nondenominational churches or heading out independently, unaffiliated with a particular church or mission society. For the unaffiliated missionary, personal call trumps organizational call, much like in the early days of the AIM. For these missionaries, there is no mission society to act as a gatekeeper to individuals responding to a personal call. Sometimes churches and boards established by the missionary will fill this role, but these gatekeepers are often new to the process and lack objectivity. Unaffiliated Western Christian missionaries, likewise, must forge their own connections with local ministries that function abroad. The connections are often made by chance rather than through a network of well-established associations. Conversely, if a local African Christian church or ministry is likewise not affiliated with an internationally established group or denomination, it can often find support through nondenominational Western entities more easily than it could through well-established mission societies; however, there is no vetting process for either the missionary or the local ministry. The system of checks and balances that a larger mission organization provides is not there. Likewise, unaffiliated missionaries are starting afresh with no institutional memory of the mission history in an area. However, the declaration of a call is similar regardless of time or sending agency. This study focuses on three American unaffiliated missionaries/groups, described below, but others like COPE (Children of Pokot Education Fund), started by Paul and Mary Boatman, and Pokot Now, started by Rick and Mary Strickland, will be referenced.

Dick and Jane Hamilton’s missionary calling came later in life than many of the missionaries discussed above. Jane considered herself the spiritual one in their marriage while

Dick was the adventuresome thrill-seeker. These identities would blur after Dick survived a small aircraft crash in 1966. He felt that God preserved his life to call him out of Oregon to some place in the world where people had not heard about Jesus. Like Tom Collins, Dick's calling related to the idea in his favorite saying, "It's not fair for people to hear the gospel over and over when there are people in the world who have not heard it the first time" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 7). After a friend took Dick to a missionary conference, Dick felt strongly that his call was to Africa. Dick's wife Jane's response at first was "'No, Lord, not Africa!' and 'No, Lord, not snakes'" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 3), drawing from popularized notions of the place of Africa, like Morrell Swart had. But Jane explained, "He [Dick] was sure of his calling and was sure that he and God made up a majority" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 8). Jane gave in: "But I knew deep down that I was only a pawn in a bigger game, and so it played on" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 9). After two years at Bible college for Dick and years of traveling to raise support, Dick made a survey trip to Kenya in 1974 "looking for a place where people had not heard the name of Jesus" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 11). As chance (or God's providence) would have it, he met George Kendagor, a pastor and missionary who had been a pioneering African missionary with the AIM in West Pokot in 1953. When Dick returned to Kenya with his family in 1976, George's son, Andrew, and his family would host and help acclimate the Hamiltons to their new home in Pokot. Andrew Kendagor, Dick and Jane Hamilton, and several other missionary families, including friends Mike and Linda Courtney, worked under the auspices of the mission organization cum denomination the Associated Christian Churches of Kenya (ACCK). (ACCK was created by Canadian missionary Frank Rempel to meet the requirement of the Kenyan government that did not allow unaffiliated missionaries to work in the country.) Eventually, the Hamiltons settled in Kiwawa, a village located near the border of Uganda in central West Pokot. While Kiwawa may not have been

directly missionized in the past, Dick's description that they were working in "an undeveloped area" with the Pokot who "are unreached and almost completely illiterate" (Hamilton, 1977), highlighted a certain ignorance of the forty years of Pokot mission history that preceded their arrival.

While Dick was sure of his calling long before their arrival in Kenya, Jane's calling was a process. She felt called to support Dick and believed in his calling. It was not until her first day in Pokot, visiting the local school, that she finally felt sure of her place in her husband's call. She met some boys in the classroom: "There was something in their eyes and expectant faces that touched deep inside of me, and somehow I never got around to telling Dick that we could not live and work in that desolate, forsaken place. After that day I never looked back... Nothing but the Holy Spirit could have galvanized my life like that" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 11). The Hamiltons stayed in Pokot for over a decade.

During their tenure as missionaries, the Hamiltons returned to the U.S. periodically for visits, speaking events, and fund-raising at receptive American churches. In 1983, Jim and Kathy Tierney of Oregon heard them speak and offered to come help in any way needed. Soon after, the Hamiltons requested the Tierneys come to Pokot, and the Tierneys joined five families working in Kiwawa for six-month stints that began to compound. Kathy explained, "It was then two years we stayed and never wanted to come home. We left part of our hearts with the people. Prayed for years about going back. Ten years ago the couple working in an area in Pokot needed to retire and asked us if we would be interested in coming back. Well, oh yes indeed. We were waiting for answered prayer, and we are here" (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, 1 Nov. 2019). The Tierneys, like the Hamiltons, were unaffiliated with any denomination or specific mission society, a conscious choice based, as Kathy explained, on being "free in Christ" and a

distaste for hierarchical churches. They assembled a stateside board that they continue to rely on for support and direction, espousing a perspective of missions that resembles the vision of Peter Cameron Scott in his establishment of the AIM. The Tierneys prepared themselves for their missionary work by familiarizing themselves with the culture through research and photos. Kathy studied to be a licensed practical nurse (LPN) to help with medical needs in Pokot, and Jim “is a Bible College grad and ordained Pastor and has about 14 years of training as an electrician, millwright welder, and electronics training” (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, 1 Nov. 2019). Upon their return to Pokot in 2009, the Tierneys established their mission in Kamketo, “about a long hours drive” from Kiwawa (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, 3 Nov. 2019). As of 2020 the Tierneys, who are in their 70s, have no plans to retire.

The final group to discuss is the one that led to this study. Friends of Asilong (FoA) is a nonprofit, unaffiliated organization that emerged out of a connection of two churches in the United States. Andy and Olivia DuPont from RCA Glen Lake Church in Michigan and Tim Keel, pastor of nondenominational Jacob’s Well Church in Kansas City, Missouri, were introduced to Pokot by Edward Simiyu, a Kenyan pastor of City Harvest Ministries in Nairobi. Edward’s connection to Pokot led some Pokot elders to ask for Edward’s help with their problem of water scarcity. Through connections made at international conferences, Edward engaged the DuPonts and Tim Keel separately with the project of digging boreholes near the village of Asilong on the western edge of West Pokot County. At the same time, a member of Edward’s church, Julius Sawe, felt called to be a full-time missionary to the community of Asilong. He

moved permanently to Asilong in 2009 and became a pastor, teacher, leader, and missionary liaison between the community and the America-based Friends of Asilong.

Jacob's Well Church's calling to mission<sup>54</sup> work in Pokot was in response to the need outlined by Edward to fund the digging of water wells in the Asilong area. In addition to helping fund a borehole (or water well), Andy DuPont felt the call of God to work with the Pokot community of Asilong, a call similar to David Webster's "deep, inner sense of purpose" (Webster, 2013, p. 59). After Andy's first visit to Pokot with Edward and Julius in 2009, he brought his wife Olivia to Asilong, West Pokot in 2010 with the covert intention of confirming his call and making it her call as well. In response to discussions about how they should spend their retirement, Olivia explained, "Literally, within 20 minutes of being there [in Asilong] I was overwhelmed by—I don't know. It was just something that was appealing, something that was happening. Andy stuck his head in our tent and said, 'Are you okay?' And I said, 'Oh, this is where we're supposed to be, isn't it?' And he said, 'Yeah, that's what I thought.' I was convinced" (Andy and Olivia DuPont, personal communication, 9 June 2019).

While Edward did not make direct introductions between the DuPonts and Tim Keel, Andy DuPont noticed the new boreholes dug by Jacob's Well when he traveled to visit Asilong. He instigated the connection between the two churches, which would implicitly also include Redeemer Bible Church in Ft. Worth, Texas through the representation of Heidi Yaple. Heidi, a close friend of Olivia, has traveled yearly to Asilong with the DuPonts since 2010. Andy remembered that after her first visit, "Heidi said she was never coming back. But then she called Olivia and said, 'God is giving me a really hard time about this. Can I go back with you?' And

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<sup>54</sup> Likely due to the negative connotations of the words, Jacob's Well leadership eschewed the terminology of mission or missionary. Instead of *mission trips*, trips to Pokot were called *field trips* (Laura Lesniewski, personal communication, 24 March 2021).



now she goes every year” (Andy and Olivia DuPont, personal communication, 9 June 2019). Since 2008, teams with a variety of individuals from Jacob’s Well have visited Asilong nearly yearly. Since 2010, Andy and Olivia DuPont have committed to two visits a year, both lasting three to four weeks. In 2012, the DuPonts, Heidi, and Jacob’s Well began to work together in their mission to the Pokot in Asilong, forming the nonprofit mission organization Friends of Asilong in 2017.

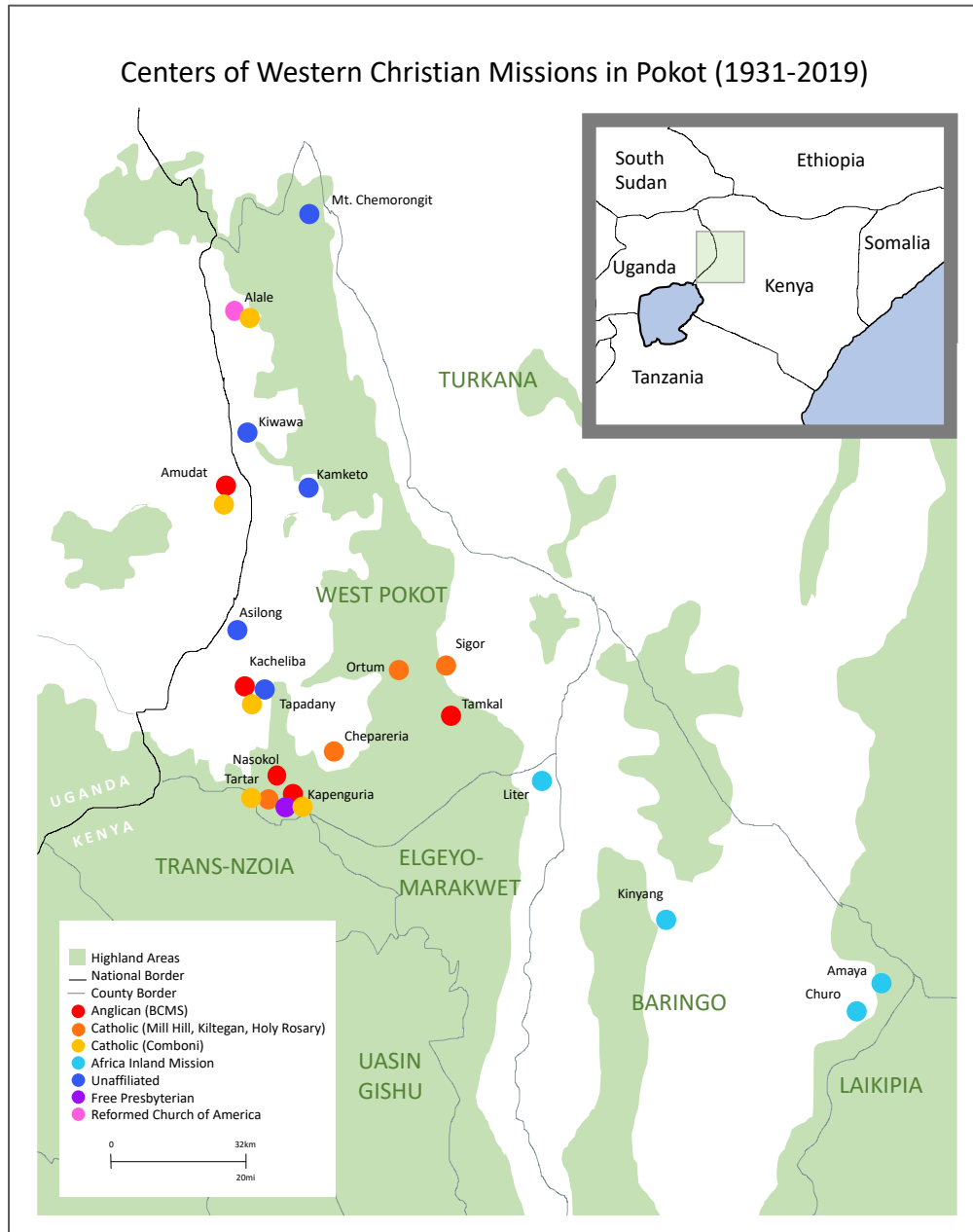


Figure 2.1: Map of the centers of Western Christian Missions in Pokot (1931-2019)

The map illustrates the relative geographical centers of Western mission work by larger category. It does not communicate how far the influence of each mission or missionary reached, and it should not be confused with a map of Christianity in the region.

## Conclusion

By 1931, the stage was set for missionary involvement in Pokot. The colonial, cultural, and political message of the West was that Africa was inferior based on its lack of development and civilization and even the shape of the heads of its populous, but the noble duty of the Western world was to help improve its plight (in exchange for economic profits). While the colonial perspective was dubious about the redeemability of the African, the Western Christian Church was not (Oldham, 1931), and missionaries stepped in as emissaries of good culture and good religion.

Like all people, the early missionaries to the Pokot were products of their time. As missionaries slowly entered Pokot, only with the expressed permission of the British colonial officials who enforced the restricted zone of the Pokot region, they took with them the influences and perspectives of colonial Britain, recent missionary history, and the founding principles of their distinct missionary group. After independence, particularly through the 1970s and 1980s, the missionary presence in Pokot increased dramatically. Each missionary, driven by their calling, empowered by their training, and carrying with them a cultural viewpoint, created a unique and significant narrative in the greater story of place. Many missionaries, particularly the pioneers, who dedicated their lives to their calling, found that decades on the mission field challenged their early approaches and beliefs about Africa. These changing narratives of place describe complex and ambivalent perspectives about the people and the place of Pokot that are enacted through a variety of strategies of mission work that the missionaries would employ. These strategies and perspectives, relayed to their constituencies at home and through their words and work in Pokot, would lay a foundation of a dynamic sense of place at the contact zone of Pokot and Western Christian missions.

### Chapter 3: Perception

Missions and missionaries documented their perceptions, often highlighting their ideas of justification of mission work, for a home audience. These texts, in the form of letters to sending agencies, letters to individual and church supporters at home, denominational news forums and similar texts, range in candor and tone, but each has the effect of communicating perceptions of self-identity, perceptions of other outsiders—colonial government officials and other missions or missionaries—as well as perceptions of the people and place of Pokot. Through these perceptions, the place of the Pokot is built in the imaginations of a Western audience and reinforced in the minds of the missionaries themselves. The perceptions of the missionaries concerning their place in the place of Pokot relates, likewise, to the strategies they employ (chapter 4) and the way they are perceived by the Pokot (chapter 5).

This place, through the unfolding of the story of missions in Pokot, changes through time as the perceptions and the people themselves transform. Myers (2005), referencing Massey (1994), describes the concept of place: “Massey... wants us to see a place as ‘constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus’ but at the same time ‘extroverted’, conscious ‘of its links with the wider world’ (Massey 1994, 154-55). Massey urges us to see places not as ‘motionless things’ but as ‘*processes*,’ without fixed boundaries, but still laden with a ‘specificity’ that globalization, far from taking away, actually intensifies (Massey 1994, 155-6)” (Myers, 2005, p. 5; emphasis mine). Spear (1999b) expands on these thoughts:

The overall *process* of mission in Africa thus incorporated an array of very specific *historical processes* that varied enormously in the individual contexts in which they actually took place. If we are to understand the process broadly, then, we must first appreciate it narrowly, paying careful attention to the attitudes, beliefs, practices and

strategies of the individual missions and missionaries; the historical context in which they encountered their potential converts; and their relations with both colonial authorities and local peoples as well as the beliefs, practices, experiences, needs and aspirations of their potential followers. (Spear, 1999b, p. 38; emphasis mine).

With the guidance of Spear's (1999b) *historical processes* and Massey's view of place as a series of *processes*, in this chapter I construct the sense of place in Pokot at the contact zone (Pratt, 1992) with missions through an examination of mission "attitudes" and "beliefs" (Spear, 1999b) toward self and one's own mission, government officials and other missions, and the Pokot people and place. This chapter about attitudes and beliefs—what I call perception—will be followed by my examination of mission "practices and strategies" in chapter 4, and finally, in chapter 5, the response of locals through their "beliefs, practices, experiences, needs and aspirations" (Spear, 1999b). Each chapter will also take into account the "historical context" as it progresses from 1931 to the present.

### **Perception of Self**

Missionaries entered the mission field with a sense of who they were based on biblical and cultural symbols (many of which reflected the religious and political rhetoric discussed in the previous chapter), on perceptions of a missionary's place in the mission field, and on the individual training each missionary received. Western Christian mission work in Pokot arose out of the mission fervor of the nineteenth century. The Enlightenment equipped Western Christians with a powerful belief in progress and self. If most people were convinced, as Bosch (1991) asserts, "that they had both the ability and the will to remake the world in their own image" (p. 265), Christians felt, instead, the obligation, desire, and call to remake the world in the image of God. This endeavor, for many missionaries, particularly the pioneers, was more akin to a

spiritual battle<sup>55</sup> in the vein of Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (ESV). The roots of the binaries of colonial discourse are evident in Christian and pre-Christian biblical symbolism, as this passage (and many others) illustrates the duality of light and dark, good and evil. Western colonial thought uses these binaries to support an us-versus-them discourse, as seen in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). While missionary reference to duality could be argued to be similar, it takes on a spiritual quality that adds dimension to the binary, personified by God and the devil. Instead of the colonial us-verses-them binary of good and bad, the Christian concept of the binary—what we might call the “ideal” missionary perception of the binary—is based theologically on our-belief-verses-their-belief binary of good and bad, founded on the biblical principles that all humankind is “bad” and only God is good<sup>56</sup>.

In 1948, Lawrence Totty, the first missionary in Pokot, wrote to the BCMS asking for prayer as “the battle is fierce and the Devil increasingly active” (Totty, 1948). In his discussion of his first years among the Pokot in the mid-1950s, BCMS missionary Philip Price spoke of the Pokot singing “songs of the Enemy” (1970, p. 8) in another reference to the devil and discusses Pokot being one of the “darkest places” (1970, p. 26), referring to its spiritual state rather than the common colonial terminology referring to it being uncharted or unseen by Western eyes. Like Philip, Margaret Carter (1955) of Gospel Recordings ascribed spiritual darkness a place,

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<sup>55</sup> Symbolic language around fighting, battles, and warfare became increasingly popular in Christian rhetoric in post-war years. While this language is used biblically, it felt a surge in popularity and focus due to the cultural and historical events—WWI, WWII, Cold War, Vietnam War, etc.—that characterized the majority of the twentieth century. Annette Totty illustrates this connection in a letter she sent in 1945, “We do not forget to pray for you all in war scarred England and we appreciate your prayers for us here in the forefront of another battle” (Totty, Annette, 1945).

<sup>56</sup> Based on the biblical passages, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 ESV) and “no one is good but God alone” (Mark 10:18 ESV).

conflating what the European would perceive as the unknown and unmapped with the spiritually depraved. Her letter to Philip Price said, “Our travelers in Africa have reported many wonderful incidents during their adventurous journeys into deep, dark places. What a privilege to carry the Light to these who must escape the bondage of sin” (Carter, 1955).

Father Leo Staples, who began his mission work in 1953, played with the language of binaries as he described the Pokot god, *Tororot*, contrasting *Tororot* with the Christian God, both supposed sources of light:

*Tororot* which means something that is very bright. *Tororot* is bright. For them [the Pokot] it was a power – a supreme power! Their lives were built around that but that wasn't enough. That was what brought out the challenge in me. As I mentioned before they were frightened and scared. I began to think about it, now God was placing an opportunity right into my hands of doing something to bring a brightness, a light that would take fear out of their hearts. Be not afraid, fear not! Their reverence for God was very much controlled by fear. They believed in a fearful God. My great joy today is that I was given that opportunity of bringing a loving God to a people who were in complete darkness as far as salvation was concerned and lead them into a knowledge of Jesus. That's my great joy now and I can't thank God enough for that. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

Early missionaries were more likely to equate the colonial version of the binary (good/bad) with the biblical (God/devil). The battle illustration induced missionaries to qualify people, place, and elements of culture as friend or foe, good or bad. Superficially, these binaries could seem sound to the novice missionary, but the process of personal experience and the passage of time made some missionaries view binaries with more and more ambivalence.

### ***Main Characters***

The main characters, missionaries and missions, of Western Christian missions in Pokot were introduced in the previous chapter. Each one approached the place of the Pokot with a

sense of self in the context of their calling and home culture—popular, political, and religious (see chapter 2). The missions and missionaries outlined in this study are shown in Figure 3.1.

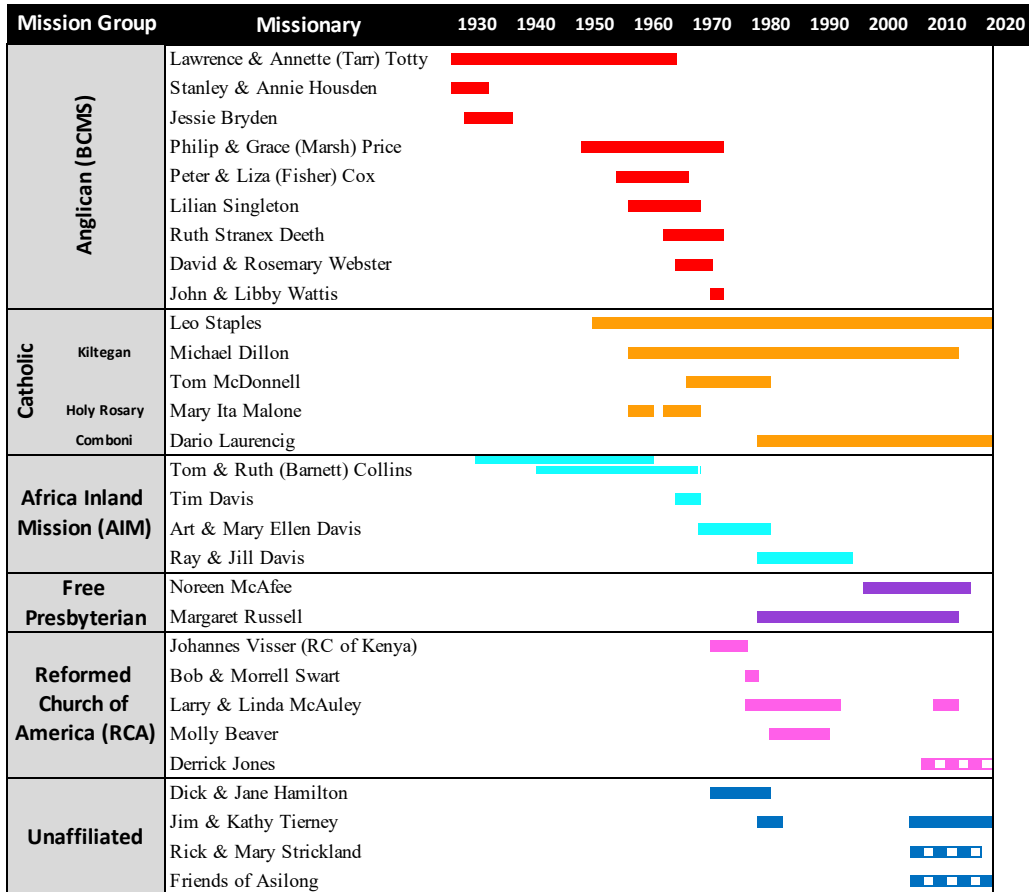


Figure 3.1: Timeline of mission work in Pokot by mission groups and missionaries profiled in this study. Dotted lines indicate repetitive visits instead of permanent residence. Colors correspond to figure 2.1 (p. 115).

### Mission Field

In the context of the spiritual battle discussed in the Bible and popular in Western Christian culture in the twentieth century, missionaries identified their role in fighting the darkness through their call to go to the mission field. After missionaries felt established in their



call but before deployment<sup>57</sup>, their destination began to take shape in the imagination of missionaries and mission organizations as the mission field, a term used often and commonly understood in mission circles as the place of missionary influence. The mission field itself is a Western missionary construct of place, indicating an area of lack. This lack was often spiritual, a lack of the knowledge of Jesus, but it could also be material, a lack of development or basic needs<sup>58</sup>.

The missionary's perception of place begins here. For example, Alfred Buxton identified a mission field in his strategy to reach people who had never heard the message Christianity (Totty, 1981). The mission field was the setting for his story that he communicated to potential missionaries. Those who agreed to go already had a sense of the place of the mission field that would be further characterized by the perceptions of the mission centers and missionaries that would be based there. Likewise, place and place-making are inexorably connected to call (discussed in the previous chapter). The mission field was a place of need and the call was a justification for the missionary to help meet that need in a place. The McAuleys were the only missionaries in my study that explained call not just *to* a place but also *away* from a place. Their disillusionment with American culture illustrated what Harries described as the missionary response to the "grim picture" of modernity and civilization in the West (2007, p. 215). The missionaries' perceived place of the Pokot, discussed below, begins as a response to the cultural (popular and religious) message of what Africa means; however, the perception for many missionaries changes along with their sense of place, sense of calling, and sense of self within

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<sup>57</sup> The term deployment is used in mission circles to describe the process of sending out missionaries. It hearkens again to battle imagery.

<sup>58</sup> The allegory from Jesus' parable of the sower in Matthew 13 describes spreading the "word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:18 ESV) like a sower spreads seed, illustrating the mission field in agricultural development terms to represent spiritual concepts.

the place. As Jane Hamilton explained, “When you are new on the mission field, you really think you know a lot. As time goes by you find out that you don’t know much” (2019, p. 18).

### ***Training***

What the missionaries knew started with their training. The emphasis on training and its requirement to enter the mission field dwindled with time. The first missionaries were required to attend years of Bible or theological training and sometimes schooling to learn a practical skill to augment their mission work (described in more detail in the previous chapter). The male Catholic missionaries, in particular, required their missionaries to have seven years of theological training, which, according to Fr. Leo Staples and Fr. Tom McDonnell lacked an emphasis on how to succeed in cross-cultural ministry. Fr. Leo explained his perspective on his training and how training has improved,

I felt lost because I think we were not trained – we were made religious people and people of learning – but we were not trained in our time to go and be initiators of the new life of Christ to the people who were in darkness. In no way were we trained; I felt completely helpless. Today, there are two aspects that help modern missionaries integrate easier: 1) They have language schools to prepare you. They can communicate with people immediately they arrive with them. We took months, or years, to build up a conversation because we had to do it on our own. 2) The culture. We knew nothing about culture. We weren’t told that culture was important and that it could teach us and give us an insight into other peoples’ relationship with God. So we were ill-prepared. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 24 July 2019)

Holy Rosary Sister Marita Malone concurred with Leo Staples,

Even though the life of a missionary would be far different from that of a cloistered religious, the Holy Rosary and other Congregations retained the emphasis on personal perfection, self-denial, detachment from everything worldly, conformity, and uniformity that was more appropriate to the sheltered life of a monastic. I would later understand firsthand how unhelpful and even detrimental these lessons would be when we were dispersed among the various missions. (2018, p. 109)

While most missionaries were trained in theology and practical skills, mostly medical, that they could use to benefit the Pokot, few were taught how to navigate the difficulties of adjusting to a different culture and navigating cross-cultural relationships and ministries. Two exceptions were the BCMS and AIM pioneers, Lawrence Totty and Tom Collins. They received practical training at the Buxton brothers' Missionary Training Colony that attempted to replicate the living conditions on the mission field. However, BCMS training soon lost its emphasis on cross-cultural training, and likewise failed to tailor missionary training to the particular missionary position. Dr. David Webster remarked about his required BCMS training in the 1960s at Tyndale Hall and his wife's at Dalton,

It was not in any way geared to missionary training - no teaching on cross-cultural issues, or language, or culture shock, or practicalities of living in the tropics. Instead lectures on church history, hermeneutics etc. Rosemary's course was a bit more relevant. It was an interesting time, but not a particularly relevant time, and not value for money. We said this quite strongly to the head of BCMS, a lovely and wise man. He took note and we were the last non-theologians to be sent to Bristol. After that all missionary candidates went to All Nations College in Ware, north of London, where the whole course was geared to mission abroad, with lectures on culture, linguistics, tropical health etc etc. (David Webster, personal communication, 5 May 2019).

As careers in missions shifted to less of a life-long pursuit, mission training became less rigorous, lengthy, and theological but more practically focused on cross-cultural issues. For unaffiliated missionaries, training became voluntary. The DuPonts, for instance, pursued training conducted by another mission society in the form of "numerous 3-day classes." In addition to personal book studies on missions, both have sought training in practical skills, such as how to maintain and repair water wells and education in sanitation and hygiene, to be useful while in Pokot (Olivia DuPont, personal correspondence, 20 Feb. 2020). Changes in training likely propelled the shift in language seen in the mission discourse of perceptions of Pokot, discussed below. Cross-cultural training prepared missionaries to potentially view Africa with a new lens

distinct from that of the popular and religious culture of the West, a lens that gave value to nonwestern cultures, people, and places

### **Perception of Other Outsiders**

Early missionaries in Pokot were not the only outsiders at the contact zone. Intersections and relationships with other Western outsiders, colonial officials and missionaries from other groups, and postcolonial African government officials would add dimension to the place of the Pokot. Even to access the Pokot people, missionaries were required to apply for a permit from the colonial government. West Pokot was a ‘closed district’ under the provisions of the ‘Outlying Districts Act’ (1902) and the ‘Special District Administration Act’ (1934) (Nangulu, 2009). Baringo, while not mentioned in the 1934 Act, was presumably controlled in a similar way. Tom Collins mentioned the need to apply for a permit to work in the area in 1934 (Phillips and Collins, 2003). Like the mission society, the colonial government held the role of gatekeeper until 1964 when the 1902 and 1934 Acts were revoked by the newly independent state. Until then, the colonial government and the missionaries remained in a constant but ambivalent relationship. After independence, the new government in Kenya still maintained a gatekeeping role for decades through checkpoints established along the roads to Pokot. The independent governments of Kenya and Uganda as well as interactions between mission groups played an ambivalent role in the story of missions in Pokot.

### ***Missions and the Colonial Government***

The Kenyan colonial government was mostly amenable to the work of missionaries. As Strayer (1978) explained,

While the missionary movement did have an ideological and structural dynamic of its own, its expansion into the African interior was greatly facilitated through association with the official agencies of European colonial policy – first the Company and after 1895 the fledgling administration of the British East Africa Protectorate. British authorities in East Africa regarded missionaries as integral to the process of ‘opening up’ Africa. (p. 32-33)

In fact, although colonial and missionary interests arguably originated from different sources, the two had, in many ways, a symbiotic relationship.

Many British observers saw the missions as a means of furthering the colonial cause. Sir Harry Johnston, who claimed to have first suggested the Cape-to-Cairo idea to Cecil Rhodes in 1889, advocated the use of missionaries as the advance guard of an expanding British empire: ‘The missionary is really gaining your experience for you without any cost to yourself.... They strengthen our hold over the country, they spread the use of the English language, they induct the natives into the best kind of civilization, and in fact, each mission station is an essay in colonization’. (Sheffield, 1973, p. 10)

This worked well in the case of the Pokot<sup>59</sup>, who according to the Housdens (Anglican missionaries in Pokot in the early 1930s) were thought of by the government as “the most difficult tribe in east Africa to administer” (Housden, 1932).

In return, the missions and missionaries viewed the colonial government with ambivalence. Those with a profound allegiance to the crown looked upon the colonial officials as benevolent helpers, like-minded (and like-skinned) dinner companions, and protectors in an unknown land. Others viewed the colonial government through the lens of law-abiding residents of Kenya and as the keepers of law and order. Some missionaries viewed the colonial government much like the Swiss missionaries in Harries’ (2007) description:

For the Swiss saw in Africa an example of a living society uncontaminated by the disenchantment and conflict caused by wars of religion and the turmoil of

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<sup>59</sup> An amusing but telling anecdote concerning the colonial view of the Pokot culture is told by Annette Totty. When Princess Elizabeth came to visit Kenya in 1952, “Our District Commissioner had brought a retinue of tribal warriors from our remote district. They were decked out in all their regalia; dyed ostrich feathers in their mud hair packs, leopard skins on their backs and as our warriors wear no clothes each was given a pair of shorts to wear for the occasion” (n.d., p. 29). As a side note, it was during this visit that the King of England died, and the princess officially became Queen.

industrialization. This led many missionaries to be critical of aspects of imperialism. Europeans not only brought colonial wars and debilitating liquor to Africa; their civilization was afflicted with ‘vices’, ‘curses’, ‘debasing influences’, wrote Junod [Swiss missionary]; and with ‘immoral customs that paganism itself had never known, unbridled luxury, sometimes crying injustices and almost everywhere a selfishness without pity.’ (p. 214)

For each of the missions and missionaries in Pokot, the relationship with the colonial government had an impact to both the benefit and detriment of the mission.

The relationship between a mission or missionary and the colonial government strongly depended on the sympathies of the mission. “Missionaries for the most part regarded British power and prosperity as a ‘blessing for fidelity to the true faith’ and thus saw nothing insidious or artificial about taking advantage of their association with British economic or political expansion to further the kingdom of God.... In short, to English missionaries patriotism was an instrument of Providence” (Strayer, 1978, p. 33). This was especially true for the BCMS missionaries in Pokot. As a missionary extension of the Church of England, the BCMS was legitimized by moral and financial support from the British government. A common theme in Lawrence and Annette Totty’s letters home was the support and oversight provided by the colonial government. Government subsidies and grants were the norm and the lifeline for the educational services provided by the Tottys to the Pokot. In fact, the Tottys were required to provide schooling to the Pokot as a stipulation of their permit for residency in the closed district. While the local colonial administrators kept an eye on their investment, governmental oversight and presence extended past education. They required the Tottys to have a car as the “government would not allow us to be here without one (in case of emergency)” (Totty, 1942). Likewise, Lawrence used the “criticism from Government regarding the state of these buildings” on the mission station to legitimize his request for more money from the BCMS (Totty, 1945). Local British colonial officials and the Tottys often socialized, further underscoring the relationship

between the Anglican mission and the government. After retirement in her memoir, Annette described her perspective of colonialism and its link to the missionary endeavor, “The tendency these days is to run down Colonialism, but wherever the British went they helped the indigenous people, and as a Christian nation we gave them the Bible. In fact it was jokingly said ‘the White man had the Book (the Bible) and the Black man the land’, but now they said ‘The White man has the land and the African the book’” (Totty, A., n.d., p. 59).

In 1950, an uprising by the religious movement of *Dini ya Msambwa* (discussed in detail in chapter 5) in Baringo County further linked the missionary cause with the colonial one, drawing in missionaries from the AIM and the BCMS. *Dini ya Msambwa*, viewed by the colonial government as a subversive religious cult with distinct anti-European overtones, had spread from farther south into Pokot. When AIM missionary Tom Collins discovered a large group of Pokot warriors who identified with the movement near his mission station in Kinyang, he reported it to the colonial authorities. After the police confronted, fought with, and put down the uprising, the Tottys were commissioned to translate during the trial, minister to followers of the movement who had been imprisoned, and help rehabilitate them upon their release. Annette described the partnership with the colonial government surrounding *Dini ya Msambwa*:

The administration was very concerned and asked if they could consult with Lawrie about some answer to the problem of this subversive religion... The Suk were to hand in their spears and were fined but the Government felt that more was needed to help the Pokot. Lawrie’s advice was two fold. Firstly that *Dini ya Msambwa* was a false religion and that they should be taught the true religion... Lawrie secondly suggested that the Suk be given greater medical facilities... They agreed. (Totty, n.d., p. 52)

The Tottys’ relationship with the government likely alienated some of their potential followers as many Pokot were at best indifferent toward or suspicious of the colonial government; however, their relationship also led to considerable investment in the region, which may have otherwise not arisen, in the form of educational funding and the establishment of a new hospital in Amudat,

Uganda. Particularly with the BCMS, the mission-colonial relationship directed development in Pokot affecting both the landscape and economy as the place of the contact zone was negotiated. However, as Fr. Leo Staples explained, an association with the colonial government could and did cause the Pokot to regard missionaries with suspicion, impeding the relationship between the two.

Not all missions and missionaries were as connected with the colonial government as the BCMS. The early Catholic missionaries expressed an ambivalent relationship with the colonial government. Fr. Leo Staples explained that the Pokot hid from colonists whose mission was tax collection. “We too, being Irish and white-skinned, came under the same suspicion” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Fr. Leo and his fellow missionaries would have to alter their strategy of missions to set themselves apart from the colonial officials (see next chapter). However, once established, Fr. Leo felt the government supported the missionaries’ work. Although “the low land people were afraid of the Government people,” Fr. Leo explained,

I must give credit and thanks to the Government; when they realised our way of ministry, they encouraged us to open schools and open medical places. That was good on their side. They gave us every encouragement. The people were still very opposed to anything European. The Government felt that as an obstacle to development. We could do something about this so they encouraged us to open schools, clinics etc.” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

While the government supported the mission’s development programs, it was in their best interest to do so as the missions were saving the government work hours, employees, and money doing what would otherwise be considered the responsibility of the government.

The AIM largely found the colonial government to be an impediment to its calling to the Pokot people. (This was likely because the AIM focused on evangelism over development.) Tom Collins petitioned the colonial government to allow a mission station in Churo, Baringo County. They refused due to the land being “Crown Land;” it was only being lent to the Pokot people,



and no permanent structure could be built there (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 71). After moving his focus to Kinyang, Baringo, Tom was thwarted once again. In 1938, he reluctantly complied with a colonial ordinance that missionaries were not to be stationed “alone.” Because the AIM had not been able to find Tom a white, male missionary to join him, the mission station at Kinyang would be run instead by Laban and Sarah, a Kikuyu missionary couple. Likewise, prior to 1947, the colonial government was not “in favour of our beginning a mission station in East Suk” (Collins, 1947). Again, in 1954, the AIM was refused the right to build a mission station, this time in Lodwar, Turkana, possibly because the colonial official in Lodwar “didn’t want missionaries around to see that he had his own reasons—unlimited access to Turkana women” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 173). Interestingly, Tom was still a patriotic Briton. Enlisting in the army in 1941, he left Baringo County and was stationed in Nairobi and Mombasa throughout World War II.

In the end, while the BCMS felt its influence in Pokot was congruent with the colonial mission in many ways and the Kiltegan mission looked with ambivalence on its relationship with the colonial government, the AIM felt that its influence was far reaching in a way that political power was not. As independence approached, the General Director of AIM wrote to the AIC Kalenjin Regional Church Council in 1960, commending the work of the church and the missionaries, “You, then, are dealing with those thousands and the way you lead them may mean far more for the future of Kenya than what the political leaders do” (General Director of AIM, 1960).

### *Missions and the Independent Government*

Kenya won its independence from Britain on December 12, 1963 and Uganda on October 9, 1962, but very little changed immediately for the Pokot due its identity as a borderland and marginalized community. As BCMS missionary Dr. Peter Cox described, “Uganda and then Kenya were getting 'Uhuru' (independence). ‘Africanisation’, ‘Harambee’ (pull together), ‘Inter-Church Aid’, ‘New Roles for the Missionary’; all were every-day topics. The whole of East Africa boiled and bubbled like a pot of porridge - except Pokot! Here life went on as usual – ‘Uhuru’ celebrations came and went. Two years afterwards an old man said to me, ‘Have we got African people in charge of us now?’” (Cox, 1967). While the colonial legislation that officially made Pokot a restricted district went the way of colonial rule, government permits were still needed to access parts of Pokot. In 1970, the northwestern area of West Pokot, known as Karapokot, changed hands (again), becoming an official part of Kenya. The residents were given and still have dual citizenship with Kenya and Uganda. While the boundary line was finally solidified, the relationship of Pokot with the independent government remained similar to that under the colonial government. Pokot continued to be seen as an outskirts, a difficult place to manage, a largely overlooked territory. Missionary presence continued unabated while the government presence and influence remained insignificant. Ruth Stranex Deeth, a BCMS nurse at Amudat Hospital, observed, “Even though Amudat was strictly speaking in Uganda, the nomadic Pokot tribe who lived in the hills and plains around Amudat wandered freely across the Kenya/Uganda border. In fact they were oblivious that there was a border, so the Anglican church in Kenya looked after the whole tribe” (Deeth, 2017, p. 2). Over time, the necessity of attaining a government issued permit waned; however, the government maintained checkpoints going into certain areas of Pokot even into the 2000s. About his first visit to Pokot, Andy DuPont

explained, “Back then in 2009, you drove through the rule of law. You came through a checkpoint, and they said if you have troubles we’re not coming after you” (Andy DuPont, personal communication, June 9, 2019).

While little changed for missions and missionaries working on the Kenya side of Pokot, much changed for those in Uganda after the coup that brought General Idi Amin to power in 1971. Dr. David Webster, the BCMS doctor in charge of Amudat hospital, remembered the change that Amin brought,

In Amudat Amin was remembered as the Sergeant who had once been in charge of an army detachment there. Amudat people had rather different recollections – of a soldier who had been only too happy to shoot up the locals. At first the coup itself had little direct impact on Amudat. John Malcolm and the nurses and hospital dressers continued their work as normal. But within three months of the coup Amin issued an edict that all Ugandans must wear clothes or be shot. Numbers at Amudat Hospital began to drop off, and it was suspected that people were afraid to be seen by the army. (Webster, 2013, p. 186)

In fact, afraid of being caught wearing their traditional cow-skin skirts, some women began to share the same dress if they needed to go to the hospital or the shops (Deeth, 2017, p. 37). David treated many women and children who had been shot by Amin’s soldiers. “One small baby had had her leg shattered by the bullet which killed her mother” (Webster, 2013, p. 190).

While the Pokot people were terrorized by Amin’s soldiers, the missionaries experienced a different kind of persecution. On August 4, 1972, Amin announced on the radio that God had given him a dream “To expel all Asians with British passports within three months” (Deeth, 2017, p. 38). Shortly after he expanded the deportation to all Asians, even those with legal Uganda passports, and then he set his sights on white foreigners. Dr. David Webster explained how BCMS and other missionaries’ lives were affected:

At regular intervals Radio Uganda made announcements about missionaries, declaring us to be mercenaries, and on another occasion saying that we were all to be counted. In November the Roman Catholic Fathers in Amudat received a police message,

summoning them to District Headquarters in Moroto to be counted and checked. There were at the time over one hundred Catholic missionaries in Karamoja District, and just ten of us Anglicans. We BCMS folk in Amudat did not receive any message, and assumed the count did not apply to us. Two days later a police message came. Because we had ‘failed’ to report to Moroto we must now proceed immediately to Kampala, and report to Immigration, and explain ourselves. This meant leaving the hospital without any doctor or nurse. In the event we were treated with great courtesy by an official at Immigration, and we were away for only two nights. We returned to Amudat to find the hospital running smoothly... Three days later Amin announced that fifty-eight missionaries were to be expelled immediately from Uganda – they were ‘mercenaries in disguise’. These turned out to be all Roman Catholics who had had some deficiency in their paperwork. Amin assured us that all missionaries would in due course of time be expelled.

Lest the level of tension should fall Amin announced in December that, in retaliation for the cancellation of British aid to Uganda, he would be taking ‘drastic action’ against British people, but would not announce it for another three weeks. (Webster, 2013, p. 211-2)

Tensions grew and Amin made his presence known around the community, mission, and hospital of Amudat. David relied on his friend and local church member, District Commissioner Owor, to warn him if the BCMS missionaries were in danger. Once, Mr. Owor sent word they should leave. The Webster family and the other BCMS missionaries escaped into Kenya and waited in Nasokol until they could return a month later. Due to intimidation and fear for their safety, David Webster and his family left Amudat in 1973 and were replaced briefly by Dr. John and Libby Wattis (Deeth, 2017). Catholic Comboni missionaries fared much worse. The persecution of Idi Amin led to the death of nine Comboni priests and one nun stationed in Uganda (Uganda, 2017).

After being the object of governmental scrutiny, in 1975 Ruth Stranex Deeth, a BCMS nurse at Amudat Hospital, was arrested by the Governor, police sergeant, and seven other uniformed officials for “confusing religions.” According to Ruth, “‘Confusing religions’ meant that I had been accused of causing ill feeling between two of the denominations working in Amudat. In a country where unity of religions is a government policy this was taken to be an anti-government activity” (Stranex, 1977, p. 24). Ruth’s arrest and extradition to Kampala was

followed by petitions from BCMS missionaries as well as Church of Uganda (Anglican) officials, including Archbishop Janani Luwuum<sup>60</sup>, and scrambling by Kampala police to identify the crime of which Ruth had been accused. On the third day of her incarceration, the archbishop gave Ruth the news: “‘You are free! I’ve seen Idi Amin myself and he says you have done nothing wrong. You may go back to Amudat and forget the whole affair’” (Deeth, 2017, p. 52). Less than two weeks later, Ruth was arrested again and this time deported back to England. Before leaving, she received an apology from an officer of the Special Branch Police: “‘This was not how Ugandans behave but it’s the fault of the present regime. Please, don’t think badly about us’” (quoted in Deeth, 2017, p. 55). After Ruth’s deportation, Dr. John Wattis was shot at by army officials. The Wattises decided to leave at the end of 1975, and until relations with the government improved, the BCMS decided to provide no new missionary staff to Amudat Hospital (Webster, 2013).

Amin’s reign of terror extended into Kenya both figuratively and literally. When Jane Hamilton agreed to follow her husband’s calling to the Pokot people in 1976, her journey began in fear, “‘With visions of an enraged Idi Amin looking for vengeance on any white person, my imagination was running wild’” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 1). While she asserted that her fears were exaggerated, Amin’s violent legacy would affect the safety and stability of Pokot in 1980, after his 1979 overthrow. Karamojong warriors raided an abandoned Ugandan armory near the Hamiltons’ home in Kiwawa and armed themselves. Jane explained the effect on the stability of the area:

The enemy of the Pokot were now heavily armed, while the Pokot had only their traditional spears and bow and arrows. To make matters worse some of Idi Amin’s henchmen joined up with the Ugandan cattle raiders. It was a time of great insecurity for the region. Unfortunately, it was also a time of famine. Some organizations doing famine

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<sup>60</sup> Archbishop Janani Luwuum would go on to help others he viewed as wrongfully imprisoned. According to Ruth, this led to his murder only a few years after he had helped her (Deeth, 2017, p. 57).

relief were forced to pack up and go. Several nuns were killed at a mission on the Uganda side of the border and the newly armed Karamojong were running amok with their powerful weapons... Eventually the Pokot, who were superior warriors, captured guns from the Karamojong and bought guns from Ethiopia. The balance of power gradually equalized, but the culture and the lifestyle of the Pokot forever changed after the transition to guns. (Hamilton, 2019, p. 102-3)

If their enemies were to be armed, the Hamiltons were glad the Pokot were armed as well. One night, when Karamoja raiders were near, a schoolboy armed with an AK rifle stood guard all night to ensure the Hamiltons' safety (Hamilton, 2019).

The independent Kenyan government continued the colonial legacy of attempting to police and curb raiding between ethnic groups that often resulted in the loss of livestock and life. In addition to attaining guns from illicit sources, the Pokot also received arms from their own government, according to Morrell Swart, RCA missionary in Alale (1998). The arming of the Pokot and adjacent people groups led to new tensions between the government of Kenya and the Pokot with missionaries stuck in the middle. The tensions continued into the 1980s and 1990s. Morrell explained how government policy and the reality of armed Pokot warriors affected the Swarts and the RCA mission in Alale: "Following the raid of June 18 [1982], when seven of the local police were killed, President Moi gave orders for all police personnel to be withdrawn from the Alale location. He said that these men didn't know how to fight raiders, so he would see to it that the Pokot themselves were armed" (Swart, 1998, p. 314). Subsequently, the Swarts's mission was attacked by armed raiders (described in detail later). Fortunately not to have been injured or killed, the Swarts lost some supplies and money to the raiders.

Up to this point, national politics had had little effect on missions in Pokot. The missionary discourse is almost entirely silent in regard to President Jomo Kenyatta's leadership, from 1963-1978, and its effect on the perceived sense of place in Pokot. Kenyatta's focus, like his British colonial predecessors, was on urban centers and the more "valuable" land in Kenya.

However, Kenyatta's successor would, like Amin, make an impression on missions in Pokot. Daniel arap Moi's presidency began with significant missionary approval. "A real Christian" and "a product of the African Inland Mission," Annette Totty declared about Moi (Totty, n.d. p. 66). Moi made a habit of socializing with older missionaries, particularly those from his AIM roots, and in fact advised the Swarts on their likelihood of returning to their mission post in Ethiopia after unrest had driven them out (Swart, 1998). However, by 1986, Moi was becoming anxious about the possibility of a coup to put a stop to his unilateral control of the government that lasted from 1978-2002.

Moi's anxiety led to tighter controls of imported cargo and heightened scrutiny of any perceived threat. In a search of freight coming into Mombasa, government officials identified suspicious items being shipped to the Hamiltons that set off "a nation-wide panic," explained Jane Hamilton (2019, p. 107). "Air pistols and air rifles which families had put in for snake and rodent control were mistaken as automatic weapons. The school uniforms were classified as military uniforms. The fly paper rolls were listed as shot gun shells. The digital bath scale was taken as evidence of something but they weren't sure what. Even a child's toy gun that shot ping pong balls was confiscated. It would have been comical if it had not ended so tragically" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 107). A friend of the Hamiltons, Lyle, was visiting the mission to help where needed. He and the Hamiltons' son Rick were arrested in Kitale in conjunction with the confiscated goods and transported to Nairobi where they were jailed in "horrible conditions" for three days. Lyle was not permitted access to his heart medication and died shortly after his release. To the Hamiltons, "He died a martyr. He died a hero" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 109). The seized goods were eventually returned to the mission. "We never received any official clearance or apology from the Kenya government. We were just told not to talk to the press and to go back

to work” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 109). Harkening to the battle imagery that remained popular in mission and evangelical circles, Jane reflected, “We reminded ourselves that our war was with Satan and not the Kenya government or officials” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 109). Soon after this event and marking about a decade in Pokot, the Hamiltons “were forced to leave Kenya,” Jane explained cryptically, “because of some political hassles” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 84). The Associated Press reported that the Hamiltons and five other missionaries, following eight missionaries from the previous week, were ordered out of Kenya, “accused of plotting to topple President Daniel arap Moi’s government” (Faul, 1987). Regardless of the political turmoil that punctuated the Hamiltons’ mission experience, on a religious level the government was supportive of the mission’s religious work at the mission. The government, in Jane’s words, actively “approved and promoted” Bible teaching (Hamilton, 2019, p. 62).

Since the end of Moi’s presidency, the relationship between the government and Western Christian missions has been mostly benign, punctuated with a few nuisances and rumors of corruption. The Kenyan government’s relationship to “remote” areas changed with the new 2010 constitution. Through devolved governance, more revenue has been allocated to county governments and constituencies through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in an attempt to counteract the colonial legacy of centralized governance that tended to marginalize rural populations (Maathai, 2009). While CDFs have the potential to change the development landscape in Pokot, missionaries (as well as local leaders) in Pokot have closer access to potential governmental financial support.

Andy DuPont’s interactions with politics in Pokot have informed his opinions of the local government which range from helpful to hindering. For example, federal moneys are promised yearly to support local schools, even private ones like Asilong Christian High School that



Andy's nonprofit organization, Friends of Asilong, has helped build, establish, and facilitate. Often these moneys are not available at the time promised, and to get the money requires patience and developing a relationship with officials to better understand the nuances of the system. At other times, the local government seems to position itself to profit from associations with FoA. In their investment in the Asilong community through the digging of bore holes, community development programs, and the establishment of a private high school, FoA has had at times to compete with the local government for community recognition and the support of village elders, exposing well-established power networks that are not uncommon in smaller communities. Like the early days of BCMS and AIM mission work, the work of FoA seems to be under government scrutiny and, of course, oversight by the Kenyan ministry of education. Like its colonial predecessors, the local government officials appear content to allow FoA to invest in development ventures that would otherwise fall to the government to provide.

Many of the schools and hospitals established by missionaries in Pokot have transitioned to partial or full government control. Nasokol Secondary School, founded and run by the Tottys and the BCMS, transitioned to be a government-run public institution. Amudat Hospital, also founded by the BCMS, is now a public hospital administered by the larger Anglican mission organization, the Church Missionary Society. Former Holy Rosary Sister, doctor and missionary, Marita Malone, described the evolution of the management of Ortum Hospital from her days as the lead doctor in the 1960s to her return visit in 2013. "Even though the sponsorship and administration of the hospital were still under the auspices of the local [Catholic] diocese, the two Kenyan doctors on staff were appointees of the Ministry of Health (MOH), who paid their salaries. It represented the good working relationship between the two" (Malone, 2018, p. 8).

As missionaries continue to work in Pokot, their perceptions of the Kenyan government continue to change, revealing a dynamic interplay of ambivalence, uniquely negotiated by missions and missionaries. Networks, relationships, and power are used by Western missionaries to accomplish their goals. Likewise, local political leaders are known to leverage their relationships with outsiders, like missionaries, known by the locals as “well-wishers,” to improve their standing in the community, increase their political power, and increase their coffers both legitimately and otherwise<sup>61</sup>. The contact zone between Western well-wishers, some of whom are missionaries in the region, the Pokot Christian church, and the local government presents ongoing dynamics of power against the backdrop of development schemes, personal ambitions, and church identity and growth. The dynamics of this interchange would make a profound and useful future study, built on the place described by this paper. Understanding the interplay of Christianity, “well-wishers,” and local political power, explored through a postcolonial lens, could both highlight the agency of Pokot players and help inform future aid and development initiatives.

### *Missions and Other Missions*

Like their relationship with the government, missions and missionaries had to negotiate their relationships with other mission organizations; although before independence, some of this management was in the hands of the colonial government. As the government policed the closed district of Pokot, separating the Pokot from other ethnic groups, they applied these same tactics

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<sup>61</sup> In November 2019, the Kenya news source, the Weekly Citizen, reported on a scandal being investigated by the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission. Allegedly, the water department in West Pokot county had used public funds to dig boreholes that already existed. The boreholes in question were thought to have been dug by Rev. Julius Murgur’s NGO, Pokot Outreach Ministry, known for its water and educational initiatives, funded largely by churches in the United States.

to the missionaries. While it is unclear whether it was the colonial government or the missionaries<sup>62</sup> who first supported the idea of mission territories, by 1931 in Pokot, the idea was entrenched in both mission and colonial thinking. As Tom Collins explained, “Under present arrangements between Societies, the Bible Churchman’s Missionary Society is allocated the geographically separated West Suk, whilst the A.I.M. is responsible for the East Suk. They both border on the Turkana tribe to the North beyond” (1945). Likewise, the Catholics and the Anglicans split West Pokot: the Kiltigans working in the east and the BCMS in the west. These boundaries were largely ceremonial and ambivalently respected by the missions. However, when the boundaries also involved a county line and an African offender, the colonial government, in at least one case, felt legally bound to defend the mission boundaries. The AIM pastor and black African missionary, George Kendagor, caused quite a stir in the 1950s as he felt called to Anglican territory in West Pokot; however, he did not want to switch his mission society allegiance from the AIM to BCMS although both societies encouraged the switch. “This problem went on for seven years. It got to a point where George was arrested by the police because he was working in a non-AIM area” (Morad, 1996b, p. 129). Finally, in 1961, George was allowed to work in West Pokot, and “it was agreed that the AIC work eastwards from Kapenguria, the B.C.M.S. more westwards. It was emphasized that should situations arise in the future likely to breed trouble, these should be mutually talked-over and our friendship maintained” (AIM, 1961). Interestingly, the “territory” allocated to the AIM was within the Catholic dominated area, but the animosity between Protestant and Catholic groups kept the Catholics out of these negotiations. As years passed, George found the need too great and Pokot territory so large that

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<sup>62</sup> Beginning in 1907, mission conferences espoused the principle that Protestant missions, both denominational and nondenominational, should work in different geographic areas “in order to maximize the use of their slender resources” (Reed, 2013, p. 207).

he invited other churches and individuals like the Hamiltons to join in the work (Morad, 1996b; Hamilton, 2019).

In the African context, it is important to note that “the mission movement itself was not a monolithic one, containing within it a bewildering array of different denominations, sects and orders, each possessing its own theology, ritual practices and strategies for conversion.... It was not purely in jest that many Africans viewed the missions as European ‘tribalism’, a view that bears reiterating in the light of a frequent tendency to essentialize Christianity, mission and the Church in the literature” (Spear, 1999a, p. 5; see Bassey, 1999). While Pokot would not experience a “bewildering array” of denominations until well after independence, the three pioneering mission groups, BCMS, AIM, and Kiltegens, not only brought different backgrounds and mission culture with them, they also brought distinct opinions about mission territory and their rival missions, meaning mission zones played a profound part in the influence of place in Pokot. Strayer (1978) explained the reality of mission and missionary territories that, despite the expanse of Pokot and the limited number of missions, rang true to some extent in Pokot: “The creation and protection of personal spheres of influence, whether geographical or institutional, consumed an inordinate amount of missionary energies, rendered rational and long-range planning difficult and was in part responsible for the haphazard nature of mission expansion” (p. 6-7). Likewise, the spheres of influence would have lasting effects on the place of the Pokot due to the variety and variable success of missionary strategies within each sphere.

The most profound sense of “tribalism,” as Spear put it (1999a, p. 5), occurred between the Protestants and the Catholics, with the majority of the ire toward the Catholics coming from the Anglican BCMS.

Other than the English Bible, the one thing British Protestants tended to have in common was opposition to Catholics – a not inconsiderable ideological force. As subjects of a

Protestant monarch, most British citizens were ready and eager to defend and extend the faith of the realm both at home and abroad. Anti-Catholicism formed part of a nationalist discourse that decried Roman Catholicism as morally and politically tyrannical and celebrated Protestantism as the font of British liberty. (Carey, 2011, p. 43)

While the AIM was largely silent on the issue of Catholicism, the BCMS was not. The Tottys' view of the Catholics, whom they refer to most commonly as "Romanists" or simply "the R.C.s," was a common theme in their writings. Annette Totty's fiery language included references to the "menace of Rome" (1957), "Romish error" (1957), "heresy" (1956), "R.C. intrusion" (1960), and "R.C. propaganda" (1960). While no other missionary could compete with Annette's vitriol for the Catholic presence in Pokot, Dr. Peter Cox also revealed an animosity toward the Catholic mission and mission practices in Amudat (1967). However, both Annette and Peter make a point of explaining that their interactions with individual Catholic missionaries were always positive. Annette explains, "We have never had any 'words' with the R.C.s and are friendly when we meet. It was purely a matter of principle" (1956).

The principle was based on several factors. The BCMS historians Hooton and Wright (1947) explained to the Anglicans at home, "Those who know Roman Catholics only in England might find it difficult to credit the crude methods of bribery, magic, lies and threats that the Roman missionaries in this area employed to win converts for themselves and to outwit the B.C.M.S. missionaries" (p. 142). The Tottys blamed the Catholics for taking "two schools from us. They only do this by bribing the people with beer" (1956) and for "putting crosses on the people, bribing them and offering a hospital. When you have no medical facilities who could blame the people for giving in?" (1960). Dr. Peter Cox had similar complaints about the Catholic missionaries' tactics:

'They will give posho [cornmeal] if you come to church.' 'They will feed you as you prepare for baptism.' There are not nearly such strict views on drinking (though Father Raphael preaches strongly against drunkenness). You will get a little medallion to hang

round your neck... Yet we cannot (as well as must not) descend to these levels; we will not bribe people into the Kingdom with food; yet charity is good, the people are hungry, the Romanists gain people daily. Our schoolboys say, 'Oh we know why you don't give posho (maize meal) but it makes it very hard for us to ask our friends to church!' And so it does. (1967)

While the colonial practice of demarcating districts for the missions (much like separating arguing children) had some success, it also resulted in missions feeling possessive of their territory. Annette Totty explained, "In Suk we have a zoning system whereby if we have a school or church in a certain district the R.Cs are not allowed to come. If the R.Cs have a school or church in a certain district we do not go, and we have faithfully kept our side of the bargain, but the R.Cs have violated this and have caused havoc in Chepareria – promising the people a hospital" (1960). She continued to explain how the local officials are drawn into the fray, further underscoring the importance of the mission-government relationship: "The chief<sup>63</sup> is one of our adherents and has stood firm and he brought the matter to the African District Council and it was unanimously agreed to hand over the Government school to BCMS which would solve all the R.C. intrusion and the matter was to be finalized at the D.E.B. meeting on November 8th. Meanwhile the D.C. [District Commissioner] who is a Catholic seeking an occasion against the Christian chief has handed him his notice" (1960). Annette's reference to the chief as Christian appears to purposefully juxtapose against the Catholic (not Christian) D.C. Likewise, when conducting mission safaris in the 1950s, Philip Price gave credence to the mission territories, "Lomut was a centre of Roman Catholic work and I never stayed longer than necessary there, hoping that they in turn would respect 'our' territory" (1970, p. 18).

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<sup>63</sup> A key element to British colonial rule was the installation of "indirect rule" through local chiefs (as described by Frederick Lugard in his book, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 1922). When a people group, like the Pokot, did not organize around a central political figure, British colonial officials appointed one. The position of "chief" for the Pokot is still a politically appointed position. One District Commissioner stated, "It is impossible to expect the primitive Suk to accept official headmen at once. The idea is foreign to them and as Suk intelligence is not one of the highest, progress is bound to be slow" (D.C. W.P. 1926: 1, 2)" (quoted in Visser, 1989, p. 34).

The Tottys' possessiveness and disapproval of Catholic missions went as far as to deny the Catholic missionaries access to the Tottys' translation work. The BCMS home office reprimanded this act of defiance and called into question other aspects of the Tottys' mission work in comparison to the Catholic missionaries: "Your refusal to allow the Roman Catholics to use the grammar has, of course, created a very bad impression, and has done considerable harm in the eyes of the African. Officials would press for the speedy appointment of a neutral expert to solve this dispute... It has been said that the feeling among the elders is that you do not seem to be doing anything, whereas by contrast, the Catholics are energetic and get things done" (BCMS Overseas Secretary, 1956). Annette stood by her convictions in reply, "We felt that to give the R.Cs the Grammar would be compromise and the longer we could keep the R.Cs from learning 'The Language of the heart', and thus put words in their mouths to teach heresy the less Suk would be lost" (1956).

While the BCMS missionaries had strong views about aspects of the practice of Catholicism, mission strategies used by the Catholic missionaries, and the existence of equally negative reciprocal feelings from the Catholics, Catholic missionary texts revealed little evidence of animosity concerning Protestants—a fact that could be attributed to the limited number of less formal texts available in this study. Fr. Leo Staples admitted that Pokot was "an area where there was a bad relationship between the [Anglican] Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK) and the Catholic Church" (personal communication, 23 July 2019). He felt the Catholic mission "differed from other agencies" by being "concerned with every aspect of human life... a wholistic approach to human growth" (personal communication, 23 July 2019). When asked about Catholic interactions with Protestant groups, Fr. Michael Dillon explained that there was little interaction with Protestant missionaries as each group had such large territories. Having

little more to say on the subject, he declared, “We let them get on with it” (Dillon, personal communication, April 5, 2019). Likewise, two stories from related Catholic sources in 1966 declared that Fr. Leo Staples was indeed the first European to live in the Suk Valley (Radharc Films; ‘Radharc’ in Eldoret). While this might be technically correct if the Suk Valley was meant to refer to the exact location of Ortum, but taken more broadly, the statement negated the work of Protestant missions that had been in the area since the early 1930s.

Cooperation between Protestant mission groups was much more common. The Tottys and AIM missionary Tom Collins, for example, worked closely with each other for decades to translate the Bible into Pokot. Likewise, the AIM as an organization made unity and community a priority. At the 1913 and 1918 Kikuyu Conferences, they worked alongside the Church of England and Church of Scotland to unite the Protestant groups working in Kenya in hopes to overcome the denominational “tribalism,” mentioned above by Spear (1999a), and form one Protestant Kenyan denomination. The proposal, while not fully successful due in large part to Anglican resistance, resulted in an alliance of mission groups<sup>64</sup> but failed to lead to “Pan-Protestantism” (Reed, 2013). After WWII, the AIM unified its established churches under the new denomination of the Africa Inland Church (AIC). While most relations between Protestant groups were amicable, an Anglican sense of superiority and possessiveness was illustrated in a situation explained in Annette’s 1960 prayer letter to the Tottys’ supporters. She told the story of an “African of another tribe and another Mission” (likely George Kendagor of the AIM) who began working in BCMS territory about a decade before. After Lawrence interceded for this man so he would not be made to leave Pokot by the colonial District Commissioner, the man

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<sup>64</sup> While the alliance did not result in a specific Kenyan denomination, it was significant in the history of Kenya’s political development. According to Reed (2013), “Perhaps the most influential activity of the Missionary Alliance in Kenya, and later in Tanganyika, was to establish schools that became significant in the education of African leaders and were an important factor in the preparation of Africa for independence from colonial rule” (p. 211).



continued working with the other mission rather than the BCMS as he had promised. “He has again broken all his promises and has asked the people and obtained land to build churches for this other Mission right close up to two of our churches. This can only spell ruin to our Suk church,” Annette bemoaned. Despite this other mission being a “Mission that we have the utmost love and respect for and one that we see eye to eye with,” Annette indicated that the African constituency of this mission has had the nerve to overlook the denominational boundaries put in place by colonial officials and Western missionaries. “The European missionaries of this other Mission certainly do not wish to sheep steal and feel very strongly about it, but their Mission has become autonomous and the Africans are in full charge and they are determined to come in at all costs” (1960). Annette’s opinion dovetailed with the Tottys’ reputation for ambivalence toward Africanization (discussed below).

A more ecumenical spirit began to arise by the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Dr. Peter Cox, while seasoning his memoir with talk of “a strong Roman challenge” and “competition from the Roman Catholic Church,” praised the effects of a government mandate to the Catholic and Anglican missions to “unite your schools – or else!” (1967). He agreed that it was logical to combine the Anglican and Catholic schools as the township was too small to require both. “We and the Verona [Comboni] Fathers had to come to an agreement between ourselves as we faced the common pressure” (Cox, 1967). Further, the new leader of the Verona Fathers in Amudat was more open to communication with the BCMS missionaries. Cox called him “a pleasant, humorous Italian” with whom he believed he was “able to coexist and even remain on good terms” (Cox, 1967). Dr. David Webster’s initial experience and perception of the nearby Catholic mission in Amudat was similar to his predecessor, Dr. Peter Cox; however, his language shows a shift of perspective, less vitriol, more understanding:

A factor that complicated Christian witness in Amudat (as in most of Africa) was the presence of two rival versions of Christianity – the Protestants (us) and the Roman Catholics. Catholic missionaries belonging to the order of the Verona Fathers arrived in Amudat soon after Uganda’s independence, and established a mission about half a mile from the hospital and Anglican church. They did not see the Protestant version of the faith as being valid, and set out to convert or proselytize as many people as possible. Their catechists were even paid a bonus for each convert baptized into the Roman Catholic church. The Verona Fathers were well resourced, and able to build a far superior church and school to ours. They were also in a position to recruit ‘rice Christians’ by their generous hand-outs. Time showed that such converts have little substance. Such rivalry is sad, and surely contrary to Jesus’ prayer that His people would be one. On a personal level we established good relationships with the Fathers (as the Coxes had done before us). Father Raphael was a cheerful, avuncular Italian, and his colleague, Father Petri, a most friendly, gentle person. (Webster, 2013, p. 132)

Dr. David Webster organized an ecumenical seminar about maternal and child health as one of his last missionary acts in Pokot. “When so often Government and Mission medical services competed rather than cooperated, and when Catholics and Protestants would have no dealings with one another, it really warmed my heart – and was a fitting conclusion to what I had strived for in the District – to see health workers learning together, and sharing their problems together” (Webster, 2013, p. 316).

While the distinct sense of competition between mission groups decreased throughout independence, some friction between groups was and is still evident from time to time. The Tierneys stated that they share the same faith with other denominations and that “the same Lord... brings us all together” (Tierney, 2016). However, Kathy Tierney spoke emphatically against what she calls hierarchical churches who come to Pokot and “take their tithe and go back to their cities” (personal communication, 3 Nov. 2019). For the Tierneys, “Because we are free in Christ and have no denominational name, the other missions seem comfortable with us, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, African Gospel Church, etc. We do not invite them to teach, but they are always welcome on the mission compound and in our home” (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, 1 Nov. 2019).

The Comboni Missionaries working in Pokot have a similar opinion. While they conceded that the Protestant churches are spreading faster than Catholicism, they suggested that the success is based on the Protestant churches being “less moralising and more pentecostal oriented” (West Pokot, 2007). In relation to working with other Christian churches, the Combonis echoed Fr. Michael Dillon’s sentiments about keeping to themselves: “There are many Christian churches in the area. We relate with them in respect while keeping distances. None has interest in cultivating relations” (West Pokot, 2007, p. 4). Likewise, the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster took issue with the charismatic influences in other mission groups and formed their own mission board in 1974 to keep true to their own doctrine. “This step was taken by the church because of the pressing need to send our missionaries from our own church and not under ecumenical and compromised interdenominational missionary societies” (Mission Board, n.d.).

Despite these divisions, according to Dietz (1987), mission activities increased dramatically after 1973. In addition to the opening of the closed district and the improved road system, another boost to missions was caused by the fall of dictator Idi Amin in 1979 who imprisoned, ousted, and terrorized many Westerners associated with Christian missions. As time continued, “Western Pokot was full of missionary zeal by 1985” (Dietz, 1987, p. 206), not least of which was from unaffiliated missionaries and mission groups. These groups tended to join forces with other missions or local Christian churches or organizations on the ground, leading to a growth in Protestant ecumenicism. The Hamiltons and the Reformed Church of America (RCA), for example, joined the AIM initiative in Pokot. For the Friends of Asilong (FoA), strong relationships of mutual support also exist between the AIM, based in Kijabe, Kenya; the AIC, the church partnering with FoA in Asilong; and the RCA, working in Alale, West Pokot. Networks

with the other mission groups and a local denomination help fill in the gaps left by FoA's nondenominational status. Supervisor of RCA Mission Programs in Africa, Rev. Derrick Jones, has shared development materials and mission strategy with FoA as well as encouraged visits and exchanges between the Alale community leaders and those in Asilong. Friction, however, has occurred between FoA and the local Catholic Church. While early Protestant-Catholic conflict based on different perspectives on theology and mission strategy is no longer center stage, conflict still occurs related to issues of resources and politics. In early 2019, the Catholic Church bought land<sup>65</sup> from a group of elders and leaders in the Asilong community in order to build a community health clinic; however, FoA already had plans to establish a clinic in Asilong in conjunction with AIC (Andy and Olivia DuPont, personal communication, 10 Jan. 2019). After meetings about the project between AIC pastor and FoA mission liaison, Julius Sawe, and a local Catholic nun, Sister Helen, were ineffective in finding a compromise, missionaries Andy and Olivia DuPont discussed the issue with Kiltegan missionary Bishop Maurice Crawley in charge of the diocese. The Irish bishop gave the nun a directive to halt the Catholic clinic project and allow FoA and the AIC to continue with their plans (Andy and Olivia DuPont, personal communication, 17 May 2019). This incident uncovered some complex local alliances between elders, the sublocation chief, and the churches active in the area. This experience also revealed possible racial power inequalities hearkening to the colonial legacy in the region. When Pastor Julius and Sister Helen were unable to reach a compromise, the missionaries, FoA and Kiltegan, were able to come to a quick agreement and solution due to their identification, at best, as outsiders to the power dynamics in the community or, at worst, as whites in a system based on colonial power and racial binaries.

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<sup>65</sup> The purchase of land by the Catholic Church has questionable legality due to the Pokot owning their land communally.

While mission and church work continue to increase in Pokot, divisions between Catholic and Protestant missions and churches remain to some extent. However, the dynamic between the two seems to have moved from explicit vitriol to respectful disregard or voluntary dissociation. The “tribalism” of denominational differences, discussed by Spear (1999a), has lessened among the Protestant groups as we see the AIM/AIC working as a bridge for Western Christian missionaries in the post-colonial era, connecting denominational and unaffiliated Western groups with the Pokot people. This bridge reveals a new face of religious place in Pokot as local church leaders share and often direct the dynamics of power at the contact zone. The place constructed at the contact zone of Western Christian missions and Pokot proves to be more complex and dynamic with the growth of African leadership, negotiated explicitly and implicitly by Western Christian missions throughout the lead up to independence and the post-colonial era. The relationships forged, experienced, or denied between Western Christian missions and other outsiders to Pokot, through government officials and other mission groups, adds a layer to the ever-changing sense of place in and about Pokot.

### **Perceptions of Pokot**

The most important aspect of missionary perception as it influences place relates to the perception of the place and people of Pokot. While the perception of their own calling and roles in Pokot in addition to their relationship to other outsiders creates a context for place-making at the contact zone, it is the actual contact zone and the perceptions that arise from the missionaries there that inform, first, the way they communicate about Pokot, building a sense of place in the discourse they use, and, second, the mission strategies they employ (discussed in the next chapter). Missionary and historian Kenneth Scott Latourette (1949) explained the influence of

missionaries on the perception of place held by Westerners: “The effect of this world-wide missionary enterprise is seldom appreciated. Even those most active in it are infrequently aware of how deeply it has molded the American outlook on the world. The supporting constituency of foreign missions numbers millions. Literally millions contribute financially to the enterprise” (pp. 31-2). The proliferation of the mission discourse communicated to these millions is a powerful example of how the place of the Pokot is ‘made’ in Western imagination.

Annette Totty understood the power of this discourse as she and Lawrence went back to England and described their work in Pokot to a rapt audience. “Deputation was a great joy. People in those days drank in every word. It was all new and strange to them, not as now when television has brought the World into one’s sitting room” (Totty, n.d., p. 42). Morrell Swart described the same phenomenon but through the written word. “In those first months, our letters home were full of detail. We wanted our families to ‘see’ all the strange sights and to enjoy our new life with us” (Swart, 1998, p. 26). In his history of the AIM, Morad (1996b) explained the benefit of the missionaries’ role in place-making, “The early missionaries wrote letters to correct misperceptions about African culture and to show areas where we could learn from them” (Morad, 1996b, p. 17). The reality was more ambivalent.

A postcolonial examination of the missionary discourse expands the understanding of the themes and the evolution of those themes as powerful descriptions of place. Common in the discourse are themes of exoticism and othering (Said, 1978) while at the same time the passage of time reveals changing and ambivalent perceptions of Pokot at the contact zone. Missionaries began by describing the physical geography of place or landscape, commonly referring to Pokot as remote and sometimes other-worldly. The landscape, like the people, is often exoticized in the language to both engage and educate the audience. While some missionaries understood their

perceptions and discourse as Western and understandably colored by their situatedness, others spoke with authority, in a vein similar to Pratt's (1992) colonial gaze. The descriptions of the landscape and the people of Pokot make up one aspect of the religious sense of place of Pokot. By relaying the words of particular missionaries whom the reader has already had the opportunity to get to know, I seek to avoid essentializing mission perception; however, I uncover some themes of the mission discourse that help further describe the perceived sense of place at the contact zone.

### *Place*

The place of Pokot is most commonly referred to by missionaries as remote. Remoteness in common parlance relates to distance “from the main centers of population” and lack of connection (Oxford, 2020). Scholars focus on remoteness as largely an economic term suggesting a lack of “access to public services and markets” (Christiaensen, Demery & Paternostro, 2003, p. 2). Within the missionary discourse, the word takes on a variety of nuances, some of which can be seen by the words paired with “remote.” In an AIM mission video from 1991, Ray and Jill Davis use the word twice in as many sentences, “We as a family must learn to live and survive in a remote area in order to tell the Pokot people about Jesus. We live in the beautiful but remote Amaya valley” (Davis, 1991). The Tottys, Fr. Tom McDonnell, the Davises, Dr. David Webster, and Morrell Swart used the word remote to describe the Pokot mission field, but the descriptor was even more popular in mission publications, designed and distributed by the societies rather than the on-the-ground missionaries. The AIM radio program probably from the 1950s described Pokot as “extremely remote and lonely” (AIM, n.d. b). Likewise, in 1966

Radharc, the heavily Catholic-influenced Irish television station, described the “Suk Valley” as “one of the most remote and primitive regions in all of Africa” (Radharc Films, 1966).

The perceived identity of the place of Pokot as remote is built on colonial legacies, extended into the post-colonial era, and solidified by Pokot’s political geography on the margins, both politically and conceptually. The map, set in place by colonialism, drew a line directly through Pokot territory. For years part of the territory shifted from the province of Kenya to Uganda to Kenya again, always far from the commercial centers of these two countries. The colonial powers closed Pokot to outsiders. The legacy of this colonial edict put Pokot on the margins of development including road building that would function to connect Pokot to the rest of Kenya. Dr. Peter Cox described the crossroads of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ in Kenya and Uganda through his description of roads: “There are few roads - one going north and south from Kenya (civilised) to Kenya (wild) through Karapokot and Upe Districts. And one going east and west and finally joining the tarmac road leading to Kampala and the big wide world of Uganda. In between there are what are technically known as 'Land-Roverable Tracks'. Much of this district can only be reached by a determined man on foot” (Cox, 1967). Legal and practical access to Pokot was limited. While some of the facts of Jane Hamilton’s statement are misleading, she commented on the colonial legacy that bred Pokot’s remoteness: “The Northern Frontier District of Pokot was a closed area until some years after Kenya’s 1963 Independence. It was closed and culturally protected, so North Pokot was pretty much caught in a time warp. We were the first white people to go in after the government opened the area” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 27).

For the people living in Pokot, the place is central and important, but for outsiders it is a little-known backwater, a preserve for a dying and exotic culture, and according to Jane



Hamilton, “a far corner of the earth, a place that time had forgotten” (2019, p. 10). For a Western audience, the use of “remote” is nearly synonymous with “other,” a concept in postcolonial theory championed by Edward Said (1978). “One of Said’s most important insights was that techniques of othering were a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the West and the rest... Colonial discourses extended and cemented the divisions between Europe and its colonies” (McEwan, 2008, p. 124). The colonial legacy of “othering” is evident in Pokot’s perceived geography as remote, isolated, and lonely, and the missionary’s perception of their place “out here” (Collins, 1940; Totty, L., 1942, 1945, 1948, 1951; Price, 1955; Totty, A., 1956). The theme of Pokot’s remoteness recurs throughout the mission discourse, building a place in Western imagination that is not only geographically far away but distant in almost every other way. The Western concept of remoteness has the power to change the perspective of place for the locals, as well. According to the AIM radio program, Letter from Africa, the nature of Pokot as a closed district during colonialism had the effect of separating Pokot “from all of civilization. They [the Pokot people] didn’t even know what the rest of Kenya was like, in fact they thought Kenya was another foreign country as far as they were concerned” (AIM, n.d. a.). This identification of place continued beyond independence as Lesorogol (2008) described in her study of the Samburu, a nearby pastoralist group:

northern Kenya in general, is considered, by other Kenyans but also to some extent by the inhabitants themselves, as a peripheral area of the country. For example, as a ‘hardship area [like West Pokot], government workers posted to Samburu draw a special allowance on top of their normal salary and benefits... People from ‘down country’ (as the central parts of Kenya are referred to) perceive a place like Samburu as being very far away from them both physically and culturally. (p. 22)

The physical geography of Pokot is a lesson in contrasts, so it stands to reason that the missionaries’ descriptions of the landscape are, as well. Even the people of the Pokot are historically broken into two distinct groups based on the Pokot landscape: the highland Pokot,

who take advantage of the cooler, more well-watered elevations through prioritizing farming and tend to be less nomadic, and the lowland Pokot, who live in the hot, semi-arid lowlands and focus their economies on pastoralism. In contrast to the Western predilection for cooler, moister climates and preference for a farming economy, the traditional Pokot prize their animals above all else and often demeaned their highland kin who use the spade. The binary of good and bad livelihoods and climates perceived by the missionaries were flip-flopped in this perspective of the majority of Pokot.

**Lowlands.** The journey from highland to lowland was often described in jarring terms that underscored Pokot's remoteness, the difficulty of accessing the place from the outside. Radharc Films (1966) described the journey as "the long and dangerous descent into the forbidden valley." Dr. David Webster (2013) explained, "At Nasokol the road to Amudat plunges down a steep and rough escarpment, from a cool, green altitude of seven thousand feet to the hot thornscrub plains at three thousand feet" (p. 73). Likewise, according to Jane Hamilton (2019), "Reaching the valley at the bottom was like falling through a time crack" (p. 12). Holy Rosary Sister, Marita Malone, added to her description a comparison of the dry and wet season conditions: "Chokingly dusty in the dry season and a viscous red slop in the wet season, the road had barely clung to a steep mountainside as it descended..." (Malone, 2018, p. 2). As is common, one of the most dramatic descriptions came from a mission publication, written by a visiting journalist rather than an individual missionary living in Pokot. The Kiltegan Missionaries' *Africa Magazine* (1966) described the journey this way:

Looking back on after an interval of several months, that night drive to Ortum has some of the qualities of a nightmare. The road (or rather the rutted track that called itself a road) snaked and twisted its way up and down bumps and hollows, around hairpin bends, over narrow bridges, through dry and not so dry river beds. Every now and then a dim

shape moved in the shadows beyond. Once it was a tribesman brandishing a nine-foot spear in no very friendly fashion. Once it was—or looked very like—a leopard. On either side, where the lights did not reach, was inky blackness and one never knew whether it represented a gentle slope or a sheer thousand-foot drop to the valley beneath. (Africa Magazine, 1966)

The lowland areas were not just climatically uncomfortable for early missionaries, they were also more commonly subjected to malarial mosquito infestations and outbreaks of diseases. In consequence, early missionaries concentrated in the highland areas. The BCMS began their mission work in the lowland area of Kacheliba. The Housdens reported, “The climate is a very difficult one, and we rely on your prayers that the Lord will keep us in good health. Already I have been down with fever for a week, and I am very grateful to have got over it so soon. Annie was very bad, and after being ill over a month with various complications following the fever, we had to go away to our nearest Doctor, 150 miles away” (Housden, 7 October 1931). The Tottys had a similar experience. However, after a few years of the heat and near-constant illness for Lawrence, the Tottys moved the mission up the escarpment to “10 acres of virgin bush and thanked our God for taking us out of Kacheliba’s burning plain” (Totty, n.d., p. 40). Dr. Peter Cox, too, had health difficulties related to “the unhealthy environs of Amudat” (Webster, 2013, p. 72). Dr. David Webster questioned the wisdom of following his BCMS predecessors to Pokot, “If Amudat was so unhealthy why should we, with baby Andrew and another due in four weeks, take that risk?... We, the new missionaries, supposedly eager to do God’s will, felt angry and rebellious. It all seemed so unfair. We had heard tales of Amudat – its remoteness and primitiveness – and I wondered how Rosemary would cope with that sort of life and isolation” (Webster, 2013, p. 72).

The opinion of Dr. David Webster was not unique; the physical geography of lowland Pokot shocked and repelled many new missionaries. As we have seen, Fr. Leo Staples’ first

impression of lowland Pokot stood in stark contrast to the affection he felt for Pokot later in his career. Holy Rosary Sister Marita Malone was surprised at her emotional response upon finally reaching her mission field in Ortum in 1960, “A sense of claustrophobia and isolation caught hold of me as I looked out on a barren landscape hemmed in on all sides by steep, craggy mountain walls. My heart sank to my boots. How could I ever survive in that godforsaken place so thoroughly cut off from the outside world?” (Malone, 2018, p. 180). When Dr. John Malcolm took over at the BCMS Amudat Hospital for Dr. David Webster while he and his family were on sabbatical in 1971, David received a letter from him: “After their first few days John confided in me that, in spite of all our attempts to prepare them for Amudat, they had been ‘absolutely shattered’ by everything – the isolation, the basic living conditions, the heat” (Webster, 2013, p. 178). Jane Hamilton felt similarly on her first visit in 1976, “No lush green fields, no banana trees, only the monotonous brown vegetation of the flat arid bush land along the Kenya-Uganda border... I looked around dismayed wondering how anyone could live in this desolate place” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 12). Andy DuPont described the place as desolate, highlighting the discomfort of his visit in 2009, “It was hard to sleep. I had left my shoes outside the tent, and in the morning the termites had started building a mound over my shoes. It was just horrible!” (Andy DuPont, personal communication, 9 June 2019). Olivia DuPont visited Pokot a year later with a similar perception of the place, “At night you could hear the termites scratching on the bottom of the tent. It was the drought season. Heidi and I literally sat on the bench and sweat and drank water as best we could, but it was miserably hot” (Olivia DuPont, personal communication, 9 June 2019).

The place of lowland Pokot often lived up to the Western construct of authentic or real Africa, a perception that “Africans should blend in an aesthetically dominated European image

of African landscape” (Wels, 2002, p. 55), similar to the landscape I described on page 1. When Dr. David Webster’s sister-in-law visited, he remarked,

Then it was time to introduce June to the real Africa. It was down on to the hot plains, to Amudat. She went to sleep that first night to the sound of Pokot singing in a nearby manyatta, and the grunting of a lion... But if June thought that life in Amudat was different she had a shock coming to her when I took her on safari to our dispensary at Katabox. Here she really saw life in the raw... June was mesmerized by the skin-clad or naked people, the smell of unwashed bodies, the total lack of any facilities, the dust and dirt, the flies, the heat. (Webster, 2013, p. 214)

Interestingly, Dr. David Webster clearly contrasts the psychology and practicality of the perception of remoteness on the place of Pokot after independence: “Amudat is remote and isolated, and yet we found ourselves hosts to an enormous number of visitors. The reason was that its isolation is enough to be exciting, romantic, ‘the real Africa’; and yet it is accessible by any reasonably sturdy motor vehicle” (Webster, 2013, p. 137). Sister Marita described the same phenomenon of expatriate adventure seekers showing up in Ortum to “see life in the raw” (Malone, 2018, p. 191). An *Africa Magazine* article augmented David and Marita’s descriptions of the “different,” “raw,” “real Africa,” equating the perceived ideal climate in the highlands with Europe and the harshness of the lowlands with Africa. “Up on the heights of Tartar, it is always like a good summer day in Ireland. It is quite cool at night, and frost is no rare occurrence. But down in the Suk Valley it is unmistakably ‘Africa,’ and the exhilarating atmosphere of the upper heights is not more” (Africa Magazine, 1955, p. 7). The binary is clear: the perceived good, appropriated, and the perceived bad, exotic or African.

While the prevailing discourse surrounding lowland Pokot discussed its heat, dryness, and unhealthiness, the descriptions were not all negative. Not one to complain, Tom Collins’s perception of the Pokot landscape was descriptive ending with a hint at the complimentary, “Stones, dust, mud, thorn bush and cedar forest, flat plains and mountains make up the scenery,

much of which is very grand” (Collins, 1947). In fact, Tom Collins’s doctors recommended the lower altitudes of the Pokot lowland as healthier for his heart condition than the highlands.

Likewise, Annette Totty reminisced about the ‘hot plains’ of Kacheliba, “I thought of the wet season, where limes grew down by the river... I thought of Kacheliba’s lovely tall Jacaranda<sup>66</sup> trees, with their purple flowers, and the Frangipani shrub with its fragrant scent growing at the foot of the 39 steps which led up to our house” (Totty, n.d., p. 79).

The descriptions change as the missionaries’ perceptions of the place move from mission field to home<sup>67</sup>. Kathy Tierney remarked, “We feel this is home. Kamketo and the Pokot area is our family and community. We never truly think of it as any different than where anyone else lives until someone says, ‘yesterday, two men were chased by a hyena’” (Tierney, 2017, Nov.). After thirty-four years in Pokot, to the Tottys it was a “beloved” place, and like Sister Marita Malone, they longed to stay longer. Friend and fellow priest Fr. Tom McDonnell described Fr. Leo Staples’ commitment to the place of the Pokot: “You are the oldest man in our Society, St. Patrick’s, at the moment. Our main home here in Kiltegan accommodates a community of over sixty old men, the majority of them are over seventy years, now retired and in many ways happily living out their autumn years as they move towards death. You are heading back again! All are amazed at you setting out again to Northern Kenya and to West Pokot” (personal communication, 23 June 2019).

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<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, jacaranda trees are as Kenyan as the British colonists themselves. Transplanted from their original home in South America, jacaranda trees were planted all over British-colonized Africa for no other reason than their beautiful lavender blossoms. A brief history of and personal reflection about the jacaranda tree was written by Kenyan writer Carey Baraka (2019) and can be found here: <https://gay.medium.com/hashtag-jacaranda-propaganda-2f20ac6958b9>.

<sup>67</sup> As individuals are able to make more mission trips to Pokot and groups can come and go without a sustained experience in or commitment to the region, it stands to reason that perceptions of these short-term visitors and missionaries never have the opportunity to evolve and change. First impressions of the place that tend to reflect binaries of good vs. bad and otherness stay intact and are potentially communicated to the West without the nuances that long term missionaries were able to communicate over time.

**Highlands.** While the lowlands required acclimation, the missionaries immediately appreciated the landscape of the Pokot highlands. When the Tottys moved to the highlands along the escarpment, they thanked God for “bringing us to this promised land – worth a guinea a smell said the boys!” (Totty, n.d., p. 40), drawing parallels from the Bible to explain their appreciation of their new environment. A government official described southern West Pokot of the 1950s: “The drive from Kitale to Kapenguria — some 20 miles away — was pleasant, and the lush green farms of the White settlers were a soothing spectacle to behold until we started making our way into the West Suk district proper. The little township of Kapenguria lies on the slopes of the Cherangani Hills, and carved a place for itself in the history of Kenya, since it was here in 1952 that the principal trial of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and his associates was held” (Maciel, 1985). Maciel’s short description highlighted two interesting aspects of place, from the perspective of a colonial official, about highland Pokot to share with a Western audience: its proximity to the White Highlands and its distinction of being the place of trial and imprisonment of the country’s first president while he was still just seen by the powers-that-be as a rebel and a rabble rouser. Regardless, the highlands of Pokot were, like the lowlands, a ‘remote’ colonial outpost of limited governmental and mission activity. The highland Catholic mission in “Tartar is about 30 miles north of Kitale... The mission is about 6,000 feet above sea-level, and it is situated in an African Reserve, where no Europeans apart from government officials and missionaries are allowed to reside” (Africa Magazine, 1955, p. 5-6).

In addition to its more moderate climate, the highlands along the southern escarpment were home to a Pokot population that was more easily accessed, literally and figuratively, by missionaries. Frs Tom McDonnell and Leo Staples discussed the different populations of Pokot:

“What made the mountain dwellers so different to those living in the valley? We always saw them as settled, more stable and easier to work with. Was it because they had food and security?” asked Fr. Tom McDonnell. Fr. Leo answered, “The people living in the lowlands generally lived very close to one another, in village gatherings; they were very much more traditional than the mountain people. The people on the mountains had their own little plots of fertile land, they had food security and they lived in peace. They could comfortably live away from one another” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). The highland Pokot were more similar to the African populations that were preferred by the West; they were not highly nomadic and engaged at least a little in an agrarian economy. The Pokot living near Tartar in the highlands, *Africa Magazine* (1955) explained, “live, not in villages, but in isolated compounds; but at least they are stationary” unlike their lowland kin who “move around with their herds where the grazing is good” (p. 6), making them difficult to evangelize.

While the southern end of West Pokot proved to be more accessible and, thus, the jumping off point for several mission groups, the Catholics began to move north along the narrow, rugged, mountainous ridge that runs the length of West Pokot. Fr. Leo Staples established the Catholic mission of Ortum in a valley in the midst of that ridge and in that rough terrain had to access the highland areas by foot to establish outstations. Fr. Leo described the landscape as it changed from the 1950s to the 2000s,

There were no roads going up into the hills. We were living at 4000 feet in Ortum; Psigor was 3,000 ft. Many of our future outstations were at 8,500 feet up the hills where most of the people lived. There were no mosquitos up at that altitude, it was cooler and water easier to find. Moreover, there were no Government officials chasing them to pay tax and other dues.... Our ambition was to get to where the people lived and worked – that is why we went there. So God gave us the courage to get there. God is great! They now have roads to get to those places. Roads and electricity in those places – never in our wildest dreams would we have thought that roads and electricity would get there – not in our time. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).



Philip Price wrote significantly about the beauty of the Mwino Valley, located almost directly east over the ridge from the Catholic mission at Ortum.

The Mwino Valley is literally a dream valley. Imagine it, about five miles wide with wooded mountains on each side, down which waterfalls cascade for hundreds of feet. Along its twelve-mile length, flows a cool river which begins as a bubbling mountain stream and ends a mighty torrent. Flowering trees of rich colours abound everywhere, particularly along the course of the river. And listen too for the songs. Nature's are, perhaps, the sweetest... But from dawn until dusk, and through the hours of darkness are heard the songs of men. Pokot songs from Pokot manyattas high in the hills. Indeed a valley of enchantment and song. (Price, 2011, p. 3)

While his perception of the place was bucolic and poetic, Philip juxtaposes the landscape with the spiritual environment. His tone changes as he references the binaries of a Christian spiritual battle that he perceives in the valley: "But what are the songs they sing? This place of Utopian beauty is a strong hold of the Enemy of the souls of men, and the songs they sing are sung in his honor... Strange and shrieking songs that sound odd to European ears echo and reecho around the valley, regular to the beating of clapping hands, monotonous and eerie" (Price, 2011, p. 3). To Philip, the people did not fit into the "Eden" of Africa, described earlier (see Neumann, 1998).

Like Philip, Art Davis communicated an appreciation of the wilderness of Pokot to the exclusion of the Pokot people themselves. While Philip sees the Pokot people as a mar on the landscape because of their spiritual depravity, Art negates their presence in the "real Africa" entirely. According to Art, the wildness of the land was really how Africa should be; development somehow spoiled it: "During our early trips to Churo it was still a wild and unspoiled place in East Pokot. We would meet elephant or buffalo on the way in through the Laikipia Ranch adjacent to Pokot. We also saw lion on occasion" (Davis, 2011, p. 98). While hunting, Art describes the stars and lack of civilization: "This was a taste of 'Old Africa,' unspoiled by man" (Davis, 2011, p. 99). Davis was unwittingly participating in the Edenic myth

of Africa produced by colonial thought and perpetuated by colonial nostalgia that embraced the “wild and natural environment which was no longer available in the domesticated landscapes of Europe’ (Anderson and Grove 1987, 4)... Incorporated in the Eden myth is the myth of the ‘noble savage’ and the concept that ‘The primitive is picturesque’” (Neumann, 1998, p. 18). While many missionaries describe and qualify the landscape of their mission field and despite Philip and Art’s sentiments described above, for most missionaries the people take precedence, and development is a beneficial addition to the place of the Pokot.

The spiritual void described by Philip Price in the place of the Pokot was mirrored in Dr. Peter Cox’s perception of a void of Christian run services. Peter’s perception of the place was professionally motivated to meet a need that had been left after independence. Pokot had been a closed district during colonialism, keeping outsiders out and insiders in, but now that it was open and Kenya was independent, it became clear that outsiders, particularly medical professionals, had no real interest in accessing it. “It quickly became apparent that the [Anglican] Diocese had something to offer the government - for they were up against a fundamental problem - no-one would go into the NFD! Doctors, medical assistants and dressers posted to these hospitals lived for one thing - to get out! Surely we Christians could meet the challenge?” (Cox, 1967). The place of the Pokot continued to be a place of lack for the Western missionary, lack of Christianity, lack of development, lack of water. These perceptions of lack within the place of Pokot would directly affect the strategies used by missionaries (discussed in the next chapter).

### *People*

Perception of landscape and place informed and intermingled with the missionaries’ perception of the Pokot people. BCMS missionary Philip Price explained, “Because of their

isolation the Pokot people are conservative to a marked degree, preferring the ways of their fathers to most of the amenities afforded by modern development... Avoiding living in villages, the Pokot prefers just the company of his own family, and each homestead is separated from its neighbor by anything from a few hundred yards to a couple of miles” (1970, p. 8). The theme of remoteness of place was easily paired with perceptions of primitivity in the people. In fact, the remoteness of the place explained its primitivity, highlighted its exoticism, playing off of colonial nostalgia, and at the same time helped legitimize the work of the missionaries to their home constituents. Likewise, a postcolonial reading of the missionary discourse around perceptions of the Pokot people uncovered themes of conservatism, heathenism, wandering, and misogyny. These themes have their roots in the earliest texts, but as both the Pokot’s and Western missionaries’ experiences and perceptions of culture changed, the discourse evolves over time, presenting these themes in nuanced, more modern ways. Some wording has merely been replaced to reflect trends in speech and rejection of negative connotations that had developed over time, for instance substituting the term *unreached* for the archaic *heathen*. Other concepts are abandoned for new ones based on a change in perspective, illustrated by the shift of focus toward measures of development in a place and away from characterizing people groups as uncivilized or primitive.

Most missionaries begin by describing the people like they described the landscape—explaining the Pokot in terms of visual aspects of culture and lifestyle, some based on the information they had received from other sources, usually Western. These descriptions highlight the exotic, the “otherness” of the Pokot. One of the first missionary descriptions of the people, lifestyle, and landscape in the Pokot area comes from the Housdens in 1931:

The people are very primitive, for the men wear nothing at all, save a link of beads and a snuff box, and the women smear their bodies in a rancid grease, and clothe themselves in

skins. They live in little huts that you have to crawl into on hands and knees. They live on the coarse native meal, blood, and milk. During the dry weather they roam about from place to place finding water for their cattle and sheep. They are quite a friendly people and seem to be contented under British rule. (Housden, 1931)

They continued their letter remarking on the intelligence they had received, “We have heard much of the hardness of heart and indifference of these Suk people” (Housden, 1931), illustrating how perceptions of one become disseminated to the many. Annette Totty remarked on what she and her husband had heard of Pokot culture, “It has been said of the cattle men that they live ‘on their cattle, for their cattle and by their cattle’” (Totty, n.d., p. 5). Similarly, Fr. Leo Staples discussed his impressions of the Pokot men on his first visit to the contact zone in 1953: “It was very primitive... Men wore skimpy loin cloths. Each and every man carried a bow-and-arrow or spear because the wild animals were all over the place” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Sister Marita Malone’s description, thirty years after the Housdens’ report, of the women’s “native costumes” was both elaborate and reflected on the author’s initial reaction, “They were wearing... animal-skin skirts and concentric collars of blue, red, and yellow beads strung on wires. Their breasts were bare. The rancid-smelling oil they applied around their necks and on their plaited hair was extracted from the native castor oil plant; the earthy odor almost burned my uninitiated nostrils. From their ears hung large circles of brass earrings, the weight of which stretched large open loops into the lobes” (Malone, 2018, p. 181).

As time passed and missionaries had more experience at the contact zone, descriptions became less superficial, sometimes to the surprise of the missionaries themselves. Annette Totty’s description of her first impression of the Pokot was immediately followed by expressing how her perception changed: “Finally, we crossed the Suam river and arrived in Kacheliba to be greeted by A.B. [Buxton] and Mr. and Mrs. Housden... Last but not least was the Chief. He had added an extra ostrich feather for the occasion, but apart from that he wore no clothes. He carried

two spears and a little stool. A.B. introduced me to him but I felt so embarrassed I did not know where to look, but after a while one is not conscious that the men wear no clothes. They were truly nature's gentlemen" (Totty, n.d., p. 12). Philip Price had a similar transformation of perception: "The first day's journey to a place called Lomut took about four hours and there was ample opportunity to chat with the men. Although they were in many ways rough and wild, I found them very likeable and often enjoyed their company" (Price, 1970, p. 18). Fr. Leo's perspective also changed as illustrated in a 1966 *Africa Magazine* article that juxtaposes an outsider's ethnocentric first impression of the Pokot with that of a more seasoned missionary: "To any criticisms of the people, he [Leo] replies indignantly that they are the finest people in the world when you get to know them" ('Radharc,' 1966).

The visual impression of the Pokot is especially prioritized in the context of film. A 1966 Catholic Radharc film highlighted "unique" and "traditional" scenes; however, by 1991, an AIM film conceded that the exotic view of material culture was becoming harder to find. After a detailed description of "traditional" dress, the film stated, "But nowadays many Pokot are giving up traditional dress and wearing western clothing" (AIM mission video, 1991). As the stark visual differences that separated the Pokot from Westerners began to subside and images of pastoralist warriors like the Maasai became more ubiquitous in popular Western culture, the descriptions of the Pokot shifted from setting the Pokot apart from the West to highlighting their admirable characteristics. The approach of missionaries to the place of the Pokot became less voyeuristic and supposedly objective, based on Enlightenment theories of truth; missionaries' perceptions showed them in relationship with the Pokot and, themselves, embedded within the landscape. "In truth they are a warm, hospitable people... The Pokot warriors are strong and swift. Their survival depends on them being vigilant, alert and ready for action at all times"

(Hamilton, 2019, p. 119). Kathy Tierney comments on her photography of the Pokot people, “The photos I got of many people and things in Pokot at that time are truly stunning but, how do you get a bad photo of these beautiful people.” (Tierney, 2019). “They were very wonderful people” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

### *Themes of perceptions*

Many of the more common themes heard in the mission record have the effect of highlighting the binaries of the normal and the exotic, the Westerner and the Pokot, the central and the periphery. The topics that repeated themselves through the Pokot mission discourse often started with a word and evolved to a theme. Perceptions of the Pokot people led missionaries to comment on their primitivity (lack of development), conservatism (resistance to outsiders), heathenism (‘unreached’ condition), wandering (aimlessness), and misogyny (gender inequality). The themes display condescending perceptions of nearly the whole culture and way of life of the Pokot: how they are, how they interact with outsiders, how they believe, how they work, and how they interact with each other. However, the discourse shows multidimensionality of placeness revealed through the ambivalence of language and evolving missionary perceptions.

**Primitive/Undeveloped.** As we have already seen in many missionary quotations above, the most common theme concerning the Pokot people found in the mission discourse was “primitivity.” Oxford (2020) has three definitions of the adjective “primitive” that shed light on different aspects and time periods of the mission discourse. The first definition, “Relating to, denoting, or preserving the character of an early stage in the evolutionary or historical development of something” relates strongly to the Enlightenment view of history as explained by

missionologist and anthropologist Paul Hiebert: science and Christianity “saw history as directional—with an origin, a progression or regression, and a culmination in an ideal state, whether that state arrived through redemption or development” (Hiebert, 1994, p. 78). Social Darwinism grew out of this belief and strongly influenced missionary perspective. Like Jane Hamilton’s description of the Pokot valley being like a “crack in time,” some missionaries and colonial officials alike viewed the Pokot as a less developed, less evolved version of humanity. The second and third definitions of primitive relate less to evolutionary or historical development and more to economic and technological development. The second states, “Having a quality or style that offers an extremely basic level of comfort, convenience, or efficiency,” and the third is like it, “Not developed or derived from anything else.” Another related word, “civilized” is used often in its binary, to compare the West to the Pokot people and is defined as “at an advanced stage of social and cultural development.” As Sister Marita Malone’s preliminary visit to Pokot came to an end, she “breathed a sigh of relief the day we eventually left and climbed the escarpment to gulp in the fresh, cool air of the highlands and interact with civilization once more” (Malone, 2018, p. 184). While certain words go in and out of favor, the discussion around primitivity, (un)civilization, backwardness, and (un)development is a focus of mission discourse around perceptions of Pokot and the Pokot people.

In her memoir, Annette Totty introduced her beloved Pokot with an interesting duality: “They are, or shall we say they were, a very primitive tribe living in N.W. Kenya. They were a warrior tribe but none the less likeable for that, they were warm hearted and full of fun though very poor in this World’s goods” (Totty, n.d., p. 2). Her perspective communicates a duality of half-devil and half-child, as popularized in Rudyard Kipling’s 1899 poem “The White Man’s Burden.” Lawrence Totty, in a letter thanking the American Christian organization, Gospel

Recordings, for sending vinyl records of the gospel in the Pokot language, described the Pokot as “very backward and primitive people.” (Totty, L., 1955). Likewise, Philip Price commented in another letter to the same organization, “I am enclosing a photograph of a group of our people listening to a recording under the shade of a tree. So primitive are our folks that one of the two women was timid at the sight of the camera, and hid behind one of the men – you can just see her legs!” (Price, 1955). Even after years at the contact zone, Dr. Peter Cox resignedly stated, “To sum up, we face apathy and slackness in our church, together with a strong Roman challenge backed by money, men and drive. All this and the same old primitive conservative mind” (Cox, 1967).

The AIM produced a radio program in the 1950s and 1960s for potential mission supporters. The program entitled “Letter from Africa: Missionaries Explore Pokot” capitalized on exotic and superlative descriptions of the Pokot landscape, and the program went on to describe the Pokot people as “extremely primitive” (AIM, n.d. b.) Later in the broadcast, the announcer described a group of Pokot women chanting and praying for rain. As the women became more and more excited, “They came charging at us, almost like wild animals” (AIM, n.d. b). The duality of humanity illustrated in this sentence degrades the Pokot from primitive out of the realm of humanity entirely. The women are equated to “wild animals,” a way to describe the superlative of their primitivity. The announcer pointed out that the women claimed to know God and did not want any outside input, highlighting their conservative approach to new knowledge being offered. Interestingly, outside of the illustration of the dancing women, the radio program emphasized the Pokot’s desire for outside help, rather than their indifference or hostility, in order to underscore the need for a missionary presence in Pokot.



With the use of similar imagery of wildness, Philip Price described a conversation with a Pochon: “With matted hair partly daubed with mud, various ornaments dangling from his ears, a plug sticking out from his lower lip, he looked a wild figure as he stood up, with a piece of skin knotted across one shoulder. He waved his arms about wildly to emphasize his point” (Price, 1970, p. 454). Jane Hamilton concurred, calling “...the Pokot tribe, one of the wildest, most resistant people groups in Kenya... one of the most combatant warrior tribes in Kenya” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 34). Likewise, Jane described the perception she and her husband brought with them to Pokot: “When we went to Pokot land, we thought we were going into a forgotten place and would be lost in the wilderness of need and anonymous suffering of the people” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 1). Philip Price related another story of an elderly Pokot man who befriended Philip’s toddler son: “‘Old Matalong’ was a frequent visitor. We sometimes wondered if he had stepped right out of the stone age into our house... He was Andrew’s friend in particular. At his baptism Andrew had received a Pokot name. Whenever old Matalong arrived he would repeatedly call the name, ‘Pughisyu! Pughisyu!’ until Andrew appeared” (Price, 1970, p. 32). Old Matalong seems the perfect personification of the devil/child duality described by Kipling (1899) and implied by Annette Totty. Likewise, the wilderness of the place and wildness of the people, echoing themes of primitivity and uncivilization throughout the mission discourse, is paired with both the Pokot’s resistance to outside influence and missionaries’ perception of Pokot need.

Through stories and colorful, often exotic, descriptions, missionaries highlighted the cultural practices of the Pokot to show the need for outside influence, whether resisted or embraced, to their supporters at home. For many missionaries, Pokot was perceived as “untouched by civilization or by the gospel message” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 21), paving the way

for mission-led development initiatives alongside evangelism (discussed in detail in the following chapter). In an AIM mission video, Ray Davis talked about the traditional medical practices, in conjunction with a belief in diviners and curses, that left dehydrated children without proper care. Children often did not receive the medical attention they needed and would die, and their mothers were viewed by their community as cursed. Ray qualified, “Though this sounds cruel, remember this comes from fear. They have never heard of Jesus.” Then the music started, evoking pity, “They’ve never heard of Jesus. They’ve never called his name... they need someone to tell them just what living's really for<sup>68</sup>” (AIM mission video, 1991). Kathy Tierney explained in a newsletter how she attempted to use her nursing training to fill voids in medical services and religious understanding, “Chesapin is our most primitive Church. The last clinic I did there made me so sad. I went away wondering what I could do so they would understand that boiling the water is a major way to help with the huge number of skin diseases or to keep the flies away that are causing eye diseases... When we drive away from Chesapin, we feel that we need a lifetime to reach them for Jesus. Gaining their trust is huge, but the Lord wants them more than his life” (Tierney, September 2016). The ‘primitive’ medical practices of the Pokot are exposed by the Western missionaries, effectually setting up the Other as an exotic object to be marveled at, pitied, and helped.

The use of the term ‘primitive’ began to fall out of favor with missionaries as a descriptor of the Pokot people at the same time word’s popularity began to decline worldwide. The word itself had its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s and then began to be used more infrequently. Because the first definition of ‘primitive’ harkens to the enlightenment perspective of history being linear and directional, its use in describing people seemed to undermine their humanity and

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<sup>68</sup> “They’ve Never Heard of Jesus” by Scott Wesley Brown (1988)

worth. Instead, primitive began to be used to describe the place or the living conditions, as seen above in the second and third definitions, correlating to the development of Pokot rather than an essentializing perspective of the Pokot people. This perspective of primitivity in Pokot was often blamed on the colonial mandate to keep Pokot as a closed, isolated district. Fr. Leo Staples explained, “I can’t leave out the fact that being a closed area had a detrimental effect for years and years on the Pokot and on development. There was no education in the reserve. Nobody was allowed in unless they had a special pass – even myself I had a special identity card” (personal communication, 23 July 2019). The primitive or undeveloped conditions were not, in the opinion of Fr. Leo, the fault of the Pokot people themselves:

The people inside never knew there was a world outside, and they were completely happy. You can’t desire something better, or have ambitions, unless you have seen it or at least heard about it... They were isolated from the outside world. The outside world was going on and improving all the time. When we independence came, the Pokot people were way behind the other people in Kenya. This had a very detrimental effect. (Personal communication, 23 July 2019)

According to Kathy Tierney, the lack of development due to their remoteness had an effect on the Pokot’s reputation within their country as they “are considered the least of all of Kenya’s tribes” (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, 1 Nov. 2019).

Nearly four decades after Kenya’s independence, the perceived “remoteness” of Pokot, geographically, developmentally, and culturally, remained largely unchanged. In 2002, getting to Fr. Michael Dillon’s parish is described as “something else. Even though it is only 60 miles from Kitale, the journey took us three hours” over “dirt tracks we had to follow over the mountains and through dried-up riverbeds” (Ryan, 2002). Andy DuPont described his first trip to Asilong, illustrating the pairing of remoteness of place with “primitivity” of the people. After leaving his wife Olivia behind due to the potential danger of the region and going through the checkpoint that for all intents and purposes indicated they were leaving the protection of the Kenyan

government, Andy pointed out that the car of Pastor Edward, Andy's host from a Nairobi-based ministry,

wasn't really suited for the trip. We had trouble getting over some of the bumps into Asilong, and we got stopped by some of the young kids who just happened to be going through one of their cultural rituals, where they put some paint on their faces and wear some animal skins; it's sort of the young boys' rite of passage. And they're supposed to stop foreigners and demand things of them... They stood across the road and stopped us... None of them speak English and none of us speak Pokot, and we're not going to give them anything and just kept going. That was an interesting introduction to West Pokot. (Andy DuPont, personal communication, 9 June 2019)

While employed increasingly less frequently, the concept of primitivity has been significant in the mission discourse about the Pokot and in the larger discourse about Africa (see Harries, 2007; Keim, 2009; Filippello, 2017; Ngeiywo, 2018). Discussions of primitivity help build a certain sense of place in Western imagination that focuses on lack and legitimizes the need for mission presence. While this sense of place underscores the power differential between the outsiders and the insiders, it also reinforces the sacrifice and potential discomfort or danger—real or perceived—for the missionaries.

**Conservativism.** The conservatism of the Pokot was and, in some ways, continues to be a ubiquitous theme in colonial and academic texts alike. According to anthropologist Barbara Bianco, most colonial “administrators attributed the region’s backwardness to the conservatism of its people” (1992, p. 46). In 1969, K.D. Patterson centered his master’s thesis around the concept of Pokot conservatism: “The Pokot of Western Kenya 1910-1963: The Response of a Conservative People to Colonial Rule.” Tom Keiyo Ngeiywo in his 2018 religion doctoral thesis, “Effect of Traditional Pokot Worldview on Spread of Christianity among the Pokot,” concluded, “This study established that the Pokot are very acculturated and conservative to their traditional beliefs and practices (traditional worldview) and are tightly bonded together by their traditional

customs and values. In this regard, they prefer their traditional lifestyle to modern amenities provided by the Western lifestyle” (p. 140-1). It was felt that conservatism, bred out of “primitivity,” accounted for the Pokot’s resistance to change. American anthropologist Harold Schneider (as previously quoted) summed up the Pokot’s resistance to outside influences this way: “The Pakot’s determined resistance to British pressure is based upon their satisfaction with their traditional culture and their feeling that it is superior to and more desirable than Euro-American civilization... The core of this conservatism is the feeling that they are inferior to no one and superior to all” (quoted in Patterson, 1969, p. 52).

Early missionaries to the Pokot carried these perceptions of Pokot conservatism and resistance with them, perceptions that were often confirmed in their own dealing with the Pokot. The Tottys were the most outspoken about the unresponsiveness, opposition, and apathy of the Pokot toward the messages of Christianity and modernity they brought. Lawrence wrote the mission society to affirm the BCMS’s work among the Pokot, claiming that other established mission groups considered it “too hard a work” (1945, Dec. 13). Three years later, the message was similar: “We have never known such opposition and apathy in spiritual things—it seems strange that we are faced with both” (Totty, L., 1948, Feb. 3). And again, “Opposition is intense but the Lord is working here” (Totty, L., 1948, April 6). When AIM missionary George Kendagor came to West Pokot, BCMS missionaries told him “the Pokot were very difficult people to reach with the Gospel. They didn’t want to believe and didn’t want to change” (Morad, 1996b, p. 129). George’s response was a departure from the message handed down from colonist<sup>69</sup> to missionary to missionary. He declared “that the Pokot were just like other people. He found them to be responsive people ready to listen and to accept the Word of God. After

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<sup>69</sup> The Housdens noted in 1932 that “The Government say they find the Suk the most difficult tribe in East Africa to administer” (2 November 1932).

interacting with them, teaching and instructing them, they were ready to believe and to leave their old way of life” (Morad, 1996b, p. 129).

Always careful with his speech, Tom Collins refrained from directly describing the Pokot as unresponsive or hostile. In fact, when discussing the Pokot’s response to his message of Christianity, he said, “When the gospel is being preached to them, they seem very attentive and often have intelligent questions to ask” (quoted in Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 138). However, in 1939, long before the end of his mission career, Tom lamented the lack of missionaries in Pokot and his forced (temporary) abandonment of the Pokot mission field while claiming that his evangelical work had been substantial: “If the Lord should come soon, I believe that the Africa Inland Mission could feel that its duty of Evangelising (not Christianising) these people has largely been fulfilled” (Collins, 1939, Nov. 20). The colonial government warned Tom to not go alone into Pokot country because, “the east Pokot had always been regarded as hard terrain, harsh climate, unresponsive and hostile warring community” (Mondi, 2016, p. 47). In the early 1950s, new AIM missionary Dr. Young enthusiastically asked Tom about the Pokot. In Dr. Young’s words, “Tom refused to paint romantic pictures of a work he knew to be hard and tedious, reaching an unresponsive, nomadic people” (quoted in Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 150). At the end of his mission career and life in 1964, Tom confided in his brother-in-law that “he reckoned in all his time in Pokot perhaps only two people had believed in Jesus Christ” (Davis, 2011, p. 97-8).

The Kiltegan fathers experienced the same resistance the Tottys spoke about and Tom Collins alluded to; however, they have had decades of retrospection to put the Pokot’s unresponsiveness in context. Fr. Michael Dillon, who worked with the Pokot for fifty-five years, explained, “They did not want any change. They were happy as they were and wanted to stay

that way. The first 10-15 years were very difficult to find anything that the people were interested in” (Michael Dillon, personal communication, 5 April 2019). For Fr. Tom McDonnell, “It was a challenging area to work in - the people were cautious, suspicious and slow to accept new ideas and our so called ‘modern’ ways of life” (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019). Fr. Leo Staples explained the conflict of interests between the missionaries and the Pokot people in the context of Pokot isolation and conservatism. “The people didn’t want education – when you don’t see a value to a thing, you will never want it, and they were certainly not going to give themselves to it and that was true for all the things we wanted to do with them, e.g. medical work. We seemed to be forcing them to take things we felt were basic rights that all people should have. They had never seen anyone else from outside, nor life outside” (Staples, personal communication, 23 July 2019). The Kiltegan fathers’ perspectives reflect their lengthy commitment to the Pokot as well as their realization of the cultural disconnections between Western and Pokot perception of need, development, and sense of place.

The Pokot’s resistance to outsiders was and continues to be a common theme advanced by government officials, academics, and missionaries alike. Outsiders’ perception of Pokot “conservatism” reinforces itself with images and stories of the traditional and exotic in material culture even though these examples are becoming scarcer. Likewise, as Christianity and development initiatives become more ubiquitous in the landscape, discussions of conservatism harken to early times and help legitimize prolonged missionary presence. Throughout the near century of mission discourse in Pokot, missionaries have responded to Pokot unresponsiveness, apathy, and hostility with a variety of strategies (discussed in the following chapter) and persistence.

**Heathen/Unreached.** The term ‘heathen’ has become synonymous with pious Western missionary fervor of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While now regarded as derogatory in tone, the original meaning just connotes a person who does not follow a major world religion, specifically Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. Even though the use of the term dropped off dramatically at the start of the twentieth century, the early missionaries to Pokot did continue to use it; however, by midcentury, the word was replaced by gentler terms such as unbeliever or the communal term “unreached.” The transition that the discourse underwent between the time of the “heathen” and the “unreached” illustrates a transition of perspective and of the “othering” binary. A heathen might be seen as willfully depraved whereas the unreached seem ignorant, the fault of which falls on the missionary. The binary shifts from good/bad or righteous/evil to knowledgeable/ignorant or messenger/receiver.

In the Pokot mission discourse, the Tottys and Tom Collins employed the term heathen the most in their writings. Lawrence Totty called Pokot a place of “dark heathenism” (Totty, L., 1945, Dec. 13). Early in his mission career, Tom Collins lamented that “so few of the heathen come to [church] services” (1939). Annette Totty, reflecting on the Tottys’ decades of mission service, equated heathenism with evil and declared God’s victory over said evil: “God’s Word had gripped a people, who had been steeped in witchcraft and evil customs” (Totty, n.d., p. 89), and “I marveled to think how God had carved a church out of such raw and heathen material. The Gospel had changed the whole lifestyle of the Pokot” (Totty, n.d., p. 91).

The descriptions of the Pokot’s religious state began to diverge by the 1960s. AIM missionary Art Davis still highlighted Pokot heathen ways without using that term: “For a couple years, there was a big increase in church membership and scores of men and women turned to Christ and away from worshiping and revering their elders, mountains, cows and stars” (Davis,



2011, p. 101). Likewise, the AIM mission video about the Davises' ministry to the Pokot drew heavily from the illustration of missions as a battle: "We are in a spiritual battle for the Pokot tribe. We need your help through your prayers. The majority of the people in East Pokot remain enslaved to their fears of evil spirits and death. They haven't heard of Jesus" (AIM mission video, 1991). Philip Price, too, expressed the void of Christianity as a place of Satan or evil. Philip told a story of being called to assist the "headman" Baponyan who had injured himself while drunk: "Two older men were with him [Baponyan] in his manyatta, both completely naked and drunk. They groveled in the muck of that homestead. Whenever I mentioned the name of Christ they sneered with Satanic mockery and hate" (Price, 1970, p. 16). Fr. Tom McDonnell commented that in his naiveté as a new missionary, his zeal was to bring "religion to the pagans" (personal communication, 19 May 2019). The perspective of the Pokot as pagan or heathen denies any validity of the Pokot's understanding of spiritual or religious truths, a perspective that not only reinforces the place of the Pokot as primitive but also influences the manner in which evangelism was conducted.

For some, like Fr. Tom, the focus of the discourse on traditional Pokot religious beliefs began to shift. Missionaries like Ruth Stranex described the Pokot religious beliefs not in contrast to Christianity but as a way to understand the religious culture of the Pokot: "They [the Pokot] are a very religious people. God and God's spirits dominate their thought and influence all their decisions. From early childhood they understand this dimension. A wife is unable to bear children—a sacrifice is called for. A cattle raid is being planned; what day should it take place? – kill a bull, examine the intestines and 'read' the answer... Calamities are believed to be caused by God who is also the omnipotent One, Who can reverse them again if He so desires" (Stranex, 1977, p. 28). Dr. David Webster, too, felt the importance of recognizing Pokot

spirituality: “They believe in the Supreme Being, Tororut, and they see every event of life – whether birth, death, sickness, drought, rain, famine or disaster – as being inextricably linked with the spiritual. Their customs, culture and whole belief system involves the physical and the spiritual” (Webster, 2013, p. 130).

The Hamiltons’ perspective of spirituality in Pokot underscored the reality of Pokot beliefs, the connection of their belief system to their culture and lifestyle, and the perception of the Pokot as “unreached.” Viewing themselves as harbingers of an important message, Jane described the Hamiltons’ first experiences as missionaries, conducting safaris among the pastoralist people of lowland Pokot: “The thousands of people who lived there had never heard the name of Jesus” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 23). The place described by Jane was one of subsistence and ignorance of Christianity. Further, Jane revealed and reoriented the perceived sense of place that she confronted in her Western supporters:

Snakes and witch doctors were the focus of a lot of the questions we were asked when we were stateside on furlough. Snakes we saw plenty; witchdoctors only a few... People believed in the spells so much that cursed people had been known to simply lie down and die. Strangely, they believed that we white folks were immune to the power of the curses. Our first trips into Pokot we crossed burned sacrifices in the road put there to stop the army trucks from passing. The people believe that our ‘medicine’ was more powerful than the witch doctor. Later on our clinics and western medicine proved that to be true. (Hamilton, 2019, p. 165-1)

Jane’s ambivalent description of Pokot spirituality both exoticizes and normalizes it as well as legitimizing and debunking the power behind it.

In a unique turn in the mission discourse, the Tierneys deemphasize the binary of the Pokot belief system/Christianity. Instead, they claim evidence that the Pokot are actually closer to the Christian biblical legacy than most.

The Pokot were in the wilderness when Moses brought the Israelites. If you read it in the Bible, they were afraid of the hill people, that would [be] the Pokot. When we ask the old men, Mzee, they say they had to leave because there was not enough food with the

thousands of people that Moses brought. They migrated from Egypt down the Nile and are sometimes called the Nile people. They have the story of Moses only his name in Pokot is Lamordisi. He had 12 children escaping from a man-eating giant. They have adopted and adapted many Jewish cultural practices and it is amazing to continue to learn more of them even now. (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, 1 Nov. 2019)

The Tierneys' view of the Pokot as ancient biblical people adds a nuance to the mission perspective that works to both legitimize the history of a people who are often seen through a colonial lens as being static and without history but also appropriates the history of the Pokot into a story with which many Westerners are familiar and consider as part of their religious heritage.

The view of Pokot spirituality strongly informs the strategy of evangelizing that each missionary employed. Like the quality of being primitive, the idea of the heathen has been modernized and upgraded, showing not only a shift in language but one of perspective. While missionary perspective may have changed, Jane Hamilton's discussion of snakes and witch doctors implies that the sense of place created by the heathen discourse might still be alive and well, fading slower in the Western imagination<sup>70</sup> than among the missionaries themselves.

**Wandering.** The colonial reaction to semi-nomadic, pastoralist people, like the Pokot, was largely condescending. "By taming the wildness the British came to tame the primitive African; 'altering the landscape, in other words, asserts social control and advances imperialism'" (Bale & Sang, 1996, p. 98). One of the first projects established by local district commissioners in West Pokot was to teach and establish cultivation practices among the Pokot,

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<sup>70</sup> Popular works of fiction, like Barbara Kingsolver's *Poisonwood Bible*, have had a role in keeping the prototype of the missionary alive in Western culture as, at worst, ethnocentric and heathen-battling and, at best, misguided. An increase in critical depictions of missionaries occurred between WWI and WWII (Scott, 2008). For more information, see Jamie Scott's article, "Missions in Fiction" (2008) which traces the perceptions about missions and missionaries through fictional writing, both Western and nonwestern.

thereby pushing an agenda of sedentarization. “Some primary school textbooks referred to pastoralism as a ‘primitive’ form of agriculture, and the common view was that pastoralists were living a backward lifestyle and needed to catch up with the rest of the country” (Lesorogol, 2008, p. 22). Many missionaries adopted the colonial disdain<sup>71</sup> for pastoralism as primitive. In reality, pastoralism was an adaptation the Pokot made after a period of extreme drought in the region in the nineteenth century. Pastoralism allowed for flexibility and mobility to adjust to ever changing environmental constraints. It was this adaptive mobility that was termed “wandering” in the mission discourse. To wander is to travel “aimlessly” or carelessly, showing lack of intent (Oxford, 2020). The Pokot’s livelihood, based on seasonal transhumance, was a far cry from wandering, but the term functioned to distance the perceiver from the perceived, creating a binary of intentional missionary/haphazard wanderer.

The AIM missionaries tended to use the term the frequently. Tom Collins referenced the “wandering East Pokot” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 42) in the 1930s. The AIM radio programs of the 1960s and 1970s, “Letter from Africa,” qualified the nomadic ways of the East Pokot as wandering, using the word twice in a short paragraph. “These people are extremely primitive. They are very nomadic and wander with their little herds of goats. Some of them, of course, have camels and a few have cattle. They wander about with them looking for food for their animals” (AIM, n.d. b). And again: “People who live there wander from water hole to water hole... to struggle to find life for these animals of theirs” (AIM, n.d.a), underscoring the difficulty of life in the place of the Pokot and implying an easy solution—aimlessness should be replaced by an intentionality, primitivity by civilization, pastoralism by cultivation.

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<sup>71</sup> For more on this topic, see James Scott’s book *Seeing Like a State* (1998), which begins with Scott’s description of the state’s antipathy toward “people who move around” (p. 1). He explains that a state’s efforts at sedentarization are “an attempt to make a society legible” (p. 2).

In 1966, the Catholic *Africa Magazine* described the Pokot in a similar way: “The Pokot tribe who number 50,000 or 80,000 or even 100,000. No one has ever succeeded in counting them. They wander freely amongst their rugged country in search for grazing for their cattle and goats, which are their only form of wealth” (Africa Magazine, 1966). As unknown entities, “the vast and primitive Suk valley and its wandering people” are perceived as unpredictable, aimless, and uncountable (Africa Magazine, 1966).

To BCMS nurse, Ruth Stranex Deeth, the wanderings of the Pokot both connected them to their past and illustrated their disinterest in the colonially imposed boundaries: “Even though Amudat was strictly speaking in Uganda, the nomadic Pokot tribe who lived in the hills and plains around Amudat wandered freely across the Kenya/Uganda border. In fact they were oblivious that there was a border, so the Anglican church in Kenya looked after the whole tribe” (Deeth, 2017, p. 2). Deeth indicated that the Pokot were “untouched by politics and governments” (Deeth, 2017, p. 20), but in place of insufficient government oversight, the wandering Pokot would be looked after by the church.

The use of wandering as a qualifier for the semi-nomadic Pokot seemed to reach its zenith in the 1960s, losing popularity at about the same rate that the Pokot became more sedentary as a result of colonial, postcolonial, and mission agricultural and development projects. However, in 1996, Ray and Jill Davis’ missionary video persists in using the term, describing the Pokot as “nomads who wander from place to place looking for pasture for their livestock” (AIM mission video, 1996). Agricultural strategies, employed first by colonial officials and subsequently by missionaries, continue to encourage a more sedentary population, a quality necessary to achieve other goals of development and evangelism (discussed in the next chapter).

**Gender Inequality.** Fresh from the first wave of feminism that culminated in the right to vote for women in Britain in 1928, early missionaries were startled by the treatment of women in Pokot society. Despite the patriarchal culture and legacy of gender inequality in Britain, Annette Totty felt that progress in equality in Pokot was millennia behind: “The history of Africa is men first and women after. In fact, the woman was simply the chattel of the man even as in the Lord’s day” (Totty, n.d., p. 25). In a letter to the BCMS, Lawrence Totty underscored the mission’s strategy of focusing on girls’ education in “a tribe such as this where women-folk are of such little importance to their men-folk” (Totty, 1939, Dec. 28). He quoted himself again in a letter in 1942 to underscore the importance of girls’ education and to request more funding. BCMS missionary Philip Price showed a more nuanced understanding of women’s roles in Pokot. Philip, who came to the mission field as a single man, hoped for a wife in order “to help me reach the Pokot women. I had made practically no contacts among them and, though they were ‘kept under’ by tradition, they nevertheless exercised a powerful influence in local society” (Price, 1970, p. 20). In their approach to evangelism and provision of education, the BCMS missionaries’ view of gender inequality directly affected their mission strategy.

Rather than using a word or phrase to express their perceptions, missionaries shared stories of women being beaten by their husbands and the cruelty of the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), such a strong symbol within Pokot girls’ coming of age ceremonies. Examples of women being “kept under” seemed to be the norm to missionaries and perceived as a flawed aspect of Pokot culture. While women could be seen as the most vulnerable and the most in need of mission services, another narrative brings some balance. Jane Hamilton spoke of how the hardships facing Pokot women affected their character: “The Pokot women: resilient... tough... feisty... always a quick sense of humor and a zest for life, in the face of the hardest of

times and the most difficult lives one could imagine” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 109). Likewise, while first impressions often led missionaries to an essentialized view of women as pitiable and backward, a prolonged exposure highlighted the humanity of Pokot women. Jane illustrated this perspective: “I walked back to the mission and saw this woman, so culturally different and yet so the same as me. I was always amazed that these women, underneath the goat skins, the tribal beads and the cow fat in their hair, were feminine, caring, hurting, romantic women. And the Lord works in their hearts just like He works in us: He changes lives, gives hope, gives joy, gives meaning to life” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 72-3).

The 2007 Catholic Comboni report illustrated that, in the perception of missionaries working with the Pokot, little had changed for women.

The Pokot are enduring people in adversity, able to live with little. Their society is well organized around their traditions and the authority of the elders. There is tight control on misbehaviour (e.g. adultery, stealing, killings). The roles of women and men are clearly defined. Women in the past did not play an important role in the public eye, but they did influence their husbands and children. Nowadays, they have a greater say in public meetings, though they still remain second class citizens. They have high esteem for their family and off-springs, though in competition with their appreciation of cattle. Their religiosity concentrates on restoring life and keeping harmonious relations among themselves. There is an increasing acceptance of God in their lives, as the one who provides and cares for his creatures. They enjoy Christian prayers, but do not care much for morals outside their traditions. (West Pokot, 2007).

The report continues by suggesting a salve for the wound of inequality: “People need to jump over the taboos that envelop some topics in order to deal with them in an efficient way; this is very true on matters pertaining to gender relations and improvement of the conditions of women” (West Pokot, 2007). In a 2019 newsletter, the unaffiliated mission COPE (Children of Pokot Educational Fund) concurred. The idea of gender-equality, it is perceived, must be brought from the outside and implemented against the cultural grain of Pokot society. “The problems facing the Pokot community are many and varied. For the most part, the segment of the community

most open to change is the women. That being the case, it is so important that the young women be brought up well. We are asking the girls to live counter-culturally on so many levels” (COPE, May 2019)

The perceptions of gender inequality held by missionaries were frequently supported by both Western and African social scientists. Anthropologists Edgerton and Conant (1964) wrote expansively about gender relations among the Pokot in their study “Kilapat: The ‘Shaming Party’ among the Pokot of East Africa.” After an interview with a man explaining that he “beats” his wives who trouble him because he “rules them,” the senior wife replied, “We cannot rule men; we can only hate them” (1964, p. 416). Over fifty years later, in his 2018 dissertation, Tom Ngeiywo drew from interviews with Pokot individuals to come to the following conclusion about gender inequality in Pokot culture:

The study established that male children are more treasured and valued than female children in the Pokot community. The boys are praised and even given more rewards than the female children. The rewards the boys are given include food stuffs, simple toys and even praises. This is the reason why some men in the Pokot community mistreat their wives because they think women are inferior to men. The study found out that most marriages in the Pokot community experience conflicts because some men view women as mere property, and hence they expect them to do only what they are told. This is the reason why, while women are busy working, men are resting, conversing and drinking beer (Mrs Kapkai, interviewed on 7th December 2015). (Ngeiywo, 2018, p. 71)

The stories told by missionaries throughout the 90 years of mission work in Pokot affirm and reaffirm the theme of gender inequality and at times misogyny in Pokot culture. This perception adds to the religious sense of place, prioritizing Western ideals of gender equality in contrast to the rigid gender roles and bias toward the masculine found in Pokot society. Nearly every mission strategy, discussed in the next chapter, is employed to at least partly address this perceived weakness in Pokot culture. For example, the Christian norm of monogamous marriage was stressed for converts in hopes of giving women more value in their marriages; development



in education was believed to empower girls and delay marriage; and medical interventions for women's health, particularly in childbirth, were prioritized.

### ***Cultural Pluralism***

As we have seen, missionaries came to Pokot from cultures—popular, political, and religious—of their own and were confronted with the culture of the Pokot at the contact zone. “While Christianity since St. Paul has been a universal and universalizing religion, in eastern Africa it came as a faith and as a specific set of institutions, part of the dominance of European states over African peoples. From the start, new adherents as well as missionaries have asked how much Africans have had to change to become Christian and how much Christianity has had to change to become African” (Maddox, 1999, p. 25). The themes described above set the stage for the missionaries' struggle concerning how to navigate the contact zone of culture as it relates to the message of Christianity through each individual missionary's lens. Missiologist and anthropologist, Paul Hiebert (1994), described the general missionary perspective, particularly that of the early missionaries:

One of the central problems facing all missionaries is how to deal with cultural pluralism—the fact that peoples put their world together in different ways that are affected by their cultural contexts. We must recognize the greatness of the early missionaries, their commitment to the gospel, and the sacrifices they made. However, for the most part, they were naïve realists [positivists] and idealists. They were convinced that their belief systems were true, and they failed to differentiate the gospel from their own cultural ways. Writing of them Juhnke says: ‘They were too confident of the wholesomeness and goodness of their own culture to see the pagan flaws in their own social and political structures. The mission was strongly influenced by nineteenth-century ideas of progress.... Missionaries believed themselves to be participating in a worldwide crusade of human advancement’ (Hiebert, 1994, p. 46).

The error in current academia today is to stop there, essentializing all missionaries under the banner of ethnocentric destroyers of culture or the personification of the religious arm of the

colonial discourse. This stagnant position overlooks the spectrum of the human experience, one that shows nuances of perspective that range from using Western culture as the touchstone of normalcy and the ultimate objective to the rejection of Western culture. The spectrum also flows through time, as popular and political views of nonwestern cultures changed, missionary perspective did as well. Likewise, mission texts reveal that all missionaries were not just a product of their culture, but many struggled with feelings of ambivalence toward negotiations of culture at the contact zone, negotiations that would affect the place of the Pokot through time and space like Aschroft's (2001) palimpsest and rhizome of place (described in chapter 1).

**Western Culture as 'Normal'.** As one would expect, the earlier missionary texts reveal more evidence of ethnocentrism in the task of missionizing. Morad, in his sympathetic history of the AIM, discussed missionaries' deficiencies in their approach to missions in East Africa, using the missionaries to the Kikuyu people as an example.

Taking the Gospel from one culture to another culture and letting the Gospel transform that culture rather than destroy it and impose an alien culture is a very difficult task, yes, a superhuman one. The missionaries understood the Bible and Christian doctrine very well, but they did not have enough understanding of Kikuyu culture to apply the bible and its teachings effectively. However, because of their confidence in their own knowledge of the Bible and of Christianity and in the superiority of Western culture, the missionaries were unable to recognize their own deficiency... What was needed was greater trust, love, humility, and a willingness to learn from each other on the part of both missionary and African Christian. But as long as we continue to be human beings who have been touched by the Fall, such qualities will always remain in short supply. (Morad, 1996b, p. 96)

Clearly, the themes of remoteness, primitivity, conservativeness, heathenness, wandering, and gender inequality described above originate in the belief that Western culture is normal and Pokot culture is not, a binary of good/bad or normal/abnormal. A few more examples arise from mission textual evidence.

Lawrence Totty enjoyed seeing how the Pokot were amazed by simple innovations of Western technology, like dentures and bicycles (Totty, n.d., p. 19). The perspective is similar to a parent finding amusement in a child's reaction. Annette Totty associated the spread of Christianity with the change in attire for the Pokot: "Such was the impact of the Gospel that we saw no one wearing skins, or carrying spears. It was a treat to see the women wearing dresses and coloured head squares" (Totty, n.d., p. 83). Philip Price praised the use of an English tune over a Pokot one. The former was happy, while the latter was droning and pagan: "As we left they sang for us a Pokot chorus set to an English tune.... It was a happy song, much happier than the droning of pagan psalmody of Pokot tradition" (Price, 1970, p. 11).

In 1932, the Housdens explained about the requirements of the Pokot who showed interest in the mission: "naturally when they come on the Station the natives have to have clothes" (Housden, 2 November 1932). For the Housdens, European propriety was a given for Pokot who were interested in Christianity. Similarly, Art Davis explained that the mission, run by Western and African missionaries, understood the elements of ornamentation worn by Pokot women to be pagan symbols that should not be worn by new Christians<sup>72</sup>.

Fr. Leo Staples mused on the topic of cultural pluralism as he reminisced on his six decades at the contact zone. He recognized that he and other missionaries put a value on certain things that were not valued by the Pokot. Leo recognized the ambivalence in his missionary perspective and strategy, straddling a colonial and postcolonial perspective. A certain sense of

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<sup>72</sup> A non-Pokot, African missionary working with Art insisted that newly converted Pokot women "remove all their beads and bangles and cut their hair, which was corn curls covered in ashes and grease, telling them that those adornments represented pagan elements of their culture." Art explained, "I should hasten to add that these changes were not affected early on, but only after the Njaus had been there many months and even years, befriending the Pokot, teaching them the Word of God and listening to what the new church elders advised about the pagan aspects of their culture. Significantly, making these drastic changes was very effective in keeping these women from returning to their dances, beer making, and traditional ceremonies. (Davis, 2011, p. 100)

paternalism was needed to press Western values on an unreceptive population. He explained that the people resisted education, medical services, and other services: “We were ‘imposing’ a lifestyle upon them, and that violates a general missionary principle that you don’t give people what they don’t want themselves. These were basic rights and we couldn’t see any other way that people would go except to educate them. Medication, revelation and education – they were essential to their growth” (personal communication, 23 July 2019).

While Fr. Leo described bringing in Western education and medicine as unpopular but essential, Jane Hamilton revealed a glimpse of ethnocentric pride in her repetitive praise of the many lives that were saved by American generosity during a time of famine. Morrell Swart’s perspective goes a step more. Not only did she express some ethnocentric pride in the services provided by Western missions, she bemoaned a lack of gratitude from the Pokot:

Some people question the matter of persevering in trying to serve an apparently ungrateful people. From our own experience, to hear a word of thanks in any language, or even to see a person’s face light up because of what one has received, has been far from the normal reaction. In fact, we learned not to expect gratitude for anything. What about Christ and the ten lepers? One thankful heart<sup>73</sup>! That is a high percentage for tribal folks. However, we believe that in obedience to the Great Commission, we must go where God leads, to love and serve in a Christlike way, realizing full well that that way is rarely welcomed, appreciated, or even tolerated in some cases... Even as God sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous, services such as medicines and water systems cannot be withheld until the whole community is Christian. (Swart, 1998, p. 315)

At the end of airing her frustrations, Morrell equates the development brought to Alale to Christianity itself, an association that missionaries face with a range of reactions and ambivalence.

It is important to remember that missionaries are appealing to their home audience, likely Westerners with whom they share a culture and belief system, when they write their memoirs

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<sup>73</sup> Morrell is referring to the story in Luke 17:11-19 where Jesus heals ten lepers but only one comes back to thank him.

and prayer letters. It stands to reason that appeals to the audience's sense of what is normal, just, and fair would accompany the missionaries' petitions for support and lessons in mission activities. Jane Hamilton, for instance, shared a story that revealed the difference in cultural concepts of murder and wife beating. Jane discussed Elizabeth's (the Hamiltons' first convert) reaction to the return of a war party in the late 1970s.

The ones who had made a kill that day would be taken back to their villages and one side of their body, chest, back and arm to the elbow would be cut with arrows to form intricate patterns... The scars would be worn proudly as a badge of honor for the rest of their lives... Then I saw why Elizabeth was crying. Heading this party of warriors was her husband, one of the leading warriors in the area. His wife was one of the leading Christians, thus causing a great gulf between the two of them... Elizabeth had come to believe that the killing was wrong. Once, she had voiced her feelings when he was getting ready to go on a raid, and he beat her so badly that she lost the sight in one eye. (Hamilton, 2019, p. 72-3).

Jane gave a lesson in Pokot culture as it stood in contrast to Western culture. Depicting the need of the Pokot people through the person of Elizabeth further legitimized the Hamiltons' presence in Pokot and justified the support given by those at home. Likewise, COPE (Children of Pokot Educational Fund) appealed for support through its newsletter by describing the culturally different experience with food. The newsletter contrasts American material wealth with the need in Pokot: "It is common practice for people in America to have at least three meals a day, with 'snacks' in between meals. In Pokot, most families are thankful that they have a meal in the evening before they go to bed. Food preparation is simple, but time-consuming because everything is made from scratch. There are no stoves, so people must collect firewood in order to cook their meals" (COPE, July 2018). Again, the binary of us/them is used to educate as well as legitimize mission presence and justify support<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Western aid organizations have had a long and tenuous relationship with how to portray need and garner support. While the 1980s and 1990s were rife with imagery of the "flies in the eyes" suffering child, a move to "upholding the dignity of those who have suffered" has been embraced by many NGOs including Christian aid organizations like World Vision. Read more about World Vision Canada's Brad Saunder's description of his experience of this

For good or bad, right or wrong, Fr. Michael Dillon concluded, “By 2000, change had come. A lot of the traditional ways of doing things, dressing, living, communicating, had been influenced by the missionaries” (personal communication, 5 April 2019).

**Resisting Western Culture.** While Western culture was for some missionaries the benchmark, it was for others a hindrance. For most missionaries, however, negotiating the cultural pluralism at the contact zone presented even more complexity than a view of each culture or even each cultural element as merely good or bad. Strayer (1978) introduces yet another missionary perspective of Western culture and its influence on local African culture. This perspective assumes that ‘lesser’ cultures should be preserved, museumified<sup>75</sup>, handled carefully. “Fearing that Africans would be ‘ruined by contact with encroaching civilization’, he [missionary Handley Hooper] saw the enemy of the missionary enterprise no longer ‘hidden in the fastness of heathenism’ but rather as the ‘dead weight of materialism’. Based on a view of African culture as essentially weak and likely to disintegrate under external pressure and on a view of Africans as basically passive in the process of cultural change, detribalization was seen as profoundly inimical to the interests of mission communities in a variety of interlocking ways” (Strayer, 1978, p. 88).

This nostalgia for Pokot culture pops up in the mission discourse, usually in response to Pokot material culture seen as ‘authentic’ or ‘quaint’ by a Western missionary. Jane Hamilton commented on several instances when her appreciation of Pokot material culture was dismissed

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transition in his article “From Flies in the Eyes to Smiling Selfies: The difficulty of portraying children who’ve survived life’s very worst,” found at <https://medium.com/@worldvisioncan/from-flies-in-the-eyes-to-smiling-selfies-the-difficulty-of-portraying-children-who-ve-survived-bfa874b26d2b>.

<sup>75</sup> Relph (1976), Cresswell (2004), and Bale and Sang (1996) talk about the museumification of culture usually in response to colonial nostalgia for cultures influenced or destroyed by Western imperialism. This process, Gregory (2004) explains, is not benign. It advances the idea that “Other cultures are fixed and frozen, often as a series of fetishes, and then brought back to life through metropolitan circuits of consumption” (Gregory, 2004, p. 10).

by the Pokot themselves, reminding missionary and reader alike of Pokot agency. “An important concept in our ministry was not to change the Pokot culture or to ‘westernize’ the people. I so admired the women and how they utilized what little they had to enhance their lives... One day a young woman came and asked me for the denim skirt I was wearing... I launched into my usual spiel about how practical her goat skins were for sitting on the rough ground and resisting the ever-present thorns that would rip holes in cloth skirts. She listened patiently and then said, ‘If you like my goat skin so much, then you wear it and give me your skirt.’ She went away happily wearing my denim skirt and I still have her goat skin” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 128). Likewise, Jane stated, “It always made me smile that we wanted their carved artifacts and they wanted our silverware” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 45). While Jane appreciated aspects of Pokot culture and lamented its change, she did not fight against it. “I felt a little nostalgic that the old ways were passing away and with it some of the warmth and openness of the Pokot society” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 138). Likewise, Jane reflected that styles of dress and hair are just as likely to change in Pokot as in the West. Fashions come and go, and while outside influences might be pointed to a cause, the belief that culture is fluid and never static illustrates a postcolonial perspective of nonwestern culture.

The Comboni Missionaries 2007 Charter discussed the reality of culture fluidity and the role of missions in it: “It is a matter of fact that the culture of the Pokot is evolving and it is being influenced from outside. Those influences are improving their living conditions but they are also eroding their system of values and their gridlock measurements of checks and balances. Besides, in their culture there are practices that need updating to push aside whatever is harmful to the people (FGM, traditional medicine, etc.) while keeping the values that are beneficial” (West

Pokot, 2007). Perspective as it translates to strategy is keenly visible. The Combonis viewed Pokot culture as a mixed bag and their role as a beneficent guide for culture change.

For several missionaries, Western culture was the proverbial elephant in the room. What should be done about it? BCMS missionaries Dr. David Webster and Ruth Stranex Deeth wrote much about their ambivalence toward their home culture and how it should or should not relate to their mission, struggling for a solution to the negotiations of cultural pluralism. David discussed a visit to his aunt, a fellow missionary working with the nearby, culturally-similar Samburu people:

What struck us at Wamba was that whole Samburu manyattas had accepted the Christian faith, without jettisoning their culture. Their manyattas were the same. Their way of life, with their cattle, was unchanged. Their dress was traditional, with all their finery of beads, and, for the men, ochre-dyed mud headdresses. But they were cleaner, and healthier, and – the impression was – happier. Their newfound faith had set them free from fear of God and spirits and curses. The lesson we learned, which was so relevant to the Pokot also, was that it is very difficult, if not impossible, for an individual to become a Christian, and then remain in tribal society. It needed villages in their entirety, from the chief down, to turn to Christ. Africans are no individualists. They have strong family, and social and tribal bonds. Just as, in the book of Acts (chapter 10), Cornelius ‘and his whole household’ were converted and baptized, so Africans (or at least rural, tribal people) need to respond collectively to the Gospel. (Webster, 2013, p. 180-1)

The Samburu village represented the utopian African Christian community that David idealized. In his opinion, Christianity of the Bible did not require or even necessarily thrive in a Western environment, but it did require Pokot agency and ability to take the religion offered by the Western hand of the missionary and adapt it to the place of the Pokot—a teasing out of cultures and message that the missionaries themselves found nearly impossible to do.

Ruth Stranex Deeth revealed her inner turmoil while she shared the story of spending time with the schoolgirls who boarded in the hostel Ruth managed. Overhearing a party in the distance, Ruth asked herself,



Did they long to join in? Deep down, did they miss being active members of their tribe? Was I wrong to encourage them to go to school, and so become outsiders? Could the two mix? These questions would whirl round my brain keeping me awake more than the clapping. From a medical point of view we had no option but to oppose unhealthy habits like not washing their children, drinking tubercular infected milk, and using cows' urine to clean out their milk gourds. If these were to be altered, changes in their way of life were inevitable. They live in squat round houses made from sticks for walls and mud roofs, or from grass, if they can find any. Cattle are their whole existence, necessary for food – cows' blood and milk – for clothing, blankets, straps and slings for babies, dowry, and to exchange for currency. How impossible it is to think of changing it. (Stranex, 1977, p. 31)

Dr. David Webster had apparently been confronted by the changing popular perspective of the day. His value as a missionary had been questioned, and he developed a response— relating it to his perspective of self, his mission, and the Pokot—to those who would say,

‘Leave it at that! Don't interfere with their beliefs and traditions. Don't try to impose a 'western' belief system on them. Don't try to convert them to Christianity.’ The problem with that viewpoint is threefold – firstly their health needs, spiritual beliefs and culture were closely interwoven and inseparable; secondly, Christianity is no more a western belief system than Jesus was a westerner; thirdly, as Christians we have a commission, a duty, laid on us by Jesus Himself to share the Good News with all the world. A non-Christian will not accept the last point, but the first two are unarguable. The Pokot have a holistic view of life. They believe in the Supreme Being, Tororut, and they see every event of life – whether birth, death, sickness, drought, rain, famine or disaster – as being inextricably linked with the spiritual. Their customs, culture and whole belief system involves the physical and the spiritual. In fact they would have been most surprised if we had come just to treat their bodies, and had ignored their spiritual needs. The policy of our Mission, BCMS, was to share unapologetically the Good News of Jesus Christ, at the same time caring for medical and social needs to the best of our ability. In other words, to care for the whole person. It was not our policy to denigrate or destroy the many good aspects of tribal culture – the strong family structure; the way of life in which everybody made their contribution; the strong tribal loyalty. Nor was it our policy to encourage naked men to wear trousers, or women in skins to wear dresses – although from the point of view of hygiene dresses did have an advantage over goat skins. Ironically it was the African Government of Uganda which ruled that western type of clothes must be worn. It was they who felt ashamed of, even sometimes despised, their 'naked' countrymen in Pokot and Karamoja. It was (in due course) General Amin's trigger-happy soldiers who shot dead anybody seen naked or in skins. It was not missionaries who changed all that – although it is missionaries whom anthropologists love to blame. (Webster, 2013, p. 130-1)

Ruth Stranex Deeth understood what those who essentialize culture as something static and in need of a protective enclosure do not understand. Pokot is, has been, and will continue to be a contact zone of cultures.

Whatever people may think about missionary work, it is a fact that a different type of culture is irrevocably encroaching upon these people. Developing countries are emphasizing the importance of eradicating their three enemies to progress: ignorance, disease and poverty. How sad it is that as they are being presented with these new ideas, they are not at the same time introduced to true Christianity, but rather to a form portrayed by people who equate it with Western culture, which is donned with Western-style clothes. (Stranex, 1977, p. 29)

To Ruth, change was being brought from outsiders through Western influence, but Christianity should not be equated with but should accompany the outside influence. While Christianity runs against elements in Pokot culture, it does not require westernization. “From a Christian viewpoint we went against their customs when we taught that Jesus Christ is the only way to God” (Stranex, 1977, p. 31).

Today, the majority of missionaries feel the tension of cultural pluralism. Kathy Tierney put it this way, “We are not trying to conform the Pokot into Americans. We keep within their culture and try to encourage and empower them better ways to use their resources here. For example, they toss bees wax away when they get honey from their pots. I shared that if they saved it, I would show them how to make candles that will last a long time that they could not only use but perhaps sell” (Tierney, 2019). The place of Pokot has been shaped in Western imaginations with Western culture as a touchstone or a starting point. As time passed and missionaries’ understanding of culture expanded, likely due in part to training, and included a perspective that valued other cultures’ strengths, negotiation at the contact zone became more and more complex for the missionary and the sense of place, directed by the missionary perspective embodies this complexity.

**Negotiating Cultural Differences.** While negotiating the concept of cultural pluralism could be an overarching theoretical struggle for missionaries, dealing with day to day cultural differences exemplifies the struggle at the contact zone. For the missionaries, cultural differences would go through a process of assessment and either acceptance or rejection. For example, the Pokot cultural practice of spitting as a blessing was negotiated different ways by different missionaries. Annette Totty explained, “One of the customs of the Suk was to bless the child by spitting on its face. Much as we loved the Suk we couldn’t allow this so we used to walk in front of the pram and say ‘No spitting, it is not our custom’” (Totty, n.d., p. 43). Tom and Ruth Collins had a similar experience: “Our baby Malcolm is quite an attraction on these trips and it is very hard to keep the Suk people from spitting on him, as is their manner of blessing” (Collins, 1947, Jan.) Fr. Leo Staples faced his first exposure to the Pokot custom of spitting with fear and then relief and acceptance: “He [Pokot man] came over and stood before me and he spat on his hands, then rubbed spittle all over my face. I was scared because the Pokot hands were never clean. I had also learned that the Pokot were quite good at witchcraft. Very often they used spittle to bewitch other people. But in this case, the very fact that he would put his spittle on my face meant that I was completely accepted by them” (Leo Staples, personal communication, July 23, 2019).

David Webster described several instances in which his culture and perspective came up against Pokot or African culture and perspective. The solution for the Websters varied depending on the circumstances. “We discovered that our milk supplier was rinsing out her gourds with cow’s urine. We opted after all for powdered milk” (Webster, 2013, p. 115). Likewise, David discussed his perception of the Amudat church and how it was run by an African pastor.

To our western eyes Christchurch Amudat was quaint. Its low open-sided mud walls, and rough Terminalia tree trunk posts holding up a rather tatty red corrugated iron roof, its seating made from rough planks balanced on tree trunks – all seemed appropriate for the setting... To our eyes it was fine. But in the eyes of the Reverend Timothy Oluoch and the church council it was not fine. In fact, it was rather a disgrace.... It was a proud day when the new church was finished, and furnished with proper benches. The exercise had cost the local Christian community a lot in both money and sweat. It was building far superior to their own homes, which were for the most part mud huts. (Webster, 2013, p. 159)

Similarly, the Websters deferred to African leadership concerning the start time of the church service. Rev. Timothy Oluoch would not start the church service “until he felt that a sufficient quorum had gathered. Then, and only then, would he come across and start the service. We, with our western obsession with time, found this practice very irritating... But as we were often reminded, Westerners have clocks, Africans have time” (Webster, 2013, p. 79).

The Tierneys also spoke about cultures at the contact zone: “If you look closely you will see differences huge and not so huge. Many things here are so much like America. When I am reading in the morning, I hear the children come to school. Their playful laughter and singing sounds the same here as it does in Oregon. They have the same needs, love for God and their families. We have been here long enough to see how much alike all humankind is” (Tierney, November 2017).

The concept of cultural pluralism, or the idea of a smaller group maintaining its cultural identity within a larger society that reflects a different culture, has been a place of struggle and negotiation for missionaries from the start of mission activities in Pokot until the present. As cultures—Pokot, missionary, Western, and even dominant Kenyan culture—change, perspectives also change. The concept of cultural pluralism has grown in importance for missionaries in Pokot over time, affecting their perspective of the place of Pokot, the way they communicate about that place, and the way they conduct their missionary work. From a postcolonial perspective,

common themes of colonial thought concerning the contact zone, while at times and places still present, have lost their one-dimensional character adding to a more multidimensional understanding of place.

### *Changing Perspective*

When examining place-making at the contact zone, we are looking at a series of moving parts. Time is passing; cultures, both inside and outside Pokot, are changing. This dynamic is likewise found in individual missionaries, many of whom chronicled their changing perceptions throughout their mission work in Pokot. Many missionaries commented on the steep learning curve presented in mission life. Leo Staples, Tom McDonnell, Jane Hamilton, and Molly Beaver confessed that their early sense of personal and spiritual competency was overturned again and again. Leo put it this way:

Maybe one inadequacy, amongst others, was that when I was ordained a priest to go to the missions, I had this idea that I had learned everything and that I had nothing else to learn. That turned out to be the very opposite when I went to the missions. I needed to learn, and it was local people who taught me the real meaning of God. It was the absence of a knowledge of Jesus Christ that was lacking in their lives; the Pokot were completely an Old Testament people. But they had a great respect for God in every way. God was very important during life and after life. (personal communication, 23 July 2019)

Fr. Tom McDonnell explained his supercilious confidence, “When I reflect back to those early days, as I often do, I can blush at my naivety. I had lots of enthusiasm and zeal but lacked a sensitive strategy as to how to go about my missionary work. I felt I was a man of wisdom with answers and much to give to a remote and ‘backward’ culture. I (with the other Sisters and Priests) was bringing education to the illiterate, religion to the pagans, modern medicine for their ailments, new agriculture ways to a primitive people etc.” (personal communication, 19 May 2019). Jane Hamilton said it succinctly, “When you are new on the mission field, you really

think you know a lot. As time goes by you find out that you don't know much" (2019, p. 18). Molly Beaver's sense of self was challenged and found wanting: "I learned many things. The first one is that I'm not as tough as I thought I was. The Pokot have a very rough life, and for me to live even a bit like them for those few days was 'interesting'!" (Beaver's Nov. 7, 1991 newsletter quoted in Swart, 1998, p. 452). Ruth Stranex Deeth's personal discovery followed the opposite trajectory, from insecurity to self-confidence. "I had a lot to learn, and made many mistakes as I went along. In the missionary books I had read as a child, the missionaries did not seem to make mistakes. I had met many missionaries who came to stay at our home. I had heard them let off steam, bandy jokes, and discuss their problems about mission policies, their fellow missionaries, or disillusionment, so I should have realized that they were really quite ordinary people" (Stranex, 1977, p. 18).

For Dick and Jane Hamilton, their perspective of the place of Pokot and their position in it underwent a binary shift, changed from being Western-centered to Pokot-centered. "During our first years in the bush we referred to back home as 'the real world.'... We were so isolated from news of the outside world. But the longer we lived in the bush, seeing life-and-death situations on a daily basis and living with people for whom survival was a daily struggle, we began to think that the bush was the real world and that many things in the developed world were simply not based on reality" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 184). In effect, the "remote" became central, and what had been central to their identity, culture, way of thinking, and even geography became remote.

Each missionary's personal growth trajectory would impact their perspective of the Pokot and subsequently their mission strategy, playing into the phenomenon of place construction (Cresswell, 2004). Fr. Leo Staples discussed two personal watershed moments in his life as a

missionary. First, he talked about his “rebellion” after working in Pokot for two months. He felt “lost” and “helpless” because of his “lack of preparation for the work” (personal communication, 24 July 2019).

I was sent there [Pokot] and told to learn the language. When I met the people down in the valley, I felt I was getting no place. I felt I didn't have the machinery within myself to do anything and after 2 months, in frustration, I said I am going to get out of this place. I am no use for myself and no use for the people and never will be! I got up on my motorbike and travelled the mud-road down to Nakuru and asked Fr. Bill Dunne, our senior Priest, to please let me out. 'I feel I am going mad,' I told him. He didn't do much to comfort me except to say, 'Well Leo, you haven't tried very hard. Please go back and try again.' So that gives some idea of my frustrations... After that then I made friends with the people. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 24 July 2019).

His change in perspective led Leo to changing his strategy for mission work. He threw himself into learning and translating Pokot. The second shift in Fr. Leo's thinking occurred in the 1970s and corresponded with Fr. Tom McDonnell's experience with the charismatic movement and subsequent transformation of mission strategy.

Like Fr. Leo, Fr. Tom McDonnell's personal transformation started with his understanding of God.

It's easy to be wise in retrospect; in my younger days, I was introduced to a 'God-to-be-feared.' I heard a lot about 'Hell' and I feared the God who might send me there. My image of God was one of being judgmental and policeman-like. God was watching from a long distance away. When I first felt called to the priesthood, it was to such a God that I related. Perhaps I felt I needed to placate this God, and priesthood, especially that of leaving family and friends, was a noble way to do so. Later, with the advent of the Charismatic movement in the early '70s, I became more and more aware of God, the 'Lover' in my life, and I began to encounter this loving God in the heart of the other person and in the deeper levels of my own self. (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019)

Fr. Leo's spiritual transformation mirrored Tom's and also centered around the Catholic charismatic movement. Leo attended a conference in 1974 to learn about the influence of the growing and increasingly ecumenical charismatic movement in the Catholic Church, and he “came back a different person altogether... We were encouraged into doing things that we would

never have thought of before; dancing in Church (things we would never have dreamed of). It certainly did something very big for me, it gave me a new spirit altogether – an open-hearted spirit” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 24 July 2019). Like Tom, even Leo’s perception of God changed, “and I became a very much better missionary as a result” (personal communication, 24 July 2019). Tom and Leo’s experience with the spiritual charismatic movement, which started within the Protestant tradition in the 1950s and moved to the Roman Catholic Church in 1967 (Hummel, 1984), was in line with the changing awareness in society, spurred on by the civil rights movement and other social movements. It was this spiritual and societal shift of thinking that led both missionaries through a process of reassessing the meaning and approach of missions, particularly in response to the resistance they experienced from the Pokot. Tom reminisced about his first years in Pokot in the early 1970s,

Change was painfully slow over the first three years. I never felt easy with what we were doing. I felt we were pushing too much with little success. There was little initiative or spontaneity from the people themselves. I felt I needed a new strategy for development, for growth, for change ... a strategy that motivated, energised and empowered people to take responsibility for their own future, growth and development. I became more and more downhearted - my dreams and sometimes prejudices no longer sustained me. When I reflect back today, it was a crisis of identity - I was part of something that was not me or who I wanted to be. I was hearing of many new things on the horizon. (McDonnell, 19 May 2019)

Tom would find his answers in an international ecumenical movement that bred a new strategy in missions, one he would bring to and implement in Pokot with the support and approval of Fr. Leo. The strategy called for Pokot leadership and put the onus on the local population to strategize and implement programs for cultural and societal development (discussed in detail in the next chapter).

Similar to Tom’s struggle and search for a new mission strategy, the Reformed Church of America along with the Africa Inland Church in Alale were disheartened by the lack of response



from the Pokot people paired with the Pokot's dependence and reliance on the Westerner to bring development. Like Frs. Tom and Leo, the RCA began to respond with a change of perspective of self and mission, and American RCA missionaries, Larry and Linda McAuley, were called out of retirement to help implement the new perspective. Like the program that Tom instigated in Pokot in the 1970s, the new program undertaken by the RCA in Alale was created by nonwesterners to empower locals. The process of empowering locals and coming alongside Africans in development and evangelical initiatives was not new. Since before independence, missionaries had struggled with their perception of encouraging, equipping, and empowering local leaders through the process of Africanization.

### ***Reactions to Africanization***

As independence in East Africa became imminent, the idea of increased African leadership gained importance in all spheres of society. From the start, most mission organizations had, at least in theory, been proponents of eventually empowering local leadership to replace missionary leadership. In his 1916 book about Anglican missions, Stock put it this way: "Provision had already been made for the Maori and the Red Indian Christians in what had become white men's countries. They would naturally take their places as small contingents in the great Colonial Churches. But the real Native Church *problem* lay in Asia and Africa, where the future Churches would be predominantly native, and must eventually become self-governing and independent, without (it would be hoped) ceasing to be in full communion with the Mother Church. To deal with this great *problem* was felt to be one of the most responsible tasks of the new century" (Stock, 1916, p. 20; emphasis mine). While early discussants of Africanization may have seen it as both inevitable and a problem to be dealt with, independence finally forced

the issue. Missionaries faced the shift with ambivalence. In a letter to AIC Kalenjii Regional Church Council on the eve of Kenya's independence, the General Director of AIM explained his concerns with Africanization with paternalistic bravado,

From north to south, east to west, the whole of the continent of Africa today is moving fast from what it was into something that it hopes to be. We are interested in it and we approve all legitimate moves for the caring for the Africans by the Africans. The main danger, I feel, is not that it should be but rather the matter of timing. A child takes so long to grow; garden produce takes just so long to mature; to endeavor to speed it up may result in the loss of it all completely or something that is not properly formed. I fear that many in your land, and it is not otherwise often in the more civilized countries also, do not realize that with independence goes responsibility. We all like freedom but we do not all like the responsibility that goes with liberty. A child does not like its periods of correction by a parent, but to be its own boss too soon would take it into all kinds of trouble. (General Director, 1960)

The General Director's sentiments illustrate a perspective common in missionary circles, summed up by Hiebert (1994), "The missionaries sought to transmit their theologies unchanged to the national church leaders. The relationship was that of parent to child... Nationals were to become self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing. But little was said about the fourth self: self-theologizing" (p. 46). Africanization was all well and good until it extended past a certain point.

Missionary ambivalence toward Africanization in Pokot is most apparent in the texts of the first missionaries in Pokot, the Tottys. A letter exchange in 1948 and again in 1953 between Lawrence and the BCMS General Secretary, Mr. Houghton, discussed the successes behind the "indigenous principle," the BCMS vision of empowering local leadership. As independence became visible on the horizon, the Tottys' discussion of local empowerment, leadership, and control became more pronounced and ambivalent; however, it is only fair to point out that their circumstances intensified the tone and direction of their correspondence. The Tottys were facing an unceremonious dismissal by the powers-that-be in the BCMS home office and had been told

they would need to retire to make room for new leadership. The Tottys would fight tooth and nail to stay in Pokot as BCMS missionaries (a doomed battle), which would require them to justify their worth. The battle ensued over letters passed between the Tottys and BCMS leadership. In response to some concerns expressed by BCMS leadership and a request for the Tottys' retirement, Lawrence responded, "There is so much remaining to be done here and so much too that can only be done by experienced and trusted people – one sees even in very experienced Africans such as the Archdeacon how very much they still need our support – and they themselves repeatedly tell us this." (Totty, 1963). Both Lawrence and Annette felt that their experience and training more than legitimized their authority to remain in leadership positions, regardless of the changing Kenyan and mission perceptions. Further, Lawrence wrote,

I must again assure you that I am no way opposed to Africanisation – I realise how absolutely necessary it is and also that it must be the acid test of all our work. It is to me a real joy to see those one has known almost from the cradle taking more and more responsibility in the Church. My regret has been that our leaders have not been allowed to take full responsibility and that the Archdeacon was imported. He neither knows the people nor the language and in view of his advancing years (64) is unlikely to do all that is required of one in full charge of Pokot... I am entirely happy to perform those tasks assigned to me by African leadership. My advice and help is available if needed but I do not in any sense 'Lord it over' my African Brethren... The Bishop writes: 'the work should be and be seen to be in African hands.' He appears to think that this can be accomplished only by removing older Missionaries who have been in charge... Surely the highest and greatest expression of our unity and love in Christ as Africans and Europeans is to be seen in our willingness to continue in the Lord's work under the African leadership although it has been we who have brought it into being. To remove my wife and me from Pokot is to openly declare that this unity between African and European cannot be achieved. (Totty, 1963)

Annette weighed in as well, "We are being treated in this disgraceful manner not because of Africanisation. How could it be when we have a European Archbishop, a European Bishop, and even after Uhuru, Robern is made Archdeacon and we are being replaced by a European in the person of Philip Price?" (1964). In response, BCMS Field Secretary R. McKemey wrote of the Tottys' great work and important role in establishing the church in Pokot, followed by,

Never-the-less, and indeed the more so because of what I have just said, we all feel that the right time has arrived for Mr. and Mrs. Totty to move right away from Nasokol; by doing so now they will complete their service to the Pokot people amid boundless gratitude and goodwill, but otherwise the situation could quickly change. We all feel that local African leadership in the Church would inevitably be cramped and inhibited by their continued presence at Nasokol. It is a well-known fact that Mr. and Mrs. Totty still feel that the Africans are not able to carry on without them! (McKemey, 1964)

The Tottys did reluctantly step down from their position as BCMS missionaries to the Pokot people after more than thirty years, returning to Cheltenham, England. Interestingly, Lawrence's 2001 obituary noted, "Perhaps the Tottys' greatest satisfaction and joy, which crowned all their years of faithful toil for their Master, was that when the time came for them to retire, they were able to hand over the leadership in every department to Africans."

For most missionaries by the 1960s, Africanization was a common topic and common goal, but Africanization, as Lawrence Totty pointed out, did not equate to Pokotization. While many churches, as well as professional and government positions, in Pokot were handed over to African leadership, much of that leadership came from outside Pokot. Most missionaries made way for this African leadership. Dr. Peter Cox praised the BCMS presence in Pokot post-independence: "Our assets are the hospital, the fact that we are known, and that we have an African Pastor." (Cox, 1967). David Webster continued Peter's description of the church in Amudat, illustrating the hybridity of culture within the evolving religious sense of place in Pokot. The "little mud church," built in the Pokot manner (but likely with a Western shape—rectangle rather than circle), was led by African Anglican Reverend Timothy Oluoch, but services were largely traditionally Anglican in tone and practice (Webster, 2013, p. 131). While Africanization was occurring in the mission-established churches and missionaries were pushing to see Pokot cultural elements integrated into the church services, the Pokot were negotiating with mission influences and global connections, at times choosing the more "exotic" British

elements over the known Pokot ones. In his professional position, David Webster prioritized Africanization in the 1970s, a shift that he welcomed but one that also put him out of a job.

In my capacity as Medical Officer of Health in charge of a large staff there had inevitably been some tensions. Some staff understandably resented having a white boss. It was too reminiscent of colonial days – after all, it was only just over ten years since Kenya’s independence. I too had misgivings about the place for an expatriate head of department in independent Kenya. So long as the likes of me filled such posts in the remoter parts of Kenya, then the longer it would be before Kenyan doctors took up the challenge of working in the rough areas. (Webster, 2013, p. 314)

Africanization took hold of the Anglican missionary endeavors in Pokot throughout the 1970s and 1980s directly affecting the sense of place in Pokot. The Anglican partnership Northern Frontier Medical Mission that Peter Cox and David Webster were a part of as well as the BCMS (now Crosslinks) no longer have a Western missionary presence in Pokot; however, the Anglican church continues to have a strong presence there under African leadership.

For the Catholic groups that today still have a Western missionary presence, they state the importance of African leadership while maintaining a continual missionary presence in Pokot. The paternal language and Western/nonwestern binaries are no longer a staple of mission texts. In the Kiltegan *Africa Magazine*, Michael Ryan, who titled his 2002 article and himself “A Missionary Tourist Visiting Kenya for the First Time,” described the shift in the relationship between the missionaries and the Kenyan Catholics:

Now that the African church has sufficient vocations it no longer depends on missionaries. The bishop felt that the help Africa needed most of all was finance for the training of priests. Could an Irish diocese look after the seminary fees of future priests who, in return, would agree to work in that diocese for a fixed number of years? He asked us to bring that proposal back with us and pass it around. It would help to keep alive the missionary dimension of the Irish church, which would also be further enriched by having contact with priests from different cultural backgrounds. (Ryan, 2002)

After visiting Fr. Michael Dillon in his parish in Chepnyal (about 13mi/22km north of Ortum) and his discussion of Fr. Michael's leadership in the less developed area, Michael Ryan returned to the theme of his article:

What we experienced was so rich and varied – the enthusiasm and joy with which people celebrate the Eucharist, the great spirit of friendship and mutual respect between the Kenyan priests and religious and the missionaries – now an ageing group who feel so pleased to see a young African clergy and religious taking responsibility for the future of the church in Kenya... Hopefully, in the plan of God, the torch will pass to the young Kenyans like Isaac and Denis, who will be the young Kiltegan Missionaries of this century to other lands. (Ryan, 2002)

While Ryan's wording revealed the optimistic, dramatic, and nostalgic perspective of a visitor, eighteen years after his article, Irish Kiltegan missionaries still hold a significant number of leadership positions within Kitale diocese (containing West Pokot county), including the bishop. According to African studies scholar, Dr. Peter Ojiambo, white, foreign missionaries are still prevalent in leadership due to their ability to attract more foreign mission aid than their African counterparts for marginalized places like Pokot (personal communication, 26 April 2021).

For the Comboni Missionaries working in West Pokot in the new millennium, the idea behind Africanization is still at the forefront of their mission (as St. Daniel Comboni envisioned in the mid-nineteenth century) even four decades after independence; however, their 2007 Charter expressed their ambivalence, encouraging local leadership while maintaining and encouraging missionary leadership. Their West Pokot Zone Charter 2007 states, "As [the Pokot] people gain knowledge they should steer the projects of their development. So, we need to give them more responsibilities in the running of projects like schools, boreholes, self-help groups. At the same time help them to learn how to run those projects" (West Pokot, 2007, p. 8). The Charter also considered more missionary personnel as an "urgent need" (West Pokot, 2007, p. 7).

Missionaries Noreen McAfee and Margaret Russell from the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster Mission, likewise, spoke about the joint need for both Kenyan leaders and new missionaries to work in Pokot, particularly in their work in education. In her 2016 newsletter, Noreen declared, “While I greatly appreciate the labours of both, the need for more long-term missionaries for Kenya weighs heavily upon my heart. Do pray therefore that the Lord of the harvest would thrust forth others into this great harvest field” (McAfee, October 2016). Margaret went into greater detail, with some of the same language used by Noreen, about filling the void created by the lack of missionaries:

I have always emphasized the need for the Lord to raise up the Kenyan labourers, and that is still a real need. We really need prayer that these children, teenagers that have been nurtured in the things of the Lord, that God would raise them up, strengthen them and thrust them out into his work in Kenya. But I suppose in the past, I haven’t dwelt on the real need of missionaries in Kenya because I suppose we did have a very comfortable Kenyan team of missionaries. We really do need missionaries. We need personnel. And we are praying much that God will raise up others to fill the great gap in the work in Kenya today. And we can fill such a gap when we follow the words of the Lord Jesus Christ when he instructed us: ‘Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest’ (Matthew 9:38). (Russell, December 2016)

Noreen and Margaret’s pleas for more Western missionaries dovetailed with the narrower vision of their mission, which prioritizes perceived correct doctrine over unity and ecumenicism.

The past couple of decades have seen a meshing of African and Western leadership in mission endeavors. As colonial themes of binaries and paternalistic language become more difficult to find in the mission discourse, so do the representation of these binaries within mission organizations. The mission organizations that still exist from the early days of missions in Pokot are now largely run by Africans, including many Pokot, although their relationship with parent organizations or larger Western-based denominations remains to be seen. The new wave of unaffiliated missionaries tends to join forces with Kenyan pastors, churches, or organizations to

support an Africanized mission within Pokot. The shift in perception of missions follows the same lines. Christianity was viewed by early missionaries as the province of Westerners; as time passed, independence came and went, and the post-colonial era commenced. Missionary perception of place in Pokot included the increasing Africanization of the Christian sphere; however, the bulk of financial support still originates from Western Christian missions, which provides a new place for negotiation between missions and local leadership. Overall, the shift in perceptions would reveal itself through a shift in strategy as well.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has traced the missionary perception of self, others, and Pokot “narrowly” and within “the historical context” as Spear (1999b) prescribed, meaning the individual missionary’s words and stories have been used as much as possible to preserve their distinct voice in the telling of overarching story of the contact zone throughout the past 90 years. The missionary perceptions reveal themes and changes in identity (both of self and mission), relationship to other outsiders (governmental and missional), and views of Pokot (place and people). Missionaries perception of self began with their calling, their understanding of the culture of their sending agencies, and their training, each element legitimizing their place in the at the contact zone of the mission field. Once on the mission field, the missionaries’ interactions with other outsiders, government officials and other missionaries, added dimension to the story. Interactions between the governments of Kenya and Uganda and missionaries complicate the stories of missionaries in Pokot through ambivalent relationships, as seen for example by the Tottys’ approval of colonial presence and power, Tom Collins’ inability to settle where he wanted, Ruth Stranex’s deportation, and the Hamilton’s brush with martyrdom and persecution.



In their relationship with other mission groups, colonial era missionary groups clung to the spheres of influence carved out for them, which would have long-term effects on the place of the Pokot. However, relationships between mission groups and missionaries would shift over time, resulting in some ecumenicism and collaboration. Most importantly, this chapter reviewed the perceptions of the people and place of Pokot within the missionary discourse. The themes that rose to the surface and the subsequent changes of these themes form a “process” that qualify the sense of place of Pokot as Massey (1994) described it. This process revealed itself in the ebbs and flows of missionary perception of culture, conversion, and Africanization in the church at the contact zone. The missionary perceptions of self, others, and Pokot, as we now understand them, directly inform the missionaries’ “practices and strategies” (Spear, 1999b, p. 38) in the mission field or contact zone of Pokot that we will explore in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4: Strategies

If place is “a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world” (Cresswell, 2004, p. 11), a landscape is a snapshot of that place from a specific vantage point. Upon entering Pokot and the village of Asilong for the first time, I stood apart from it, viewed it, and tried to interpret the landscape as I saw it. In encountering this lowland area, I had many of the same perceptions that other missionaries had had concerning its dryness and heat. As I described in the introduction, after my eyes adjusted to the saturation of color in the ground, vegetation, and sky, I took in the built landscape, perceiving round mud huts and rectangular concrete structures with roofs of corrugated metal sheeting (see Figure 1.1). I concluded that the huts must be traditional Pokot structures and the rectangular buildings must have been built by Western missionaries. I was wrong on both counts. Instead, what the built environment communicated was a complex layering of cultural changes and influences. The round huts were an evolved style from a less refined shelter built by nomadic people that did not stay in one spot for long. The new style showed time and artistry, reflecting a more sedentary people. The rectangular buildings had been built by a Pokot pastor and politician who began a nonprofit organization to help bring development and advances to the more “remote” areas of Pokot. The larger building, meant to be a church, had been left with a gap in the roof and without windows or a floor for some time. These were added in the first half of the 2010s by a church in Fort Worth, TX, associated with Friends of Asilong, and the building began to function finally as a church. The smaller building, built to be a clinic, was finished and houses teachers for the nearby primary school. Each landscape is part of a place which shows a layering of influences and significance that might not be readily legible. As I discovered in Asilong, story helps make place legible.

The landscape, as perceived from the point of view of a missionary, typically revealed a lack or a need that fell into one or both of two categories: spiritual and/or practical. The perception of the missionaries working in Pokot directed their strategies to meet the needs through evangelism or development, usually a combination thereof. These categories have been broken down numerous ways. David Livingstone famously called for missionaries to bring Christianity, civilization, and commerce to the African continent (Ngeiywo, 2018). Catholic missionary Leo Staples described a three-pronged approach he called “medication, revelation, and education” (personal communication, 23 June 2019). In his doctoral thesis, Tom Ngeiywo (2018) thoroughly described seven missionary strategies<sup>76</sup>. In the same vein, this chapter will outline and describe missionary strategies but this time with an emphasis on their relationship to place-making at the contact zone of Western missions and Pokot, an embodiment of the missionary perspective described in the previous chapter.

Each mission and missionary working in Pokot since 1931 has approached the voids they see in the place and landscape in a variety of ways. Through analyzing the missionary discourse, themes of strategies became clear (Waitt, 2005). Within evangelism the following have been key: language learning, translating, and communicating the Christian message; cultural connections in sharing the Christian message and responding to cultural disconnects; and expansion through the conducting of “safaris,” establishing outstations, sending out indigenous workers, and church planting and growth. Within the category of development<sup>77</sup>, missionaries in

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<sup>76</sup> “The Christian missionaries used different strategies to evangelize the African people. The first strategy they used was the proclamation of the Gospel... The second strategy the Western Christian missionaries used was the instruction of the new converts... The third strategy the Western Christian missionaries used was the establishment of schools where literacy was taught... The fourth strategy the Western Christian missionaries used was industrial training... The fifth strategy was the provision of medical services... The sixth strategy the Western Christian missionaries used was to address special needs... The last strategy the Western Christian missionaries used was the presence of the resident missionaries in the mission stations in the community” (Ngeiywo, 2018, p. 98-102).

<sup>77</sup> I have chosen to use the term development in this study, but I recognize its kinship with the archaic idea of *civilizing*, the ethnocentric *Westernizing*, and the western concept of *modernizing*. “Projects of modernization...

Pokot focused primarily on education and medical services, followed by agriculture initiatives, provision of relief and emergency aid, and water provision.

Strategies reflect perspective and build upon the realities the missionaries have seen in the place, and each strategy plays a role in the building and shaping of the landscape and place of Pokot. While the above lists make each strategy seem discrete, the complex reality of the layering and intersecting of these strategies mirrors the multidimensionality of time and space in the dynamic quality of culture, the construction of place, and the subsequent story of the contact zone. Employing a postcolonial lens to these strategies means reading the missionary discourse with these complexities in mind to tell a story that is not merely a history of facts but a reflection of the rhizomal and palimpsest qualities of place (Ashcroft, 2001).

## **Evangelism**

Spreading Christianity through evangelism<sup>78</sup> was (and is) the *raison d'être* for most missionaries, a response to their calling. Like teaching for a teacher, evangelism is the purpose, call, and vocation of a missionary, perhaps making it strange to call it a strategy here. However, understanding the process or way evangelism was done arises from a mission's or missionary's perception of Pokot and is part of describing the religious sense of place at the contact zone of Pokot and Western Christian missions. The first hurdle for early missionaries was to answer the

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have been recast as 'development' in late colonial and postcolonial discourse" (Filippello, 2017, p. 10). While each of these terms has its own baggage, development is the most current term in use. Cheryl McEwan explains that term development is difficult to define, and each definition is somewhat problematic. "In development studies it has been defined more as the use of resources to relieve poverty and improve the standard of living of a nation... this kind of thinking is also problematic because it is rooted in western understandings of modernization" (McEwan, 2008, p. 12)

<sup>78</sup> Evangelism is defined as "The spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness" (Oxford, 2020).

always present question “how?” How should the people be approached and how should they be evangelized?

The environment of evangelism was a difficult one for the missionaries. The difficult environment included the physical, emotional, and spiritual place of which missionaries found themselves a part. Likewise, each missionary was tasked with how to perceive and approach not just a new life in a new place but also a response to his or her calling. The Catholic Comboni 2007 mission charter explained what most missionaries felt in their approach to evangelism in Pokot,

After all these years, we can say that the evangelisation of the Pokot has been hazardous, especially the pastoralists, but lately even they are accepting the Gospel more openly, especially women. At present, distances, roads, mountains and sickness makes the evangelisation of our people still a tough task to accomplish. Yet, we know that we are fulfilling Jesus’ commandment of bringing to the Father’s sheepfold the lost sheep, and attaching to the crown of the Church the Pokot people for God’s glory (as Comboni would say). (West Pokot, 2007)

Missionaries engaged in their mission and ministry based on their perspectives, described in the previous chapter. Whether the Pokot were perceived as “heathens” or “unreached,” the process of evangelization would change as time and perspective changed. The first step, particularly for early missionaries, involved language learning, which led to translation projects, the process of making Pokot a written language, and eventually successful communication through the spoken, written, and recorded word. In keeping with the zones of mission influence discussed previously, the profound effect Western Christian missions would have on the Pokot language was characterized by whether the area was considered the territory of the Protestants or the Catholics. From there, evangelism took into account cultural connections with the Pokot to share and expand the sharing of the message, through missionary safaris, creating outstations,

and sending out indigenous evangelists. Finally, each mission and missionary had to assess where to emphasize their efforts: evangelism alone or development.

### *Language*

Early missionaries underscored the importance of learning to speak the local language, Pokot. BCMS missionary Annette Totty described the commitment of her husband, Lawrence, in learning Pokot (previously Suk): “Suk ‘The Language of the Heart’ was the way to find a welcome from the people, so he took every opportunity of learning and speaking it” (Totty, n.d., p. 31). The BCMS missionaries, the Housdens, concurred with the necessity of language learning. One of the founding members of the Africa Inland Mission argued for patience in language and culture learning, “It is much better to wait for years and be sure of what we say, than perhaps, to give the heathen a wrong impression of the nature and word of God, by attempting to teach them before the time” (quoted in Morad, 1996b, p. 17-8). Accordingly, AIM missionary Tom Collins began learning Pokot in the mid-1930s in a slow and methodical way. By 1939, he commented, “Still I have averaged learning between two and three new Suk words a day for the past five years and now have more than I really know on paper!” (1939, June 3). In 1945, Tom commented on the difficulty but importance of language learning for him and his wife Ruth: “Learning a new language is never easy, though perhaps we, who have been born in Africa, may find it easier than some. We both know Kiswahili, which allows one to contact the population who are in touch with the outside world. Children, women and the aged, however, can be effectively contacted really only through their mother-tongue” (Collins, 1945). Likewise, Catholic Kiltegan missionary Father Leo Staples discussed that his “first duty there [West Pokot] was to learn the language in order to be able to converse with the people” (Leo Staples, personal

communication, 23 June 2019). The 1966 description of Leo by *Africa Magazine* both highlighted his exceptional language and cross-cultural learning: “The Suk or Pokot tribe are undoubtedly one of the most remote in Africa and are largely untouched by Western influence. Father Staples was the first European to live in the valley and in his ten years there has not only learned to speak their strange Chinese-sounding language fluently but has almost become more Pokot than the Pokots themselves” (‘Radharc,’ 1966). Likewise, this quotation, notably from an outside source and not a missionary on the ground, underscores the audacity of Western pride through declaring that a foreigner could actually master a language and culture better than the indigenous population.

Language is not just a practical aspect of cross-cultural evangelism. As Annette Totty hinted at by calling it “the language of the heart,” learning Pokot was a key element in building mutual understanding and trust at the contact zone. Pokot scholar and pastor John Mondri explained, “Language is a primary indicator of a missionary’s humility... [L]earning the host culture’s language has two other spiritual/evangelical benefits: it provides humility as the missionary acts as the learner, and it enables the missionaries to preach the gospel to all people rather than to preach to the most learned members of the community” (Mondri, 2016, p. 144). For Fr. Leo Staples, language learning helped set him apart from colonial government personnel, which had the added benefit of building trust with the locals:

The one thing, I think, that made me different from the Government personnel in time was that I started to learn the language. The colonialists on the other hand always worked through interpreters. That influenced the local people – this man is different! When other St. Patrick fathers came along (Michael Dillon, Joe Flynn, and... Tom [McDonnell]) and made an attempt to learn the language – they [the Pokot] began to see that we were different. That was the beginning of acceptance... They hated the Colonialists so much that they had no interest or belief that one could meet a friendly European. They didn’t think such existed. Speaking their language helped to break down the prejudices. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

Despite Pokot animosity toward outsiders, particularly Europeans, speaking Pokot fluently had the unexpected result of at times putting missionaries as the bridge between the outsiders and the insiders. For example, in 1950, the Tottys “were called in to interpret and help” by the colonial government at the “Baringo murder trial of thirty accused” (Totty, L, 1950, Nov. 16), the legal proceedings after the violent incident, known as the battle of Koloa, between the colonial government and members of Dini ya Msambwa (discussed in the next chapter). Unlike Leo’s use of language to set him apart from the colonial officials, the Tottys’ work as translators would likely make them seem more aligned with the colonial powers. Language functioned to break, build, and reinforce networks among those working and living within Pokot.

Illustrative of the divide between the Protestant and Catholic missions, both remained largely ignorant of the other’s Pokot language learning and translating. Over two decades after the Anglican Tottys of the BCMS began their mission and translation work, working closely with AIM missionary Tom Collins, the Kiltegan Catholic magazine *Africa* underscored at least twice that Leo Staples was a lone pioneer in learning and developing an orthography for the Pokot language. In a 1955 article, the author’s declaration disregarded (likely unknowingly) the Protestant missions’ language efforts: “In addition to Swahili, which every missionary in the area must be able to speak, Fr. Staples speaks the Suk language. There are only three Europeans in the world with this accomplishment; the other two are a farmer and his wife who have been in the country for many years” (Safari in Suk, 1955, p. 7). Even half a millennium later, the divide caused by the Reformation still muffled the exchange of history and progress of Western Christian missions working in Pokot. In the Catholic periodical *Africa Magazine*, McCamphill stated, “[Leo’s] first task was to learn the Pokot language; made harder by the fact that there was nothing written in the language at that time” (2007). In contrast, Leo himself was somewhat



aware of the BCMS's efforts: "At that time [1950s] there was very little written in the Pokot language; the Bible Church Mission Society (BCMS) had been there for a couple of years beforehand; they had little prayer books written but apart from these, there was nothing written" (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). However, Leo only attributed a "couple of years" and "little prayer books" to the BCMS when the reality was twenty years and at least a grammar book, prayer books, the gospels of Mark and John, and a "Miniature Suk Bible" (Totty, A., 1956, May 6).

While the Catholics remained ignorant of Anglican language work, the Anglican missionaries, the Tottys, worked to keep them so. As noted earlier, in 1956, the BCMS chastised Lawrence and Annette Totty for withholding their Pokot "grammar" from the Catholic missionaries, declaring that doing so had "created a very bad impression, and has done considerable harm in the eyes of the African. Officials would press for the speedy appointment of a neutral expert to solve this dispute" (Overseas Sec., 1956, May 4). Annette's response to this claim was direct: "We felt that to give the R.Cs [Roman Catholics] the Grammar would be compromise and the longer we could keep the R.Cs from learning 'The Language of the heart', and thus put words in their mouths to teach heresy the less Suk would be lost..." (Totty, A., 1956, May 6).

**Translation Projects.** In 1911, colonial district commissioner Mervyn Worcester Howard Beech published his linguistic and anthropologic research of the East Pokot language and people, a study that was compiled throughout a year while he was stationed in Baringo County. Like early missionaries to the Pokot, Beech understood "the acquisition of the language is, I believe, the first step towards understanding the manners and customs of such a people and

thence getting into touch with their life, character, and environment... [and further] has a remarkable effect towards removing the suspicions of the natives, and, indeed, towards enlisting their sympathies” (Beech, 1911, p. iv). Beech’s short book, which included one hundred pages of Pokot grammar and vocabulary, was the only written record of the language of Pokot when the Tottys became the first Western missionaries in Pokot in 1931. There is no evidence that the Tottys were familiar with Beech’s work, and even if they had been, the discrepancies between the dialects of Pokot, East and West, would have made it virtually useless.

Like Beech before him and Leo Staples after him, Lawrence Totty started from scratch to learn to speak and develop an orthography for the Pokot language, known by some as “the most difficult East African language” (Totty, A, 1956, May 6). Annette wrote later that in the early years of the BCMS mission in Pokot, Lawrence “mastered their language and built up a vocabulary and grammar” (Totty, n.d., p. 10), and “compiled a dictionary and grammar and wrote a hymn book. Next, he translated St. Mark’s Gospel” (Totty, n.d., p. 31). Annette’s summary belied the time and effort required for these translations that would consume the attentions of both Tottys and AIM missionary Tom Collins, with the help of local teachers and Pokot leaders, for three decades. At the outset of their translation work, Annette explained, “We formed a language committee of James Toboyo, another teacher Philip Sipoyin, the Chief, Tom Collins, Jessie Bryden, Lawrie and me” (Totty, n.d., p. 33).

The translation project’s aim was primarily to translate the New Testament and was often fraught with difficulties and contention. When translating the Bible into Pokot, decisions had to be made: “The Pokot had no windows, no doors, no tables, no beds, no cupboards, hardly anything, so we just had to coin words” (Totty, n.d., p. 33). Difficulty intrinsic in the work was mirrored by extrinsic resistance. Annette explained, “We then found that Suk contained many

dialects and if a man spoke a different dialect every other dialect was wrong except his own. Feelings ran high but now we had to soft pedal on Pokot, but quietly. Day in and day out, Meshak, our Primary School headmaster and I wrestled away quietly translating the New Testament for twenty years” (Totty, n.d., p. 34). The publishers refused to support more than one Pokot dialect, so the Tottys and their team were tasked with finding an acceptable middle ground in their language and orthography choices. After the first printing of the New Testament, two Pokot “youths” wanted “to change everything,” according to Annette. “They kept changing what they wanted and they did not agree amongst themselves. What they wanted was completely fantastic” (Totty, A, 1956, May 6). Annette ascribed this dissention to a spiritual battle: “The devil cannot bear the Scriptures being put into the language of the heart of the people and translation work often is a battle ground over which Satan tries to hold sway and it was so with the Suk translations” (Totty, n.d., p. 34).

The translation project worked to unify the work of AIM missionary Tom Collins and BCMS missionaries as the two groups met often. When they could not meet, they transported manuscripts from the BCMS headquarters at Nasokol, West Pokot County, to Tom’s home base in Liter, Baringo County. As Tom’s health and mobility diminished, he spent more and more time on the translation project, just finishing a final proofread of a manuscript due soon to the printers when he died on September 23, 1964. “The Pokot New Testament was printed in 1967 by the Trinitarian Bible Society and has gone through two editions” (Totty, 1981, p. 7). The disputes over the original orthography developed by the Tottys foreshadowed the eventual rejection of their decades of work. In 1975, a new, more accurate orthography was coordinated by the Bible Society of Kenya and undertaken by Rev. Daniel Tumkou, a student of the Tottys and “the first Pokot to be ordained” (McKemey, 1964, Jan. 4). While Daniel called the

orthographic and translation work of the Tottys “important,” the Pokot resistance to the missionaries’ work resulted in a new, entirely Pokot-led orthography.

On the Catholic side of the divide, Kiltegan Father Leo Staples became known for his exceptional fluency in Pokot. His learning corresponded with an early translation project that began several months after his arrival in West Pokot in 1953: “There were two [Pokot] teachers, one was a Protestant and one was a Catholic, and I made friends with them. They both understood English, and we got together and translated a Kisumu Diocesan Penny Catechism into the Ki-Pokot<sup>79</sup> language. That really was the first exercise that brought a breakthrough. That helped me to learn Pokot” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Leo’s Pokot language skills became even more necessary after Vatican II in the 1960s. Holy Rosary Sister Marita Malone explained the impact of Vatican II on the weekly religious practices in Pokot: “When it came to church services, the language was slowly transitioning from the Latin to the vernacular. That meant Father Leo had his work cut out for him to translate the rituals of the Masses, and sacraments into kPokot. The Latin- and English-style hymns were being replaced by ones in the Pokot language incorporating them into their own melodic tunes” (Malone, 2018, p. 320). The priest commentator in the 1966 Catholic film “Killeshandra Nuns: Forbidden Valley” described the use of the Pokot language at the Ortum mission: “Everything possible has been done to make them feel at home in church. They pray in their own language and above all they sing in their own language, hymns and litanies set to their own Pokot melodies and sung with wholehearted conviction” (Radharc Films, 1966).

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<sup>79</sup> In the language of Swahili, the prefix ‘Ki-’ is used to indicate a language (Kipokot) as opposed to a people group (prefix ‘Wa-’ such as Wapokot) or a country/land (prefix ‘U-’ or Upokot). Marita Malone often abbreviated Kipokot further to kPokot (2018).

In keeping with tensions between Protestant and Catholic missions in Pokot, Leo began his own translation project for the Bible from scratch, distinct from and likely decades after the one pioneered by the BCMS and AIM. Fr. Leo Staples explained the project as it developed:

Schools and education were beginning to grow and flourish. Fortunately, we had quite a number of educated youth, so we said, ‘now that we have educated youth among us, as Catholics, the Bible is of paramount importance. People should have the Bible in their local language.’ We made contact with the Bible Society in Nairobi, and they were very happy to join in with us, and they gave us every encouragement. So in each parish we formed a group of educated youth together with elders who had a deep understanding of the culture. Then we all used to meet every month; each group was given a share of the Bible to look at and translate for the month ahead; then all would come back after a month and we would listen to the translation of each group. When satisfied and all agreed, that portion of the Bible was now finished. Eventually, we ended up with the New Testament and later the Old Testament – when I was going on leave in 2002 the whole Bible was translated. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

The Catholic Comboni missionaries likewise continued to emphasize the need for written material in the language of Pokot: “In our ministry priests have concentrated very much on evangelising through: visitation, catechism instruction, formation of leaders and catechists, sharing God’s grace through his Sacraments and preparation of material in local languages.” (West Pokot, 2007, p. 5). Interestingly, the Catholics sought to translate the Bible once literacy and education were well-established in Pokot; whereas, the Protestants began with the translation and then sought to teach the Pokot how to read it.

**Changing Trends.** The prevalence of language learning began to be de-emphasized in mission work as time went on and missions transitioned to shorter term commitments. In 1957, Annette Totty spoke of “attempting to teach language to Dr. Cox and the others” (1957, Oct. 18). For the doctors who came after him in Amudat and the Sister Doctors who worked in Ortum, medical service was time consuming and did not allow for the study of the local language. While Dr. Peter Cox’s wife Liza became fluent in Pokot, Peter, Dr. David Webster, and Sister Doctor

Marita Malone did not. Marita explained that she had not been given “the opportunity to study... the intricacies of the Pokot language... Having no knowledge of the language was a major obstacle” (Malone, 2018, p. 19-21). After some years in Pokot and a short stint in Tanzania to complete a Swahili learning course, Marita stated, “By that time, I could speak a little Swahili, the widely accepted language of Kenya, but I never had the time or the capacity to learn kPokot, the language spoken by the Pokot people and not yet available in print. This left me relying on interpreters to ascertain the medical problems or communicate with the patients” (Malone, 2018, p. 213).

While learning Kiswahili was often encouraged or required for new missionaries after Kenya’s independence, learning Pokot was still highly impractical as no written learning materials or classes were available. Catholic Kiltegan Father Tom McDonnell described his experience with language learning:

The Pokot people did not know nor speak Swahili in the early 1970s. Hence, when I first arrived in Nairobi, our leadership strongly recommended that I learn Pokot first and Swahili later... I found it very difficult to hear the ‘spoken’ Pokot. It is a ‘tonal’ language, and I am slightly tonal deaf. I must confess that I never really spoke the Pokot language fluently. I could never preach a sermon without notes. I could carry on simple conversations with the people in the hospital, at the wells, on the hills etc. (personal communication, 19 May 2019).

AIM missionary Art Davis traveled to Kenya in 1972, attended Swahili language classes at the Anglican Church of Kenya Language School in Nairobi, but likewise was not trained in Pokot (Davis, 2011). Reformed Church of America missionary Molly Beaver did the same in 1985, and other RCA missionaries were encouraged and allotted time to “apply themselves to studying the language and getting to know the people and their customs and cultures” in an informal way (Swart, 1998, p. 300). Pokot still remains a difficult language to learn as materials and training programs are not available. As trends in the length of missionary service have

decreased and more Pokot are educated and typically tri-lingual in Pokot, Kiswahili, and English, fewer and fewer Western Christian missionaries are learning the language of the Pokot. The Comboni 2007 West Pokot Charter stated, “At present the most challenging situations we find are the following: Learning of the local language by the missionaries, is still needed, though not imperative” (West Pokot, 2007, p. 7). Kathy Tierney explained in 2019, “We use translators but do know some Pokot language. I use a gal here and then try to use my own parables from their surroundings to explain the Bible” (personal communication, 4 Nov. 2019). Andy DuPont of Friends of Asilong has picked up greetings and commonly used phrases in Pokot and Swahili since he began coming to Pokot in 2009, but he relies on the Kenyan missionary, Julius Sawe, who spoke fluent English, Swahili, and Nandi upon moving to West Pokot in 2009 and has since learned fluent Pokot.

The missionary focus on language learning, developing orthographies, and translation in Pokot and in other mission fields has had two profound effects on, first, the missionaries’ perception of the Pokot and, then, the place of the Pokot. First, according to Volker Martin Dally, the director of Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Leipzig, Germany, “Many examples show that their intensive engagement with indigenous languages and cultures often led the missionaries to a change in attitude. It almost seems that the deeper they penetrated into the secrets of a respective language, the more they became advocates of the language itself, and for the people who used this language as their mother tongue” (2013). Second, through their work, missionaries began to preserve local languages long before the international community began to value this initiative (Oldham, 1931, notwithstanding). Coincidentally, while interest in preserving local languages has increased (the UN declared 2019 to be the International Year of

Indigenous Languages<sup>80</sup>), the number of outsiders learning Pokot has fallen off due to the difficulty of learning the language, an increase in ease in communicating in English or Swahili, and the shortening of missionary commitment to Pokot. However, the mission legacy of language preservation and subsequent Pokot pride in their heritage (discussed in the next chapter) reflects the missionary perception, or “change of attitude” as Dally mentioned, and illustrates an example of culture preservation in the place of the Pokot that stands against a popular (anti-missionary) discourse of mission-instigated cultural destruction.

**Gramophone Ministry.** The use of language in evangelism went high-tech in 1950s Pokot. Annette Totty, overwhelmed with the expanse of her mission field, explained the solution: “We had stood on the tops of our high mountains some 11,000 ft with their little villages nestling in their craters and we wonder how could they ever be evangelized. Here was the answer, we would have records made in the Pokot language and get gramophones in the hands of evangelists and the little singing discs could be taken to places where our feet could never tread” (Totty, n.d., p. 45). At the request of AIM missionary Tom Collins, two American women from the American ministry called Gospel Recordings visited the Tottys at the BCMS mission in Nasokol in 1954. After making preliminary recordings in Pokot, the women returned to their home office to produce records of the gospel message in the Pokot language. The gramophone ministry, as Annette called it, appealed to her sense of urgency to evangelize the Pokot people. “We took the records on safari and played them everywhere. To our primitive people it was a seven-day wonder” (Totty, n.d., p. 46). In a 1956 prayer letter, Annette explained the logistics of the

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<sup>80</sup> The President of the General Assembly of the UN pointed out that the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples “calls on States, among other things, to enact policies and laws aimed at preserving and strengthening indigenous languages.” Read more here: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1053711>

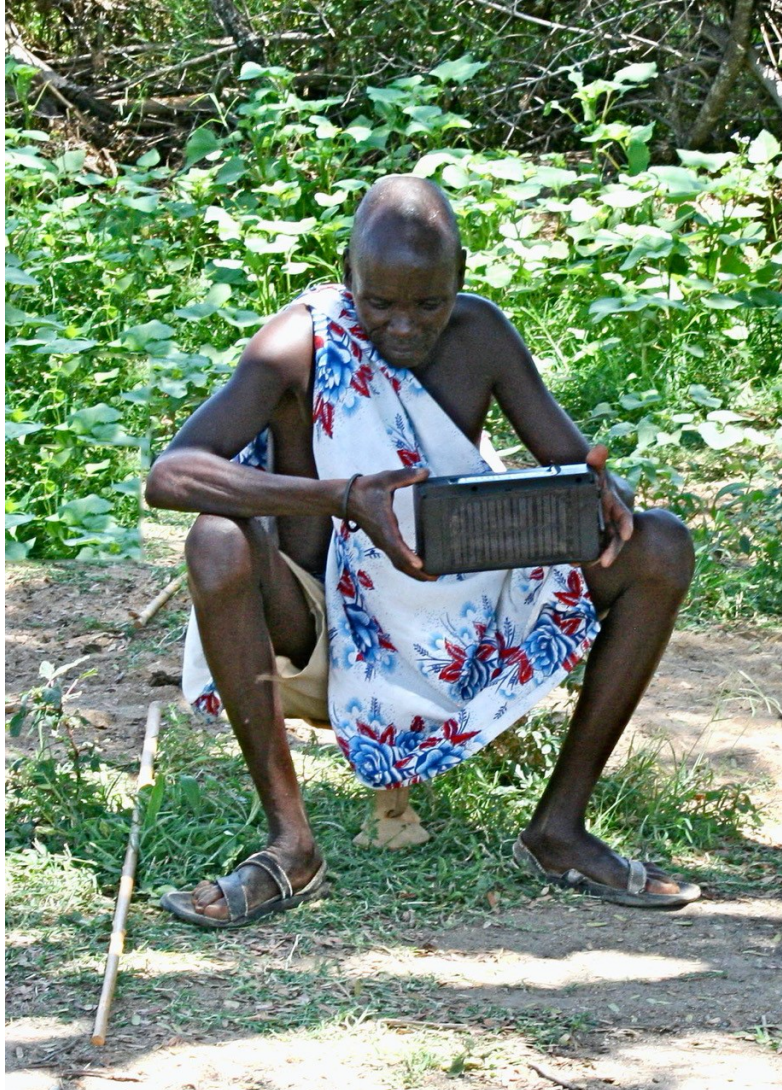


gramophone ministry, again alluding to a relationship of cooperation between the colonial government and BCMS: “The Suk love these records and we have used them intensively. The record can scale the highest mountains. They can go where no European can go; they do not need an evangelist. This Mission makes a cheap gramophone. Our plan is to put a gramophone and records in ten police posts. Our police officer is keenly cooperating” (Totty, 1956, Sept. 25).

The gramophone ministry, which modernized with the times, continued from the 1950s through the 2000s. BCMS missionary Phillip Price described their usefulness in a 1955 letter to Gospel Recordings: “The Rev. L.H. Totty has just passed on to me two sets of the Suk series of Gospel Recordings, and I’m writing to say how wonderful they are. Out here in Suk, life hasn’t reached the gramophone stage yet, so if you have a gramophone you draw the crowds. How wonderful to give them the Gospel this way” (Price, 1955, Nov. 24). A letter from Gospel Recordings to Art and Mary Ellen Davis in 1974 both suggested that the AIM missionaries employed the recordings in Baringo County and highlighted a benefit of using the recordings: “I understand that the Pokot people move around with their cattle, which does not make it easy to reach them. A Cardtalk [cardboard record player] and records can be given to them, and in this way they become travelling evangelists!” (Gibson, 1974, Sept. 24). The unaffiliated missionaries, the Hamiltons, employed gospel cassette tapes in their evangelism efforts in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the early 2000s, a Kenyan pastor brought ten solar-powered digital recording devices<sup>81</sup> to Asilong, West Pokot to play the gospel message much like the gramophones of the past. A further fifty devices were distributed by the Friends of Asilong in the 2010s (Figure 4.1). Unaffiliated missionaries Rick and Mary Strickland also distributed audio Bibles around Pokot throughout the mid-2010s (Pokot Now, n.d.).

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<sup>81</sup> These devices came from a ministry called Faith Comes from Hearing in New Mexico, similar but newer than the Gospel Recordings Network organization, which now has offices around the world.



*Figure 4.1: Pokot man listens to the Bible on a solar-powered audio device. Asilong, West Pokot.*

*(Photo Credit: Andy DuPont, 2010)*

Evangelism by audio device, devoid of missionary presence, presents an interesting environment of cultural exchange. One of the benefits of evangelism by audio device, according to Gospel Recordings, is that “records do not create personality or denominational prejudices” (1970). As the devices come from outside Pokot but express voices of Pokot individuals, they become a material reflection of postcolonial hybridity at the contact zone. However, these

devices in Pokot usually originated from a missionary source, and in most cases have accompanied missionary presence.

### ***Cultural Connections and Disconnections***

Within the context of evangelism, missionaries were constantly negotiating with their perception of Pokot culture. The missionaries' goal to evangelize and make Christian converts was complicated by their commitment to not just share the message and leave but to live amongst the Pokot and teach them how to live like Christians. Each element of Pokot culture had to be evaluated against the mission organization and missionary's standard of biblical truth and/or beliefs of morality and rightness. Through this sometimes-subconscious process, missionaries found connections and disconnections with Pokot culture, based largely on their perceptions, to both make their case for their message and encourage further Christian development.

**Connections.** Although early missionaries had difficulty separating their faith from their culture, many sought to find cultural connections with the Pokot to help explain the gospel ("good news") they came to share. The connections the missionaries made directly related to their perceptions of the Pokot people and place. BCMS doctor/missionary David Webster explained, "To study and try to understand the beliefs and mind of the local people was essential. It was essential from the point of view of evangelism – explaining the Christian message in a relevant and meaningful way" (Webster, 2013, p. 169). For the Protestant missionaries, and to a lesser degree the Catholic missionaries, this meant using cultural touchstones to explain God, the stories of the Bible, belief in Jesus as God's son, and the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of

humankind. From the Housdens and Tottys in the early 1930s to the Tierneys almost ninety years later, attempts have been made by missionaries to draw connections from what the Pokot know and believe with the Christian message and the practice of Christianity.

In a 1932 prayer letter home, Stanley Housden illustrated this strategy, drawing from his perception of the Pokot, “Annie has been teaching them Old Testament Stories, mainly on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It would have been an inspiration to you to have seen them listening for the first time to these stories with wide open mouths. And the great thing to remember is that so much in the lives of these Suk people corresponds with the lives of those in the Old Testament times” (Housden, 2 November 1932). In keeping with the Housden’s perception of the Pokot as similar to biblical characters thousands of years ago<sup>82</sup> and the place of the Pokot as uncivilized or undeveloped, BCMS missionary Dr. Peter Cox described his strategy of missions to a Western audience: “‘How do you get your message across?’, I hear you say. Well, partly by establishing a common ground, partly by Pokot-orientated parable and partly by trying to link the teaching to everyday life and local people. Just slough off your civilisation for a moment, and project yourself into a nomadic frame - you would be amazed at the difference!” (Cox, 1967). Like Stanley Housden and Peter Cox, Kathy Tierney explained in a 2016 newsletter that an understanding of Pokot culture and livelihood provided a link for the Christian message: “The Pokot understand the Good Shepherd because they are shepherds of all the camels, goats, cows and sheep running everywhere in Pokot. We have the honor and privilege to share with them that Jesus is their Good Shepherd, sometimes for the first time” (Tierney, November 2016).

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<sup>82</sup> The perception is reciprocated according to Mojola (2014): “The Old Testament (OT) is much loved in Africa, perhaps due to its close cultural and religious affinities with traditional African culture and ethnic religions.” Mojola explains that the Africans often relate better to the Old Testament because of similar “ontologies,” “religious practices and institutions” as well as “stories from their own cultures” (2014).

In addition to a basic understanding of Pokot culture and livelihood, BCMS missionary Annette Totty drew from her understanding of the Pokot religion to explain the message of Jesus: “The Pokot believe in a blood sacrifice. They know that they have all sinned and God has to be appeased for that sin, so an ox is slain and placed on a stone altar as propitiation for that sin. This is a wonderful point of contact and an opportunity for preaching the gospel” (Totty, n.d., p. 3). Likewise, when the colonial government officials employed the Tottys to minister to followers of the anticolonial religion, *Dini ya Msambwa*, the strategy was similar: “What can we do on our part to prevent this ghastly subversion? One of the aims of ‘Dini ya Msambwa’ is to procure Eternal life. Well then let us tell them how they can find Eternal Life, let us go everywhere preaching the Gospel” (Totty, A, 1956). The Tottys’ successor, Philip Price, brought together his understanding of Pokot livelihood, culture, and religion to ground his strategy of evangelism: “The Pokot are a healthy and a hardy people; their very isolation encourages them to be bound together by tribal customs. From a religious point of view the Pokot are spirit-worshippers; they have a highly organized ritual in which animal sacrifices are offered to placate the spirits in times of drought, sickness and other adversity” (Price, 1970, p. 8).

Catholic Kiltegan missionary Leo Staples illustrated a similar approach to evangelism, connecting Pokot culture and beliefs to the Christian message. Leo explained how his understanding of the Pokot god, *Tororot*, enabled him to better teach about the Christian god:

‘Tororot’ which means something that is very bright. ‘Tororot’ is bright. For them it was a power – a supreme power! Their lives were built around that but that wasn’t enough. That was what brought out the challenge in me. As I mentioned before they were frightened and scared. I began to think about it; now God was placing an opportunity right into my hands of doing something to bring a brightness, a light that would take fear out of their hearts. Be not afraid, fear not! Their reverence for God was very much controlled by fear. They believed in a fearful God. My great joy today is that I was given that opportunity of bringing a loving God to a people who were in complete darkness as far as salvation was concerned and lead them into a knowledge of Jesus. That’s my great

joy now, and I can't thank God enough for that. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

While Leo sometimes made cultural connections of religious belief, most Catholic missionary texts discuss connecting Pokot culture and beliefs to the practice of Christianity rather than the belief in Christianity. Leo Staples explained several practices of the Catholic church in Pokot and how these practices drew from an understanding of Pokot culture. For example, in the Pokot traditional rite of passage of circumcision, Leo explained, "Every child has a sponsor. No circumcision will take place without a sponsor and that sponsor is chosen by the family of the person to be circumcised. When the ceremony is over, there is a deep relationship with that person – between the sponsor and the person who is being circumcised. A life-long relationship. So we used similar relationship in our ceremony of Baptism" (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Likewise, in the 1966 Radharc Film, Leo explained the use of the Pokot language in the weekly church services as an example that "Everything possible has been done to make them feel at home in church." The singing in church, according to Leo, appealed strongly to the musical culture of the Pokot. Church services "will also include a proportion of pagans drawn in by the singing and their own instinct of religious sense" (Radharc Films, 1966). Like singing, stories are a common cultural feature of oral traditional people. For Leo, that meant incorporating stories into his evangelism strategy: "I go in for parables in a very big way" (Radharc Films, 1966).

The connections above illustrate missional evangelism in West Pokot with examples from Anglican, Catholic, and unaffiliated missionaries; whereas, in Baringo County (previously East Pokot), an area dominated by the AIM, Pokot theologian John Mondri found in his research that the connections between Pokot culture and Christianity were lacking: "Culture shapes how people live in their particular context. The findings of this dissertation show that low Christian

population in East Pokot nomadic context is due to lack of understanding of their lifestyle and culture by mission practitioners” (Mondi, 2016, p. 144). The uncovering of and communicating about cultural connections not only allowed the message of the missionaries to make sense to the Pokot people, resulting in a greater number of converts, but, like language learning, allowed the missionaries to better understand and appreciate the people and place of the Pokot.

**Disconnections.** While an understanding of Pokot culture and religion helped many missionaries connect their evangelical message with the people they were trying to evangelize, cultural practices and institutions often presented areas of disconnect as well. Missionaries’ perceptions of the contact zone between Western and Pokot culture directly influenced their strategy of evangelism and informed their position toward Pokot cultural practices and institutions. At times, Western cultural norms blended into missionaries’ messages about biblical lifestyle and Christian practices. As described in the previous section concerning missionary perceptions of cultural pluralism, historian Gregory H. Maddox (1999) explained that the mere act of evangelism was fraught with probable colonial overtones and decisions missionaries had to navigate in a cross-cultural exchange: “Both secular and theological writing on the issue of the adaptation of Christianity to African cultures has continued to postulate a duality between African cultures and Christianity. As the terminology has shifted from adaptationism to inculturation to incarnation, theologians have continued to argue about the means of Africanizing Christianity” (Maddox, 1999, p. 28). In other words, missionaries had to decide what parts of Pokot culture were compatible with Christianity, and in keeping with the missionaries’ perceptions of the Pokot people, their perception of how Christianity fit in Pokot shifted over time. Common habits and cultural practices that were viewed as having spiritual significance

such as drinking alcohol (drunkenness), polygamy, and ritualized rites of passage fell under the scrutiny of missionaries with a variety of results. Participation in these practices was frowned upon or prohibited for individuals who had professed conversion to Christianity. Missionaries' views on these practices had a direct effect on how the Christian church developed in Pokot and subsequently the religious sense of place of Pokot.

***Drunkenness.*** While the British colonial machine was powered by gin and tonic, the colonial introduction of distilled liquor into East Africa was overshadowed in Pokot by the traditional drink of fermented local grains (De Smedt, 2009). Nutrient rich, millet-based beers were a Pokot dietary staple, used in religious rituals, such as *Sapana*, and often given as a part of dowries (Ngeiywo, 2018; Bianco, 1992). By some accounts, an increased prevalence of drinking alcoholic beverages and thus drunkenness was a colonial legacy, associated with the spread of distilled liquors and a modernizing influence<sup>83</sup> (Russell, 1994; De Smedt, 2009). BCMS missionary Dr. Peter Cox bemoaned the drinking habits of once seemingly converted Pokot schoolboys, describing them as having “lapsed into the easy-going drinking of the semi-civilised” (Cox, 1967). However, Charles H. Ambler (1987) explained that the consumption (and overconsumption) of beer was common in precolonial western Kenya, and rather than being a concern for the community, it functioned to reinforce “community solidarity and elder hierarchy” (p. 2). The “social problem” of drunkenness, as the colonial officials and missionaries viewed it, likely arose not out of new access to alcoholic beverages and Western influence but

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<sup>83</sup> The consumption of alcohol in British colonies has an interesting history. While De Smedt (2009, p. 201) declared that “distilled liquors were largely unknown in East Africa until their introduction by John Hanning Speke and Samuel Baker in the 1860s,” fermented local grains were common (see MJR Nout’s 1981 thesis “Aspects of the manufacture and consumption of Kenyan traditional fermented beverages” for an exhaustive list, <https://edepot.wur.nl/205798>).



due to the new lens of Western perspective that viewed drunkenness as an impediment to a well-run economy (Bianco, 1992) and a morally upright populace.

While drunkenness was highly discouraged by all mission groups, each missionary group accepted a varying degree of drinking, basing their stance on the biblical injunction from Ephesians 5:18, “Do not get drunk on wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (ESV). For the more conservative Africa Inland Mission, historian Morad explained, “Back in their homelands, these missionaries came from churches that had clear ideas about what behavior indicated if a person was saved or not. A saved individual would not drink alcohol or smoke tobacco, go to dances, or gamble” (Morad, 1996b, p. 70). AIM missionary Art Davis (1982-1997) concurred, including “beer making” among the “pagan aspects” of Pokot culture along with dances and traditional ceremonies (Davis, 2011, p. 100). The Tottys, who were part of the more conservative Anglican mission organization BCMS, made numerous references to the Catholic missionaries’ permissive attitude toward drinking, claiming in at least one letter that the Catholics were “bribing the [Pokot] people with beer” (Totty, A., 1956, May 6). BCMS missionary Dr. Peter Cox, likewise, bemoaned that in the Catholic mission in Amudat “there are not nearly such strict views on drinking (though Father Raphael preaches strongly against drunkenness)” (1967). The issue of drinking alcohol was also an issue the BCMS missionaries, the Websters, would have to negotiate. For Anglicans, alcohol was a benign part of regular life meant to be taken in moderation<sup>84</sup>. But for the Pokot,

Alcohol was a major stumbling block for Christians. Home brews, made from maize or honey, could be very potent indeed. And the whole purpose of drinking was to get drunk. Drunken rows and fights and injuries were very common indeed... The idea of having

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<sup>84</sup> The more mainstream Anglican mission, the Church Mission Society, “never imposed total abstinence [from alcohol] as a condition for baptism. The product of a more tolerant Anglican tradition, this decision represented in fact a major point of conflict between the CMS on the one hand and the African Inland Mission and the Presbyterians on the other, and was in part responsible for the failure of the Kikuyu movement for Protestant unity in Kenya” (Strayer, 1978, p. 78-9).

just a social tippie of alcohol was not a prevalent concept. It was all or nothing. When we first arrived in Amudat we thought we would vary our fluid intake by making ginger beer. In no time at all the news got around that the doctor was himself brewing beer in his house – the implication being that therefore beer-brewing must be all right. We realized that, in that situation, we ourselves needed to be teetotal – and that included ginger ‘beer’. Alcohol was at the root of so many social problems. It was alcohol that destroyed the life and marriage of little Samson Adio, our Health Worker. (Webster, 2013, p. 161)

In this example, David Webster adjusted his moral perspective on alcohol to better fit how he viewed the realities of alcohol in the place of Pokot.

***Polygamy.*** Polygamy, like drunkenness, was a practice that Western Christian missionaries strongly opposed<sup>85</sup>. Pokot pastor and scholar John Mondi explained, “The mainline churches that had missionaries (Anglicans, Africa Inland Church or Africa Inland Mission, Lutherans, Pentecostals and Roman Catholics) in East and West Pokot had one common formula to deal with polygamous marriages among the Pokot nomad; ‘they out-richtly condemned polygamy and upheld monogamy as the type of marriage supported by the Scripture’” (Mondi, 2016, p. 77-8). Scholar Tom Ngeiywo (2018) claimed, “The act of the Western Christian missionaries rejecting to baptize the Pokot who were polygamists made the majority of the Pokot to equate the Christian religion with colonialism. Therefore, they rejected both the Western Christian Missionaries and the Colonial Administration” (p. 8). While this may have been the case, the missionary discourse disclosed that most missionaries working in Pokot understood that polygamy was deeply entrenched in the culture and unlikely to change quickly. Holy Rosary Sister Marita Malone explained a reason for the practice, “Many women died in childbirth, which reinforced the practice of polygamy” (Malone, 2018, p. 203). Humorously, Marita also

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<sup>85</sup> While not explicitly mandated by the Bible, Western Christian missionaries felt that monogamous marriage was the ideal supported biblically by God’s creation of Eve, the one wife of Adam (Genesis 2:22-24), Paul’s allegory of Christ’s love for the Church representing a husband’s love for his wife (Ephesians 5:22-33), and the command that church elders should only have one wife (1 Timothy 3:2).

mentioned that it was widely believed by the Pokot community around the Ortum mission, despite missionary claims to the contrary, that the four nuns working at Ortum were the four wives of Fr. Leo Staples (Malone, 2018).

While the celibacy of the Catholic missionaries would have been highly countercultural for the Pokot, David Webster explained that the ideal of a monogamous Christian marriage ran against “traditional customs” as well: “For the Christian man to have just one wife, and for the couple to remain committed and faithful to one another, was a new concept” (Webster, 2013, p. 160). The push for monogamy had its roots in the missionary perception of gender inequality in Pokot. Girl children were valued by their parents for the dowry they would bring in at marriage, and because of polygamy, young women were always in demand. Missionary Jane Hamilton explained her ambivalence toward the Pokot dowry system associated with polygamy: “When cows were exchanged for wives, the family and community recognized and enforced the marriage bond... It was a stable, binding system though not advantageous for the women who were in effect sold to their husbands. It did represent an obligatory agreement that was foundational to the society. Today without those traditional trappings, the morals are looser and the young people are not always held to the old traditional standards. Hopefully the Christian standards of one wife and married for life will replace the old ways” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 109). Jane’s perception reflected both an insightful cross-cultural understanding of the value of the dowry system within Pokot society and a Western-centric view of the dowry as a sales price, which many Africans would find offensive.

Jane’s hope for a Christian restructuring of the Pokot institution of marriage was not new. For the girls who were being educated and had converted to Christianity in the late 1960s and early 1970s, David Webster explained,

There would be enormous pressures on them over such issues as circumcision and arranged marriage. There would be a tension between their Christian faith and their tribal loyalty, which they would have to work out for themselves. It was a great joy when they married young Christian men, and showed all the evidence of Christian marriages, with mutual love, and respect, and faithfulness. It was a joy when, as Christians, they felt able to retain the positive and constructive values of tribal life. Christ was not calling them out of their community, but rather calling them to live as Christians within it. (Webster, 2013, p. 163)

BCMS missionary Ruth Stranex Deeth reflected on the hybridized culture of marriage that these same Pokot girls would experience, as cultural negotiations—Western, Christian, and Pokot—effected change at the contact zone, “A Christian marriage seems frighteningly permanent. Not many go into it lightheartedly. The ceremony has, perhaps unfortunately, taken on many of the frills of a Western wedding, but in essence it is Christian and unique. Of course, tribal custom is also satisfied and a dowry paid” (Stranex, 1977, p. 30).

As of 2020, polygamy is still common among the Pokot, was legalized in Kenya in 2014, and continues to be viewed as a mark against “Christian principals of marriage” and gender equality by missionaries (President, 2014). Recent mission groups, like Friends of Asilong, tend to encourage new, unmarried converts to commit to monogamous marriages and married converts to avoid adding wives to already polygynous relationships. (The exchange of a dowry is not addressed). This stance had a surprisingly progressive precedent in 1909 when Anglican missionaries working in other parts of Kenya “expressed the view that baptism should not be denied to a man having more than one wife though any church member subsequently taking a second or additional wife would be subject to church discipline” (Strayer, 1978, p. 79). While such a proposal was speedily denounced<sup>86</sup> by the “Parent Committee,” the concept became widely accepted much later. For example, a Pokot community elder and his fifth wife are active

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<sup>86</sup> Strayer (1978) remarked that such a rebuke and dismissal of mission leniency toward polygamy amongst new converts resulted in a “lost opportunity” for “‘adapting’ Christianity to African culture” (p. 79).

leaders in the AIC church in Asilong, supported by the mission Friends of Asilong. Unaffiliated missionary Kathy Tierney had a similar perspective and strategy in Kamketo, “There are men who, at times, come to Jesus with more than one wife. When I got here some were even Pastors of a couple of Churches. My plan is to keep on keeping on and trusting that the Spirit of Christ Jesus will move hearts when His truth is taught” (Tierney, September 2016).

While the missionary perception of inequality or misogyny (in addition to biblical support) still drives the strategy of encouraging monogamy in Pokot, the strength of that encouragement or potential consequences of ignoring it for Pokot Christians have lessened in severity. As a practice, polygamy continues to decrease around Africa, and missionaries continue to add their voice to what is becoming more of a cultural norm of monogamy, slowly affecting change at the contact zone.

***Rituals and Rites of Passage.*** Pokot rituals and rites of passage, which often included participants painting their faces white and dancing, hearkened to the images of Africa’s “prehistoric man” with his primitive ways popularized in Western imagination by Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness*: “they howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar” (1969, p. 53). Conrad (1899) described the orientalist view of African ceremony, barely connecting the humanity of the African as ‘other’ with the humanity of the Western observer. On the other hand, Pokot scholar and pastor, John Mond (2016), described Pokot traditional beliefs in a clear and practical manner,

Pokot religious life emphasizes maintaining a harmonious relationship with the divine power and not adherence to doctrines. Their rituals attempt to harness cosmic powers and

channel them to maintain fecundity and sustain the community. Like in other African religions, Pokot rituals are the means by which a person negotiates responsible relationships with other members of the community, with the ancestors, with the spiritual forces of nature, and with the gods. For this reason, worship is extremely practical. Worship is a direct response to cosmic powers. (Mondi, 2016, p. 23)

Conrad and Mondri represent a spectrum of perspective through time and space<sup>87</sup>. Missionaries' evangelical strategy arose from their place on that spectrum. Most, but not all, missionaries in Pokot came closer to Mondri's understanding of Pokot rituals and rites of passage than Conrad's, responding to them with a variety of perspectives from uncertainty to ambivalence to denunciation. The missionaries' response to Pokot rituals directly related to the spiritual significance the missionaries perceived in these rituals. Since the first of the ten commandments in Exodus 20 requires that followers of the biblical god have "no other gods before Me" (ESV), converts were prohibited from participating in traditional ceremonies that were perceived as pagan.

One of the most profound and recurring rituals in Pokot culture was the coming of age ceremony for boys called *Sapana*. Anthropologist and Pokot ethnologist "Peristiany (1951) in his work, 'The Age-Set System of the Pastoral Pokot,' describes the *Sapana* (spearing of the bull) initiation rite and its significance to the Pokot. He states that after circumcision, the next initiation rite for Pokot men is *Sapana*... Pokot men who have undergone *Sapana* are permitted to participate in activities of manhood" (Ngeiywo, 2018, p. 21). Even though very few missionaries discussed *Sapana*, the discourse reveals two distinct responses to the ritual. Missionary-cum-anthropologist Johannes Visser (1989) shared an illuminating vignette. During the colonial period of land alienation, non-Pokot individuals who were forced off of their own land because of white settlement had moved into Pokot territory. These emigrants were required

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<sup>87</sup> A precedent for negotiating with and evaluating cultural practices with cross-cultural converts is found in the New Testament with Paul's ministry to the Greeks (see Acts 17) and Galatian Gentiles (see Galatians 2).

by the Pokot to undergo *Sapana*<sup>88</sup> in order to be “Pökootized;” “In 1949 for instance, many Nandi and Bukusu were initiated in this way, although some 30 Sebei refused. These Sebei, as Christians, swore on the Bible that they were ‘Suk and would be accepted into one of the Suk clans’ (A.R. 1948)” (Visser, 1989, p. 38). Clearly, these Sebei converts viewed the *Sapana* initiation as a religious conflict of interest. Likewise, AIM missionary Art Davis discussed a convert who had been advised by a local Christian against participating in the circumcision ceremony. Described by Art, “Things that are done at these ceremonies are immoral, degrading and full of pagan prayers to the dead, the cows, etc.” (Davis, 2011, p. 124). Converts in the AIM mission were strongly encouraged not to participate in “pagan” rituals such as circumcision and *Sapana*.

On the other end of the spectrum of perspective, Catholic Kiltegan Fr. Tom McDonnell was surprised to learn that fellow missionary Fr. Leo Staples had not, himself, gone through the initiation rite of *Sapana* since he had been given a ceremonial name by the Pokot people. Leo’s experience with the rite showed his acceptance by the local people and his lack of religious opposition to the practice: “I never did the initiation [*Sapana*]. But the strange thing was that someone called me ‘Logomol’. This name means ‘Black and white bull’, a leader of the herd! It’s a bossy bull. A leading bull. Many people would come along and say to me ‘I donated a bull for your initiation’. So the bull had many owners? Everyone was claiming credit! Even up to now they call me by the name Logomol!... Men from three different districts claimed to have provided the bull for the initiation. There is no contradicting that” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

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<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, the *Sapana* initiation rite, in this case, underscores both its importance in declaring one’s identity as a Pochon and the flexibility of tribal identity at the time.

While the boys' initiation was not a prominent topic in missionary discourse and was approached with ambivalence, the girls' initiation was met with a moral opposition due to its association with the practice of female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM, like polygamy, was viewed as detrimental to the equal treatment of the sexes. A staunch mission stance and prohibition against FGM had been the undoing of many missionary endeavors at the contact zones in Kenya, particularly among the Maasai<sup>89</sup> and Kikuyu. The missionaries in Pokot, however, either refused to follow a legalized prohibition against converts undergoing or supporting FGM or never were forced into making an ultimatum. Although most were outspoken in their opposition to the practice on moral rather than religious grounds, they did not require converts to take a stand against FGM. BCMS pioneer, Annette Totty, explained, "Our greatest problem was that of female circumcision, a ghastly custom deeply embedded in the tribe, but Lawrie never legislated for them – he would call the Church Council together and they would talk it over and reach an agreement... our Africans settling the problem for us in their way, which was the Christian way" (Totty, n.d., p. 1 and 82). However, BCMS missionary Philip Price's story in which two Pokot girls refused circumcision clearly communicated the pressure that converts were under: "Two of the Christian girls, Lois and Chepkite were of marriageable age and therefore due to enter into adult initiation rites which included circumcision. As Christians they felt that they could not take part in these. They felt they owed allegiance to a new Lord and Master which was incompatible with the spirit-worshipping rites of their traditional

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<sup>89</sup> AIM missionary to the Maasai, John Stauffacher, was compelled by the AIM law against FGM to make a stand in church. Only two Maasai boys stood by him, and his mission eventually fell apart. In retrospect, he stated, "I can't help but feel sometimes that somewhere we have made a tremendous mistake, when it becomes necessary for us to force out Christians (and I believe most of them are Christians) who have only so recently come out of the rankest heathenism. I don't see now how we can do differently, but I doubt if we should have done much harm if we had agreed that since female circumcision must go, we would be patient and work and pray against it until the natives themselves had cast an overwhelming vote against it, rather than that we should make a rule that severs them from church membership" (Morad, 1996, p. 101).



upbringing. The local elders were furious” (Price, 1970, p. 56-7). Philip underscored the girls’ choice in the matter against a backdrop of strong mission disapproval for FGM. At the same time BCMS missionary Ruth Stranex Deeth questioned her mission’s stance: “Were we wrong to encourage the girls to go to school, and to discourage them from being circumcised? Was I making them outsiders? Could modern schooling and tribal customs mix?” (Deeth, 2017, p. 36). Like Ruth, Jane Hamilton a decade later explained her perspective and understanding of FGM, “The Kenya government has been doing a vigorous campaign against FGM... We tried unsuccessfully for many years to discourage this practice... The deep significance this has in tribal life makes it very difficult for change to take place. It is all part of coming-of-age, status in the tribe, and marriage prospects for the girls” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 135). Likewise, the Comboni missionaries recognized FGM as a “harmful” cultural practice, an impediment to development but not Christianization: “Besides, in their culture there are practices that need updating to push aside whatever is harmful to the people (FGM, traditional medicine, etc.) while keeping the values that are beneficial. People need to jump over the taboos that envelop some topics in order to deal with them in an efficient way; this is very true on matters pertaining to gender relations and improvement of the conditions of women” (West Pokot, 2007). Fr. Leo Staples explained how education was leveraged recently to discourage FGM and change the landscape:

One very large school was established especially for girls who would volunteer not be circumcised. That school caters for girls who say I will not be circumcised; that would have been useless were it not for the fact that they had to find a group of boys who would say ‘I will marry a girl who is not circumcised’. The boys needed to commit themselves to marry the uncircumcised girls. Many boys/men would never marry a girl who was not circumcised. They had to get a group from both sides, male and female. So we have that school then and things are going on nicely. Then again the old people are still doing it in the bush. Circumcision for girls is actually a crime now in Kenya. If a girl or boy dies after circumcision today, it is regarded as murder. That just shows you the advance in thinking about the whole thing. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

Not all missionaries in Pokot responded with ambivalence about or lack of specific judgment on Pokot traditions and rituals. In accordance with his mission's stance on *Sapana*, AIM missionary Art Davis wrote,

Unfortunately, many western missionaries have not taken seriously the importance of insisting that the traditional people completely separate themselves from the practices of their tribal culture that are pagan or against Scripture. Especially forbidden are those aspects that demand loyalty to the point of worship of the elders, ceremonies and rituals. We must confess that we erred on the side of expecting the Holy Spirit to convict the new believers about when to change concerning these issues in their lives, whereas Pastor Njau was absolutely right in obedience to Scripture and insisting on change. (Davis, 2011, p. 102)

Kenyan Pastor Njau who working with the Davises connected many of the material aspects of Pokot culture to their belief systems, insisting that new converts remove their beads and cut their hair, acts that he felt separated them from their "pagan" beliefs (see footnote 62). Art Davis defended this point of view by explaining that these changes of culture were only implemented after a reasonable amount of time of observing Pokot ceremonies including the practice of diviners forecasting rain or attacks from neighboring enemies: "But because we were just learning about their culture and traditions, we didn't try to stop any of their practices; rather we tried to learn about them and understand how and why they did things. It was only after several years of working there that we learned how locked into their traditions they really were" (Davis, 2011, p. 104).

Missionaries like Art Davis understood that the spiritual beliefs of the Pokot permeated all areas of their culture, like many nonwestern belief systems, and to truly convert to Christianity, one would need to make significant cultural changes. For other missionaries in Pokot, Christianity, it was believed, could fit into Pokot culture without a wholesale overhaul. In BCMS missionary David Webster's perspective, "There was the tension between traditional customs and the new faith. In many respects the two were entirely compatible, but in other

respects not” (Webster, 2013, p. 160). Scholar Robert Strayer (1978) explained this perspective and mission strategy, “In the first place missionaries believed that ‘detrribalization’ would render impossible the creation of a truly African church” (p. 88). In other words, the wholesale adoption of Western practices of Christianity would negate a uniquely African Christianity. In this vein, many missionaries disliked Africans adopting western dress, the “erection of large European-style churches,” and adopting European rather than biblical names at baptism. “Despite the superficiality of such measures, they do indicate a genuine concern that Africans should not experience Christianity as a foreign transplant. Within at least these narrow limits, missionaries did attempt to distinguish between what was essentially Christian and what was merely European” (Strayer, 1978, p. 88). In practice, David Webster explained how Western culture often replaced Pokot culture to the dismay of missionaries: “The Sunday services were basically Anglican in form. It was ironical that we missionaries would have liked much more local culture in the services – drums, and Pokot tunes, and informality. But for the local Christians some of these things were too close to a life and to beliefs from which they had moved on. To them Anglican worship was new and exciting” (Webster, 2013, p. 131).

Missionaries would continue to make choices about Pokot cultural practices and their level of compatibility with Christianity. Fr. Tom McDonnell explained that in the Catholic mission in Ortum, “We did not rush to ‘baptise’ people quickly for the sake of numbers. We felt that the people should have a relationship with God and this be expressed by a change in lifestyle” (personal communication, 19 May 2019). The distinct strategies, reflecting unique perspectives, with which missionaries approached Pokot culture would guide the place and practice of Christianity within Pokot, adjusting and negotiating with the cultural identity and religious sense of place. However, mission choices concerning Pokot culture’s compatibility

with Christianity never occurred in a vacuum. Pokot Christians, as in David Webster's church, likewise appropriated, hybridized, or resisted cultural influences at the contact zone (discussed in the next chapter).

### *Itineration/Safaris/Outstations*

Like the early European explorers in Africa, early missionaries spent a great deal of time on safari. The Swahili word, meaning a trip, was used often in the missionary discourse to describe periodic outings away from the mission station by the itinerant evangelist missionaries and later missionary doctors. Unlike explorers, however, missionaries on safari were not merely observing the landscape and encountering the people, they sought to make personal connections with the people, teach them about Christianity and find locations for outstations, churches, and schools that would largely be supervised and run by local converts, called evangelists by the Protestants and catechists by the Catholics. The safari widened the missionary's sphere of influence and thus the contact zone. The evangelistic strategy of the pioneers, BCMS missionary Lawrence Totty, AIM missionary Tom Collins, and Catholic Kiltegan missionary Leo Staples, was dominated by frequent safaris into Pokot, which would affect the built landscape, the development potential, and the religious sense of place in Pokot as outstations were established.

Tom Collins explained in a 1939 letter the motivation for safari work based on his perception of the Pokot: "We know, however, that the Scriptures never teach us to expect the heathen to come to us, but that we must go to them. We therefore praise the Lord for the real desire He has implanted in the hearts of ourselves, our teachers and evangelists to do evangelistic work" (1939, Nov. 20). Tom spent much of his first decade of mission work making safaris to the Pokot people for "language learning and evangelism" (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 39). In

1947, Tom wrote, “We have visited around our out-churches and also made a couple of safaris of nearly a week each into the East Suk country since our arrival” (Collins, 1947, January). Fr. Leo Staples further described his mission’s attempt to increase the contact zone through his first experiences with safari work,

Our workers were not Pokot. We all sat together and asked each other ‘what do we do to make contact with our people?’ We decided, ‘Let’s go down – if they won’t come to us, we will go to them’. We all went down to the river and developed relationships with them where they were! Trust began to grow as we got to know each other. We started dancing with them. After a while they decided ‘these are not a bad crowd’. Then we invited them to come up to the Mission. We brought them as near to the house as possible; for them to see where these strangers lived and that brought a big breakthrough in breaking down their prejudices. We danced together. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

The concept of the safari came from a missionary feeling of urgency in the message and vastness in the landscape. In a letter in 1950 requesting additional missionaries to be assigned to the Pokot mission, Lawrence Totty alluded to both: “We do not need a married couple but a single man who is willing to do a great deal of itinerating and willing to spend a considerable amount of his time alone. At the risk of wearying you by repetition may I again point out that we have a much bigger work here than that of Samburu and a much bigger tribe (44,000 as compared with Samburu 17,000). We have six out centres to maintain in addition to the work at Nasokol” (Totty, 1950, Nov. 16). Likewise, the BCMS General Secretary wrote to Lawrence Totty to confirm the evangelical strategy of safaris and establishing outstations:

What seems to be most urgently needed is teaching of the Christians there that they may feel a part of the wider Church and realise that though there may be no missionaries resident there, they will not be deprived of fellowship and frequent visits from missionaries, while making their own contribution and witness on the spot. I am increasingly convinced that we cannot attempt to fight either against the Roman menace or subversive tribal movements with carnal weapons, that it is ‘not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts<sup>90</sup>’, and that what is needed is a real quickening by the Holy Spirit in the life and witness of each Christian to meet the enemy with the weapons that only God can use. (Gen. Sec., 1957, Jan. 30)

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<sup>90</sup> Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)

To the BCMS, expanding the mission's influence through safaris and establishing outstations, in effect planting the Anglican flag through and every widening territory, effectively counteracted the influence of the Catholic missions and the growth of religious resistance groups like *Dini ya Msambwa* while enculturating Christians into the Protestant fold.

Fr. Leo explained that the first outstations established by the Kiltegan mission were in the lowlands in Cheperaria, Sebit, and Moripus. Later, outstations would be established in Saya, Wagor, Psigor, Orwa, Lomut and along the Kerio valley. Despite the lack of roads, the priests would travel by foot from Ortum at 4000 feet to highland outstations at 8,500 feet. "If we wanted to reach these people, we had to climb and walk to where they lived" (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

In addition to evangelism, the safaris also brought development. Safari work itself was difficult and physically taxing, particularly in the early days of missions in Pokot. BCMS missionary Annette Totty explained, "The safari work took its toll of Lawrie. It was endless walking over excruciating roads, sometimes climbing mountains 10,000 feet above sea level" (Totty, n.d., p. 38). Leo described, "Some walks up the mountains would take about 4 hours. Often we would stay overnight. To walk to Mbarra would be about three hours; Kerelwa would be an hour and a half. It was quite near" (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). However, whether a direct or indirect effect of mission work, safaris often resulted in the "opening up" of Pokot. Development through road building, and school and clinic establishment made accessing these 'remote' locations easier. Leo alluded to the connection between itineration and development: "Our ambition was to get to where the people lived and worked – that is why we went there. So God gave us the courage to get there. God is great! They now have

roads to get to those places. Roads and electricity in those places – never in our wildest dreams would we have thought that roads and electricity would get there – not in our time” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Annette Totty explained that the *Dini ya Msambwa* conflict brought colonial attention to West Pokot and led to greater development of roads based on the Tottys’ expert knowledge of the terrain and the colonial desire to make West Pokot more legible: “Since *Dini ya Msambwa* we can now visit our out centers by road (at least we will call them roads) when once we foot slogged. Since Laurie’s illness and our middle agedness we can no longer do long foot safaris so we spent all we had on a Land Rover the only thing that could tackle our ‘roads’” (Totty, A., 1951).

Even after independence and into the early 1980s, safaris continued to be a strategy of missionary evangelism, and more and more safaris were accompanied by medical missionaries to address health issues of the locals (development of medical services discussed further below). In 1966, the Catholic Kiltegan *Africa Magazine* reported,

Life at Ortum is never dull. A church, a hospital and boarding schools for boys and girls might seem enough to keep the priest and nuns busy. But in addition they were taking on responsibility for the spiritual and physical welfare of the whole of the vast and primitive Suk valley and its wandering people. Mass at Ortum on Sunday for instance was followed by an expedition to Cheperaria twenty miles away for a second Mass and Baptisms. The following day saw a medical safari to Lomut thirty miles off in the opposite direction. Here, Father Staples said Mass and preached to the largely pagan people of the district while the doctor, Sister de Paul, held an open-air clinic under a convenient tree (*Africa Magazine*, 1966).

In the early 1970s, BCMS missionary doctor David Webster made periodic safaris to treat locals and to help establish dispensaries (Webster, 2013). At around the same time, AIM missionary Art Davis was introduced to the area of Churo, East Pokot by Tim Davis during a safari for evangelism and to hold a clinic. Art began taking monthly safaris to Churo and began to support the primary school there. “Mountain climbing and overland foot safaris were some of the

methods we used to have time to talk to Pokot warriors who normally didn't have time for the missionary's stories of God. As we rested, or drank tea, or set up camp for the night, or sat around the campfire at night, we had many chances to talk to them about Jesus Christ. And the Christian Pokot who went with us became good at sharing their faith in Christ and learned lots of new Bible stories from us" (Davis, 2011, p. 134). Art's message built on the previous safaris of Tom Collins who was "well-remembered" by locals as "Bwana Kolong" (Davis, 2011, p. 98). In the mid-1970s, Dick and Jane Hamilton, too, employed the evangelical strategy of taking safaris like their missionary predecessors in Pokot had done for four decades even though they appeared to be ignorant of this precedent: "In the early years we did safari ministry, kind of like camping trips, packing up our supplies and descending down the winding road that was cut out of the side of the escarpment wall, into the Great Rift Valley floor. The thousands of people who lived there had never heard the name of Jesus. They lived in little mud huts, sustained by their herds of cattle and goats and followed a nomadic lifestyle of searching for water and graze for their animals" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 23). The need for the strategy was underscored by the "primitive" nature of the people and the place. While most current missionaries prioritize other strategies of evangelism, the concept of the safari continued through the late 2010s by unaffiliated missionary Dick Strickland, whose missionary strategies involve trekking, sometimes by foot, from Pokot to Turkana, preaching the message of Christianity and peace between the Pokot and the Turkana (Pokot Now, n.d.).

The decline of the mention of safaris in the mission narrative corresponded with the "impressive" expansion of missions from 1973-1985, as described by professor and researcher Ton Dietz (1987). One explanation was that the vastness of the mission field in relationship to the number of missionaries had shrunk immeasurably. Throughout the history of Western



Christian missions in Pokot, small outstations have popped up and disappeared, often forgotten, while others grew and thrived because of increased Pokot population (often in response to services provided by the mission), the continuity of mission work, the hand-off of outstations to local churches or government agencies (in the case of schools and hospitals), or the initiative of local Pokot leadership. Many missions and outstations saw a transition to Kenyan-based denominations (many created from missionary sources). Some research<sup>91</sup> has been done to explain the successes and the failures of missionary endeavors in the place of the Pokot and among other pastoralist people groups; however, more ethnographic and qualitative studies, particularly in rural areas, could augment current studies to help ascertain which outstations have remained and flourished and which have disappeared and why. However, regardless of the length of their existence, the establishment, through safaris and outstations, of spheres of missionary influence on the Pokot landscape provided a basis for future place-building in Pokot Christianity and development.

### ***Sending Out Indigenous Workers***

As an extension to the strategy of conducting safaris, early missionaries hoped to expand their evangelical capacity by sending out indigenous converts. The Anglican BCMS was especially committed to this strategy that was referred to as “indigenous principles”: Annette Totty explained the early advice of their mission mentor, “Papa [Ford]’s advice was to send our five young men [new Pokot converts] out to witness straight away and bring them in from time to time for further teaching” (Totty, n.d., p. 23). Interestingly, while the BCMS required significant training for missionaries to go to the mission field, this same commitment to

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<sup>91</sup> See Shingledecker, 1981; Dietz, 1987; Ndegwah, 2007; Mondy, 2016; Ngeiywo et. al, 2017.

gatekeeping did not apply to local converts. The urgency of the message was the primary motivation. Annette described, “Right from the beginning Lawrie had aimed at the Pokot church being self-propagating, self-governing and self-supporting. He encouraged even the very earliest converts to preach the gospel even before they had had very much training. These converts had started little out-churches... To have the church in the hands of the Kenyan people was our aim for all the years we were in Pokot” (Totty, 1981, p. 17). Many letters passed between the Tottys and the home office discussing the “indigenous principles” as the foundation of the Tottys’ mission work in Pokot. In 1945, Annette explained that a boy named Kalapaton who had “completed his course in school here feels called to go out as an evangelist and is receiving training here,” and their head teacher, Abram, “has offered to go out for a year as an evangelist without salary” (1945, Jan. 30). Lawrence explained the success of this strategy in a 1948 letter to the home office, “We have made a beginning with indigenous principles and are determined to get the work on this basis – we now have now paid evangelists. We have been encouraged by the little Church which is entirely supported by Native funds – it is about four miles from here and near the Catholic Mission! – the average attendance on Sundays is about 50” (1948, Feb. 3). The discussion continued into the 1950s. Annette once again described the urgency and the agency of the message while suggesting a duality and double standard of race: “Suk country is mainly a succession of mountain ranges. The white man cannot climb all over these. Then let the African do the climbing. We have fifteen African teacher evangelists and one full time evangelist paid by the Nasokol Church. They surely are the answer – but what a pitiful little handful to meet the need of this dire hour” (1956, Sept. 25). Despite the Tottys’ outspoken commitment to local leadership, the mission in Nasokol might have reflected a different reality as the independence of

Kenya and a push toward Africanization, described earlier, began to loom large<sup>92</sup>. Conversely, the AIM stressed local evangelist work significantly less. Early missionary Tom Collins worked closely with Kenyan evangelists in the mission field of Pokot, but he did not speak of equipping Pokot evangelists to take the message to other parts of Pokot, partially due, it seems, to his minimal success rate in converting Pokot individuals.

After independence, the BCMS missionaries continued to apply the “indigenous principles” to their evangelism with a more nuanced understanding of their place in the story of evangelism. The Tottys’ successor, Philip Price, turned the tables, explaining how the missionary presence was seen as a help to a Pokot convert and teacher named Solomon. Whereas government officials came, instructed, and left, the missionaries were examples of commitment to Pokot. Solomon agreed with Philip that educated Christian Pokot should do likewise, commit to stay in Pokot and live the mission example in their home areas (Price, 1970). Likewise, BCMS nurse and missionary Ruth Stranex Deeth perceived the voice of the Pokot evangelists as more legitimate than that of the missionary. About sharing the Gospel, Ruth asked, “Why should they believe us? To them, this is all strange new teaching which is easily confused with new customs, clothes and schooling. They are now hearing these same truths from some of their own sons, married and respectable. As they hear from the Church Army captains and others who are the same colour, speak the same language and idiom, perhaps it will be accepted as the truth in its own right, without the complications of western civilization, and realise how vital this good news is” (Stranex, 1977, p. 32). In the same way, the AIM missionaries, Ray and Jill Davis explained in a promotional video their view that “the backbone of the Pokot church has been the

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<sup>92</sup> The BCMS General Secretary wrote to Lawrence, “You may well look back with thanksgiving to what God has enabled you and Mrs. Totty to do in the past, but this may be God’s drastic way of awakening you to see how important it is that you should be able to adapt yourselves and your thinking to the new Africa, when an ever deepening humility and willingness to serve alongside or under African brethren is needed” (1956, May 28).

Pokot evangelists;” the Davises believed that the Pokot evangelists must contextualize the gospel for and can most effectively persuade their own people. (AIM mission video, 1991)

The Catholic missions were much later in the equipping of local converts as evangelists or catechists. Despite the commitment and motto of the founder of the Catholic Comboni Missionaries to “save Africa with Africans” (St. Daniel Comboni, n.d.), the Kilegean Missionaries, the most established Catholic mission in Pokot, had no such aim until the late 1970s. A 1980 film produced by the Catholic media company Radharc explained the transition that was occurring all over Kenya: “For too long missionaries have failed to recognize the values inherent in traditional African culture, but now Catholics are following the lead of missionaries in Latin America—encouraging the development of small Christian communities” (Radharc, 1980). Previously, the center of the Catholic church in Pokot was the mission station, and many people had to walk long distances to reach the mission. The Catholic missionaries began to encourage and empower local converts to meet in community groups, often led by trained Pokot converts rather than missionary priests. The film explained that the priest might come just once per month, giving Makutano, near Kapenguria, as an example (Radharc, 1980). A missionary priest commented about this new trend in sharing leadership in the African church, “I don’t feel anymore alone in the church... Everyone has a hand in the church” (Radharc, 1980). While some missionaries were on the forefront of empowering African leadership, some were afraid of losing their jobs and others felt ill-prepared or resistant to the new initiative. The film claimed that some priests might not be prepared for equipping small groups. It’s easier to just give the sacrament (Radharc, 1980).

In Pokot, Fr. Leo Staples explained that converts were sent to a training program in Kitale for three months to equip them to help spiritually guide churches in outstations,

particularly those located significant distances from the mission station in Ortum. As the educational level in Pokot began to rise, Leo admitted that the training program should be longer to meet a higher standard. Funding was always difficult as these catechists “were leaving their ‘means’ of living behind in the hills, their small businesses, their little farms, sacrificing themselves for the work in the mission. It was difficult to get funds to support them... Ideally, what we were aiming for was that each Christian community itself would support its own Catechists. That is happening now in a very big way, thank God. It is their responsibility. So again, it’s about involvement of the people themselves, for themselves” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

While the number of Western Christian missionaries remained relatively small in Pokot until into the 1970s, the strategies of conducting safaris for the missionaries and empowering local converts as evangelists helped spread the message of Christianity to a much wider geographic area than otherwise would have been possible. The missionary spheres of influence created an overlapping network that was especially prominent in the urban and highland areas where both missionaries and Pokot people tended to settle. Pokot pastor and scholar John Mondi explained this pattern for Baringo County: “A tour through the East Pokot communities of Baringo County would reveal that there are concentrations of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches around the shopping centers and little towns that are situated along the roads. However, in the recent years, due to borehole drilling and establishment of village schools, some churches have emerged in the deep ends of the nomadic country, but they are sporadically distributed. The established churches in East Pokot were begun by the missionaries in the seventies and eighties” (Mondi, 2016, p. 57).

### *Measures of Success in Evangelism*

Missionaries consistently traced their success by the spread of their influence, evidenced by the establishment of outstations or satellite congregations and the number of professed converts. “From African missionary history, ‘...it has been said that evangelizing an African people takes 50 years. The first 25 years may result in 25 converts, but the harvest<sup>93</sup> only comes in the second 25 years...’ [David J. Phillips].” (Mondi, 2016, p. 143). Despite this proposed theory, early missionaries were even more likely than later missionaries to declare their success through the numbers of converts and church goers they influenced. In 1931, BCMS missionary Stanley Housden declared, “We have quite a number of people attending services now, and we believe some of them are really ‘Born Again’” (Housden, 7 October 1931). In 1945, Lawrence Totty wrote to the BCMS, “We shall be opening our new African Church next month... It is much bigger and better than our present one and we feel that it is indicative of the growth and expansion of *the* Church. Please pray that we may continue faithful in this glorious privilege of building up the Suk Church” (1945, Oct. 18). Interestingly, a 1956 letter from the BCMS Overseas Secretary praised the Tottys’ success but questioned their results as they related to the Pokot people: “There is appreciation in official circles of the fact that your primary school is full and happy. That the church is full on Sundays, although it is pointed out that the congregation consists largely of non-Suk” (May 4, 1956). Lawrence’s successor, Philip Price, declared, “So it was that by mid-1963 there were eight centres throughout the Mwino Valley where weekly services were being held, and these were reaching about four hundred people regularly, besides those who casually wandered into the services. A living church was growing” (Price, 1970, p.

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<sup>93</sup> The imagery of new converts as a harvest comes from Matthew 9:35-38 (ESV) where, after “proclaiming the good news of the kingdom,” Jesus tells his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

45). Like those who came before them, the unaffiliated missionaries Jim and Kathy Tierney explained their success with numbers and growth: “We began with 6 churches 7 years ago and now have 19” (Tierney, June 2016). Again, “The latest mission news is that we have 2 more Church bodies being formed. One is in about a 500 people village. There are about 20 Christians there. We will go there when the dry season comes. One of them is out of the Mbaru Church that is large enough to plant another Church” (Tierney, May 2016).

While early letters from AIM missionary Tom Collins mentioned converts and additional interest in the message he brought, after fourteen years in Pokot, he confided in Lawrence Totty that he believed he could only be sure of one convert (Totty, L., 1950, Nov. 16). Again, as quoted earlier, “In 1964, at the end of his life, he [Tom] told his mission leader and brother-in-law Erik Barnett that he reckoned in all his time in Pokot perhaps only two people had believed in Jesus Christ” (Davis, 2011, p. 97-8). While measurable growth in numbers of converts, church goers, and established churches would continue to be important, Tom pragmatically highlighted the importance of local leadership in the mission work: “The foothold for teachers of salvation in East Suk is still precarious and the work of the Lord in this little country needs to be backed up still with prayer; half a dozen or so fellows, which is that much more than this time last year, are being looked after by the native evangelists at Kinyang” (3 June 1939). Similarly, in a 1996 AIM mission video, Ray and Jill Davis explained that there were now ten churches in the Churo district with 130 in attendance in the biggest church found in the town of Churo. “We have now handed over the ministry at Amaya to [Kenyan] pastor John... What a thrill it is to leave a young but thriving church” (AIM mission video, 1996). RCA missionary Morrell Swart, likewise, described success through the empowerment of Pokot evangelists and mission leaders: “By this time, and as part of the AIC/RCA Joint Projects agreement, Ronald and Alice Chomom with

their little daughter Chemutai had joined the Alale team. Ronald and Alice were Pokot. Both were Bible school graduates and were therefore a gift to the evangelistic thrust in the Alale area. We praised God for them. When we went to the United States in May for a brief furlough, we were thankful to be able to leave the Alale mission and its incipient program in their care” (Swart, 1998, p. 304). More recent mission activity in Pokot, such as Friends of Asilong and the AIM/RCA partnership in Alale, relied on Kenyan missionaries and Pokot leadership instead of permanent Western missionary residents. Kenyan leaders are supported remotely and visited yearly or biyearly.

Kiltegan missionary Leo Staples shared a different perspective of missionary success: “When I see the Catholic Pokot themselves these days, they are very staunch and I am very proud of the way we evangelised them and prepared them for Baptism. It was not about getting numbers of people to be Christian. Rather our formation helped the catechuminate to find God in a living relationship, living a quality of Christian witness. Our evangelisation programme prepared the candidates for a meaningful Baptism” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Despite Leo’s downplay of the numbers of converts, the growth of the Catholic community in Pokot has been significant. Leo pointed out that as far as he knew, there were only thirteen Catholic Pokot when he arrived in 1953, and “they had not been evangelised in Pokot land” (personal communication, 23 June 2019). By 1982, the Catholic church was the most widely attended Christian church in Pokot and was characterized by steady, continual growth in the place of the Pokot (Shingledecker, 1982). In 2016 the Catholic Diocese of Kitale which encompasses all of West Pokot County and the northern section of Trans Nzoia County counted



a population of nearly 250,000 Catholics, a little over 18% of the total population of the diocese, an increase of 3% since 2000<sup>94</sup>.

While missionaries habitually reported numbers of converts and church expansion, the reality of the religious sense of place in Pokot reflected a small percentage of Christians until a couple of decades after independence (Dietz, 1987). According to Shingledecker's survey, published by Daystar University in 1982, 10% of the Pokot people in Kenya (including those in West Pokot and Baringo Counties) were consistent church goers within nineteen denominations. "The Church is the strongest in the central part of West Pokot and much weaker in Karapokot and Baringo District" (Shingledecker, 1982, p. 46). In 1982, Shingledecker's comprehensive study showed 365 congregations in the whole of Kenyan Pokot. Since then, the number of churches in Pokot has increased dramatically. In their 2017 study, Ngeiywo et. al highlighted the expanse of Protestant influence in West Pokot, focusing only on six denominations—including Anglican and AIC—that represented 866 congregations<sup>95</sup>. Ngeiywo et al's (2017) limited study showed a significant increase of Christian church congregations even with the study's omissions of the sizeable Catholic population throughout Pokot, a comprehensive look at minority denominations, and the Pokot church population in Baringo County. Even so, five out of the six groups described by Ngeiywo et. al (2017) began with Western Christian missionary leadership in keeping with the profound effect missions has had at the place of Pokot. The church landscape shows the successful Africanization of the church through an overwhelming predominance in leadership of black Africans, many of whom are Pokot<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>94</sup> Statistics found at <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dkita.html> on August 25, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> Only 17% of the 866 congregations met in permanent church buildings. The remainder were in temporary structures, school buildings, or outdoor locations (Ngeiywo et. al, 2017).

<sup>96</sup> Further study on the Africanization of the church in Pokot would help add dimension to the decoloniality of place in Christianized Pokot with possible comparisons between larger and smaller, urban and rural, and established and new congregations.

The proliferation of Christian churches on the landscape within the spheres of mission and missionary influence reflect the evangelical strategies of the missionaries and their followers, from the way they relate their Christian faith to the Pokot language and culture to the manner in which each church relates to the community and churches around it. Churches continue to be areas of complex hybridity, revealed in the negotiations between mission Christianity and Pokot agency (discussed in the following chapter). In Asilong, for instance, church services are regularly conducted in both Swahili and Pokot, and when Western missionaries visit, the third language of English is thrown in the mix. Likewise, church attendants personify a hybridity of culture through their attire—most wear Western clothes but some include a *shuka* or other more traditional ornamentation—and manner of worship—Christian songs, sung in Pokot, are accompanied by the traditional group dancing and jumping. The sense of religious place in Pokot is built on the mission strategies described above and visible in the landscape of churches and congregations as they expand.

### ***Evangelism or Development***

In addition to the expansion of the church built around strategies of evangelism, each mission and missionary dealt with the question of development. How much development should accompany evangelism? Each mission group answered this question on a continuum from very little development to extensive and diverse development initiatives in conjunction with evangelism<sup>97</sup>. Their place on this continuum, paired with their level of access to resources<sup>98</sup>,

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<sup>97</sup> A study comparing the effects and longevity of religious and NGO development programs as they relate to the continuum of development vs. evangelism would be a worthwhile future research project.

<sup>98</sup> Complaints about limited resources were common throughout and across the mission discourse. While this study does not go into the finances of the mission organizations or missionaries studies, the resulting development infrastructure reflects what one might suppose: larger, more centralized and established mission organizations (such

often affected both the response of the Pokot community and the depth and longevity of the mission influence on the community and, likewise, the sense of place in Pokot. Strayer (1978) explained the shift in conservative missionary thinking after World War I, coinciding with the advent of mission work in Pokot, “The newer views allowed missionaries to embrace education, agriculture, community development, even politics as genuine missionary concerns significant in their own right, for the older dichotomies between church and world, evangelism and education, secular and religious work seemed far less sharp than they had for the conservative evangelicals of the pre-war era” (p. 8). With this embrace of modernizing/westernizing/developing by post-WWI missionaries came a variety of critiques. “African nationalists and their European supporters have damned missions for indiscriminately undermining African cultural self-confidence, while secular champions of mission activity have seen it as an important agency of social mobilization and as a mechanism for easing the transition to the modern world” (Strayer, 1978, p. 77).

The struggle missionaries experienced as they negotiated the relationship between evangelism and development begins to weaken Edward Said’s argument, stated above, that missionaries like colonial officials focused on subordinating subaltern people, places, and histories to the culture and idea of “white Christian Europe” (quoted in Carey, 2011, p. 15). Although many were not equipped with the training or worldview to understand how to successfully work in a cross-cultural setting, missionaries, particularly those of the post WWI era, increasingly sought to resist imposing Western cultural norms on the Pokot while, at the same time, providing services that improved the livelihoods in areas of perceived “primitivity,” “backwardness,” and lack. The tension between these perspectives allows one to make both

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as those associated with the Catholic or Anglican churches) tend to have more resources available for mission development initiatives.

distinct comparisons and contrasts between missionaries and their colonial/imperial counterparts. While perceived needs based in poverty and lack of resources propelled missionaries into development, the pervasive mission strategy involved the integral linking of development with evangelism on a continuum negotiated by mission groups and missionaries.

The AIM began as a mission wholly committed to evangelism without development initiatives except as they were a requirement by the colonial government. An AIM missionary in Kenya explained in 1912, “The task imposed upon the Church is not to civilize the world, nor to educate the world, but simply preach God’s message and for this message the world has always been prepared.... We are called distinctly to be witnesses of Jesus. Almost nothing else was given us to do” (quoted in Morad, 1996b, p. 105). According to Spear (1999a), “With their almost exclusive stress on personal conversion, the AIM showed little interest in education or medicine, and they viewed the persistence of African customs as the work of Satan that had to be overcome at all costs” (p. 14). AIM pioneer Tom Collins agreed with the perspective that the spiritual “battle” was the crux of mission work, claiming that “widespread evangelistic effort is curtailed by the amount of work which a school and station organization require” (20 Nov. 1939). His biographers (friend Ken Phillips and son Malcolm Collins) went so far as to suggest Tom equated development initiatives with “stunts and attractions,” explaining, “He avoided offering community development as bait, or sugar on the gospel pill... It was his conviction that when a few had truly believed, they would want a church, would ask for it, and would build it themselves” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 68-9). Eventually, Tom would acquiesce that the mission’s policy of doing elementary education work could be of some benefit spiritually.

Later AIM missionaries, like the Davises, were less reluctant to address development needs in addition to their primary focus of evangelism. The Davis’ 1996 AIM mission video

explained the organization's evolved perspective of development initiatives: "Africa is a continent of vast need, stricken shanty towns of Nairobi to the deserts of Chad. AIM has brought the word of hope to the unreached of Africa through outreach, evangelism and church planting, medicine, orphan care, agriculture, and much, much more. We dig wells for those who are thirsty and feed those in need of food and through it all try to show the love of Jesus to the people we serve in ministry" (AIM mission video, 1996). Likewise, the AIC, the denomination that sprang out of the AIM, is now a leader in establishing schools and clinics in Kenya.

Catholic missions found themselves most often at the other end of the continuum. In the case of the Kiltigans in Ortum, a hospital was built almost simultaneously to the church mission station. A school soon followed. The nuns working at the mission were tasked almost exclusively with the development initiatives whereas the priests often split their time, depending on their position, between spiritual and developmental activities. In her memoir, Doctor Sister Marita Malone discussed in depth her preparation to address the medical needs of the Pokot people with little to no mention of the spiritual. On the other hand, Father Leo Staples was the spiritual leader at the mission. Likewise, the Catholic Comboni missionaries stated their approach in their 2007 West Pokot Charter, "The spreading of the gospel was done hand in hand with some social services in the health and education sectors" (p. 3). Specifically, in terms of development, "Brothers have been working very much in the building and maintenance of physical structures and schools, plus the drilling and maintenance of boreholes. Sisters have worked to improve the health conditions of the people, teaching in schools, women's groups and pastoral activities addressed to professionals and catechists" (West Pokot, 2007, p. 5). From the perspective of Kiltegan Father Michael Dillon, changes led to "mostly positive things... Anything you tried to do was an improvement" and a step toward the goal to "find better ways—what is good, what

will give [the Pokot] a better way of life, a better future” (personal communication, 5 April 2019).

Not all Catholic missionaries were devoted to development. A 1980 Radharc Film entitled, “Kenya Comes of Age,” covered a Kenyan missionary conference of Western missionary priests. The film explained that some missionaries stress evangelism and some development to reflect the Catholic mission belief of the “wholeness” of the Christian message. However, one white priest interviewed made a moral stance against the development initiatives, stating, “I don’t want to impose development on people” (Radharc, 1980).

Likewise, most other groups grappled with the balance between evangelism and development. The Tottys explained that education work was required by the colonial government for their mission to continue to work in Pokot. BCMS nurse Ruth Stranex Deeth explained her stance against Western-style development initiatives of the late 1960s and early 1970s,

Whatever people may think about missionary work, it is a fact that a different type of culture is irrevocably encroaching upon these people. Developing countries are emphasizing the importance of eradicating their three enemies to progress: ignorance, disease and poverty. How sad it is that as they are being presented with these new ideas, they are not at the same time introduced to true Christianity, but rather to a form portrayed by people who equate it with Western culture, which is donned with Western-style clothes. (Stranex, 1977, p. 29)

BCMS missionary Dr. David Webster explained, “The policy of our Mission, BCMS, was to share unapologetically the Good News of Jesus Christ, at the same time caring for medical and social needs to the best of our ability. In other words, to care for the whole person” (Webster, 2013, p. 130). Providing development in the form of education and medical services was the most popular and prevalent; however, significant work in the areas of agricultural training, relief or emergency aid, and water provision characterized missionary initiatives in Pokot.

## Development

The first level of development, especially for early missionaries, was the establishment of the mission station, which would usually include the missionaries' house and a structure or structures for a church, school, and dispensary. In 1931 BCMS missionaries Stanley and Annie Housden explained the complex process required to establish a mission station in colonial Kenya: "But on the completion of the choice of the site being made, we have to make an application to the Government for permission. If they agree we have to ask the permission of the natives, and if they are not agreeable it is scarcely ever possible to gain permission to have a Station there. If the natives give their permission, we have to get permission from about four other bodies, all of whom have power to refuse the application, and it takes months finally to get final permission" (Housden, 2 November 1932). The emphasis on building up the mission station and then expanding to outstations that also required structures for schools, churches, and dispensaries stands in stark contrast to the traditional culture of the Pokot as semi-nomadic. As the missionaries busily transformed the landscape at the contact zone, first through building structures then through the use of the structures in development initiatives, the place of Pokot began to change. Historian Robert Strayer (1978) described,

In terms of institutional development they [mission communities] gave rise to schools and churches of both an independent and an orthodox variety. They participated in most of the political crises of the colony and reflected within themselves many of the tensions and conflicts of a colonial society. They were in a position to channel and direct, if not control, those multiple processes of social and cultural transformation that everywhere accompanied a measure of economic change. And they served both to bind colonial society together and to erode its structures and values. The profound loyalties and vehement antipathies which mission communities generated are ample testimony to their central position in the history of twentieth-century Kenya. (Strayer, 1978, p. 2-3)

Mission-led development grew out of perceptions of place and lack found in the landscape of Pokot discussed in the previous chapter through the themes of primitivity,

conservatism, heathenism, aimlessness, and gender inequality. The strategies to address these themes began with a strong focus on ongoing formal Western education and provision of medical services. For the Kiltegan Catholic mission in Ortum and to a lesser extent the AIM/RCA mission in Alale, education led to a unique initiative in community development (discussed below). In addition, some mission groups embraced a variety of strategies in the areas of agriculture, relief or emergency aid, and water provision. These six themes in development will be discussed below, focusing on the missions through which they occurred and the mode of development's unique influence on the layers of place developing at the contact zone.

The trajectory of development in Pokot began slowly, steadily increasing after independence, largely at the hands of missions. Rachel Andiema, Ton Dietz, and Albino Kotomei (2008) explained what development looked like in the 1960s for much of Pokot but especially the Karapokot area of West Pokot County, which rejoined Kenya in 1970:

There were few schools, no healthcare facilities, no shops, and no roads in the region. The next two decades are characterized by a series of droughts, warfare between the Pokot, Karamojong, and Turkana, and relief responses from the Red Cross, the Catholic Church, and the government. In 1981, the region was adopted by the Netherlands, which implemented their ASAL development program. The program focused on grassroots strategies but eventually fell out of favor with the Dutch government in 1999 and funding stopped. An evaluation of development programs was conducted in 2002 through funding from the University of Amsterdam. More than sixty locals gathered to share their thoughts and their stories about poverty and development in the region. Overall, churches and to a lesser extent NGOs were seen as the best development agencies, particularly those who committed to long-term, bottom-up projects. The government was viewed negatively. (Andiema, R. et al., 2008)

Mission-led development initiatives, starting in 1931, would irrevocably influence the place of Pokot, particularly in the areas of education and medical care but also in agriculture, relief/aid, and water provision.



## *Education*

The impact of missionary-led formal education throughout Kenya is subject to a variety of perceptions. Kenyan education scholar, Sorobe Nyachio Bogonko, felt that Western education challenged and eventually weakened African traditional education.

First, western education rendered the teachers of the old system almost helpless. Second, it replaced the more practical nature of traditional African education with the more theoretical Western education. Third, Western education was individualistic rather than collective. Fourth, this education produced new types of elite classes who soon found themselves torn between two opposing worlds. Fifth is the fact that African society was divided into two opposing groups--the readers and non-readers... Education was meant to prepare African children to live as Africans. Western education, on the other hand, prepared them to live as Europeans in an irrelevant environment. (Bogonko, 1992, p. 93-4)

The missionaries who pioneered and provided education to Kenyans largely saw the benefits of education, a perspective fully supported in rhetoric and finances by the colonial government and the independent government after it. In 1924, the foundation of mission education in Kenya was solidified by the Phelps-Stokes Education Commission and accepted, both by word and finances, by the colonial government administration:

This insured that education remained largely in mission hands, and that the government supported such education on a much more liberal scale than previously through grants-in-aid. [The AIM and] Most other Protestant missions gladly accept this arrangement; they soon began to rely on government assistance to such an extent that their whole schools system would have collapsed if government support were taken away. By the 30s, the Catholic missions, too, were co-operating in this system. (Ward, 1975, p. 251)

Most missionaries in Pokot viewed providing early and simple education as part and parcel of their evangelical call and a valid response to some if not all of the perceptions detailed in the previous chapter. In addition to providing an excellent forum for evangelism (addressing the perception of heathenism), education provided a place to address missionaries' perceptions of Pokot primitivity and conservatism, by introducing the youngest to "civilization" and the ways of Western progress. Particularly in Pokot, where development lagged behind much of the rest of

the country, missionaries felt that providing Western education helped close that gap, providing a more diverse future for educated Pokot within a global and globalizing economy. On a practical level, the student population would largely board at school, pulling them out of their “wandering” nomadism. Likewise, education would help equalize gender inequality. Educated girls were and are less likely to undergo FGM and become child brides, both cultural practices that missionaries felt stood at odds with their Christian belief system. When Fr. Michael Dillon left the mission field in 2016 after fifty-five years in Pokot, he reflected that things had improved so much. He claimed that now, “every child goes to school,” which brought many changes even affecting dress and communication. He believed their education allowed them to access a variety of careers, including teachers and nurses, helping them “build a better life... Life had changed and improved so much... They had caught up with the other tribes of Kenya” (personal communication, 5 May 2019).

In relation to the missionaries’ perception of lack in Pokot, education, particularly mission education, was the near perfect salve. However, each mission and missionary approached education with a unique perspective, adding variety to the strategy that corresponded with the spheres of influence or places of the contact zone. Instead of a generalized discussion around education in Pokot, which would likely mirror many others concerning the Kenyan education system (see Kalu, 2010; Bogonko, 1992; Strayer, 1978; Sheffield, 1973), I organize this section by mission organization to underscore the geographic particularity of the mission strategy, approach, and subsequent influence on place.

**BCMS.** The BCMS began their educational initiative in conjunction with their evangelical mission, partly due to government stipulations and partly due to the complementary

nature of the two. Lawrence Totty explained the practical and spiritual necessity of mission-provided education in Pokot,

As you know, we cannot dispense with our school work here inasmuch as we are required of Government to include this in our activities, and a cessation of such would undoubtedly jeopardise the whole of the work. Apart from this consideration of Government relation I am convinced that our School work is very necessary in connection with Evangelism at the moment although this may not always be the case in future. As far as I know, there is not a Mission in Kenya (after our own hearts) which can dispense with Education of some sort. Our own Schools are only up to Elementary Standards and in no way prevent full freedom for Evangelism – rather they are fruitful avenue for this. Actually, without Government assistance for our Bush Schools trekking among the out-districts could not have been undertaken. (Totty, L., 22 Jan. 1941)

Lawrence Totty began educating Pokot boys almost as soon as he set up the BCMS mission in Kacheliba in 1931. In 1934, the Tottys' move up the escarpment to Nasokol was delayed because of its possible conflict of interest and proximity to a government school in Kapenguria, which had "an agricultural bias" (Totty, 1980, p. 8). Annette described the compromise with the principal: "We assured him that we did not wish to rival him in any way. Our aim was spiritual, so we came to the arrangement that we should teach the boys for four years, then we would hold an exam. Those who passed the exam would go to the Kapenguria Government School, with the understanding that the boys came from Kapenguria to Nasokol on Sunday for church, and that we be allowed to teach Scripture one morning a week in Kapenguria" (Totty, 1980, p. 9). This symbiotic relationship between the colonial government and the BCMS mission in the educational arena was, likewise, encouraged by the former, who supported the link between education and evangelism, stressing the socializing influence: Annette explained that after the anti-European *Dini ya Msambwa* uprising, "Then came a circular from the Governor that all Government Schoolboys must go to church on Sunday because of Subversive activity" (6 May 1956).

In 1942, Annette described the running of the school at Nasokol and an outschool in Kacheliba. The mission was too poor to afford certified teachers “so we use boys that we train here” (Totty, A., 26 May 1942) who were referred to as “teacher/evangelists” (Annette Totty’s Obituary, 1998). After some months of training, new teachers were ready for the classroom, but the tone and emphasis of her letter focused on the evangelism work going on at the school even more than the general education. Annette highlighted a Christian conference that the Tottys conducted for several days before letting the students out for the holiday; “Six boys gave their hearts to the Lord as a result of it and, another six signified their desire to preach in the outdistricts during the holidays” (Totty, A., 26 May 1942).

The majority of school-related responsibilities, including creative use of limited resources, fell to Annette with the help of other female missionaries as they arrived. While BCMS-sponsored schools grew and multiplied, Dr. Peter Cox’s description of his wife’s work in the school at Nasokol in the late 1950s illustrated some of the difficulties faced by the Anglican missionaries: “Liza soon began to help and organise the school, - which in those days was under mission management, when every penny had to be squeezed dry - and then put through the mangle! It was uphill and discouraging. Boys came and left. There was no food and everyone went to the Catholic School; equipment was scanty and teachers unqualified and therefore underpaid and therefore unhappy” (Cox, 1967). Likewise, missionary Philip Price found significant resistance from the Pokot as he attempted to establish schools: “My main job there was to try to encourage the collecting of stones for the building of a new school. The Government had given money for its erection but the people were expected to provide the materials, and it was a slow job to get them to show any real enthusiasm for this” (Price, 1970, p. 19).

While education began with the boys at the BCMS mission station in Nasokol, girls' education soon followed in 1934 with the expressed purpose of addressing the cultural devaluing of females. In Amudat, formal education for girls did not begin in earnest until nearly 1970. The medical focus of the BCMS in Amudat did not preclude nurse Ruth Stranex Deeth and Rosemary Webster, Dr. David Webster's wife, from addressing gender inequality through aiding formal and informal education initiatives. David explained,

Ruth Stranex had by now established a hostel for girls, where girls from remote manyattas could live and be cared for while attending the local primary school. Until then education, such as there was, was almost entirely the preserve of the boys. Each week Rosemary held a sewing class for Ruth's girls, teaching them skills that would stand them in good stead for the future. The girls loved to come to our house, and to sit chatting and sewing on the verandah, and to make a fuss of [our children] Andrew and Paul. (Webster, 2013, p. 157)

While most missionaries focused on the difficulty of providing education and the good that resulted from educational development, BCMS missionary Ruth Stranex Deeth paused in her memoir to question the outcomes of formal Western education on traditional Pokot values (quoted previously): "Were we wrong to encourage the girls to go to school, and to discourage them from being circumcised? Was I making them outsiders? Could modern schooling and tribal customs mix?" (Deeth, 2017, p. 36). Ruth's reflections concur with some postcolonial scholarship that saw formal Western education as facilitating "the breakdown of tribal barriers and fostered the emergence of a new cleavage between the educated and the illiterate" (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994, p. 204).

Today, the Totty's school in Nasokol still remains and includes a "mixed" or co-ed primary school and a girls' secondary school, which opened in 1966, shortly after the Tottys retired from missionary work. While the secondary school was established and sponsored by the Anglican Church Mission Society, both the secondary and primary schools are public

institutions<sup>99</sup>. At the secondary school, a multi-purpose hall was built in 2004 and bears the name Chepaypay Memorial Hall, meaning “happy face” in Pokot, a nod to the legacy of Annette Totty and her Pokot nickname (Lines, 2012). The legacy of BCMS’s commitment to education can also be found in Tamkal, West Pokot through a secondary school that bears Philip Price’s name.

**AIM.** Like the BCMS, the AIM saw education as a means to an end. AIM founder Peter Cameron Scott recognized the necessity of equipping local evangelists through basic education, explained by mission historian Stephen Morad, “The educational work, then, would have a dual purpose. First to win African young people to Christ and also to train them to be those ‘native evangelists’ that Scott knew were necessary for the evangelization of Africa” (Morad, 1996b, p. 19). However, unlike the BCMS, AIM leadership in Kenya delayed in taking advantage of educational support from the colonial government through grants-in-aid, many viewing education as the domain of the government or “liberal” mission groups (Morad, 1996b). “In the years to come, AIM was able to receive limited financial aid from the government to improve their schools somewhat, but with the limited aid and the Mission itself deeply divided on the issue, the AIM educational programs always remained behind the work the other missions in Kenya were doing” (Morad, 1996b, p. 110). As mission work to the Pokot was picking up in the 1930s, the AIM’s role in developing education in Pokot reflected or even fell behind the AIM’s educational work in other areas of Kenya. Throughout the country, AIM “failed to develop an educational system which conformed to colonial education policy or which satisfied the

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<sup>99</sup> Information about the history and current status of the Nasokol Schools was obtained via word of mouth and found in various websites of unsubstantiated credibility, including <https://softkenya.com/nasokol-girls-secondary-school/>.

aspirations of the African Christian communities among whom the Mission was working” (Ward, 1975, p. 243).

AIM missionary pioneer Tom Collins, while criticizing AIM education standards, agreed with his mission society that education was a diversion from the purpose of evangelism: “Truly, if it were for the handful of the sons of Africa one very laboriously helps to a low standard of education, it would be worse than useless to make any self-denial for that end. But it would be harder to state the missionary objective more poorly when ‘we know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in the wicked one<sup>100</sup>,’ and that the Son of Man, who came to seek and to save those who are lost, commissioned us to preach the Gospel to such, we also know that great resources are required and great things need to be done” (Collins, 3 June 1939)

A decade after Tom’s ministry in Pokot ended, Art and Mary Ellen Davis began working in Pokot, followed by Ray and Jill Davis. The two Davis couples worked together to “launch the Churo High School,” finding more value in education than their AIM predecessors (Davis, 2011, p. 92). However, as a means to an evangelical end, Ray and Jill felt called to begin early childhood education in Churo,

building a multi-purpose building that could be used for a church and a preschool. The tribal elders gave a plot of land to build on and we hired a Christian teacher to teach the children God’s word. World Vision provides uniforms and another organization called Feed the Children provides lunch for the children... Since most people in Pokot have never been to school, it was the school lunch that motivated most parents to send their children to school. Getting involved in the community this way gave us a chance to talk to parents. At PTA meetings, we could talk to people about Jesus who would never come to church. (AIM mission video, 1991)

Clearly, the value of the education held little importance to both the providers and the recipients. Pokot pastor and scholar John Mond (2016) found in his research the same patterns of AIM provision of education that were overshadowed by a focus on evangelism. Mond (2016), in his

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<sup>100</sup> Quoted from 1 John 5:19 (KJV)

discussion of the AIM “outreach method” of building schools, related the perspective of a former student of an AIM education in Baringo County, “The primary objective of the teachers hired by the missionaries was to teach the salvation of Jesus and convert into Christianity. He [the student] observed that ten percent of their time at school was spent in actual learning, that is learning how to write and read, and ninety percent was allotted either to singing Christian songs or learning bible stories. Sunday worship was compulsory” (p. 58).

Today, according to John Mondi, the legacy of poor education provided by early AIM missionaries persists as the East Pokot in Baringo County live in areas less developed than those in West Pokot dominated by Anglican and Catholic missions (personal communication, 8 May 2019). However, the AIM together with the AIC is attempting to remedy this situation. The secondary school that was begun in Churo by the Davises continues to value the Christian message in conjunction with its provision of quality education. While AIM missionaries Rod and Brenda Redding highlighted the importance of the school’s Christian identity, they likewise boast that it has “had many successful graduates. Two have attended college in the United States – one a chemical engineer and the other a pilot. There is an accountant, a computer analyst, teacher, pastor, soldier, nurse and on and on” (n.d.). Likewise, the Reddings have responded to a local request for a primary school in Amaya, Baringo County, located not far from Churo, forming a small foundation to help fund the school. The Reddings explained, “The school has received only a little help from the government. The last year and a half has been fantastic. We will have our first forms seven and eight coming next year. The government provided one classroom. The local community, our foundation and another foundation have provided metal classrooms, desks, blackboards, a teacher’s room, books, balls, swings, slide and a seesaw” (personal communication, 17 Feb. 2020). Pictures from the Reddings’ website show the newest



structures framed with wood and clad with metal sheeting for the roofs and walls, reflecting the limited funds available for the project. Rectangular holes have been cut for doors and windows.

The AIM, working with the RCA, also established schools in Alale beginning in the 1980s and 90s. “Thanks to Larry’s [McAuley] vision and implementation, fine school buildings, funded by Worldwide Christian Schools, had been constructed. Under Linda’s able leadership and the services of qualified Kenyan teachers, Pokot children were being educated, not only in the basic curricula, but also in Christian truths” (Swart, 1998, p. 450). The AIC, in contrast with its historical roots in the AIM, is active in establishing and helping build schools all over West Pokot, including the primary school in Asilong. The Kenyan government relies on groups like the AIC to provide much needed structures, many of which are quite basic, and often additional teachers to “public” primary schools in marginal locations like Pokot where the student population is growing faster than the government resources available to meet the demand (David Mburu<sup>101</sup>, personal communication, 31 March 2016).

**Catholic Missions.** When Fr. Leo Staples first came to Pokot, “There was only one Catholic Parish in it – that was Tartar. Seven primary schools in the whole area and they only went as far as Standard 4. It was a daunting task. The people didn’t want education” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Almost as soon as Leo pioneered the Kiltegan Catholic mission in Ortum, roughly 25 miles (~40km) northeast of Tartar, education became one of its most valued initiatives; however, the idea of education was resisted by the Pokot. Kiltegan missionary Fr. Michael Dillon explained, “There were very few people with any education.” The

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<sup>101</sup> Dr. David Mburu was a Swahili language teacher and lecturer at the University of Kansas and had a background working for Kenya’s Ministry of Education. I was lucky enough to have a short conversation about the intersection of missions and government education in Kenya before he passed away from a sudden and short illness in the fall of 2016.

response of the people when they asked them if they wanted a school was “no, no, no. Work was so difficult, but little by little things changed. First there were ten students and then twenty” (personal communication, 5 April 2019). Fr. Leo discussed with Fr. Tom McDonnell how education evolved especially in outstation schools: “The first teachers would have been untrained Primary School boys,” Tom remarked. “Yes, all un-trained – Primary School Boys and some of them would only have half the primary school – primary 4 or primary 5. Prior to the opening of the TTC [St. Joseph Teacher Training Center in Kitale], our small primary schools were staffed with very poorly educated teachers. The training of the teachers was a very big step in the development of education<sup>102</sup> in West Pokot” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 24 June 2019). By 1970, some success in education had come: “We had a big number of students – mostly boys, some girls – who had finished primary school” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

As the Catholic presence spread, education did too. Fr. Leo Staples discussed evangelism and education hand-in-hand. Christianity led to education, which led to new professions and an ability to enter into the Western economic system that began to dominate Kenya’s economy. Fr. Tom McDonnell explained how the growth of education impacted the landscape, “Such little mostly one classroom schools grew slowly from centre to centre, about sixteen in a four-year period. These schools often became the place and focus of most gatherings in the community. They would be used for clinics, adult literacy, children’s daily schooling, prayer on Sundays, etc. Classrooms would be added if and when numbers expanded” (personal communication, 19 May 2019).

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<sup>102</sup> Fr. Leo’s emphasis on the value of good teacher training echoed the sentiments of Reverend Joseph Oldham (1931) in his exposition concerning mission education in Africa. “Whatever else the missions do or leave undone they must give of their best to the training of these African workers” in areas of Christianity, education, and medicine (p. 140).

Like the BCMS, the Catholic mission worked with the government to make education both a priority and a reality. Fr. Michael Dillon explained that the government chiefs helped “a little piece,” and early schools met under a bush or under a tree with pressure from government officials (personal communication, 5 April 2019). A 1955 article in *Africa Magazine* related, “Fr. Staples paid a visit to the mission school there [in Lomut]. Once upon a time he might have been dismayed by its ruinous conditions – crumbling mud walls barely supporting a tattered roof of grass-thatch. But there were 30 scholars on the roll, a big number by local standards, and he knew he could have a new school for the asking. A short interview with the chief, whom he found out in the fields nearby, and the matter was settled. A new school has since been erected in Lomut” (*Africa Magazine*, 1955, p. 7). Since the chief was (and is) a government employee, this vignette, possibly written to show communal support of the school, actually showed colonial government support instead. Colonial government employee, District Officer John Russell, commented on his exposure to the contact zone of the Catholic mission in Pokot in the late 1950s: “Being church schools, religion also featured prominently and I think that the tuition in reading and writing centered on it.” After finding Latin written on an outschool blackboard, he reflected, “I spent the rest of my evening stroll wondering what we were trying to do to these simple, happy and unspoilt people” (Russell, 1994, p. 136). John’s statement both questioned colonial and mission influence and reinforced a colonial perspective of a “primitive” people. Regardless, John’s opinion of the Catholic missionary priests was quite positive: “I developed a lot of respect and admiration for that small band of missionaries; they contributed so much to the well-being of the people of the district and seemed to devote most of their time to my division. I would meet them in all sorts of remote areas, either inspecting their schools or administering medical services or both” (Russell, 1994, p. 132). The legacy of the Catholic partnership with the

government and the missionaries' prioritization of continued improvement in the quality of education offered to students within the Catholic sphere of influence is evident in a landscape of established and respected schools and the continual growth of the Catholic church in Pokot.

As soon as education began, a focus on educating and empowering Pokot girls began. When the Holy Rosary Sisters came to Ortum in 1956, they immediately opened a girls' primary school. Fr. Leo Staples explained the nuns' work,

The Pokot did not want to send girls to school at that time. It wasn't an option. We had a girls' boarding school in Tartar, but we wouldn't have any Pokot in it; they were all from other ethnic groups. We were determined to start a girls' school in Ortum. We knew and believed in the importance of teaching and educating women. So in order to get the boarding school up and running, we brought down a number of girls from Tartar boarding school just to let the Pokot parents see that girls did and can go to school, just physically seeing them at school. And they could talk with them and mix with them. It was a Girls' Boarding School. There was also a Boys Boarding School. It started in 1957 (personal communication, 23 June 2019).

Like the school in Tartar, the school in Ortum began with students who were not Pokot. Head Mistress Sister Aloysius explained in a Radharc interview in 1966 her perception of why the Pokot resisted education: "I think it's just that they are still very backward, Father" (Radharc Films, 1966). Confronted with the missionaries' perceptions of the Pokot's backwardness or primitivity and Pokot resistance toward education, the Catholic mission like many others continued to offer Western education to the Pokot people, hoping they would recognize its value. Indeed, by starting with the children, the landscape of Pokot began to change. Despite admitting that the vast majority of students in the school were not Pokot, a nun in the 1966 Radharc Film approvingly explained that many of the schoolgirls were excited to exchange traditional dress and adornment for European styles of clothing. Likewise, little by little, the Pokot's reaction toward schooling shifted (explained further in the next chapter).

In addition to the establishment of many schools in and around Ortum, many of which still exist (one bears Leo Staples' name), the growth in education for girls, and the resulting growth of the Catholic Church, laity and clergy, Leo Staples helped establish a special school for the Pokot:

We have started a home now for physically disabled within Pokot county; the home is not exclusively for Pokot children but, in reality, 90% of the residents are Pokot... We have eighty-one physically disabled children in that home. We are educating them up to University level, medicating them, giving them new limbs, repairing their old limbs and giving them the Word of God, giving them a full education. We make them ready so that when they leave the home and go out into the world, they will be recognised as normal people. That is wonderful. Probably the most fruitful work I have ever done... They would have been allowed to die. Yes. The first children who were brought into that home came as a result of our Christians visiting the little centres in the hills, knowing that the children were hidden away where nobody could see them. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

The influence of education, both academic and Catholic/Christian, on culture and place added new dimensions to the sense of place within the contact zone. Leo described the change he has seen over the past sixty years:

They are competing with one another to get the best education possible. Education is the one thing that is spoken of so widely. Every child wants to go to school. Remember long ago when going along the road, even the smallest had a bow and arrow shooting frogs and rats and things. But now they have a school bag on their back. The pencil is the armour they have now. That is all they think of. They look forward to going back to school, they don't want to be home too long on holidays. All want to go to school. That's a wonderful change. Marvelous to see. Wonderful to see. That is why they are the envy of many who laughed at them before. They were a laughingstock – many would say 'Those people, they are a hundred years behind us!' Through no fault of their own, they were behind. They were denied the eyes to see that there was a different world outside. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

Catholic schooling in Pokot has multiplied since Leo first came to Ortum in 1955 and moved to Sigor in 1972. "Initially, the big thrust outward from Ortum was medicine and education. ...in 2002 there were 38 stations in the Sigor Parish and 36 of those stations had little primary schools. It gives an idea of the extent of the development that took place from 1972 until 2002"

(Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Generally speaking, Catholic schools, both primary and secondary, have a good reputation in Pokot as being academically rigorous.

**Unaffiliated Missions.** In some ways, the unaffiliated or nondenominational mission groups have had similar experiences in providing education to the Pokot as the established pioneers before them. However, the missionary discourse of most unaffiliated groups focuses on the evangelical side of education, similar to the AIM. Jane Hamilton explained how their mission's educational initiative began in Kiwawa, "In 1976, we started the first schools, and for several decades ours were the only schools available for the children of 50,000 Kara Pokot people. In the beginning the chiefs decreed that each family send one boy to school... Devotions were held nightly and Bible classes were taught in the schools; Bible teachings were approved and promoted by the Kenya government" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 62). For the Hamiltons, education was a tool for evangelism: "The mission still sponsors many of the schools with dormitories run by the mission, a great tool for reaching the hearts and minds of the young Pokot students. All the years of schooling and Bible teaching have changed a generation of Pokot and turned on a light reaching into an entire culture" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 70). Jane, like her predecessors, saw how education, particularly religious education, led to a change in the place and landscape of Pokot, starting with the youth of Pokot: "It was amazing to see the children easily transition from one world to the other. As they went home to their families they carried with them the lessons they learned, the Bible stories and gospel songs. Slowly the message penetrated into the unreached villages and mountains surrounding Kiwawa mission" (Hamilton, 2019, p. 63).

The mission organization, Children of Pokot Educational Fund (COPE), compared the starts of school in the United States and in Pokot, highlighting the development and relief

potential that education brought: “There is no sense of dread about going to school because, at school, the students will get hot cereal for breakfast and corn and beans for lunch. There is little shopping because very few have money” (COPE, Aug. 2018). Education for many missions is a bridge from evangelism to further development, filling perceived voids in the place and landscape. Again, a COPE newsletter explained, “In the Pokot traditional lifestyle, a girl was married by the time she was 13 or 14 years old, so parenting was essentially done. Now the children are with the parents until they are much older. Education is transforming the entire culture” (COPE, Aug. 2018)

For the Tierneys, who focus primarily on evangelism, education in practical and technical skills was used to equip and develop youth for whom Western education was out of reach:

The young boys who cannot afford secondary school come to the Mission and Jim is teaching them to use his tools, build with wood, school desks for example, build with blocks, weld, mason cement work, and they are delighted. They get paid a small sum of shillings but seem to be so delighted to learn. The women too are learning all these same skills and actually built the church we have now using cement blocks, cement and wood. We are trying to work ourselves out of a job and want the ones we teach to teach others. (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, 4 Nov. 2019)

Education as an initiative and a mission strategy followed a different pattern for the Friends of Asilong (FoA); likewise, FoA is a different kind of missionary organization than many of the others discussed in that they do not have a permanent Western missionary presence in Pokot. The individuals and churches that would eventually make up the mission organization FoA were introduced to Pokot through a Kenyan ministry that sought to help bring peace to the area through the provision of development, particularly supplying water resources through the digging of boreholes (more on that below). Julius Sawe, a Kenyan pastor, teacher, and missionary to the Pokot, explained that when he first visited the village of Asilong in West Pokot with the Kenyan ministry in 2009, the primary school was nearly closed down; there were only

two teachers present: “There is no way the school can survive without water. A few years back, there was no water and not even settlement. People used to move from one place to another looking for water” (Friends, 2017). The boreholes (or water wells) that the FoA established led to the Asilong community to donate land to the mission and request a high school to be built. Two architects from Jacob’s Well Church in Kansas City, founding members of FoA, began working on the project in 2011. Building began in 2013, and the first class of freshmen (Form 1 students) enrolled in 2017.

FoA’s commitment to education highlighted its focus on “holistic development leading to sustainable community empowerment and peace” as articulated in the mission statement (Friends, 2020). Pastor Tim Keel, who is associated with FoA, explained that education in Pokot has an even greater role in the development of the place of the Pokot than mere transfer of knowledge. Education provides an “encounter with the rest of the world” while leading to the decline of rates of child marriage, child mortality rates, and blindness (Keel, 2018). FoA missionary<sup>103</sup> Andy DuPont explained, “The presence of the high school is critical in retaining some of the brightest students in the community with the hopes that they will use their talents to help the community grow rather than leaving Asilong for urban areas” (Friends, 2019). The school structure alone exhibited a different mission strategy of education. Asilong Christian High School (Figures 5 and 6) was named a recipient of the prestigious American Institute of Architects (AIA) Committee on the Environment (COTE) Top Ten Award in 2019. Architect Laura Lesniewski described the focus of the building project as a response to the place of the

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<sup>103</sup> The missionaries with FoA have an ambivalent relationship with that title. While FoA claims no permanent missionary staff in Pokot, volunteers associated with FoA visit Pokot regularly. Andy and Olivia DuPont make two 3-4-week trips per year. Heidi Yaple accompanies the DuPonts on one of those visits. FoA volunteers, including lead architects for the school, Laura Lesniewski and Sam DeJong, from Jacob’s Well Church in Kansas City are less regular but typically make one 2-week trip per year.



Pokot, “Because of this project’s remote location, we started with sustainability out of need and a sense of this place” (quoted in Kratz, 2019). Architect Sam DeJong concurred that the structure came out of an understanding of the place, allowing for sustainable and appropriate building methods (Kratz, 2019). Sam DeJong explained,

The buildings continue to be constructed from local materials by local laborers; bricks are made on site by a team of community members and wicker screens are made by local women, adapting traditional grain storage construction methods to the school structures. The buildings utilize a confined masonry approach that incorporates regionally typical construction materials with critically different construction detailing and sequencing to produce a more seismically resistant building. Natural and passive strategies are integrated into the design to create a healthier user experience focused on a learning environment with more daylight and natural ventilation. (2018)



*Figure 4.2: ACHS teachers' quarters*

*(Photo credit: Sam DeJong, 2018)*



*Figure 4.3: Female students in front of ACHS classroom building*

*(Photo credit: Sam DeJong, 2018)*

Like many other mission-led educational initiatives, addressing gender inequality was a focus of FoA. While Asilong Christian High School opened as a co-educational facility, after two years, it transitioned to an all girls' school. According to the school's principal and the board liaison, the girls were at times harassed by some of the boys and were not performing to their potential. Likewise, the mission believed that boys had greater access to secondary education than girls. Girls were perceived as less likely to be sent by their parents longer distances to pursue secondary education. In additions to focusing on girls' schooling, FoA regularly conducted women's conferences for the women and unschooled girls in the community. Missionary Olivia DuPont described the topics covered, "Because polygamy is still practiced in

Asilong, the women are also learning practical ways to get along with their co-wives. Issues of physical abuse and female circumcision come up often. Heidi and I are teaching the unmarried girls from the village about their bodies and about maintaining feminine hygiene in such a harsh environment” (Friends, 2019).

The establishment of Asilong Christian High School in response to the provision of water sources has resulted in developmental change for the place of Asilong in Pokot. While the message of Christianity is the motivation behind the work of FoA, most direct evangelism is largely left to Kenyan pastor and missionary Julius Sawe, supported emotionally, spiritually, and financially by FoA. Mission work continues primarily along developmental lines as FoA facilitates and mostly funds the continued building, maintenance, and operation of the school. Likewise, plans are in the works for helping establish a clinic in Asilong through a partnership with the AIC. Architect Laura Lesniewski explained her perception of change at the contact zone, emphasizing the place and people—Pokot, Kenyan, and American—involved,

When we visited Asilong the first time, it was a desolate place. There were extreme environmental conditions with the river drying up, malnourishment, scarcity of basic human needs, weak livestock, and unhealthy conditions. Now, 10 years later, the difference is palpable. Everything feels vibrant, people’s spirits are brighter. Along the way, the voice of women in the community has been elevated; and the plight of young girls has improved dramatically. Typically, girls were taken as young teens to become wives, and that was their future. Now they can go to school and get an education. That piece has really been transformational. Enhancing the human condition is more apparent on this project than any other that I’ve worked on, and that does not just refer to the people of Asilong. The human condition of everyone involved in this place is enhanced. (quoted in Kratz, 2019).

Despite the mission focus on education, Pokot is still characterized by low rates of school attendance; however, the geographic patterns of education exposed by the Socio-Economic Atlas of Kenya (2016) corresponds to the missionary strategies employed in certain areas of Pokot. In 2003, the Kenyan government instituted the policy of free primary education due to the belief

that “broad-based primary education is a crucial precondition for national development” (Socio-Economic Atlas of Kenya, 2016, p. 122). Since then, rates of primary schooling in Kenya have increased dramatically. However, according to the Socio-Economic Atlas of Kenya (2016), which based its findings on 2009 census data, half of primary-aged children in West Pokot did not attend primary school in 2009, ranking it 41<sup>st</sup> out of 47 counties in Kenya. The numbers are even more dire for lowland Pokot that has a primary school attendance rate of less than 30%. For secondary school, West Pokot ranks 46<sup>th</sup> with only 5.6% of secondary-aged<sup>104</sup> students attending school. The higher rates of education in the highlands of West Pokot correspond to the areas that are more urbanized and have a longer history of missionary presence, particularly from the Anglican and Catholic missions that focused on quality primary and some secondary education. The lowland areas of West Pokot and the Pokot-dominated areas of Baringo County show very low levels of education, especially secondary. These areas correspond with more recent unaffiliated mission spheres and AIM-dominate areas, respectively; both of which typically downplayed education, prioritizing resources toward evangelical outcomes.

### ***Community Development***

A unique turn in mission strategy came to the Kiltegan Catholic mission center in Ortum on the heels of the Catholic charismatic movement discussed in the previous chapter. Spearheaded by Father Tom McDonnell, Tom introduced the mission and the people of Pokot to a movement that was gaining speed in nonwestern societies around the world, a movement to empower local leadership in specific ways. Told from the perspective of Tom and Father Leo

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<sup>104</sup> When one takes into account students that are outside of the prescribed age bracket of primary and secondary students, the incidence of schooling increases, particularly for primary schooling (see more on this topic at the Socio-Economic Atlas of Kenya found here <https://www.kenya-atlas.org/onlineatlas.html>).

Staples, change came to the place of the Pokot under the leadership of the Pokot youth in a way that found resonance in the Pokot population, a resonance that had been lacking in response to former mission endeavors and strategies. The movement became known as *Kablelach*<sup>105</sup>, named after the generation of youth that participated.

Leo began the story,

Tom McDonnell came [to Ortum] in 1971... He formed groups of youths with the idea that, first of all, they get an experience of what it meant to be true Christians. It was this *Kablelach* movement which formed them into a youth who would go on to become leaders of their people in all aspects of life, in business, in social work, in politics, education and banking. That movement was called *Kablelach* meaning the new group [the new age set], the new generation... they were a mixed group, boys and girls, Anglican and Catholic and others. It was amazing, there were quite a few Protestants, Bible Churchmen's Society who later became Anglican. They joined and were as much with the Catholic Group as they were with their own people at home. They developed a great awareness of their togetherness as a community of Christian youth. That was a wonderful movement. It had a big influence on the building up of the Catholic Church, and ecumenism, in West Pokot. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

Before he pioneered the *Kablelach* movement, when Tom came to Pokot, he followed the advice and lead of his fellow missionaries in Ortum. He took time to study the Pokot language and culture and began to help in evangelism and development initiatives. Tom explained,

Change was painfully slow over the first three years. I never felt easy with what we were doing. I felt we were pushing too much with little success. There was little initiative or spontaneity from the people themselves. I felt I needed a new strategy for development, for growth, for change, a strategy that motivated, energised and empowered people to take responsibility for their own future, growth and development. I became more and more downhearted. My dreams and sometimes prejudices no longer sustained me. When I reflect back today, it was a crisis of identity—I was part of something that was not me or who I wanted to be. I was hearing of many new things on the horizon. (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019)

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<sup>105</sup> Like all Kalenjin groups, the Pokot organize people into generational groups or age sets. Peristiany (1951) recognized eight age sets, and Daniels (1982) lists them as Maina, Chumo, Sawe, Korongoro, Kipkoimet, Kablelach, Merkutwa, and Nyongi.

Tom's changing perspective of himself as a missionary and of the role of the Kiltigans led him to begin to investigate "how to involve people in facilitating change in their own communities" (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019).

In 1974, Tom found the answer to his search: "I heard of an initiative taken by two Grail ladies. They came to Kenya with a vision." They "targeted priests in their initial workshops in the early 70s. They felt that if they converted the priests, they would change the strategy for appropriate development, for participatory evangelization, etc. through the Catholic church in Kenya. They did this through the seventies and early eighties." After investigating this new initiative, Tom explained,

I was invited to do a... training programme called 'Training for Trainers' later to be known as DELTA (Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action). These seminars<sup>106</sup> transformed my life and gave me a methodology that satisfied my yearnings. I met Anne Hope from South Africa and Sally Timmel from USA... Their work transformed the church in Kenya and in many parts of Africa. Other names for this way of transformation were 'The Psycho-Social Method of Education', the 'Problem Posing Method' etc. Together with others, I brought the methodology to West Pokot. (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019).

Tom was not the only Catholic missionary looking for a new strategy.

The 'Basic Christian Community' movement came at the initiative of the East Africa Bishops conference in the seventies. A participatory training programme for church personnel called 'The Lumko Method' etc. came from South Africa. A strong ecumenical Charismatic movement, internationally inspired, swept through Kenya in the mid-seventies. Many of our priests, St. Patrick's men, responded whole-heartedly to the Psycho-Social way of development and transformation. I'd imagine that at least 70% of us in the Diocese of Eldoret went for training of one form or other ... I know many from

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<sup>106</sup> The seminars are based on a series of books edited by "the Grail ladies," Anne Hope and Sally Timmel. Fr. Tom McDonnell stated, "I quote here a description of their methodology from their books *Training for Transformation*: '[This book has as its] basic philosophy the belief that we should all participate in making this world a more just place to live in. This work integrates the approach of Paulo Freire and how to put his method into practice, Manfred Max-Neef's understanding of fundamental human needs, group methods which are essential for participatory education, organizational development, which stresses how to build structures which enable people to become self-reliant, and social analysis to help groups find the root causes of problems. This title illustrates the spiritual concept of transformation challenging us in the light of the Gospel and other spiritual teaching. It can be used in basic Christian communities and all Faith traditions which share a vision of a just alternative society' (Hope & Timmel, 1984)" (personal communication, 19 May 2019).

the CPK [Anglican Church of the Province of Kenya] community came to these workshops; I always felt (and still feel even to this day), that this method broke down barriers, diminished prejudices, and invited people to a shared vision of a way forward for everyone. (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019)

The new strategy was implemented by Tom with the youth around the Ortum mission.

I decided to work with the young people; the Pastoral Pokot had a tradition of ‘The Age-Set System’ determined by circumcision age sets. If my memory serves me right, these sets or generations followed a 5- or 6-year cycle. The old men would determine when another generation would begin. The name of the youth of that time was *Kablelach* or new generation... Those targeted and present were the ones going to primary/secondary schools in the mid-seventies... All religions felt free to participate: Catholic, Anglican, Friends, etc. Participants came from the highland areas (the slopes of Kamatira, beyond Cheperaria) to the lowland areas of Chesegon, Lomut, and Psigor as well as Ortum. (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019)

Young men and women were both represented in the movement. “It was initially about them and not the general population. It is not a ‘finger-pointing’ way of motivation but rather grounded in those present” (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019).

Tom convened meetings with the youth interested in the new initiative. “When invited to experience these participatory workshops, they took to them with energy and commitment; they were excited, energised, and moved to act. We did ‘listening surveys’; we did not go with a set of questions but rather listened to people in places where they gathered: by the water holes, the market, the animal auctions, when playing games under the trees etc. We noted what made the people more emotional, what angered them, what did they complain about. In listening we determined their ‘felt needs.’” Tom continued, “Listening surveys among the youth unearthed emotive themes such as poor leadership, uneducated leaders; girls being married off without having a chance to finish school, even primary; few girls in secondary schools; poverty, an analysis of the causes of poverty; sickness caused by the use of dirty water; famine, lack of food; Ignorance among the adult population and the need for adult literacy; ethnic conflict and cattle

raiding especially with the Turkana and Marakwet etc. Relevant scripture passages would always be used in each learning session” (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019).

In addition to listening surveys, “We used the ‘problem posing method’ where we would present a 2-minute code (a play, perhaps a picture, a poem, a song) that depicted the truth of how things are in their real-life situations. Some basic questions followed the presentation” that guided their comprehension and analysis of the theme presented. “Here the group would take ownership of a way forward.... After a few initial 5-day workshops, leaders were identified and sent for further training and experience to other places up-country where similar programmes were being done. They then became facilitators of their own programmes” (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019). The participatory workshops and other meetings, facilitated by the priests, were designed to encourage the youth to identify problems in their community and work together toward solutions. On a practical level, the *Kablelach* initiative succeeded in adding two additional classrooms to the local school; the group prevented a local chief from taking a child bride without her consent; a meeting with community elders was initiated to encourage them to allow their daughters to continue education; and “a new water scheme was installed mainly by local labour and local government assistance to provide clear, filtered water for the village and hospital of Ortum”. These examples are just a few of many. “It's hard to itemise transformation and change,” but change can be seen not just in programs but in the trajectory of people’s lives. “Some of this group became members of parliament later, others including a lady<sup>107</sup>, became chiefs, others heads of schools primary and secondary etc. One of our first *Kablelach* leaders had a high-ranking job in the Central Bank of Kenya in

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<sup>107</sup> According to Fr. Leo Staples, they had “some wonderful Catechists” in Cheperaria, including “Ambrose Ptonon and his wife, Lucia. In fact, she later made history in the Pokot tribe and in Kenya, by becoming the first woman Chief. She was universally recognised as a great Chief. She was a member of the *Kablelach* generation, a product of the great fruits of that movement” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).



Nairobi” (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019). According to Father Leo Staples, the *Kablelach* group “influenced the growth of healthy living among the people. They were a wonderful group. They were inspirational” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

While Tom and Leo declared the benefits of the new strategy, Tom explained that not all reaction was positive: “Such growth among a community or section of a community can often cause suspicion and fear. After one of our earlier workshops, the District Officer came and arrested our facilitators and I was put under house arrest. Very early next morning, I left by motorcycle and went the 60 miles to Kitale. I took a local taxi (Matatu) to Eldoret and met our Bishop, John Njenga. He made a few phone calls to the various political leaders and he soon cleared the air and our facilitators were release the next evening” (McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019).

The program continued at least as long as Tom was present in Pokot. He was asked to relocate to South Sudan in 1983, “so I lost contact with the movement after that time. I am still in contact with many of those initial leaders of the early 70s.” Tom’s health is not what it once was, but his hope is “to make a final visit to West Pokot” to see the legacy of the *Kablelach* movement he began over four decades ago (McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019).

Most missions, like the Kiltegan mission in Ortum, had the goal of empowering the local people around their own development; however, few had a program set in place to assure sustainability in this way. As missions have become less denominational and more unaffiliated and missionaries have become less life-long, relying more on frequent visits, an emphasis on

sustainability and not dependency has grown. (This may not be the case for short, one-time missionary visits; a commitment to relationship with the place is still key). Kathy Tierney explained for her and her husband's work in Kamketo, "One of the things that they [local government workers] are most grateful about is that we are, 'empowering' the people to help themselves. So many times they share that too many come here and just give and give until the people expect to have things given to them. This makes them more cautious when they first meet us, because many missionaries do this and it causes many to simply become beggars and expect us to give and give" (Tierney, May 2016). From their perspective, the Pokot do not have the same advantages of learning skills that Americans do: "The Pokot never learn how to do things from their fathers like in the States. Most of us grow up learning to do a lot of things for ourselves, cooking, cleaning, changing the oil in a car, and little things we take for granted. Here, no one learns skilled trades while they are growing up" (Tierney, May 2016). Kathy Tierney's statement related a Western or even a colonial perspective of what could be considered a valuable trade. She naively negated the value of traditional Pokot education in order to relate her perspective of legitimacy for her and her husband's part in the development of Pokot, development through a Western lens.

Catholic Comboni missionary Dario Laurencig concurred that missionaries are necessary instigators of development; however, he prioritized local initiative: "Now what remains to be done is what has to be done by the local agents and the local people. They have to go on with what they got or what we transmitted to them. Now they reality is that people have to work by themselves and be agents of their own development in all the fields," (quoted in Bwalya, 2018). Olivia DuPont of Friends of Asilong, likewise, reiterated the goal of FoA to not breed

dependency, but worried, “Have we as outsiders shaped the conversation? As we think they’re becoming more self-sufficient, they ask for help” (personal communication, 26 August 2018).

Like the Catholic Kiltigans in the 1970s and 1980s, some recent groups have adopted programs to ensure community development success through an empowered local leadership. Wayne Jacobsen of the unaffiliated Lifestream ministry began supporting a Kenyan ministry that was reaching out with emergency relief to Pokot. After working in Pokot for three months, Wayne met Rolland and Heidi Baker, missionaries with their own sizeable unaffiliated mission. They told him, “You must move into development or you’ll own them” (Wayne Jacobsen, personal communication, 21 Dec. 2018). While the Bakers’ statement disregards the agency of the Pokot and whether individuals might decide to align with or refuse help provided by missionaries, Wayne felt that the Baker’s advice led to a more responsible model of missions. Lifestream ministry started with relief work and moved into development work, following the plan for development designed by the ministry Global Hope International, out of nearby Turkana. It is based on a 5-year program to reach self-sufficiency (Wayne Jacobsen, personal communication, 21 Dec. 2018).

In Alale in the 2010s, the RCA/AIM mission partnership, which began in 1980, began to revisit its mission strategies. Like so many other missions, the strategy had been to plant a church, school, and a clinic in order to evangelize and help develop the community of Alale. In 1988, when the community school that had been started by the mission was turned over to the community, elements of dependency and reliance on Western missionary support came to the forefront. The mission, like most others, increasingly valued local leadership. RCA missionary Morrell Swart quoted a fellow missionary: ““My contact with African Christians and with various development projects has made me increasingly aware that we Americans do not have all

the answers to spiritual or technical issues. There is a lot that we can learn from others so that together we can grow” (Caryl Busman, 1992, quoted by Swart, 1998, p. 272). However, it was not until 2012 that a new strategy was adopted to empower local leadership and curb dependency. The RCA asked Larry and Linda McAuley, who had been missionaries in Alale from 1981-1996, to return for four years to establish an asset-based community development program. Umoja or Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP) was an “Africa-based methodology” developed in the late 1990s by Tearfund, a Christian relief and development organization, with a goal of “breaking cycles of dependency” (Derrick Jones, personal communication, 15 November 2019).

The McAuleys explained the message behind CCMP, “This process attempts to help churches understand that they have a responsibility in the community – not just proclaiming the Gospel but living it out in both word and deed. It also attempts to help communities identify their God-given resources and put those resources to work in moving the community toward a more God-glorifying life” (McAuley, June 2015). The McAuleys facilitated CCMP training for interested Pokot in the Alale area. “In the first week of July we have another Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP) training scheduled. The first day will feature a report by a group of 5 women who went to a training center in another part of Kenya and learned about kitchen gardens, conservation farming, fruit trees and many other things that will help them be better stewards of their family resources. They came back all fired up about what they had learned and EAGER to pass it on to others!” (McAuley, June 2015). From there, individuals who have been trained are encouraged to train others: CCMP emphasized “training done locally BY local people FOR local people!” (McAuley, June 2015). From the McAuleys’ perspective, the new strategy and methodology was beginning to bear fruit towards sustainability: “It’s exciting to

see all the things happening at the local church level using their own resources. Churches are preparing gardens with the hopes of helping to meet the costs of church activities as well as contributing to the pastor's salary and helping people in need. Each small church has at least a nursery school associated with it and often a small primary school” (McAuley, March 2015). Likewise, in 2010, the community mobilized and requested a school be built in Alale. The government responded and built Alale Girls Secondary School that opened the following year.

Throughout the process of CCMP, the Western mission organization supports a local facilitator who is ultimately in charge of the training and equipping on the ground. Much like the *Kablelach* movement in Ortum pioneered by the Kiltegan priests, CCMP sought to lead church-based small groups to think through initiatives that were important to the community. According to the CCMP Facilitator’s Guide, “Facilitation is the best way to work with communities to help them discover for themselves the potential they have to bring positive changes to their community” (Njoroge et al., 2009). In 2016, missionaries Larry and Linda McAuley left Alale after helping to plant twenty-four churches in the area. Unlike the Kiltegan community development program, the RCA emphasized the need to remove all permanent resident Western Christian missionaries from Alale in order to further “break the cycle of dependency” (Derrick Jones, personal communication, 15 November 2019). The community continued to be supported remotely from RCA mission headquarter in the United States, and volunteers or RCA employees like the Supervisor of RCA Mission Programs in Africa, Derrick Jones, make yearly trips to Alale to support the continued CCMP initiative.

While all mission groups grapple with their strategies of missions, particularly their approach to development, some, including the Kiltegans in Ortum, Wayne Jacobson’s Lifestream ministry, and the RCA/AIM partnership in Alale, employed community development programs

with the expressed purpose of intentionally addressing dependency issues. Any mission-led development initiative carries a hint of the thread of paternalism seen in Social Darwinist philosophy and continued by Christian, government, and NGO attempts to “civilize,” “modernize,” and finally to “develop” the “remote” places of the world. Community development initiatives attempt to lightly touch these remnants of colonial thought while attempting to emphasize local leadership and a postcolonial if not anticolonial view of development. Mission-facilitated and locally-led community development models attempt to bridge the divide between theoretical models of development and postcolonial/decolonial theory (see McEwan, 2008). As missionaries embrace community development methods at the contact zone, place is augmented, shifted, and changed in a way that attempts to bring “Western” development to Pokot while decreasing the influence of missionary perspective.

### ***Medical Development***

Of all the parties caught up in the scramble for Africa, missionaries are said to have held the most ambitious aims. Where administrators, traders, and planters pursued ‘limited ends such as order, taxation, profits, cheap labor, and advantages against competing Europeans,’ missionaries, bent on redeeming pagan souls, ‘invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonization of heart and mind as well as body’ (Beidelman 1982a:6). Of all the apostolic enterprises missionaries engaged in, healing the sick often seemed the surest means of achieving these aims, especially among peoples hostile to the missionary cause. (Bianco, 1992, p. 1)

While most missionaries would take issue with Bianco and Beidelman’s perspective of evangelism as “colonization of heart and mind,” providing medical services was used, like education, as a strategy of missionary work in Pokot. RCA missionary Morrell Swart seemed to concur with the power of the medical strategy: “Medical work, however, does present many opportunities for showing the love of Christ and telling the Good News” (Swart, 1998, p. 60).

Medical work in Pokot took two primary forms that I will call informal and formal medical provision, both rising out of perceived medical and spiritual needs. Often informal medical services, provided as the need arose by missionaries minimally trained to address minor medical needs, led to the establishment of clinics, dispensaries, and a more formal provision of medical care. Unaffiliated missionary Jane Hamilton noted that in the late 1970s: “During the years before we were able to build a proper clinic at Kiwawa, we carried the little medical box everywhere we went” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 27-8). Missionaries, like AIM missionary Tom Collins and BCMS missionary Philip Price, underwent basic tropical medical training as part of their missionary training to be able to treat common illnesses. Others, like Tom’s wife Ruth, RCA missionary Molly Beaver, and unaffiliated missionary Kathy Tierney, studied nursing in order to be useful on the mission field. BCMS missionary Philip Price showed how the government supported mission-led informal medical services, leading to more formalized health care options at the contact zone: “The Government gave us a small annual grant for medicines and we started a dispensary, coping with such things as colds, malaria, eye diseases, sores and wounds of various types” (Price, 1970, p. 32). However, the Anglican missionary presence in Amudat, Uganda and the Catholic presence in Ortum, Kenya were accompanied almost immediately with fully functioning hospitals and a formal provision of medical care. Amudat Hospital and Ortum Hospital were established by mission groups, strongly encouraged and supported by the Kenyan government, and run by missionary doctors and nurses with mission and governmental funds.

Many missionaries in Pokot discussed the striking health problems in the Pokot population, a perception that encouraged the strategy of mission development in health services. BCMS missionary Annette Totty wrote in her report for 1944, “There has been much sickness during the year. Whooping cough in nearly all the surrounding villages but it did not get into the

school. One boy contracted Cerebral Spinal Meningitis but was cured and we do praise Him, as many die of this dread disease. Abram also our head teacher was marvelously healed from siplicaemia” (Totty, A., 30 Jan. 1945). The unhealthiness of the lowland areas was the focus of many early missionary letters and the cause of the Tottys’ move up the escarpment just three years after their arrival in Kacheliba. *Africa Magazine* discussed the establishment of Ortum Hospital, built for “the disease-infected lowlands,” as “a contact-point with the scattered people” (*Africa Magazine*, 1955, p. 8).

Kiltegan missionary Fr. Michael Dillon explained that around Ortum there was a great need for medical work because for many people, sickness meant death (personal communication, April 5, 2019). Fr. Leo Staples described the establishment of Ortum Hospital: “First of all, I must say that we had done a survey to establish what was needed (felt needs) in this area. The survey showed that there was a 75% infant mortality rate. Seventy-five children out of every 100 died before they were two years of age. They died from malaria and all kinds of sicknesses; there was no medicine for those things. The survey inspired the foundation of the hospital in Ortum” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Fr. Tom McDonnell praised the survey as a way to legitimize the missionaries’ perception of need in the community: “It wasn’t like you [Leo], as an outsider, deciding this is what the people want, especially the medical survey. So it was really a felt-need of the people that brought about the hospital, and Dr. Murphy and then you had to build up trust with the people” (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

In addition to addressing the illness and disease present in Pokot, some missionaries perceived a need to address unhealthy medical practices found in Pokot traditional medicine. Holy Rosary missionary Sister Dr. Marita Malone explained, “When I’d arrived in Ortum in 1960, the infant and maternal mortality rate had been extremely high—although we don’t know



the extent of it because countless Pokot mothers and babies died without coming near the hospital. Childbirth had been extremely perilous for Pokot women because of their traditional practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) and other practices of the traditional midwives... Through trial and error, bearing in mind the centuries-old traditions regarding childbirth, we had made progress in assuring a woman that she would have a living child and hopefully learn to care for it while she was in the hospital” (Malone, 2018, p. 9-10). Marita explained that her struggle as a doctor was not only against illness and disease but the practices that perpetuated them: “The status quo was also held together by the lack of formal education, the isolation of the district, and treasured traditions that did not contribute to health or longevity” (Malone, 2018, p. 305).

While not a medical provider, AIM missionary Ray Davis explained his perception of health and traditional medicine in a way that exoticized the Pokot. Accompanied by a gloomy soundtrack, in the 1991 AIM missionary video Ray Davis talked about the traditional medical practices that had led to a high infant mortality rate (up to 50%). He explained that children with diarrhea were given herbs to induce vomiting rather than giving the child water. Other times, goats were slaughtered, and a diviner was asked who had cursed an ailing child. Often, it was too late, he explained, when children were finally brought to the dispensary. Ray’s explanation connected the medical needs with the spiritual ones, justifying the strategy of medical services in order to address the primary purpose of evangelical mission work.

BCMS missionary Dr. David Webster’s perception of Pokot culture agreed with Ray’s explanation: “Their customs, culture and whole belief system involves the physical and the spiritual. In fact they would have been most surprised if we had come just to treat their bodies, and had ignored their spiritual needs” (Webster, 2013, p. 130). However, while Ray Davis’s

appeal hearkened to the colonial language of duality, placing modern medicine in sharp contrast to Pokot traditional medicine, Dr. David Webster did not portray the medical divide as starkly. “To the Pokot our western medicine was as strange and irrational as many of their treatments were to us. Their trust had to be won” (Webster, 2013, p. 124). After a string of deaths from hepatitis, David found “a gourd full of crushed red bark under the bed of a hepatitis patient who had suddenly deteriorated” (Webster, 2013, p. 88). David explained, “Some of the Pokot traditional medicines were undoubtedly effective (such as aloe juice as an antiseptic), but this hepatitis ‘treatment’ was undoubtedly poisonous. Another traditional treatment that we discouraged was the dressing of leg ulcers with cow dung – a frequent source of tetanus. Bathing them, however, with urine was not discouraged – urine was no doubt more sterile than any water from waterholes” (Webster, 2013, p. 88). Again, describing the spiritual and physical connection in Pokot culture, David understood that by continuing traditional medical treatments against his advice, the Pokot “wanted to appease Tororut, not to displease the doctor. There was this spiritual element to so many of their traditional treatments. We had no wish to undermine their own culture, but the liberating message of the Christian Gospel was particularly relevant to this fear of God” (Webster, 2013, p. 125).

The evangelical message paired with medical services was presented differently by different missions. In 1931, the BCMS missionaries Stanley and Annie Housden explained how delivering the Christian message accompanied all mission activities, including provision of medical services, “At 9am there is a bell for Morning Worship, which everybody on the station, from schoolboys to workmen have to attend. Also if there is anybody wanting any medicine they have to attend this Service, when there is a hymn, a short message and prayer. Afterwards there is the dispensary. During the last twenty-four days one hundred and ten patients have been

treated” (Housden, 7 October 1931). The implication to the reader of this prayer letter was that, likewise, one hundred and ten people had been evangelized. While the pattern was similar nearly forty years later, the compulsory nature of the evangelism was downplayed in Dr. David Webster’s description: “On each occasion increasing numbers of mothers would agree to let us immunize their children, and each time it was a step forward. At some stage in the day we would break off and have a very informal service – the dresser might teach them a Christian song in Pokot, and then tell them what his faith in Jesus meant to him. I might give a very simple explanation of the Christian message. Then it would be back to work” (Webster, 2007, p. 58).

In the same way, unaffiliated missionary Kathy Tierney saw a connection between her perception of medical and spiritual need and subsequent trust and growth of the mission: “Chesapin is our most primitive Church. The last clinic I did there made me so sad. I went away wondering what I could do so they would understand that boiling the water is a major way to help with the huge number of skin diseases or to keep the flies away that are causing eye diseases... When we drive away from Chesapin, we feel that we need a lifetime to reach them for Jesus. Gaining their trust is huge, but the Lord wants them more than his life” (Tierney, September 2016). As a strategy, the provision of medical services succeeded in two ways. First, it helped build trust at the contact zone as the missionaries demonstrated care for the practical suffering of ill or injured Pokot. Not only did the missionaries ingratiate themselves to the Pokot but they also improved morale for other aspects of Western culture and innovation. Second, medically treating a Pochon allowed for time and opportunity to evangelize the Pochon as well.

**Ortum Hospital.** At the intersection of mission perspective and development of the Pokot landscape is the hospital. Formal Western medical services were scarce in Pokot during

the first half of the twentieth century, so the government was in strong support of the Catholic mission establishing Ortum Hospital. Like education, the provision of medical services by the missions saved the government from having to provide the same. Upon her arrival to Pokot in 1960, Sister Doctor Marita Malone remarked, “Twenty miles farther into the valley beyond Ortum was a government-sponsored health center in Sigor, staffed by auxiliary medical assistants, who after completing high school, had undergone a three-year training program in diagnosing and treating patients at the primary care level. Other than that there were no medical facilities in the entire district of approximately 3,500 square miles” (Malone, 2018, p. 1). Fr. Leo Staples told the story of the establishment of the Ortum Hospital in 1955, arising out of mission and colonial government perception of need. “There was one big thing the Government really wanted us to do; that was to start the hospital. They were not very satisfied with our choice of Ortum; they wanted it put in Psebit or in another place. But we saw very good reasons for starting in Ortum because it was 1) geographically the centre. 2) There was some kind of a road and there was a river and water available, and these were essential for the running of the hospital” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Despite the mission and government support of the hospital, keeping it running was a constant struggle according to Sister Doctor Marita Malone: “The Ortum Mission Hospital, even though it was sponsored by the Catholic Church, depended on government support to keep it functioning and to entitle us to such perks as obtaining drugs and medical supplies at a cheaper rate from central government stores” (Malone, 2018, p. 192). Likewise, Fr. Leo related the government’s material support of the hospital, “In 1957 or 1958 the government saw and appreciated what we were doing in the hospital, so they gave us an old Bedford truck for an ambulance complete with driver. They paid his salary and the running cost of the vehicle etc. From then onwards, the Sisters could go to the

outstations. We choose a number of priority places to go and bring medicines to the people. Their work was wonderful – a real success story” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Despite the governmental support, “Financing the hospital was a constant concern. We lived from month to month and worried about being able to meet the payroll. It was necessary for us to contact friends and overseas organizations to request financial help” (Malone, 2018, p. 192).

Dr. Finbarr Murphy was the first doctor before the hospital began being fully staffed by the Holy Rosary Sisters. District Officer John Russell’s description of Dr. Murphy highlighted the perception of Pokot as remote and the Pokot as different, requiring different treatment than Westerners, and hearkened to the earlier belief that missionaries were the masters of their own mission station.

The priest who was a doctor was probably only in his early forties, but his lived-in face suggested at least 100 years of experience and no illusions whatsoever. I do not know where he had previously served, but it must have been in other back-of-beyond places. Because it was impossible to visualize him anywhere else. His bedside manner in any city setting would have had him both stripped of the cloth and drummed out of the medical profession within a week. Nevertheless, my Pokot parishioners could not have had a better doctor... The lash of his tongue when he found a neglected child or an ill-treated woman would reduce an arrogant warrior to a penitent parent or husband in very short order – though, to be fair, this did not happen very often, for that sort of situation seldom arose. (Russell, 1994, p. 133-4)

By 1957, the hospital was under the authority of the Holy Rosary Sisters. Sister Doctor Marita Malone ran the hospital as the head (and usually only) doctor from 1960 to 1972 with a two-year hiatus working elsewhere. As a response to Fr. Leo’s health survey, Marita’s highest priority was to address the high infant mortality rate in and around the hospital and related dangers to the mothers in childbirth, particularly related to the practice of FGM. Marita’s attempts to change the culture around labor and delivery found resistance, from her perspective, because the institutions of midwifery and marriage were being challenged. “Many women died

in childbirth, which reinforced the practice of polygamy. Delivering babies in the hospital was a new and unfamiliar idea for the local women. Besides, the traditional midwives worked against us, not only by their traditional interventions but also by assuring these women that the customs of centuries were sound and should be maintained” (Malone, 2018, p. 203).

Marita’s belief in modern medicine and proof of this belief through a decrease in infant mortality began to change the landscape of maternity at the contact zone of Ortum Hospital. District Officer John Russell explained, “The primary need [to combat infant mortality] was for education, but when this was seen to conflict with custom and culture, all the best endeavours were resisted. So it was once again teaching by results, which was a slow process fraught with innumerable frustrations. This was where the strength of the nuns lay, for not only were they realists, but they were also blessed with unlimited patience and, slowly but surely, the death toll dropped to a more acceptable level” (Russell, 1994, p. 133-4). Marita concurred, explaining how change was attained, “Through trial and error, bearing in mind the centuries-old traditions regarding childbirth, we had made progress in assuring a woman that she would have a living child and hopefully learn to care for it while she was in the hospital. One such innovation was to construct a basic building on the campus, which we christened the Ladies in Waiting, so that women in the advanced stages of pregnancy could live there until the onset of labor” (Malone, 2018, p. 9-10). Marita realized, “Two obvious reasons stood out as to why pregnant women did not give birth at our hospital. First of all, they had no idea of their due dates, or expected date of delivery (EDD) in medical terms. Second, they had no means of transport to the hospital once they went into labor” (Malone, 2018, p. 284). Marita felt that the idea of the “Ladies in Waiting” maternity building had strong support from the community: “We needed a hostel for the ladies in waiting that would include space for them to sleep and an area where they could take care of

their own cooking and other day-to-day chores. Short on funds, as we always were, we approached the local elders and asked for their help in rallying the local people in a harambee project to build the hostel on the hospital grounds... The elders received this suggestion with great enthusiasm” (Malone, 2018, p. 285). Upon Marita’s visit to Ortum over forty years after she left, “I was surprised to learn that this idea had flourished and that the old building had been replaced by a new permanent hostel funded by USAID” (Malone, 2018, p. 10).

The influence of the Ortum Hospital spread from the mission station with a mobile service partially supported by the colonial government. Marita described, “Before I arrived, the hospital had entered into an agreement with the Ministry of Health to carry out a mobile service to the outlying remote areas where there was not access to medical care. We received some financial assistance for this effort” (Malone, 2018, p. 210). “Twice per week, after completing the inpatient rounds and attending to any urgent duties, I would join the other members of the team and set out to one of the designated locations in our mobile unit. We chose locations where we were assured of a welcome from the local people and a good turnout of needy patients” (Malone, 2018, p. 212). While missions and thus mission expansion were relegated to their specific denominational/mission organizational “zones” during colonialism, the Catholic mission was free to expand to new areas, such as Cheperaria<sup>108</sup>, after independence. “Another factor that had a significant impact on the increased numbers not only in the maternity services but also generally was that we had opened a dispensary in Cheperaria, a busy center halfway between

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<sup>108</sup> In 1960, BCMS missionary Annette Totty wrote a scathing indictment of the Catholic mission for attempting to build a hospital in Chepararia: “In Suk we have a zoning system whereby if we have a school or church in a certain district the R.Cs are not allowed to come. If the R.Cs have a school or church in a certain district we do not go, and we have faithfully kept our side of the bargain, but the R.Cs have violated this and have caused havoc in Chepararia – promising the people a hospital” (10 Nov. 1960).

Ortum and Kapenguria. This was in response to frequent and compelling invitations from the local elders” (Malone, 2018, p. 290).

While the hospital and outstation clinics continued to be led by Western missionaries, practicality, at least initially, led to some indigenization of the hospital. Initially, educated and trained locals were scarce. Marita explained, “During my tenure, either we had to recruit staff from outside the area because none of the local people had been trained or, later, the local people who had been educated fled to the larger towns and cities, where they would get higher pay and enjoy more modern facilities and amenities” (Malone, 2018, p. 7). To keep qualified hospital aides, “the best solution, it seemed, would be to start our own nurse training program. This would give us at least a cadre of local women in training who, under supervision, could perform some of our nursing needs... We therefore decided to focus the training program around our goal of increasing the number of pregnant women who delivered their babies in our hospital” (Malone, 2018, p. 283). “We were approved to start an enrolled midwifery training school... I believe our initial intake was in 1970. It was a two-year program. Each student had to have a certificate of primary education (CPE). From the start, we were able to find the approved number of student midwives from the local school, mostly Pokot women” (Malone, 2018, p. 304). Education continued after Marita left through the established nursing school in Ortum and another health initiative: “At Ortum, in a hospital tucked in among high hills near Kitale, Antony [Latham] has initiated a scheme for community health workers, people from the surrounding villages who come to the hospital for training in very basic skills and then promote preventative and curative measures in their own areas. The hospital’s mobile clinic provides the back-up and supervisory services needed” (Boylan, 1983).



While faced with resistance at the start, Marita explained her perspective of the roots of Pokot resistance, “There were many factors contributing to our lack of progress, most of them intertwined. The people were not receptive to a monetary economy... The status quo was also held together by the lack of formal education, the isolation of the district, and treasured traditions that did not contribute to health or longevity” (Malone, 2018, p. 305). In many ways Marita, Leo, and other missionaries based in Ortum focused their attention on overcoming these areas of lack that they perceived in the place of the Pokot. One strategy to overcome the isolation and “remoteness” of Ortum was to connect it to the greater medical network in Kenya. In the early 1970s, Marita pioneered a relationship with African Medical Service for Research and Education Foundation (AMREF), which would allow doctors to be flown into Ortum and patients to be flown out. After meeting with the AMREF director, Marita “hastily returned to base to initiate the gigantic task of planning and constructing an airstrip... Having proved we had a safe place to land and adequate medical facilities, we were approved to be on the regular monthly schedule from the Flying Doctors Service” (Malone, 2018, p. 294-5). “The Flying Doctors Service maintained daily radio contact between isolated stations, such as ours and the main office in Nairobi.... We were no longer isolated—Ortum was on the map” (Malone, 2018, p. 297-8). While a seemingly innocent turn of phrase, Ortum’s location “on the map” underscores its connection to a colonial way of seeing and knowing the world. Ortum had previously been part of the empty map<sup>109</sup>, the Dark (unknown) Continent, made visible by Western eyes (Keim, 2009; Ashcroft, 2001; Pratt, 1992).

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<sup>109</sup> In his July 2020 article, “Mapping as a Colonial Technology: Africa and the Map,” in the *Cambridge Globalist*, George Hill explained, “In the colonial era, unmapped spaces were viewed as lawless voids, existing beyond the ordered geography of the sovereign European state. The map was employed as a means of subsuming these spaces into the European conception of a governable, manageable and, crucially, exploitable state.” (Access the article at <https://cambridgeglobalist.org/?p=2154>).

Despite employing a colonial perspective at times, Sister Doctor Marita Malone, like her contemporary Ortum missionary Fr. Tom McDonnell, felt a dissatisfaction with the seemingly Western-oriented manner in which the Catholic mission—medical and religious—was established and progressing in Ortum. In 1969, just over two years before she would leave Pokot permanently, Marita explained, “I continued to grapple with the question as to whether our hospital-based approach was the right one to answer the health needs of the people that we served. I realized I was not alone in my doubts when I discovered a recently published book<sup>110</sup> that formulated a completely new approach to health care in the developing world” (Malone, 2018, p. 315). Like Fr. Tom, she had been searching for a better way to serve the Pokot, a way that conformed to the place of the Pokot rather than attempting to further influence cultural change in place. “After a dozen somewhat frustrating years of acting as a general doctor for the indigenous people of the Pokot tribe, who had scarce knowledge of and little interest in Western medicine, I had hatched an ambitious plan to organize community-based health services for the area around Ortum...” (Malone, 2018, p. 1). Unfortunately, after receiving her public health degree from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in 1973 and penning the thesis, “Maternal and Child Health Services for the Kerio-Weiwei Valley,” she was prevented by the Catholic mission hierarchy from returning to said valley in Pokot to put her new ideas into action. Much later Marita happened upon a dissertation that solidified her sense that a colonial mindset hampered the success of the development offered through the Catholic mission in Ortum: “The research, part of a philosophy PhD thesis, entitled ‘The Management of Illness in an East African Society: A Study of Choice and Constraint in Health Care among the Pokot,’ written by David C. Nyamwaya of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, in 1982, gives eye-opening glimpses into the

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<sup>110</sup> King, Maurice (1966). *Medical Care in Developing Countries, a Symposium from Makerere*. Oxford University Press.

beliefs and practices regarding health and illness of the Pokot. It also makes me acutely aware of how little understanding we had of those beliefs and how lacking we were in addressing them with our Western-style approach” (Malone, 2018, p. 306).

Ortum Hospital has irrevocably changed the landscape and place of Pokot. In 1966 the Radharc Film, *Killeshandra Nuns: Forbidden Valley*, described a snapshot of that change: the nuns came in 1956, on the heels of Fr Staples, to set up the hospital and fight the common illnesses, “TB, malaria, dysentery, kala azar; all of them complicated with malnutrition.” The new hospital “is always over-crowded, but this is at least a welcome change from the early days when the people were afraid to go near the white man’s house... The sick now raise no objection to the preliminary bath and haircut. They put on the colored night shirt, take the white man’s medicine and sleep in the white man’s bed without any visible ill effects.” A nun in the film explained that when the men come in, “We cut [the mudcaps] off; we try to get it off. In the beginning they wouldn’t let us do it, but now they’re beginning to realize. They’re beginning to learn a little bit of hygiene. I think we’re teaching them that” (quoted in Radharc, 1966). The missionary removal of the mudcap<sup>111</sup>, a symbol of manhood, ancestry, culture, and superiority “in the acquisition of cattle” (Peristiany, 1951), was deeply symbolic of the change of place occurring in Pokot. Likewise, Sister Doctor Marita explained, “Later, after much discussion, it became the practice to give each woman being admitted a short haircut. This was necessary to solve the problem of the stubborn stains on the bed linens. Amazingly, there were no objections either from the patients or the local elders” (Malone, 2018, p. 303).

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<sup>111</sup> Beech (1911) described the mudcap or *siolip* as “the most striking part of the men's appearance... they claim to have copied [it] from the Karamojo... The hair at the back of the head is allowed to grow long, and on to this is woven other hair, in many cases said to be that of their ancestors, until a kind of chignon of oval shape is formed, reaching often as far down as the waist. This is dressed with grey mud (*munyan*), so that the whole becomes hard and solid. Where this *siolip* covers the nape of the neck a ball of ostrich feathers (*adukus*) is fixed, and here and there dotted over the whole surface of the head-dress are little gut sockets (*ho-pa-songol*), in which ostrich feathers (*songol*) are planted” (p. 13-14).

Nearly fifty years later, Marita Malone reflected on the changes she perceived in medical care in Ortum when she visited in 2013. “It was exciting to see the well-equipped laboratory and modern x-ray department. Outpatients, I discovered, were being treated by an indigenous certified medical officer. More exciting still was to see the Maternal Child Health Clinic abuzz with activity as mothers waited patiently to have their young children weighed, checked for health problems, and given scheduled immunizations” (Malone, 2018, p. 7). Likewise, “Another source of joy and pride was learning that the Enrolled Community Nurse Training School that had opened before I’d left had now been replaced by a higher level of training, a Registered Community Nurse Training School” (Malone, 2018, p. 10). Pokot culture was no longer evident in hairstyles and dress, and many Pokot had been educated and trained to take over the running of the hospital. In Fr. Leo’s estimation, the hospital’s community health education programs have changed the place, “Young people are very healthy, and they know the importance of good food, good nutrition and all the rest of it” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

**Amudat Hospital.** Like Ortum Hospital, Amudat Hospital grew out of mission/government cooperation. Unlike Ortum, the hospital in Amudat was a direct political response to Pokot resistance to colonial control in the form of taxation or the suppression of the anti-colonial movement *Dini ya Msambwa* (discussed in greater detail in the following chapter) or both. From BCMS missionary Dr. David Webster’s perspective,

The concept of Amudat Hospital had begun following the visit of the British Governor of Uganda in the 1950s. Disgruntled local Pokot tribesmen threw mud at him. They were not happy at paying poll tax to the Government and getting little back in return. So how about a hospital? An agreement was reached between the then colonial government and BCMS (who already had worked in the area) that the Government would fund a hospital, if the Mission would staff and run it. It was to be a unique joint venture. (2013, p. 76)

In Annette Totty's estimation, the hospital was the brainchild of her husband, a response to the government's desire to "help the Pokot" and address the "problem of this subversive religion" *Dini ya Msambwa*. When asked by government officials, "Lawrie's advice was... that the Government should build a hospital at Amudat and that BCMS should supply a doctor. They agreed and the Mission sent out Dr. Peter Cox" (Totty, n.d., p. 52). In Peter's opinion, the hospital arose out of a desire from colonial officials to provide a positive impact on the region. According to him, the colonial Field Officer realized his legacy was relegated to putting people in prison, destroying their religion, and providing subpar medical care (Cox, 1967). In his flamboyant style, Peter he explained how he became the first missionary doctor at Amudat Hospital,

When Governors utter, things are done; and as this Governor did utter, in no time at all BCMS (Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society) were asked if by any chance they would care to open a medical work among the Karapokot, as they already worked among the Pokot in Kenya and the Karamojong in Uganda. BCMS in even less time said that they would care and what about it? Thus the letters rolled and as they had a spare doctor [Cox] on the books, he was taken off the books and sent to Africa (in spite of the fact that he had arranged to work in India and climb the Himalayas on his local leaves). (Cox, 1967, para. 14)

"So it was that Peter Cox arrived in Amudat in 1957, and he began to hold medical clinics under a thorn tree while the first hospital buildings went up," Peter's replacement, Dr. David Webster explained (2013, p. 76). The hospital was slowly accepted by the Pokot through successful treatments. Peter stated, "Only a demonstration of our medicine will win them over - and of course on the church level it is the same" (Cox, 1967, para. 53). Many of these health needs, David believed, were culturally enmeshed with spirituality, so the strategy of providing medical care went hand-in-hand with evangelism. "The Christian Church in Amudat grew out of the medical work. The approach of the Coxes, and [nurses] Lilian [Singleton] and Ruth [Stranex

Deeth], and other mission partners in Amudat had, from the start, been holistic – to care for body, mind and soul” (Webster, 2013, p. 130-1). David continued the story of the hospital,

By the time we [the Webster family) arrived, in 1967, Amudat Hospital was a thriving little hospital, with a reputation far and wide. It served an area of about five thousand square miles of remote bush country. Its main clients were the semi-nomadic Pokot people who populated the area. But at that time the workload had been increased considerably by a refugee camp of twenty thousand Sudanese, twenty miles away at the foot of Kadam... As I stepped into the hospital for the first time I had mixed feelings – excitement, nervousness, inadequacy. It was all so different from an English hospital. The two open-sided twelve-bedded wards, male and female, were virtually empty. Apart from very ill patients everybody – patients and the relatives caring for them – was outside... And then there was the smell and the dirt. The walls of the wards were distinctly grubby, smeared by dirty hands and greasy heads. The bed linen (originally white) was various shades of brown. It soon became obvious that, in a culture where water is very short and where washing is not the custom, where animal fat is used to oil the hair and where the dress of the women was goatskins, it was unrealistic to expect the wards to be pristine. (Webster, 2013, p. 76).

Whereas, in Ortum Hospital, hair was cut to avoid stained bed linens, and cloth clothes were encouraged, in Amudat, David explained (as quoted above) that by the late 1960s it was not BCMS “policy to encourage naked men to wear trousers, or women in skins to wear dresses – although from the point of view of hygiene dresses did have an advantage over goat skins” (Webster, 2013, p. 130-1). Discouragement, to put it mildly, of Pokot attire came from the Ugandan government and added to the workload at the hospital: “As well as the busyness [at the hospital] resulting from tribal raiding it was also busy thanks to the Uganda army. They despised the Pokot. Amin had already made his edict about clothing, and any Pokot seen naked or in traditional goat skins was shot on sight. Most of the victims that we saw at hospital were women and children. One small baby had had her leg shattered by the bullet which killed her mother” (Webster, 2013, p. 190).

Like the response to hair and clothing, the medical response to the high infant mortality rate in Amudat reflected a different missionary perspective and thus a different strategy was

employed from the one in Ortum. Dr. David Webster explained that the mission hospital attempted to both recognize and acknowledge the medical, spiritual, and practical role held by traditional Pokot midwives; likewise, rather than re-centering the place of childbirth to the hospital, David explained that educating and providing simple tools to local midwives did much to address the infant mortality problem:

We did not want to take deliveries out of the hands of the village ‘midwives’<sup>112</sup>. Rather, we wanted them to be involved in hospital deliveries, and to learn better ways. The simple act of distributing new razor blades and a piece of clean string meant a considerable reduction in neonatal tetanus. Apart from learning better ways, it was important for the ‘midwives’ to be present during labour because, according to Pokot custom, this was the time the expectant mother must confess all her past misdeeds, and come clean. Each labour pain brought with it new revelations to the ‘midwives’ – a sort of confession by contraction. Without it they believed the baby would be weak or would die. (Webster, 2013, p. 165-6)

David believed strongly that it was essential to “study and try to understand the beliefs and mind of the local people” both in the context of evangelism and development initiatives and especially where these two mission activities overlapped. “It was also essential medically – to understand why people often delayed so long before coming to the hospital... It was precisely because of their fear that they might have been cursed, either by Tororut or by an evil spirit, that sick people were so anxious to make sacrifices. They dare not neglect the spiritual aspect of their illness” (Webster, 2013, p. 169).

The Amudat mission hospital, like Ortum, expanded its operation and influence through establishing outstations and dispensaries. Based on his regular medical safaris, David selected areas for more permanent structures that he would build, sometimes with the help of Pokot community members. The expansion of the BCMS medical mission endeavor in and around

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<sup>112</sup> While the reason behind David Webster’s use of quotation marks around the word midwives is not made clear in the text, my assumption is it indicates the lack of formal education and training that goes into the position in Western medical settings.

Amudat was further supported by a network of mission organizations and the independent government. A new mission arm of the BCMS was established and organized by Dr. Peter Cox.

Dr. David Webster explains its function:

Graham Fraser, Peter Cox, Maurice Heyman, Peter Green and I were all part of what was called The Northern Frontier Medical Mission (NFMM). This was really the brainchild of Peter Cox and bishop Neville. Scattered across the vast northern districts of Kenya were Government District Hospitals – notably Marsabit, Moyale, Maralal, and Kapenguria. Although strictly in Uganda, Amudat was included in the scheme. The Kenya Government found it difficult to staff these isolated hospitals with Kenyan doctors. A posting to any one of them was sometimes considered (and occasionally probably was) a punishment. A Government doctor so posted was quite likely to resign, and go instead into private practice in one of the towns. Missionary agencies, especially BCMS, had doctors available keen to work in these remote parts, but the policy of the Society was not, itself, to run hospitals. The NFMM was a scheme to match these needs – the Mission would second its doctors to the Kenya Government, to work as Medical Officers of Health, based at Government hospitals. (Webster, 2013, p. 146)

NFMM functioned to blur the lines between church and state as missionary doctors received salaries from the Kenyan government but were viewed by their mission organization and the government as missionaries. In a 1969 job posting for doctors to work with NFMM, Peter stated the flexibility of the position and its evangelical purpose, “Doctors can be engaged on a short-term basis of two-year contracts with salaries provided by Government, or can serve in NFMM as full missionaries of the Society. One thing has been made abundantly clear, nothing else can reach as many individuals of the nomadic tribes as medical services” (quoted in Hansen, 2015, p. 183).

Missionary presence in Amudat waned in the mid-1970s due to political insecurity. Dr. David Webster and his family left in 1973, “But the question still remained – what about Amudat Hospital? BCMS made a policy decision that, until the situation in Uganda improved, they would not send further doctors or nurses to Amudat. The hospital would meanwhile be run as a health centre by the Ugandan staff, whom we knew to be so capable” (Webster, 2013, p. 316). Today,



the legacy of mission influence and development at the contact zone of Pokot is evident. Amudat Hospital is still run by the Anglican Church of Uganda. As of 2014, “It serves a population of about 100,000 people... It is also a centre for clinical trials and biomedical research attracting both local and international collaborators” (Olobo-Okao & Sagaki, 2014, p. 3).

### *Agriculture*

Agricultural schemes centered on farming were largely the providence of colonial government attempts to teach the pastoralist Pokot a more “progressive<sup>113</sup>” way to live off the land (Lesorogol, 2008; Visser, 1989). “The colonial government considered traditional forms of livestock husbandry throughout the territory to be wasteful and uneconomic in its concern for the display of wealth rather than production for market” (Shetler, 2007, p. 192). Taxes were used to provoke the people into farming or creating productive wealth within the economic vision of the colonizer (Sifuna & Otiende, 1994; Myers, 2003); however, livestock was always viewed by the Pokot as more valuable both literally and culturally (Dietz, 1987). Influenced by the post-Industrial Revolution ideal of Western materialism, accumulation, and prioritization of a market economy, missionaries, like their colonial predecessors, were often keen to add agricultural training to their strategies of development (Waller, 1999). The strategy addressed the perspective of the “wandering” Pokot by encouraging sedentarization.

One mission-led agricultural initiative began in Tamkal, a BCMS outstation established by missionary Philip Price in the 1950s but left with no missionary in 1963. The evidence of mission influence at that contact zone had faded. The transition of place from the 1960s to the

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<sup>113</sup> As discussed previously, A.A. Sheldon, DC in 1924, was an avid proponent for agriculture despite that 80% of Pokot relied exclusively on pastoralism. Sheldon declared the Pokot to be “disinclined to progress” and that they “seek only cows” (quoted in Patterson, 1969, p. 17).

1980s was described by BCMS missionary David Payne and BCMS Christian convert and pastor Daniel Tumkou: “With the lack of leaders no one had been bothering even to maintain the road to Tamkal, and when David [Payne] visited there... every other month or so he had to walk the eight miles from Sangat and back again. What once had been a thriving centre spiritually had now degenerated into a tiny congregation of a few young people. The ‘powers of darkness’ seemed very strong. Gradually new hope seemed to open up” (Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 23). An agricultural initiative provided a place of both development and evangelism for the BCMS and, with a somewhat reluctant invitation, the local Catholic mission. According to Daniel and David, “Christian Rural Service was offered some assistance through the government to rejuvenate some Ministry of Agriculture demonstration agricultural plots, which had been established 20 years before under the colonial regime and since fallen into disrepair. As some of these plots were in centres served by the Catholic Church, it was decided to undertake this development in co-operation with them” (Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 23). Agriculture provided a new foray into mission development with the hopes of improving and diversifying food supply and leading to evangelism. Those engaged in agriculture would return again and again, giving missionaries a more stable and settled population to evangelize.

AIM missionary Art Davis also linked evangelism and farming with a tacit understanding of their close relationship. In his description of Pokot convert Paulo, Art equated his new life in Christ with his new life as a farmer, with the first transformation encouraging the second: “But when he became a Christian, Paulo was a different person. His words were taken seriously in the tribal councils. He earned respect from Pokot leaders by becoming an assistant to Pastor Njau and working together with him on farming—a new concept to these nomadic cattle people, but a concept that gained quick acceptance” (Davis, 2011, p. 101).

Like the BCMS and AIM, the Kiltegan Catholics worked on an agricultural project among the strongly pastoralist East Pokot in Baringo County. Showing a shift from the colonial mindset popularized by early district commissioners who came with predetermined schemes, these Catholic missionaries hoped to employ local knowledge to increase the food supply.

Here on the Eastern side of the Cherangani Hills, in an arid region, Michael Long from Tipperary works with Ed Barrow of Dublin on a Gorta project. At their base, Kositei, and in the surrounding areas, the two men have, with the local Pokot people, conducted tests with seeds to select the best food crops and trees for the area... What is more impressive about the approach of Michael and Ed is how they have tapped the existing local knowledge and practice of the Pokot, and have built on it, rather than, as so often used to happen in such projects, introduce new techniques which don't suit the situation (Boylan, 1983).

Friends of Asilong, likewise, engaged with Kenyan agricultural knowledge in an unexpected agricultural development opportunity in Pokot. When chickens were ordered to provide eggs for students and staff at Asilong Christian High School, they were delivered by Patrick, a nonPokot, who was immediately impressed by the work of FoA in the school and community. Patrick opted to remain in Asilong. He is now paid by the school through FoA to grow food for the school, work with the students taking agriculture classes, and teach both directly and by example new agricultural practices to the Pokot community in and around Asilong.

The transition from being primarily reliant on pastoralism to a more mixed and sedentary livelihood—particularly for lowland Pokot—has been something encouraged and promoted by Kenya's colonial and independent governments and missionaries. Through outside pressures coupled with political land constraints and increased policing of cattle raiding, the place of Pokot has changed and is changing. RCA missionaries Larry and Linda McAuley realized through a community development or CCMP (discussed above) meeting that the popularization of farming was creating a tension in the place of the Pokot. Fenced areas, necessary for keeping valued

livestock out, had the unforeseen consequence of dividing and blocking off valued grazing land. If the farmed areas are not fenced, the animals enjoyed and destroyed the cultivated crops, particularly as the boys who traditionally watched them were now in school. The reality of Pokot's transition from a mostly pastoralist society to a mixed agriculture economy was not without its difficulties, many unforeseen by the outsiders who encouraged the shift.

Although agriculture has not been a primary development initiative for most of the mission organizations working in Pokot, missionary texts reveal a perspective that highly values cultivation and agricultural development. Fr. Leo Staples declared,

In the early days, all I saw in the valley and down in the lower parts were a pastoral, cattle dependent people. Now the whole place has been transformed into an agricultural rich land. There is a surplus of food production; buyers come from very far away to buy potatoes, onions, cabbages, all kinds of vegetables and fruit. These are grown up in the higher parts of the mountains. There's such a transformation that I am just baffled by it. I am amazed at how quickly a whole people have moved from a famine-styled pastoral existence to a relatively well-off agricultural-based economy. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

Sister Doctor Marita Malone, likewise, saw agriculture as a progressive and important change for the place of the Pokot, a development that went hand in hand with education and medical services: "I also realized that improving the health of the people could only progress in relation with developments in other areas, including education, improved farming practices, and the advent of cash crops" (Malone, 2018, p. 241). When Marita returned to visit Ortum in 2014, she witnessed the development she had seen as necessary: "As I gazed down on the area of the fertile river basin, I could see the rows and rows of neatly cultivated crops. I could never have envisaged such a social change for this traditional pastoral people" (Malone, 2018, p. 11). While livestock still holds significant cultural, societal, and economic capital in the place of Pokot, missions and other outside forces are influencing change that affects not just the economy of Pokot but the very sense of place.

### *Emergency Relief*

While drought and food insecurity are hallmarks of living in an ASAL (arid and semi-arid land)—and the likely impetuses toward a pastoralist livelihood—only one mission organization in this study has made emergency relief a primary focus of its ministry. However, like agricultural initiatives, other mission organizations participated in emergency aid or relief as opportunity demanded. The unaffiliated ministry, Lifestream, began its mission work in Pokot through its support of a local Kenyan pastor doing relief work. The ministry continues to respond to emergency needs in West Pokot, such as those caused by the devastating landslides in December 2019; however, it began to move into development work through a community development model described above. Relief provided an open door for Lifestream to support new development initiatives, based on the mission’s desire to evangelize and provide material assistance.

Like Lifestream, most mission organizations viewed emergency relief as short-term aid that led to long-term development and evangelism. As early as 1933, the BCMS missionaries the Housdens saw that hardship could provide unique opportunities to evangelize. “This year has been a very hard year for European Settlers and the Natives alike. The drought has been one of the longest in the history of the Colony. Here in Suk, 75% of the Cattle have died. For this reason we had a big influx of Suk into Kacheliba, for the people came in to sell the hides. We took advantage of this, and had Special Prayer Meetings in Church, beseeching the Lord to send the rain” (Housden, 20 May 1933). In 1940, AIM missionary Tom Collins had a similar experience. Drought drove the Pokot out of the area in which he was working, so he took the opportunity with his Kikuyu ministry partner Laban to follow: “Drought has caused the migration of a

number of Suk to the Marakwet country and I expect to go there next week with Laban, the Kikuyu native evangelist, who is as much a missionary to the Suk as myself, to get in contact with them” (Collins, 1940, Feb. 27).

Kiltegan Father Leo Staples linked hardship—which led to emergency aid—with trust and increased opportunity when the Ortum mission was newly established: “Famine relief work played a very important part in building trust with the people. But still the people would not come near our mission... When the famine broke out, we began getting food from Catholic Relief Service. Trust grew stronger and stronger.” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Over a decade later, the Catholic mission in Ortum had a trusted reputation as a provider of emergency aid. Holy Rosary Sister Doctor Marita Malone explained how the mission became a clearing house for aid when needs arose: “When starving people looked to us for help, we had to turn to other nongovernment organizations (NGOs). One of the funding agencies that helped us greatly was Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Through a special association with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), we were able to secure bulgur wheat and protein supplements for children under five years of age. The snag was that we could not distribute the aid to the general public because there was never an official proclamation of famine in West Pokot” (Malone, 2018, p. 220).

Providing emergency relief became central to the mission of the unaffiliated missionaries Dick and Jane Hamilton. In 1980, “starving people” started filing into the village of Kiwawa. As Jane described it, “In desperation we took pictures and headed to the city to look for help. At the World Vision office, they took one look at the photos and immediately dispatched truckloads of food into the desert... soon a makeshift famine camp had sprung up in the middle of our mission compound, eventually feeding over a thousand people a day... We hauled maize meal into the

outlying areas, sometimes by helicopter up into the remote mountains where there were no roads” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 78). Like the Catholic mission in Ortum, the Hamiltons acted as a relief clearinghouse in Kiwawa: “Praise God for the organizations like International Disaster Emergency Service [IDES], World Vision and Food for the Hungry, who over the years responded and saved the lives of so many many people. As we would drive the one road that ran the length of Kara Pokot, we saw faces every day of people who would have been gone if not for help from the Western World. Later people would run out from villages to flag down our car to tell us that we saved their lives during the famine” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 79). Having worked for two years with the Hamiltons, when the Tierneys began their mission in Pokot in 2009, they also worked with organizations like IDES (International Disaster Emergency Service) to regularly provide food and seed for agriculture to the Pokot with whom they worked. Their 2017 newsletter explained, “IDES provides funds each month to feed the school kids in our 20 villages and this year provided seed for them to plant” (Tierney, April 2017). Provision of emergency aid built trust and increased opportunities for future development programs in Pokot, including a push toward cultivation. Like the Tierneys’ experience with IDES, Jane Hamilton discussed World Vision’s provisions, “Then when the life and death crisis subsided, we began food for work projects so people could do community projects in exchange for food to take home to their families. This continued for many months until the rains returned. Then World Vision supplied seed so that the people could plant” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 78-9).

The Hamiltons’ relief work in Pokot enabled their connection with World Vision, a large international mission organization based in Washington D.C., which led to more development opportunities in the Kiwawa area. “Our association with World Vision brought many fascinating people into our lives. Several times a year the organization would bring groups out to see the

work, first of famine feeding and then the child sponsorship program” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 94). World Vision’s perception of and communication about Pokot rested firmly in its identity as a poverty-stricken, remote, and isolated outpost in need of help from the Western world. Jane Hamilton explained that Chuck Henry, Chicago news anchor and brother-in-law of a World Vision executive, came to do a documentary on the famine in Pokot and the Hamiltons’ famine feeding program. Chuck remarked, “This may not be the end of the earth but I’m sure you can see it from here” (quoted in Hamilton, 2019, p. 99). The resulting World Vision film, “*Crisis in the Horn of Africa* [1981] raised millions of dollars in the US” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 98; see footnote 64 about World Vision’s portrayal of poverty). Throughout her book, Jane reiterated how many lives were saved because of American generosity through World Vision and other organizations.

The mission organization COPE (Children of Pokot Educational Fund) likewise focused its description of Pokot on food scarcity and need. While COPE’s primary mission is to provide education to the community of Tapadany, emergency aid is a recurring theme in their mission. A 2018 newsletter highlighted the importance of relief work due to the difficulty of food procurement and preparation in Pokot in contrast to the American norm (COPE, July 2018). The newsletter then explained the strategy of emergency aid, provided by IDES, in a time of flooding as a means to evangelize all who come seeking help: “Every Thursday over 700 people of different belief systems come to the COPE Mission. Whether they are Animists or Traditionalists or Muslims or Christians – they come together and are led in prayer, thanking Jesus for his love” (COPE, July 2018). Likewise, the header of the COPE website in the spring of 2020 read, “Pokot is one of the areas invaded by locusts. And now the locust[s] have reached the COPE Mission.



As a result, when relief food was distributed on February 27th over 1,000 people came hoping for something to eat” (<https://www.childrenofpokot.org/>).

Since Pokot is considered a marginalized area, emergency aid is a recurring theme in Pokot, a theme that both promotes and supports the need for development initiatives and reinforces perceptions of remoteness and poverty. Like most labels, the identification of Pokot as marginalized has resulted in extra attention to be paid to the place’s chronic problems while stigmatizing the place and the sense of place as an area of lack and need.

### *Water*

“It was the water that opened the door to the hearts of the Pokot. It was the water that brought the illusive men out of the cover of the bush to interact with the strange white mzungu (foreigner) and ultimately to open their hearts to the gospel. It was the water that made possible the schools, clinics, churches and permanent villages that grew up around the wells” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 43). Jane Hamilton summed up the missionary perspective of the importance of water at the contact zone. The story of the Pokot revolves around water, where it is, who controls it, how to access it. In an ASAL, water is the key to understanding how the pastoralist Pokot interact with the place and the landscape, and it often became the key to understanding the contact zone of missionaries and the Pokot. The Pokot’s relationship to water underscored the missionaries’ views of the wandering ways of the Pokot: their nomadic existence precluded the “civilization” that Westerners idealized. In 1931, BCMS missionary Stanley Housden explained, “During the dry weather they roam about from place to place finding water for their cattle and sheep” (Housden, 7 October 1931). An AIM Radio Program, possibly from the 1960s, described Pokot as “all dry, sandy dust,” and subsequently, the people “who live there wander from water hole to

water hole” (quoted fully above; AIM, n.d. a). Likewise, the significance of water in Pokot culture and livelihood is spiritualized in the symbolic Christian understanding of water. Kathy Tierney expressed this connection as she discussed the pairing of evangelism with the drilling of a new borehole: “God is providing not only the living water<sup>114</sup> but the water for their physical needs” (Tierney, April 2017).

In practical ways, water and its scarcity in Pokot affected missionaries at the contact zone. David Webster talked much of how water scarcity characterized his family’s experience in Pokot. “Water for the house came from a borehole in a nearby gulley, and the water had to be pumped daily by hand. Later an electric pump was installed. The water was metallic in taste, orange in colour, and the supply frequently broke down. Baths had to be very shallow. The whole family in turn washed in the same water, then the laundry, then nappies, and finally the water was directed to the small, struggling vegetable patch” (Webster, 2013, p. 75). Likewise, lack of water explained the level of cleanliness among both the patients and the linens at the hospital in which David worked. Cow urine was used in place of water to wash milk gourds and clean wounds. While many missionary texts do not mention personal experiences with water, most missionaries chose to live in locations with a reliable source of water.

The Hamiltons were an exception. Their mission field of Kiwawa was located in northern West Pokot far from the population centers or the four perennial rivers found in the southern half of the county. Soon after arriving in Pokot, Dick started repairing broken colonial wells. “About 30 wells were drilled in the KaraPokot area in the 1950s. When the Hamiltons arrived only 3 or 4 wells were still pumping. The desperate need for water made this a natural open door into the community. Repairing the pumps won acceptance and provided a natural place to communicate

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<sup>114</sup> The concept of living water occurs several times in the Bible (Song of Solomon 4:15, John 4:11, John 7:38). In John 7:39, the living water is explained as the Holy Spirit as it is received by believers in Jesus.

the gospel to the people as they come to the boreholes for water” (Courtney, 1980). The relationship the Hamiltons built with World Vision during the famine years of the early 1980s led to an expansion of their ability to provide water: “The film *Crisis in the Horn of Africa* [1981] raised millions of dollars in the US... Stan Mooneyham, the President of World Vision International, called and asked what do the Pokot people need? Dick’s reply was WATER. Out of that money came funding for the Rift Valley Water Project which opened a whole new chapter in our lives. Over 150 water wells were drilled” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 98 and 104). Provision of water led to other successful development projects, affecting change in the place of Pokot at the contact zone. From Jane’s perspective, “We saw such changes in lifestyle where there were pumping wells. The tropical skin ulcers and eye diseases disappeared in areas where there was fresh well water. Schools and clinics were established for the families. The normally nomadic Pokot settled into permanent villages where the old and little ones could stay in one place when the adults went with the cattle in search of grazing” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 46). “Today there is an active church and a big primary school at Kases, made possible because of the drilling of the water wells” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 57).

Just north of Kiwawa, RCA missionaries in Alale had similar water scarcity problems as the Hamiltons. A water provision scheme began when a spring was discovered on nearby Lorsuk Mountain. Unfortunately, Morrell Swart explained, the spring was depleted due to drought and illegal<sup>115</sup> farming on the mountain. Regardless, because the local borehole in Alale was a very slow producer, the spring on Lorsuk, if capped and piping built down to the village, seemed an excellent solution to the water supply problem. “To make available to our neighbors a source of good water, easily obtained, would be a service of incalculable value—for better health, and for a

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<sup>115</sup> It is unclear from the text what made the farming illegal, whether or not the farmers were Pokot who had legal right to the land, and whose or what law the farmers were breaking.

degree of the abundant life God means for his people to enjoy” (Swart, 1998, p. 304). With funding from Food for the Hungry/Canada and approval, “for the most part,” from the community, the chief, sub-chiefs, and tribal elders, the water project became a reality (Swart, 1998, p. 308). Morrell declared the project both a developmental and spiritual success—at least for the lowland Pokot—and Pokot resistance (discussed more fully in the next chapter), in her perspective, was rooted in “spiritual forces of evil” (Eph. 6:12) and evidenced by “our October doldrums” when “the ‘principalities and powers<sup>116</sup>’ were in conflict with God’s purposes”:

This project had been a physical feat; it was also a spiritual victory. Prayer played a large part in the whole process... We were sure that prayer was instrumental in... enabling the whole team, together with the Pokot workers, to accomplish this tremendous task... Shortly after the spring was capped, the mission and community tanks were erected and the pipeline to the Alale community center was laid. Many hundreds of people now had the blessing of abundant, pure water (Swart, 1998, p. 309).

Morrell’s description of water became a spiritual metaphor for the RCA’s work in Alale.

The Comboni Catholic missionary, Brother Dario Laurencig, had a unique relationship with water that began in the early 1980s. During the famine, drought, and Cholera outbreak of 1979-1980 in West Pokot, the International Red Cross was stationed near Amakuriat, not far from Alale in northern West Pokot County to assist locals and drill boreholes. In 1982, the borehole project was taken over by Bro. Dario as he established the first Comboni mission in the area. Dario explained that the start of the project was marked by frustration, “When I started drilling in West Pokot, we were drilling on the spots that were suggested by the hydrologists. The first borehole was dry. The second borehole was dry. So, I said here we are throwing away money for nothing” (quoted in Bwalya, 2018). After the failure of the second borehole, Dario drew from his boyhood memories of Slovenian village life in northern Italy where shepherds

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<sup>116</sup> Here, Morrell Swart referred to Ephesians 6:12: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (KJV).

would use divining rods to locate underground water sources. “‘I took the stick in my hands then I could feel something and the stick started to rotate. I drilled and we found water,’ he says. He then went on trying and finding water in many other places. ‘I could see immediate results, so I went on and gained experience,’ he says. The rest is now history. Hundreds of boreholes have been drilled using this God given gift” (Bwalya, 2018). Like many others, Dario believed water would enable change and development in Pokot: “Without water there is no future and no way to start any permanent development. We have been struggling to give water accessibility to people, and I can say that we succeeded to do a lot, even if still a lot remains to be done” (quoted in Clean Water, n.d.). Dario continued, “Now what remains to be done is what has to be done by the local agents and the local people. They have to go on with what they got or what we transmitted to them. Now the reality is that people have to work by themselves and be agents of their own development in all the fields” (Bwalya, 2018). For Dario, water, like education and community development, was a way to empower local leadership to lead development for the Pokot community.

Like Dario, in addition to enabling and encouraging development, Friends of Asilong realized that water meant peace for an area characterized by pastoralists searching and competing for grazing and water for their cattle. Before FoA began to develop a high school in Pokot and even before FoA was officially established, the DuPonts in Michigan and Jacob’s Well Church in Missouri partnered with a Kenyan ministry, led by Pastor Edward Simiyu, to provide water to the Pokot in the village of Asilong and along Kenya’s western border with Uganda, an area “prone to conflict” (Asilong book draft, p. 20). The Jacob’s Well website explained, “In December 2007, the Jacob’s Well community raised enough money through the Advent

Conspiracy<sup>117</sup> to drill four water wells in Pokot. A team of six visited the region in May 2008 with Pastor Edward and witnessed the great need for fresh water... Over the next two years, funds were raised to drill six additional wells.” At the same time, Andy and Olivia DuPont likewise responded to Pastor Edward’s request and helped fund a well in the same area near Asilong. In doing so, they discovered a community with which to engage in evangelism and development, joining with Jacob’s Well to form the mission organization Friends of Asilong. In subsequent trips to Asilong, Andy DuPont was often approached to fix broken pumps and borehole infrastructure. Concerned about creating dependency in the area, Andy explained to the community

that the water wells did not belong to us but that the wells were theirs and that their lives were being impacted positively because of the wells, and they needed to take care of the wells. Their response was that they don’t really know how to take care of the wells... Future trips were focused on training the technical team how to fix the wells. The warriors had not been to school; they didn’t know physics; they didn’t know numbers; they couldn’t read. It was quite a barrier to get them trained up. After much training, we now have a technical team that can fix wells. (quoted in DuPont, 2017)

The technical team has been successful in keeping the wells running for the community; however, ownership is still questioned as the community resists collecting funds for the repairs. Instead, they often wait for the DuPonts to visit in hopes they will fund any repairs.

About a decade has elapsed since the first boreholes were established, and most are in working order and have changed the place and landscape of Pokot. The Jacob’s Well website communicated the place changing effects of water:

What happened next was unreal. The impact of fresh, clean water stabilized and transformed the Pokot community in Asilong. They no longer had to travel hours on foot only to wait in line for twelve hours at the one well that served a huge area. They no longer went blind for lack of water to clean their face and eyes; their children were no

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<sup>117</sup> Advent Conspiracy was a movement begun by three pastors in 2006 to address the cultural focus on busyness and materialism of Christmas. Jacob’s Well Church engaged in the movement by raising money for a project that would end up being the digging of boreholes in Pokot (see <https://adventconspiracy.org/about/>).

longer attacked by African killer bees for being the only source of water nearby. Over time, women found that they had time to attend church because the nearby water allowed them to get their chores done in time. Attendance at the local elementary school exploded as children too were freed up from walking back and forth to distant wells every day. The need for violent raiding dissipated, and people no longer lived in fear of warriors and thieves. (Jacob's Well, n.d. b)

The availability of water directly influenced educational opportunities in Asilong: "In less than two years, the population of the local primary school grew from 63 students to 324" (Jacob's Well, n.d. a, p. 35). Likewise, in a meeting in 2010 with the community "and the chiefs and elders of the local village, it was unanimous that a secondary school was the greatest need" (Jacob's Well, n.d. b).

As much as water scarcity seemed to be at the root of political instability and lack of development, it also caused environmental instability. According to Pastor Edward, lack of water caused bees to "go wild in the marketplaces, in schools; they would chase away everybody. So, there would be no markets; there would even be no schools in some places. But because the wells were there now, and there was spillover water, now the bees were calm and schools could happen, marketplaces can happen. And so the community has started settling in the area now. We also really want to thank God now because we can now start sharing the Gospel" (Edward Simiyu, quoted in Jacob's Well Church, 2010, p. 8). From the perspective of the missionaries, the results of the eleven new boreholes could not be overstated.

In comparison to other strategies, water provision through the digging of boreholes is a relatively new phenomenon. As a resource intensive but short-term project, establishing boreholes is often the province of drop-in missionary or aid groups who have little vision for long-term missionary service. This was certainly the case for FoA, whose members sought to invest collected resources in a short-term project to help people in need. Instead, the effects of the boreholes on the place of the Pokot, described above, drew the members of FoA into a deeper

relationship with the place and people of Asilong, leading to a unique contact zone between Western Christian missions and Pokot, discussed further in the next chapter. Water provision for other missionaries, particularly the Hamiltons and Comboni Brother Dario, functioned like many of the strategies described above, providing a place for trust to be established at the contact zone and subsequent development projects (for the Combonis) or evangelism (for the Hamiltons).

## **Conclusion**

Mission and missionary strategy has had a profound effect on the place of the Pokot. Around 1980, Annette summed up the change much like a parent who has been telling funny childhood stories about her grown children: “I tell you these stories now for the Suk could not be hurt, for after fifty years they are really civilized” (Totty, n.d., p. 18). While the landscape may appear to the outsider as showing little change, the place shows the layers of cultural influence through the decades of interaction at the contact zone.

Evangelism has resulted in exponential growth in Christianity. After fifty years of missionary involvement in Pokot, a scant 10% of the population attended church regularly (Shingledecker, 1982); however, by 2009 over 80% of the population of West Pokot identified themselves as Christian (Socio-Economic Atlas of Kenya, 2016). While this identification does not come with a wholesale adoption of the missionary cultural agenda, alcohol abuse, polygamy, and FGM continue to be discouraged in the church. At the same time missionary development strategies, particularly in education, have increased across Pokot, dovetailing with and encouraging more national government investment (particularly through the CDF mentioned earlier (Maathai, 2009)). Medical services, agricultural initiatives, and the establishment of water boreholes continue to be areas addressed by missionaries with greater acceptance from the Pokot



population. Fr. Leo Staples stated a fully optimistic view of place transformation from the perspective of six decades at the contact zone:

I can compare it to a barren field really that showed no sign that it could bring forth any produce and then, all of a sudden, or over a short time, it was cultivated and been treated to produce a marvellous harvest - a harvest that we could never have expected. By my description at the very beginning I could see no change coming in the Pokot at that time. But when I look back on what it was like in the beginning and see it now, it's just a miracle of God's transformation. It's a miracle because the Pokot themselves – through no fault of their own, were cut off from any kind of modern development - and they were the laughingstock of Kenya when Independence came! They were so far behind in everything. Now every aspect of modern life has been transformed by bringing those people into a new life – the life of Christ. I think of what Paul said: 'I live now not I but Christ lives in me' Gal 2:20. The way the Pokot people were living then, and it seemed that such a lifestyle would continue forever like that, was a life of subsistence, of mere survival. They were living for a short period of time, just to prolong their destiny. The important thing in life was to keep the name going. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

The general missionary perspective is optimistic concerning the strategies undertaken at the contact zone, but some leave room for the complexities brought by change. The perspective of the Comboni Catholic mission related a more realistic view than Leo Staples: “It is a matter of fact that the culture of the Pokot is evolving and it is being influenced from outside. Those influences are improving their living conditions but they are also eroding their system of values and their gridlock measurements of checks and balances” (West Pokot, 2007). For instance, in Alale, cultivation projects were interfering with traditional pastoral rhythms; in Ortum, women were bypassing the traditional rites that accompany home births for the safety of hospital births; and in Amudat, educated girls were refusing FGM and the cultural ceremony that attended it. Each strategy employed at the contact zone—whether associated with evangelism or development—addressed the missionary perception of lack in the landscape. Missionary perspective, as clearly described by David Webster, regarded the whole person, with a call to both relay spiritual truth and address want and suffering. With each strategy or “improvement,”

cultural negotiations and revisions occur, smudging, writing, erasing, rewriting, and overlaying the perspectives of place as a palimpsest (Ashcroft, 2001), both in the minds of the outsiders and for the Pokot themselves.

## Chapter 5: Pokot Response

*We have been having different minds all together. Each and every one has his own perspective and point of view.*

*- Chief Nicholas, Assistant Chief of Asilong Sub-Location  
(During a community meeting, Oct. 2018)*

While missionaries initiated the contact zone of missions and the Pokot, and while they contextualized their perceptions of Pokot within their mission strategies, the Pokot were not passive recipients in place. As Cresswell (2004) stated, “Places need to be studied in terms of the ‘dominant institutional projects,’ the individual biographies of people negotiating a place and the way in which a sense of place is developed through the interaction of structure and agency” (p. 37). As Gupta and Ferguson (1997) and Ashcroft (2001) remind us, though, no static, original community exists, as is often assumed in colonial thought. Local places are derived from identity negotiations with other localities and resilient adaptations, processes that have occurred, are occurring, and will continue to occur at all contact zones (Massey, 1994). For the intent of this study and this chapter, in particular, I will examine place-making through Pokot agency and negotiation in their response to missionary messages and strategies. Thomas Spear (1999b) ends his description of how to study the mission “process” the same way I will, emphasizing “the beliefs, practices, experiences, needs and aspirations” of the missionaries’ “potential followers” (p. 38). As Garth Myers (2003) wrote about the state’s place-making, so his words can be applied to the dominant outside influence in Pokot—the missionaries:

It has become common to speak of the landscape as a geographical text bearing the political and ideological impress of the state, but we must recognize that these geographical texts are often read very differently than the state intends in the everyday spatial language of the less powerful. Those on whom such texts are presumed to be written are themselves active and assertive agents in the defining and redefining of spatial boundaries and cultural markers. (p. 132-3)

In the same way, the reading of the landscape, ordered by missions at the contact zone, was and is willfully resisted, neglected, questioned, negotiated, and accepted by Pokot agency.

Strayer (1978) explains that while scholars are reticent to discuss African interest in Christianity for fear of endorsing what they view as missionary condescension toward indigenous belief systems, “we now know that the expansion of Christianity in Africa had important popular religious dimensions as both individuals and societies found on occasion in the immigrant religion symbols, techniques and ideas which seemed appropriate to meeting old needs and which could facilitate their adjustment to the new and wider world increasingly impinging upon them” (Strayer, 1978, p. 2). As we have seen, missionary perceptions and strategies in Pokot have been diverse, not essentialized under one banner of colonial thought, and resulting Pokot responses are equally varied, the narrative of which embraces a decolonial discourse and builds a complex, multidimensional understanding of place.

The Pokot response varied from resistance to ambivalence to a hybridized acceptance. Resistance and hybridity, although seemingly on opposite sides of a spectrum, both form a discourse at a contact zone that transforms history, place, and the actors within it, in this case both the Pokot and the missionaries (Ashcroft, 2001). Based on the belief that no culture is static and that discussions of alternative histories are fruitless, Ashcroft (2001) looks at resistance through a postcolonial lens as “not so much deconstructive (or contradictory) as dynamic, not so much ethically insoluble as practically affirmative” (p. 7). Resistance, like ambivalence and hybridity, reveals the moving pieces of agency and power within the relationships created at the contact zone (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). In this study, ambivalence is shown two ways, through a bifurcated community, the duality of opinion, and through selective approval of a message or initiative. The latter often leads to hybridized acceptance or what Pratt (1992) calls

transculturation at the contact zone of the colonizer and the colonized: “While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone” (p. 6). Likewise, McEwan (2008) related Bhabha’s (1994) view of exchanges at the colonial contact zone: “hybridity has the potential to intervene and dislocate processes of domination through re-interpreting and redeploying dominant discourses; the spaces where differences meet become important” (McEwan, 2008, p. 67). While the tone of the academic discourse (through use of words like “subjugated” and “domination”) around the postcolonial themes of resistance, ambivalence, and hybridity is more appropriate in the context of colonial political control, the general concepts apply for the place where missions and the Pokot meet, an environment defined by less uneven and more variable power imbalances.

This chapter outlines Pokot responses through the concepts of these postcolonial themes. The voice of the Pokot will be found within the ninety years of missionary discourse, Pokot-written texts, and interviews with residents of present-day (late 2010s) Asilong village in West Pokot County (as described in the method section of chapter 1). Many of these sources, including my own interviews, have the potential to be equally as skewed as the missionary texts utilized in previous chapters. As one of my interviewees declared, “We know who you are, that you are with Jacob’s Well Church,” who as part of Friends of Asilong had had a Western Christian mission influence in the Asilong community since 2009. His and his friends’ answers to my questions reflected this knowledge and the assumptions that go along with it. My skin color and my associations are problematic factors in my research in Asilong, neither of which can I overcome, resulting in most of my interviewees likely feeling it in bad taste to criticize mission work in the area. All of the perceptions discussed in this chapter are filtered second- and third-

hand through a postcolonial lens and my white, Western, female perspective. Regardless, perceptions, while not always a reflection of empirical “truth,” carry weight and influence, describe landscape, and define place. The variety of these sources and perspectives underscores the importance of employing a postcolonial method of reading and a decolonial method of allowing the Pokot voice to speak for itself, not rereading or reappropriating the perspectives of the Pokot toward meaning (or connection to colonial/postcolonial thought) that was not intended.

The Pokot response to missionary evangelism and development initiatives, discussed in chapter 4, varied through time and depended on the stimulus. Generally speaking, the Pokot have become more and more receptive to Western Christian missions since its inception in 1931. The response to the missionaries and their Christian message varied tremendously, often beginning with suspicion, reticence, or indifference, followed by sporadic stories of conversion, baptism, and commitment to the faith. Mission-led development initiatives, likewise, received a mixed response. For example, medical services and establishing water wells were usually well-received while the Pokot responded at best ambivalently toward mission education. This chapter follows patterns explored in previous chapters, beginning with the background story of Christianity and missions in the village of Asilong; then a discussion of the larger Pokot response to missions, including the missionaries themselves, the message, and the cultural change influenced by the missionaries; followed by a discussion of the Pokot response to development as it relates to a fear of land loss, education, medicine, agriculture, and water. The Pokot response illuminates their perception and negotiation of place at the contact zone.

Ninety years of mission texts and recent interviews in Asilong reflect an important aspect of Pokot worldview. Anthropologist Barbara Bianco (1992) described the Pokot of West Pokot,

The rhetoric of conservatism, so prominent in government reports and Convent Annals, seemed to be ever-present in this outlying district. But in contrast to their District

Commissioners and Catholic missionaries, Pokot regarded the slow pace of change with more pride than chagrin. To Pokot, ‘learning slowly’ connotes thoughtfulness (*kinonisyo*) and wisdom (*ngoghomyo*), hallmarks of social maturity in a society where living in concert is an achievement rooted in the capacity to recollect and remember as well as to think and to know. (Bianco, 1992, p. 178)

With this core value in mind, it is not surprising that change has occurred slowly and thoughtfully among the Pokot, their response to missions playing a part in the dynamic sense of place of Pokot.

### **Story of Missions in Asilong**

While missions have been active and progressively expanding throughout Pokot since 1931, the village of Asilong<sup>118</sup> did not have a direct Western missionary influence until 2009. In many ways the story of missions in Asilong is atypical of the mission story I have been telling; however, it is not atypical of the story of Christianity in Africa or even in Pokot. The strategy of equipping Africans to be evangelists to Africa employed by many Western missionaries, particularly the Anglican Tottys and the Catholic Comboni missionaries, worked. Christianity came to many parts of Pokot before or regardless of whether a Western missionary ever set foot in the area. This brief and focused history of Christianity and missions in Asilong, while unique and significant, is just another in the vast landscape of Pokot. The story of Asilong becoming a part of a larger network of Kenyan missionaries, churches, and Western missionaries both sets it apart and weaves it into the greater place story of the region.

Asilong is located in lowland Karapokot along the Kenya-Uganda border in West Pokot County. While perceived as “remote” by outsiders, Asilong, like many Pokot villages, exists in

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<sup>118</sup> Asilong is technically a sublocation of Kacheliba constituency. It is the hub of five villages, including (and probably spelled incorrectly) Cheputation, Sagat, Chemoror, Katukumwok, and Napawoi. According to Chief Nicholas, the Kenyan Asilong population is 2428, but if you consider the Ugandan side of the border, the area boasts a population of 5630 (personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018).

an elaborate network of connected places. The residents have a seasonal practice of transhumance as well as a weekly practice of traveling to several local markets in more urbanized hubs, including Kacheliba (the original mission field of Lawrence and Annette Totty from 1931-1934), Orolwo, and Karita, enabling the Asilong community to have some exposure to missions and Christianity. In other words, we cannot view Asilong as a discreet and cloistered specimen. It was and is a constantly changing rural community, a connected part of the larger place of Pokot, of Kenya, and of East Africa.

According to Asilong community elder Jacob, there were missionaries in Makutano (near the capital of Kapenguria), and “the church” started coming slowly from Makutano around twenty to thirty years ago. According to Jacob, the Anglican church came first to the region, followed by the Catholics, but they kept to urban areas, like Makutano, Kacheliba, and Kodich. The church did not move to the more rural places, like Asilong, because of fear of violence and fighting over livestock between the Pokot and neighboring groups. Jacob explained that

the stealing became like a business... The Karamoja would come with the plan of killing all the people in the area. One time they came up to here and took all the animals from this area. They had plans to kill everyone in the area. That was a difficult time for us. Some [Pokot] went behind them to kill them. Some would hide in caves. Some would hide in trees. The Turkana were saying they want to kill all the Pokot. (Jacob, quoted in DuPont, 2017)

Jacob estimated that the fighting began to subside about twenty years ago when “Uganda took away all the guns from the Karamoja<sup>119</sup> and the Pokot” (Jacob, quoted in DuPont, 2017).

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<sup>119</sup> At the end of 2001, Uganda’s government, under President Museveni, launched a program to disarm Karamojong warriors at the border. According to the Economist, “Barely a month since the Ugandan government launched a program to rid Karamoja of its estimated 40,000 guns, the dusty roads of this remote north-eastern region already seem safer” (Disarming, 2002).



The Christian evangelists who came were not Western missionaries. “They were just black. They were just black” (Jacob, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018). Rebecca, the young fifth wife of community elder Jacob, continued the story of how Christianity came to Asilong:

Since salvation entered this area, there was no church for all of us. There was one in Kacheliba. One skipped us and went to Orolwo. When the church went to Orolwo, Rael was the first one to get born again. And Rael used to go to church in Orolwo. And then there was a mother who moved from Kunyao and came to Asilong, and then they became two. And they went to church to fellowship in Orolwo. They stayed in Asilong. The mother called Susan that you met yesterday also received the Lord. A short while, a man called Peter received the Lord; he’s now a pastor. Then they became four. Where they were fellowshipping in the Lord, those four people said, ‘Okay, we need to open a church in Asilong.’ Where the primary school is now, they began a small church under a tree. There was a pastor called Lokomere who was preaching in Orolwo and was also coming to help in Asilong. And they started doing evangelism in Asilong... After a short while, I gave my life to the Lord. I came by myself; there was no one else. And I used to pray a lot, ‘God, help this area have more people who would know you.’ I was praying always, ‘God, change the hearts of men and the women in this area.’ (Rebecca, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018)

In 2000, a Marakwet woman by the name of Emmy Chepkemoi came to Asilong as a missionary. When Emmy began to share about Christianity, Gladys explained, “Women were not allowed to go to church. The men were harsh to them. They had to go get water for the animals. Pastor Emmy came and invited [people] to go to church. The women who went, their husbands beat them” (quoted in DuPont, 2017). Likewise, Emmy went from home to home and encouraged the children to go to school. According to Rebecca, the beginning of education in Asilong began with Emmy (personal communication, 6 Oct. 2018). Rebecca explained, “When we used to pray with Emmy, we used to pray holding each ones’ hands and pray, ‘May God bring miracles here.’ The biggest problem was lack of water and food. As we were praying with Emmy for a very long duration, the vision of water coming into this land became our own” (Asilong community meeting, 6 Oct. 2018). When Emmy left in 2009, her message to the community was to welcome outsiders.

In 2007, Nairobi-based pastor, Edward Simiyu, had been invited by some churches in Uganda to help them discuss and work through, among other issues, “how to promote peace, particularly in areas that were prone to conflict (one area of which was on the border of Kenya and Uganda where the Pokot live)” (Simiyu quoted in Jacob’s Well Church, 2010). Edward was reticent to get involved with a people he described as “troublesome,” who were “almost like a small band of terrorists who are just problematic,” but he felt God calling him to work with the Pokot (Simiyu quoted in Jacob’s Well Church, 2010). The group of churches in Uganda as well as Edward at a later date decided to invite some Pokot men (commonly known as warriors) out of Pokot to see “modern civilization” and discuss the prospect of peace in Pokot. The warriors, amazed by the tall buildings of the urban centers in Kampala and Nairobi, identified that their fighting was what prevented such development in Pokot, and water scarcity was a root cause of the fighting. The same year, Edward began to mobilize some of his Western Christian contacts to help meet the need of water wells in Asilong. Edward introduced Jacob’s Well Church in Kansas City and Andy and Olivia DuPont in Glen Arbor, Michigan to the Asilong community. Although Edward is no longer involved in ministry, these two groups would continue to work in Pokot and form Friends of Asilong. When the people who would make up Friends of Asilong first visited Asilong, they found the church and dispensary buildings that had been built by a local nonprofit, Pokot Outreach Ministry, led by Pokot pastor and politician Julius Murgor. While Julius Murgor had promised to help with development in Asilong, these buildings were never fully finished and not used in the manner intended.

In bringing teams to visit the Asilong area, Edward Simiyu unwittingly provided Asilong with its second African missionary. Julius Sawe, a teacher by training and volunteer in Edward’s ministry in Nairobi, visited Asilong for the first time in 2008 with Edward and Andy DuPont.

After returning home from that visit, Julius felt God calling him to move permanently to Asilong, located just 100km (62mi) north of the small town in which he grew up in Uasin Gishu County. In 2009, just before Emmy left, Julius moved into the storeroom in the back of the unfinished church building and took on his new missionary role in Asilong to share Christ with the community, to help educate children—first at the primary school and then at the newly built secondary school, and to pastor the burgeoning church. Former Asilong primary student and current college student, Gladys, explained the impact of Julius coming to Asilong:

Then Julius came. He encouraged the people who didn't come to church to come. Now we have men who know God. Also, men love God. They were convinced by Julius since he was a man. Women now have freedom to worship. Women encourage the men to go to church. Even the cleanness, these people before people know Christ, they are so dirty, they don't know how to be clean. They don't know how to handle things softly, but now they can see the church is running smoothly. People are living in harmony. People are just rejoicing and love each other because of that great love of Jesus. (quoted in DuPont, 2017)

Western Christian missions came on the heels of a Christian awakening in Asilong. Emmy Chepkemoi and Julius Sawe—living examples of successful Africanization of missionaries—would be considered the pioneering missionaries in Asilong, living among the people. The Western Christian mission organization, Friends of Asilong, came to be both a support for Julius and a driver of development in the area. The response of the community reflected these roles. Like other missionaries working in Pokot, Friends of Asilong was viewed as a harbinger of a foreign culture and way of life. The missionaries' white skin carried with it unspoken meanings for Asilong residents, some hearkening back to colonial fears of control and land alienation and others tying it to power, money, and resources. The place of the Pokot in Asilong reflects the response of the residents to missions, like in other areas of Pokot, based on the resistance, ambivalence, and acceptance of the Pokot community.

The story of Asilong conveys a different path of religious place change than many discussed previously; however, since long-term Western Christian missionaries have always been sparse on the landscape (although significantly influential), the story of Asilong is probably more representative of the many lowland, rural villages in Pokot that have seen a slow introduction of outside influences including Christianity. The response of the Asilong residents to the Western Christian mission influence of FoA allows for a more recent exploration of the themes of resistance, ambivalence, and hybrid acceptance at the contact zone and how these themes add layers of complexity to the sense of place.

### **Response to Missions**

Packaged neatly with their primary message, missionaries brought with them whiteness, new religious views, and accompanying cultural changes. At the same time missionaries were entering Pokot, finding their place at the contact zone, and perceiving the place of the Pokot, the Pokot at the contact zone were developing their own opinions of these foreign visitors. The missionaries' whiteness symbolized the cultural differences between the Pokot and the missionaries in a stark visual duality (Pratt, 1992; Maddox, 1999). At the same time, their whiteness aligned them with the colonial forces first and then the assumptions of wealth and power of the Western world. "As one African theologian comments, 'awe of the white person and need for money' continue to give foreign Christians an illusion of control" (Maddox, 1999, p. 162). The first impressions made at the contact zone were soon followed by the Pokot response to the missionaries' message of a new religion and its associated culture. The place of the contact zone was developed around initial responses to racial differences and identity,

religious resistance, and fear. Each of these responses would mark the foundation of the contact zone but would likewise shift in the dynamic story of culture in Pokot.

### *Contact Zone: First Impressions*

**Wazungu**<sup>120</sup>. While missionaries were negotiating their new reality as a racial minority, they were observing the responses that their whiteness instigated among the Pokot, many of whom, in the early days of missions, had never seen a white person. The Kiswahili word for a foreigner, *mzungu*, is used all over the Kiswahili speaking world and beyond to indicate not just a foreigner but a white person. Scholar Lowell Brower (2010) explained, “The word *mzungu* derives from *kizunguzungu*, which means nausea or dizziness... Whether this is because white men always seemed foolishly busy or pitifully frail—unable to stand the harsh sun or many diseases waiting to pounce upon them—is a matter of hot debate among Swahili aficionados.” While there is no evidence that the term *mzungu* was used in Pokot until much later, the connotation of the word as related to *kizunguzungu* expresses a certain mild disdain for or benign mockery of white foreigners in the vernacular region.

In the early years of their work in Pokot in the 1930s, BCMS missionary and *mzungu* Annette Totty saw the pride the Pokot had in their identity and color, a pride based in a conservative worldview that was recognized by anthropologists and missionaries alike. She discussed the need for school primers or textbooks for their new Pokot students, “So we delved into Suk folk lore stories and produced two folk lore books... Then we translated ‘Little black Sambo’, ‘Sambo Nyo Munung’. We didn’t dare call him black, in case it might offend them, but not a bit of it. The Suk are proud of being black – and why not? One of the prettiest sights to me

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<sup>120</sup> *Wazungu* is plural for *mzungu* meaning foreigner, particularly white foreigner, in Kiswahili. According to John Mondy, the Pokot equivalent is *musungun* (2016, p. 48)

is a black baby – a real little chocolate drop. The wife of the Bishop of the Upper Nile once asked an African what he thought of the first European he saw. He replied, ‘I went behind a tree and was violently sick, I thought he looked like a peeled banana and smelt like a camel!’ so you see we haven’t much to brag about” (Totty, n.d., p. 32).

Catholic Kiltegan missionaries, Leo Staples and Tom McDonnell, noted that the Pokot were highly suspicious of white missionaries in the 1950s, due to their association with the colonial powers. Leo commented about the colonial impact on the place of the Pokot:

This was a colonial area in colonial time; the people who were the colonisers were the same colour as ourselves. The colonialists, being British, were under suspicion all the time. We too, being Irish and white-skinned, came under the same suspicion. I heard that from one of the British Police who told me the story; selected ones among us were really watched... because they were being chased for taxes, every time they saw a car they said, ‘This is a Government car,’ and they would run away into the bush (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

In congruence with the pride Annette described, Tom felt that “The Pokot had many suspicions about the White man, his medicine and his ‘school’ ways. They trusted their own experience and wisdom. The ‘pushiness’ of our mission was not an issue for them one way or the other in those earlier days. They seemed quite happy as they were hence their resistance to change and new ideas was just being themselves” (McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019).

Pokot scholar and pastor John Mondi interviewed his grandmother in 2012 to better understand the perception that some older (East) Pokot had toward the *wazungu*. She shared a story of how her father, a prophet and the chief elder, along with other elders were angered by a large group of British men who “had decided to establish a town at Churo without consulting the residents” (Mondi, 2016, p. 48). In response, the community elders slyly offered to the British settlers a slaughtered ox that had undergone a ritual to rid the area of the *wazungu*. The following day the British settlers packed up and left the area. John’s grandmother took great pride in the

traditions and strong “powers” of the Pokot rituals, and despite the education and conversion of some of her grandchildren, she continued to resist development and Christianity through her eighties (Mondi, 2016).

By the 1960s through the 1980s, missionaries in Pokot rarely discussed Pokot pride or suspicion, and instead, they highlighted the curiosity that Pokot people approached them with. BCMS missionary Philip Price explained, “Having not only a white man but also his family living with them was a wonderful novelty to our Pokot neighbours... We were watched at most meals until it became an embarrassment” (Price, 1970, p. 32). Likewise, unaffiliated missionary Jane Hamilton commented about her family’s first years in Pokot in the mid-1970s, “Oh, those early years! They were the hardest and they were the best. We were such an oddity, we funny white-skinned people. Kids would run, babies would cry and whole herds of cows would stop and stare” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 27).

Even today, as one travels through Pokot, the initial response from many, particularly the children, focuses on the whiteness of the visitor’s skin. “*Mzungu, mzungu, mzungu...*” is the cry of the children as they gather around the vehicle or the person. Such is the foreignness of the white visitor in this still “remote” location. However, the children understand why the white person is there, and they often hold their hands out to hopefully receive gifts or money. The adults I met in 2016 and 2018 when traveling through Pokot assumed I was American or Canadian, that I must be with a church bringing something of value to the place they have come to perceive, as outsiders do, as lacking and in need of help. In my experience, the pride and suspicion with which the Pokot perceived the *wazungu* had been largely replaced by curiosity and a more informed perception of what white skin means.

In Asilong prior to 2009, the white visitor was an anomaly. Asilong resident William told me about a visit of a colonial official who established a borehole, likely in the last years before independence: “There was a white man many, many years ago who dug the borehole. He was very young. In those days, all this area was Uganda. We believe those were people coming from Uganda because this was Uganda. When that water was pulled, this became Kenya. There was no one else who came before that or after that” (William, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018).

In addition, the colonial period was associated with a time of violence in the region and corresponding governmental neglect, which would continue through independence. Asilong elder Jacob explained that, “When the white man was ruling, people were fighting all over. I don’t remember anything good. They were saying Pokots were stealing from other tribes. The other people that were ruling at the time of the white man came and took animals away from the Pokot. When the Karamoja would steal animals, they would come to Pokot and take Pokot animals. We didn’t see any help” (Jacob, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018).

Despite colonial neglect of or absence in the area, the colonial reputation was met with suspicion and fear, which affected the way the people engaged with their land, resisting living near roads. According to Chief Nicholas<sup>121</sup>, it was too easy to be arrested if one lived near the roads (personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018). Nicholas aimed to be a model of a modern Pokot and built his house along the road. Since then, more have followed suit, finding the proximity to the road to be economically advantageous. The legacy of colonial rule has been a remnant of suspicion and fear toward *wazungu* coming into the place of Pokot.

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<sup>121</sup> At the time of our interview in 2018, Chief Nicholas had held the government position of Assistant Chief of Asilong Sub-Location for ten years. As a well-educated and at least trilingual Pochon, he held himself as a model of Pokot development and success and sought to promote education and development among his constituency, amongst whom he lived. Unfortunately, Chief Nicholas died tragically in a motorbike accident in February 2020.



**Dini ya Msambwa.** Pokot resistance to *wazungu*, both political and religious, colonial official and missionary, was communicated the most loudly through *Dini ya Msambwa (DyM)*, translated as “religion of the ancestors,” or *Dini ya Msango* as it is called in Pokot (Visser, 1989, p. 40). The cult, movement, or religion—depending upon the perspective—began in 1935 by originator Elijah Masinde around the Mount Elgon<sup>122</sup> area. By the time the movement reached Pokot in 1947, it had taken on strong anti-colonial, anti-modernist tenets. Lukas Pkiech<sup>123</sup>, a student of Elijah Masinde, became the leader of *DyM* in West Pokot. He held song meetings at which a variety of illicit events, including sacrifices, self-cutting, and ceremonial sexual activities, were rumored to have occurred (Denton, 1955, p. 2-3). Seen as a threat to colonial law and order, Pkiech was arrested in 1948 but escaped after two months. As he returned to West Pokot, his following grew. While the movement has been described and analyzed by colonial agents and scholars (see Bianco, 1996; Dietz, 1987; Patterson, 1969; Russell, 1994), for the purposes of this study, I will primarily rely on the words and, thus, the perspectives of missionaries to explain Pokot resistance through *DyM* and its significance. Pokot perspective must be inferred from their reactions at the contact zone.

Descriptions of the movement came from Reformed Church of East Africa missionary and anthropologist Johannes Jacobus Visser as well as a variety of BCMS missionaries. Visser claimed that *DyM*, described as a “prophetic movement,” arose out of a collective realization of Pokot’s inferiority in its “confrontations with dominating peoples,” which led “to a radically new definition of self and society” (Visser, 1989, p. 39). In his flamboyant style, BCMS missionary doctor Peter Cox described the nature of *DyM*, “Around the time of Mau Mau there grew up in Western Kenya a mystical subversive element called the Dini ya Msambwa, which swept

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<sup>122</sup> Interestingly, many point to Mount Elgon as the place of origin for the Pokot people group (Beech, 1911).

<sup>123</sup> Lukas Pkiech appears in the literature with various spellings, including Luka, Pketch, and Kipkoech.

through the tribe with a brand of cut-rate witch doctory, mysticism, singing and praying to shrines. As it was anti-law and order, anti-European and anti-most other things too, it became dangerous and had to be suppressed” (Cox, 1967). Visser’s description reveals an anthropological analysis of the movement while Cox stays true to the colonial description, underscoring the harmonious relationship we have already seen between the BCMS and the British colonial government.

Annette Totty described not only the direct link between *DyM* and Western Christian missions but the professed goals and promises of the movement:

This religion had started in Kitosh country by a renegade mission adherent. His African church council had disciplined him for polygamy so he left the church in dudgeon and started his own religion. He made himself out to be God’s prophet. He planned to kill the European farmers living on the borders of his country, burning their homesteads, which were mainly thatched roofed houses, and taking their land and cattle. He gathered together many followers to whom he promised three things in return for murdering Europeans and burning their homesteads. 1. Land and cattle (taken from the European). 2. Health – especially sight to the blind; and fertility to the women folk. 3. Eternal life. (Totty, n.d., p. 51)

BCMS missionary Philip Price’s opinion of the movement underscores the binaries of colonial perspective while illustrating how mission-influence fed into the “Satanic sect” *Dini ya Msambwa*.

They brought a call to return to sinister and primitive ways, with large crowds of people dancing naked to the weird chants of pseudo-Christian songs copied from Christian hymnals and then altered to suit their own tenets. With its anti-European emphasis it was growing fast, particularly among isolated and backward people. (Price, 1970, p. 22)

The Pokot offshoot of *DyM* drew heavily from mission Christianity to form the movement’s narrative and directed that narrative toward resistance of the *wazungu* in Kenya, identified by Visser as “administrator, missionary and research-fellow” (1989, p. 45). Lukas Pkiech was reported to have told a crowd “that he was the son of God. He had been put to death by the government, but he had risen again” (Reed, 1954, pp. 14-15). Visser connected the symbols used

by and the rhetoric of *DyM* to resistance against missions: “While all of these elements – baptism, new names offices and white clothes – point to missionary or at least churchlike influences, songs about the useless churches, especially the *Tendereza* (= name of the hymnbook) or Protestant reveal the anti-church nature of the movement” (Visser, 1989, p. 42). At the same time, Visser, in support of sociologist Audrey Wipper (1977), suggested that “The Dini ya Masambwa movement in Pökoot was not really directed against the missionaries as such in spite of some expressions of this nature... ‘since the missions had made no impact upon the Pokot, it was not a return in the sense of leaving Christianity for indigenous beliefs’ (Wipper 1977: 210)” (Visser, 1989, p. 47). Lawrence Totty, who was called on by the colonial government for his knowledge of Pokot culture and language, concurred. “The Pokot’s newfound religious enthusiasm could not have been ‘deep rooted in social and economic injustice,’ as had been suggested in the House of Commons. The Pokot way of life, Totty observed, was not much different from what it had been before the advent of British rule” (Bianco, 1996, p. 25). Visser concluded, “The cause of the resistance... had a much broader base: taxation, loss of land, enforced agriculture, conservation measures, etc.” which was viewed as “an imposition by a superior culture” (1989, p. 45). Religious themes based on the legacy of Western Christian missions were likely more convenient ways to symbolically appropriate power from white interlopers than direct resistance to the Christian message.

Active resistance from *DyM* came to a head in April of 1950. Lukas Pkiech, who was on the lam, was meeting with a group of about 300 of his followers in Kolloa near Kinyang in Baringo County. AIM missionary Tom Collins overheard a group singing the familiar hymn “Come to Jesus” but replacing Jesus with “Luka.” Tom approached the group to investigate. Finding their gathering to be unlike a typical Pokot celebration or rite of passage, he tried to

negotiate with the leader. When Tom approached the gathering, “The report is that Luka [the leader] told the warriors to kill that mzungu, but the local people refused—they stood up for him” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p.159). Upon returning home, he wrote a report of what he had witnessed, and he and his wife delivered it to the colonial authorities. Tom reported that he had heard their leader, Lukas, say “Who is the enemy? Is it not the white people? Even this white man is teaching us wrong. You should not listen to him. We have our religion. We worship Jehovah. The white people teach us of Jesus, but who is he? He is dead” (quoted in Reed, 1954, p. 14). While Tom’s trusted relationship with the Pokot saved his life that day, his reporting to the authorities put his life in danger again. Members of the movement later came to Tom’s house to kill him, but he and his wife had fled, suspecting retribution (Phillips and Collins, 2003).

Upon receiving Tom’s intelligence and concluding that the group was indeed the Lukas-Pkiech-led *DyM* sect, District Commissioner A.B. Simpson gathered three other Europeans, including the man set to become the new DC in the area, and forty armed African askaris (police) to arrest Pkiech. After perceived hostility from the *DyM* group, the police opened fire. The Kolloa Affray, as it was called, resulted in thirty-three fatalities according to official records: “The new D.C., the two European policemen and one African policeman had been speared to death by the Suk. Twenty-nine Suk had been killed. One of them was Pkiech” (Reed, 1954, p. 15).

Following the clash at Kolloa, government officials took punitive action, not just on the surviving members of the *DyM* group present in Kolloa, but on the whole of the Pokot community. District official John Russell explained in his memoir, “The whole tribe was severely punished with heavy fines in money and cattle. My parishioners had to pay their share of this and suffer the stigma of having been associated with the cult. A system of permits was

introduced and kept in force for a number of years to restrict and control their movement” (Russell, 1994, p. 32-33). Colonial officials would continue to discuss the right punishment for the Pokot tribe, questioning their leniency at times. Conversely, Annette Totty questioned the justice behind at least part of the punishment, “To their great grief the Pokot were de-speared. How now were they going to defend their cattle and themselves from marauding lions or leopards?” (Totty, n.d., p. 71).

In addition to the role Tom Collins played in discovering the *DyM* group, missionaries continued to be involved in responding to the resistance movement, working together with colonial officials. Lawrence Totty and his colleague were both called on as expert witnesses in the case concerning the movement (Bianco, 1996). In 1950, Lawrence wrote to his supporters at home concerning the “fanatical<sup>124</sup> Suk” of “the seditious religion,” explaining “I am attending a conference this afternoon to discuss the whole situation with officials and the Police” (Totty, L., 1950). Likewise, Annette Totty visited *DyM* women prisoners held in work camps in Kapenguria and, upon release, helped them reintegrate (Miller, 1956). Visser concluded that the nature of *DyM*, while superficially anti-missionary, actually primed its followers to readily accept Christianity, resulting in missionaries teaching “the *DyM* detainees” and ““converting them to a better frame of mind’ (A.R. 1954)” (Visser, 1989, p. 47). Annette Totty concurred: “What can we do on our part to prevent this ghastly subversion? One of the aims of ‘Dini ya Msambwa’ is to procure Eternal life. Well then let us tell them how they can find Eternal Life, let us go everywhere preaching the Gospel” (Totty, A., 1956). Colonial agents responded to *DyM* by inviting missionary expansion, especially into the lowland areas that had only peripherally been reached by missionary presence. Geographer Ton Dietz (1987) viewed the establishment of the

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<sup>124</sup> The examination of African so-called fanaticism, resistance, and mental illness reveals fascinating layers of the contact zone of colonialism and Africa. See Edgar & Sapire, 2000; Swartz, 1996; Sadowsky, 1999.

Kiltegan Catholic mission in Ortum as well as the BCMS hospital in Amudat as a direct result of colonial strategy to quell resistance; however, while the latter supposition is supported by the Tottys (Totty, n.d., p. 52), the former is not addressed within Kiltegan missionary texts.

After the Kolloa Affray, *DyM* went underground. Colonial officials believed the movement had been greatly diminished, with only small groups of followers discovered yearly. However, in 1956 nearly 300 followers were arrested. The same year, Annette wrote of *DyM* to her prayer partners at home, “Nothing can effectively stop it but some act of God. Will you agonise in prayer that God will work a miracle on behalf of these poor deluded Suk people also please pray for our safety for it is definitely anti-European” (Totty, A., 1956). Resurgence of *DyM* was blamed on the colonial perceptions that “W. Suk got off very lightly” after Kolloa along with the difficulty of policing Pokot due to its rough terrain, “secretive” people, and lack of Swahili speakers (Denton, 1955, p. 8 and 3).

*DyM* as well as related and unrelated “cults<sup>125</sup>” continued for decades to function in hiding in the less accessible parts of Pokot, particularly in Karapokot, the area of West Pokot that had previously been administered by Uganda. Despite the attempts of the colonial government to open Pokot to missionaries to counter these anti-*wazungu* movements and religions, Asilong, located in Karapokot, felt the influence of *DyM* long before Western Christian missions. Elder Jacob explained that the missionaries were in Makutano, “but there were other cults that used to come. Not churches but cults used to come... There was a cult named Dini ya Msambwa. When that cult came, the cult operated in this area until the government stepped in. When the government stepped in, they were chased away... In a place called Lomeka, they disappeared into

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<sup>125</sup> According to Kitale District Commissioner C.J. Denton, “Dini ya Masambwa is known to Suk as Dini ya Masango (they cannot pronounce Msambwa) of yomut (lit to air)” (1955).

those areas. Then the children started coming back. The children of those people” (Jacob, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018).

While significant, *Dini ya Msambwa* was a rare example of collective resistance in Pokot<sup>126</sup> and likely reflected more animosity toward the colonial government than toward missions. Even though many missionaries worked with the colonial government to suppress *DyM*, the general sentiment, shown by the *DyM* adherents’ refusal to attack Tom Collins, toward missionaries ranged from indifference (a more benign mode of resistance) to ambivalence.

**Response to Missionaries.** While the reaction to the missionaries had a racial component tied (often vaguely) to Kenya’s (and Uganda’s) British colonial past<sup>127</sup>, the Pokot developed more general and specific reactions to the Western Christian missionaries they encountered at the contact zone. These reactions ranged from resistance to ambivalence to acceptance, often independent of the Pokot perception of Christianity or development initiatives brought by the missionaries. As the missionaries moved into the neighborhood, their new neighbors responded in a variety of ways, typically dependent on the length of the missionaries’ residency and the missionaries’ perception of their place in their new community.

**Resistance.** RCA missionary Morrell Swart discussed her view of Pokot indifference to their presence despite the message and services the Swarts had provided to the Alale community. Their lack of gratitude expressed by the Pokot frustrated her. Morrell’s explanation (quoted above) reveals more about her own attitudes of paternalism and self-righteousness than the Pokot

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<sup>126</sup> To explore a well-known resistance movement by a nearby Kalenjin group, the Nandi, see A. T. Matson’s 1972 book entitled *Nandi Resistance to British Rule, 1890–1906* (East African Publishing House).

<sup>127</sup> Missionary and anthropologist, Johannes Jacobus Visser, wrote, “It is said, that the arrival of the white man was foretold by a prophet or *werkoyon* of the Chuma age set. ‘They will come with bitterness and they will go with bitterness, being rude in many ways and taking things by force’” (Visser, 1989, p. 33).

perception of missions; however, clearly, the community had kept their distance from Morrell and her fellow missionaries, finding little apparent value in the initiatives brought by the missionaries. Her discourse of mission work in Alale focused more strongly on the processes of evangelism and development than engagement with the people who made up the community.

*Ambivalence.* Most missionaries did not speak of outright resistance without balancing the narrative with stories of Pokot acceptance and support. The range of perspectives, while understandably often skewed in favor of the speaker, helped develop the multi-dimensionality of place in Pokot with a view to the ambivalence the Pokot held for missions. For example, at the end of the Tottys' long tenure as missionaries in Pokot, Lawrence wrote to the BCMS powers-that-be, responding to the mission society's plan to force them into relocation or retirement. While Lawrence recognized the dissenting voices among the Pokot, he focused on the message of solidarity he perceived from the Pokot community: they "look upon us as part of the tribe and as a tribe far behind most of the Kenya tribes and apprehensive of the future they have almost pathetically begged us to stay with them as independence comes to this Country" (Totty, L., 1963). Lawrence couched the community's acceptance of him within a framework of Pokot weakness and lack to reinforce needed Western knowledge and his place of authority. Lawrence explained that the Pokot so valued the Tottys that they had "been offered a residential plot where our bones may be finally deposited<sup>128</sup>! As far as I know, such an offer has never been made to any other European" (Totty, L., 1963). At the same time, Lawrence offered, "There are of course

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<sup>128</sup> Lawrence's emphasis on this fact underscores the earlier missionary view that mission work was a lifelong commitment, a commitment that Lawrence and Annette were ready and willing to make. Likewise, it points to a cultural shift in end-of-life rituals that in Pokot traditional society rarely included burial of their dead.



some who would be glad to see us leave,” but these, he implied, are just a few bad seeds (Totty, L., 1963).

In a letter almost a year later, Annette echoed her husband’s sentiments with dramatic emphasis but lacking Lawrence’s paternalism: “Not only are we wanted by the Nasokol people but they are shattered beyond words by the treatment meted out to us their missionaries of thirty-three years faithful service amongst them” (Totty, A. 1964). She went on to cite specific instances of Pokot support for the Tottys. She ended her letter the same way her husband did, acknowledging and disqualifying the voices of resistance: “It is true that before Uhuru some of the Pokot politicians wanted to stop all progress and revert to their old heathen customs. They wanted to stop grazing control, veterinary services, Christian marriage, etc. and they were rushing about telling people to get out, but in answer to prayer and pressure from the Central Government they have completely turned round” (Totty, A. 1964). While the descriptive language (“pathetic,” “shattered”) chosen by the Tottys conveys (with hints of paternalistic responsibility) the couple’s desperation at being called from the mission field, their words also underscore their feeling of acceptance by and into the Pokot community.

As violence in the place of the Pokot became increasingly prevalent, missionaries in the early 1980s found themselves in both the literal crossfire and the metaphorical crossfire of opinion, illustrating Pokot ambivalence to their presence. As noted above, unaffiliated missionary Jane Hamilton wrote about a schoolboy from the community who approved enough of the missionaries’ presence to stand in the way of potential harm. Jane described,

About midnight one of the older schoolboys came up to the house to reassure us. He had an AK rifle and said he would sit down in front of the house and if the warriors sent the signal that the raiders had been sighted, he would come and tell us. Lotuu sat alone all that night under a tree in front of the house. I knew he was putting himself at risk being there alone, but I was touched and comforted by his faithfulness. (Hamilton, 2019, p. 109)

While violence was less of a problem for unaffiliated missionaries Jim and Kathy Tierney nearly thirty years later, Kathy Tierney experienced a similar act of protection:

From the first they [the Pokot] were extremely friendly and we were very comfortable always about being with them. One day Jim said that he had to go to Kitale for something and I would be alone at the mission for a couple of days. I stayed in a hut. When I got up the next morning and crawled outside, I was startled by two Pokot standing at the door. They just automatically, I was told, protected me for Jimmy. No one told them to but there they were wearing nothing but spears and a Shuka. (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2019)

In both occasions, the assumed power structure between missionaries and their potential followers had flipped. These Pokot recognized the vulnerable position of the missionaries and their response was viewed as, at least, goodwill and, at most, an acceptance of the missionaries.

For the RCA missionaries Bob and Morrell Swart in the early 1980s, Pokot violence was not just a potential threat. One night as four to five hundred Karamojong raiders were returning from a revenge raid against the Pokot, the missionaries at the station ran and hid in the hills nearby. Upon their return to the mission station, they “were angered to see that with the Karamojong gone, some Pokot were in the yard looting. We yelled at them. They dropped everything and ran. As we moved closer, we could see that the Karamojong had ransacked the entire mission. Everything is in a shambles” (Swart, 1998, p. 311). After another raid in 1982 when seven local police were killed, Morrell explained,

Bob and I were having supper Sunday evening, July 11, by the light of two kerosene lanterns. I had just gotten up to cut some cake for dessert when our little tin house exploded with gunshot. We dove to the floor. Bob had the presence of mind to extinguish the lights. He braced a chair against the door with its back caught under the doorknob. Shooting into the house continued and the attackers began to bombard our flimsy dwelling with rocks. The newly repaired windows were again being shattered. I whispered to Bob, ‘What shall we do?’ He said, ‘Pray!’ (Swart, 1998, p. 314).

The attackers demanded sugar and money. When they got both, they left. The Swarts fled and spent the rest of the night outside. In the morning, with the help of Pokot friends, they loaded up

their car and went to Eldoret to meet up with RCA mission teammates and discuss how to proceed. Bob Swart along with Larry McAuley later returned to Alale and were told that only a few Pokot were involved in the raid.

So the men laid down certain conditions that must be met if the Pokot wanted missionaries to return to Alale: the culprits must be apprehended and disciplined; the families involved must return the money that had been taken (it had been cash for workers' wages); and the Pokot, who are well aware when raids are imminent, would be responsible for warning the missionaries who were there to serve them. How had the Pokot responded to these conditions? When Bob returned to Nairobi, he had encouraging news. The community of Alale had rallied around the mission in a tremendous way, and not only in word. It had not been able to apprehend the attackers because they had fled across the border into Uganda. But their parents had been ordered to sell enough of their cattle to make up the full amount of cash in repayment for what had been taken. The chief had handed Bob a paper bag containing seven thousand shilling in one hundred shilling notes. Full payment! The tank up on the mountain had been vandalized, probably by the irate, illegal farmers up there. The Pokot themselves had repaired it as best they could. They had also had a big baraza (meeting) at which the people promised that such a thing would never happen again. They would protect the mission. Word also came while they were there that the warrior age-sets of the Pokot and the Karamojong had agreed to be at peace. With all of this encouragement and goodwill in evidence, the McAuleys had perfect peace about staying on at Alale. Following such adverse events, this was a first step in a steady walk of faith. (Swart, 1998, p. 317-8)

Morrell's description clearly illustrates the ambivalence of the Pokot community toward the missionaries. For some, resistance was bold and violent, and these were perceived by the missionaries as "a few renegade Pokot." For others, the missionary presence was valued enough to meet the missionaries' requirements for their return; however, while acceptance was viewed by the missionaries as a result of the Pokot's "steady walk of faith," fear of government or legal retribution or aversion to lost missionary investment may have also played a role in the Pokot response of acceptance.

Pokot ambivalence experienced by more recent missionaries tended to be more philosophical. Resistance showed up not in external violence or even overt actions but in internal perceptions of the missionaries that stood in conflict with mission intentions. Unaffiliated

missionary Kathy Tierney explained a common concern about the Pokot perception of missionaries: “The people responded to us at first so well but now see us as a money tree. It is sad sometimes but there are many I think that love us and are glad we are here, but I know they love the food, medicine, and wells we bring. We continue to explain that it is God who sent us; it is He who loves them and has moved hearts in America to give so they can have these needs” (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2019). Friends of Asilong faced the same ambivalence. Heidi Yapple commented that three or four years ago, women often asked for money for their charcoal businesses, but now they do not ask. “It’s taken consistency,” she explained, to change the Pokot perspective of missionaries (personal communication, 26 Aug. 2018). Andy DuPont concurred, “Now we can have a women’s conference, and no one asks for money” (personal communication, 26 Aug. 2018). In the research of Pokot pastor and scholar John Mondri (2016), he found that the majority of East Pokot residents interviewed preferred Western missionaries over local missionaries because “Western missionaries bring resources to help in evangelism and assist the locals with other important developments” (Mondri, 2016, p. 137).

Missionaries in Pokot have largely sought, at least in word, to avoid a dependency model of mission service and seek to empower local communities to take charge of their own spiritual and economic development through partnership; however, a clash of expectations and perspectives results in ambivalence toward missionaries at the contact zone. This clash is evidenced by some Pokot resisting the missionary message and strategy and often the missionary him or herself, while at the same time accepting some of the resources that the missionaries provide; likewise, others accept the presence of the missionaries along with a negotiated version of the message and strategy they bring. The community development programs embraced

especially by the Kiltegan Catholic missionaries in the 1970s through the *Kablelach* movement and the RCA/AIM mission partnership in 2012 through Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP) reflected a very clear strategy to respond to this type of Pokot ambivalence.

As a relationship develops at the contact zone, Pokot ambivalence toward missionaries can be a direct result of failures in communication. In a community meeting in Asilong concerning friction about community interests and land use at Asilong Christian High School (established and supported by Friends of Asilong), Chief Nicholas, the Assistant Chief of Asilong Sub-Location, spoke about the root of community resistance being lack of communication about projects and initiatives occurring at the hands of FoA. “A communication barrier has been there... That is the problem that has emerged. So we have to work inclusively together, so that we focus on how to [progress]. That is how we get this resistance. We get this resistance because we are not in one talk. Others are saying, ‘We did not have that. When did we plan that? When did we have that vision? ... Why is it carried on that way?’” (Chief Nicholas, community meeting, 6 Oct. 2018). In this case, FoA missionaries perceived Pokot community ambivalence through the discourse of the community meeting. One by one, key community leaders spoke about the land concern, some supporting the school and the missionaries and others resisting, based largely on a lack of communication or misunderstanding of the issue at hand.

*Acceptance.* The long-term missionaries perceived acceptance by the Pokot as they were integrated into the community. Augmenting BCMS missionary Lawrence Totty’s feeling that he and his wife were accepted as members “of the tribe” (1963), as mentioned above, Annette Totty also spoke of the love her children had for and from the Pokot community they were raised

within: “The Africans loved our children and our children loved the Africans. Any Suk with two spears in his hand and feathers in his hair was Ann’s friend. Four years later Wendy was born” (Totty, n.d., p. 43). Lawrence Totty, Leo Staples, and Dick Hamilton perceived acceptance through receiving new names from the Pokot. According to Annette, because Lawrence fixed problems and spoke Pokot fluently, “they called him *Lomurtom*, which means ‘The chief bull in the heard’, the one that wore a bell round its neck and led the herd” (Totty, n.d., p. 10). Likewise, as discussed above, Leo was called *Logomol*, meaning “‘Black and white bull’, a leader of the herd! It’s a bossy bull. A leading bull” (Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). The people gave Dick a nickname that meant “the man with hair like a cow’s tail” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 27). Naming went another direction as well. BCMS missionary and doctor, David Webster, found that “many Pokot children were called ‘Coggis’ after Peter” Cox, David’s predecessor at Amudat Hospital, and “in the years ahead there were not a few called ‘Westa’ after me” (Webster, 2007, p. 41).

Not surprisingly, the missionaries with the longest tenure in Pokot shared the most about being accepted and integrated into the community. Leo Staples, who as of 2020 has spent sixty-seven years as a missionary in Pokot, related a story, shared above, about an interaction with a Pokot man that occurred early in Leo’s missionary tenure. The man spat on his hands and rubbed them on Leo’s face to show “I was completely accepted by them” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Fellow Kiltegan missionary Michael Dillon spoke of Leo being accepted by the community as “a guru or chief.” It was this personal acceptance, Michael explained, that allowed the Pokot to begin to accept what the missionaries were doing was good (Michael Dillon, personal communication, 5 April 2019). Likewise, Annette Totty shared that their reputation as beloved by the Pokot extended beyond the community and was revealed by

how they came to her and Lawrence's aid when Lawrence had a health scare. Annette explained in a 1958 letter that the new School Inspector told her,

'I hear that "Bwana Tot" is a household word in Suk and that all the people love him.' Truly the African Christians have been absolutely splendid in all our trouble. During each heart attack they all rushed up to the house and one stayed by me doing what we could for Lawrie and the others went to the edge of the verandah to pray. It was frightening for us when we couldn't find any pulse. The Africans have carried on and have planned for me and helped even more than a white man could do. (Totty, A., 1958)

A few years later, Lawrence reiterated the acceptance he and Annette felt from the Pokot community and the community's need for the missionaries' continued support, "and they themselves repeatedly tell us this" (Totty, L., 1963).

The missionaries' presence and consistency were attributes viewed positively by the many Pokot. BCMS missionary Philip Price related a conversation he had with Solomon, a Pochon who had been educated in mission schools and become a teacher. Solomon told Philip, "We shall remember you and your family out here, because this is what you have done for us. The Government often sent us Agricultural officers and Veterinary officers, but they didn't stay with the people as you have done. They told our fathers what to do and then left them. But you have lived with us, patiently teaching God's Word. We shall always remember you!" (quoted in Price, 1970, p. 43). The Pokot appreciation of the commitment of the Kiltegan fathers was communicated on Facebook in February of 2021 after the death of "the legendary St. Patrick priest Fr. Michael Dillon," who served as a missionary in Pokot for forty-four years, retiring to Ireland in 2016 (posted to West Pokot News on [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), 7 Feb. 2021). In addition to dozens of comments of appreciation and condolences, Patrick Pkiach<sup>129</sup> posted a tribute to Michael:

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<sup>129</sup> Patrick ended his post with, "As a tribute to him we need to have written history of our great pioneer leaders. My I request our elites in the Catholic Church to spearhead this exercise of writing late Fr. Dhillons contribution to our society. His soul rest in eternal peace" (posted to West Pokot News on [www.Facebook.com](http://www.Facebook.com), 8 Feb. 2021).

He came from Ireland and dedicated most of his life to serve the people of Pokot particularly Chepareria, Sook, Endogh, Batei, etc. to the very end of his energetic life... Though I'm Anglican, that did not make our friendship any less... [He] shared great company with Fr Leo Staples popularly known as Fr Lokomol, and we were really humbled that as old as they were, they continued to wish and have our interests at heart. Truly, they were dedicated. On behalf of the Christians of Sook, Chepareria, Batei in particular and West Pokot in general, we can only say THANK YOU for their selfless service. We pray that the Lord bless them abundantly. (some grammatical and spelling corrections made; posted to West Pokot News on [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), 8 Feb. 2021)

Like Solomon and Patrick, Asilong elder Jacob perceived the presence of Western Christian missions positively because of consistency and follow-through. He contrasted the work of the local Pokot Outreach Mission, led by Julius Murgor, with Friends of Asilong (which he lumps together with Edward Simiyu of City Harvest Ministry, Jacob's Well Church, and the DuPonts from Glen Lake Church):

If one gives you something, you have to thank them for it. As Murgor came to this area, we communicated with him. And Murgor gave us what we wanted. He constructed the church, but he never [completed] it. And he constructed the dispensary—never [completed]. He never constructed anything... And Pastor Murgor left us behind with open mouths. And Pastor Simiyu came in. The group that came with Andy. We cannot separate you—Jacob's Well, City Harvest, and Andy and Olivia, Glen Lake Church. You are all united and you are in unison. When Edward Simiyu came, what I saw, I saw wonderful things. And I believe that we all saw. The first boreholes followed by school laptops; those items made us become praised. Things that we could not dream of where we could get [them]. We, each village, was drilled a borehole. We were very grateful. (Jacob, community meeting, Oct. 2018)

Jacob was not alone in his expression of acceptance of Western Christian missions in Asilong. Fellow Asilong resident Esther concurred, "They have become part of this community. We are happy that they have come and be a part of our community. They have come and shown us the power of God. We pray that God would keep them safe and they would come to us for many years. Sometimes we remember people coming from far. It's not very easy" (Esther quoted in DuPont, 2017). In Elijah's opinion, "The American people come and make this place better" (Elijah quoted in DuPont, 2017).



The contact zone developed into a web of intricate networks and relationships around the presence of missionaries the longer they stayed. Relationships were built through ordinary exchanges of friendship—asking after one another, visiting in homes, eating together, etc. Missionaries perceived the ambivalence of Pokot perspective but built strong ties with those open to the foreigners. While the missionary discourse and the interviews with Asilong residents reflected more readily a Pokot perspective of acceptance (by virtue of the biases held or communicated by the speaker), each geographically specific story revealed at least a hint of resistance to the Christian *wazungu*. The focus of Pokot resistance or ambivalence (or even acceptance) in the place of the contact zone did not usually stop with the missionaries themselves but centered around an issue of evangelism or development brought by the missionaries.

### ***The Message***

A missionary's function is to share their faith, to spread the message of Jesus found in the Christian Bible. As we have seen in chapter 4, missionaries approached this "calling" in a variety of ways in Pokot. Language would be a primary and prioritized tool, employed through language learning, translation projects, and distribution of recorded versions of the Christian message. In addition, evangelism required an understanding and evaluation of Pokot cultural touchstones. Finally, the methods of spreading the message relied on itineration and equipping of indigenous workers. The missionary discourse as well as interviews with Asilong residents reveal the range of reactions from the Pokot, from resistance to ambivalence to acceptance, typically without a critical analysis of the methods of evangelism used. While the missionary discourse is lacking in a depth of understanding of Pokot perception, the dissertation of Pokot pastor and scholar, John Mond, titled *The Challenges of Mission to Nomadic Peoples: A Case Study on the Pokot People*

*of North West Kenya*, helps add an analytical Pokot voice to the discourse. Even though Mondi as a Christian himself believes missions produced beneficial results in Pokot—“The benefits of missions have been the introduction of evangelism and churches, education, and health (dispensaries)” (John Mondi, personal communication, 8 May 2019)—he is critical of some of the methods used, as noted below.

**Resistance.** Pokot resistance to the message was commonly cited by missionaries; however, the sources of that resistance hearkened to the missionaries’ worldview of good versus evil or to the perspectives they had developed about the people and the place of the Pokot (described in chapter 3). In a 1931 prayer letter to their supporters, Stanley Housden explained his wife’s perspective of the resistance of the Pokot to the message: “Annie believes that the hearts of some have been definitely touched, and she would like you to pray for the Salvation of all. Some of those attending are most hard and indifferent. She had one old man one day who said ‘I don’t want to hear “the Words of God,” but I want medicine, but I want it free.’ Still God can and does break hearts that are as hard as these” (Housden, 7 October 1931). BCMS, AIM, and Kiltegan missionaries followed suit, describing the Pokot as unresponsive or even hostile to the Christian message. While finding solace in the Christian belief that “the Lord is working here” (Totty, L., 1948, April 6), the missionaries described the Pokot as “unresponsive, nomadic people” (quoted in Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 150), possessing “opposition and apathy in spiritual things” (Totty, L., 1948, Feb. 3), and “cautious, suspicious, and slow to accept new ideas” (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019).

The missionary discourse largely ascribes Pokot resistance to a spiritual battle between good and evil that God would eventually win. However, some missionaries, typically the more

recent ones, provided some practical reasons behind Pokot resistance in an attempt to better understand the Pokot perspective to the message. In their mission video, AIM missionaries Ray and Jill Davis explained, “To many Pokot becoming a Christian is a dangerous step that will cause them to be cursed by the ancestors and ridiculed by their friends and neighbors” (AIM mission video, 1996). In a shift of focus, Tom McDonnell reacted to Pokot indifference by questioning the prevailing mission methods employed. His re-evaluation led to the start of the *Kablelach* movement.

Like Tom, John Mondi sought to explain Pokot resistance, not through characterizing the culture and place of the Pokot but by questioning the evangelical methods employed by missionaries. John Mondi, himself a Pochon and a pastor to the Pokot, reflected that his ministry to the East Pokot people was also the object of resistance, failing to identify and meet the specific evangelistic needs of the nomadic population of Baringo County. “We had applied the wrong methods of evangelism,” he explained in his dissertation (Mondi, 2016, p. 54). The strategy of evangelism that he employed, like many Western missionaries, required an educated, somewhat sedentary population—in essence a Westernization or modernization of the culture—to fully appreciate the Christian message as it was shared. “85% of the East Pokot population was still actively nomadic and unchurched. This is a demographic that we attempted to reach but there was no viable response during my time as a pastor. I made an effort of putting into practice the methods of evangelism that I was taught in the Bible College, but I realized that most of the methods did not resonate well with the life of the nomadic Pokot” (Mondi, 2016, p. 54). While Pokot resistance to the missionary message was a clear theme throughout missionary discourse, the origin of that resistance shifted from what missionaries perceived as Pokot spiritual deficiencies to a self-reflective understanding of missionary strategy failure.

**Ambivalence.** Mission texts revealed Pokot ambivalence to the message of Christianity by weighing episodes of resistance against individual or community stories of acceptance. BCMS missionary Philip Price, like the Davises mentioned above, recognized the community reaction to a new Pokot convert; Chelimo had decided to be baptized and not partake in *Sapana*: “‘All our babies will be stillborn,’ said some of the old women. Everywhere there seemed to be an ominous feeling of suspicion and mistrust. Some of the Christian teachers from the schools around came for the baptism service on the following Sunday. Unfortunately, one or two wore very western dress: one even had a lounge suit with collar and tie. In this setting it was rather a pity, seeming to suggest that ‘civilisation’ was coming in rather than that Christ was being glorified. Still, it was a memorable service” (Price, 1970, p. 40). Several things are illustrated in this quotation. Certainly, the community was polarized around the introduction of Christianity with some accepting the message and others warning against the fallout of rejecting the old ways. Some who approved of the message of the missionaries in this story appear to equate it to a Western cultural overhaul, symbolized in Western clothing.

The complexity of factors faced by potential Pokot converts was alluded to by Philip and addressed by fellow BCMS missionary Ruth Stranex Deeth:

Those first Christian schoolboys... all came face to face with this conflict when they left their nomadic way of life and came to Amudat and school. Another confusing factor awaited them. They met two kinds of Christianity. The kind most people wore like their clothes, which they took off when it suited them. And a more difficult variety practiced by a small proportion of the church members including those strange ‘pink’ creatures who worked in the hospital, who had far more possessions than any one else they had met, but turned out to be quite harmless. (Stranex, 1977, p. 29)

Philip and Ruth described how the culture clash that had to be negotiated by potential converts was made more complex by the mixture of Western culture and the message of Christianity.

Likewise, the Holy Rosary sisters explained that ambivalence to the message of Jesus was a generational phenomenon. Concerning the boys at the mission school, “Almost all these boys are Christians. They are usually only a short time at school before they start asking for baptism and a place under instruction. Their parents raise no objection and are usually quite pleased, but they are very slow to accept Christianity themselves” (Radharc Films, 1966).

While Pokot resistance is often explained by missionaries in binary terms—yes-or-no, resistant-or-acceptant, welcoming-or-hostile—explanations of ambivalence show the multidimensionality of Pokot perspective. The Pokot response to the Christian message required a consideration of and negotiation of Pokot culture, community values, and influence, as well as the perception of the missionary message and its alignment with Western values and development.

The 2007 Catholic Comboni charter removed the language of binaries, highlighted possible missionary influence, and reflected Pokot agency in response to the Christian message:

The Pokot are enduring people in adversity, able to live with little. Their society is well organized around their traditions and the authority of the elders... Women in the past did not play an important role in the public eye, but they did influence their husbands and children. Nowadays, they have a greater say in public meetings, though they still remain second class citizens... Their religiosity concentrates on restoring life and keeping harmonious relations among themselves. There is an increasing acceptance of God in their lives, as the one who provides and cares for his creatures. They enjoy Christian prayers, but do not care much for morals outside their traditions. (West Pokot, 2007)

In contrast to the Comboni use of impersonal and objective language, AIM missionaries Ray and Jill Davis bring the message back to a duality of belief—one right and one wrong—as they stand against a hybrid acceptance of the missionary message: “Many nationals still cling to their traditional beliefs, wrongly incorporating them into their new faith. They need leaders who can challenge the dangerous practices of witchcraft and ancestor worship; leaders that can set them free from the bondage of their old beliefs” (AIM mission video, 1996). Pokot response will not

only be colored by the perspective of the missionaries telling the story of missions, but it will also negotiate the message in light of the perspective of the missionary, both highly dependent on the personal and organizational differences between missionaries.

In Asilong, the message of Christianity is largely in African hands, but the church and pastor are strongly supported by FoA. Their partnership is well-known. In the community, ambivalence to the message is based on gender, economics, and respect for tradition. Pastor of the Asilong AIC church and African missionary Julius Sawe explained how the church functioned in Asilong:

We teach a lifestyle at the church. Display good characters, display light to the community, so the community can learn from them [the church goers]. We still have some that hold to their culture and are completely against the church. There's only a small percentage... [They think], 'If I go to church, I'll be told not to marry a second wife; if I go to church, I'll be told not to make sacrifices to my ancestors; if I go to church, I'll be told you must take all your children to school; if I go to church...' They give so many reasons... There's just a small group of people who see the church in a negative light. (Julius Sawe, quoted in DuPont, 2017)

When I interviewed a group of men who were largely non-church goers, they diplomatically suggested that the church was good for the community as was the mission-funded school. However, friends, mothers, and sisters-in-law Naomi and Helen, both church-goers, described in frank terms the ambivalence of the Pokot response to the message of Christianity in Asilong. Naomi, a mother of five, explained that in the past when women would go to church, men would say, "Never go to church. What we had in the past is much better than what they teach at church." Sometimes, the men let the women go and report back to the men. As women began to go to church, they heard the message to put their children in school. "A mother takes her children to school and the man says, 'Where are you taking my child?'" Naomi explained that along with the church, they felt pressure from the government (via the police) to put their children in school. While the men had little respect for the church, they used to fear the police a

lot. “The men began to change a little by little, men like Jacob, and my husband put their children to school” (Naomi, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018). Naomi’s perception of the Christian message conflated it with the importance of formal education for her children. In this way, the church and the government are working toward the same goal, foreshadowed by the symbiotic relationship between the early missionaries and the colonial government. The Pokot perception of one will undoubtedly affect the perception of the other.

Helen, a mother of eight, also conflating church and school, had a different response from her sister-in-law: “[The husbands] say church is good, but they don’t come. They will never come. They don’t like the schools. They only like putting boys to school, not girls, because you spend a lot of money to put a girl to school. There is more dowry for a girl who has never gone to school. The girls who go to school decide who will marry them, so they might pick someone who only has a few animals. The girls who stay at home, they will get someone who has many animals” (Helen, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018). Not only does the cost of secondary school deter families from educating girls, girls who are in school are not available to be married at a young age. Julius elaborated on those who think like Helen, “They don’t see the future benefit of school. They only see the animals” (personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018).

**Acceptance.** Descriptions of Pokot ambivalence in the missionary discourse and through interviews with Asilong residents revealed a complexity of place at the contact zone. Layers of reasons and nuanced reactions backed by culture, identity, and perspective built on top of the basic binary response of the Pokot—no/yes, resistance/acceptance—to the message of Christianity. Shifting to the response of “yes” from the Pokot, the missionary discourse becomes more one-dimensional again with countless stories of conversions, existing as more of an

ongoing tally than a detailed testimony of conversion. However, looking deeper, the tallies are often followed by evidence of conversion and change. As time passed, missionaries stopped focusing on the former and emphasized the latter. Pokot acceptance of the message of Christianity was illustrated, through the missionary lens, by their response, commitment, and subsequent actions on behalf of the mission or message. Place, particularly religious place, was characterized by a shift of religious allegiance, reflected both in the built environment (simply stated, more churches) and the human interaction with place.

The first missionaries, particularly the Tottys, filled their letters home with tallies of converts. Quantity seemed to be the mark of success. BCMS missionary Annette Totty shared her perspective of the first story of conversion in Pokot:

A.B. [Buxton] preached on Sunday morning in the church that had been a goal when Kacheliba was an administrative post. Here we were told men had been hanged for bloodspearing. Now where many received death many were destined to receive Eternal life in response to the preaching of the Gospel. When A.B. preached his sermon that Sunday he appealed to those who had given their hearts to the Lord to stand up. Five young men stood up signifying that they wished to become Christians. Here were our first five converts our first recruits. Our hearts were thrilled. (Totty, n.d., p. 22)

Stanley Housden explained conversion by explaining the vows new converts made: “Now one of the most important pieces of news we have to give you is of a definite profession made by four of our Suk boys. These four boys each stood up before the whole Church one Sunday morning, and each one made a promise, to repent and forsake sin and uncleanness” (Housden, 20 May 1933).

The Tottys, especially Annette, continued throughout the years listing names of new converts and tallies of conversions and church attenders. Likewise, those numbers are followed by signs of the converts’ commitment: monetary giving, attendance at church and other Christian activities, and the spreading of the Christian message. For example, Kalapaton, a young man



who graduated from the mission school, showed his faith by volunteering to be trained as an itinerate evangelist (Totty, A., 1944). The 1945 Easter Service boasted over three hundred in attendance; “Also these days there is an increased sense of giving” (Totty, A., 1945). Annette explained that “the women’s meeting too is being blessed” as the attendance at the previous meeting was twenty Pokot women. The women themselves ran the meeting: “Each Monday they choose one of their number to speak and always they find some illustration from their every day life which fixes the spiritual truth in their minds. Then we have a time of prayer when we pray over each others problems” (Totty, A., 1945). In 1956, Annette defended the Tottys’ work in Pokot by explaining that “the Nasokol Church was built entirely with Suk money from the Xtians [Christians],” and the church’s local evangelist was supported with local funds (Totty, A., 1956, May 6). In a 1957 letter, this time Lawrence described Pokot acceptance of the Christian message by describing the growth of new congregations: “New churches are coming into being all over Suk. Just this week a chief asked if we would start a church and send an evangelist to his location” (Totty, L., 1957, July 17). Pokot response to the Tottys’ missionary endeavors came to a climax in a 1964 revival, according to BCMS convert and community pastor Daniel Tumkou and BCMS missionary David Payne:

In the same year a group of Christians mainly from Cheperaria, attended a Revival Brethren Convention at Maseno. Suddenly all the teaching they had heard over the previous years took on a new, personal meaning... The year 1964 was a year of great rejoicing in the life of the church in Pokot. People praised God for the work which Lawrie and Annette, Gwen Kerr and others had done, for now they were reaping the rich harvest of spiritual blessings they had sowed. (Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 19)

Daniel Tumkou and David Payne, likewise, gathered short statements from Pokot converts to give to the Tottys to mark their jubilee (50 years), seventeen years after their departure from the mission field of Pokot, as a testament to the lasting legacy of their message. A small book was compiled for the celebration, containing the Tottys’ memoir of their time in

Pokot and a collection of seven individuals' "tributes" to the Tottys, beginning with Daniel's. Daniel felt God's call and guidance on his life because of the message of Christianity explained by the Tottys. Likewise, Daniel praised the Tottys' emphasis on translating and creating a written Pokot Bible. "Their unswerving determination created in me a strong concern for our Heritage, the Pokot Language; and I am thoroughly convinced that God, the Giver of all good gifts, will one day demand an explanation from all of us should the Pokot language be ignored through our laziness" (quoted in Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 32). Sarah Tumkou similarly praised the BCMS missionaries, "They enlightened our country, bringing progress and spiritual growth" (quoted in Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 33). John Ng'imor traced his Christian faith through a line of BCMS missionaries and local evangelists, who employed various strategies of evangelism. He first heard the message of Christianity at the Anglican primary school in Chesegon through BCMS missionary Philip Price and Pastor Daudi Lokwakit, through the songs and messages played on the gramophone, and later in a government school in Kapenguria through Pastor Daniel Tumkou and Lawrence Totty (quoted in Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 37). Dinah Katina learned the message of Christianity from her mother, who had been taught by the missionaries. The message, according to Dinah, "brought spiritual and social change to our country" (quoted in Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 36). Like Dinah, Isaac Pkukat learned about Jesus from a parent, his father, who was a "casual worker" at the Tottys' mission station in Kacheliba the first year it was established. "We were so pleased when he told us about the ideas which the missionaries were teaching, and we noticed their kindly discipline compared with other Europeans who were ruling the country." Isaac went on to attend the mission school, and like the Tottys themselves, described the acceptance of the Christian message through numbers: "Now there are 3 church buildings in the Chepareria area, and 4 other congregations meeting

under trees. Altogether there are about 700 Christians meeting on Sundays for worship” (quoted in Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 33-4). Jackson Katina explained, “The Easter Message preached in 1950 by the Rev. L. Totty in Kokwotondwo School (near Psigor) provided the new life in me... In addition to thorough teaching of the scriptures, they taught various kinds of handwork, including farming. The training they gave has proved invaluable in my life.” Again, Jackson confirmed the narrative of Pokot acceptance of the message by describing a church he and his wife started that had grown from six to 120 (quoted in Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 34). Julius Psirwo, who attended Nasokol Primary School several years after the Tottys had left, explained that although he did not succeed academically, his Christian faith gave him purpose. Despite his circumstances, he was committed to evangelizing. He explained, “The number of Christians is increasing year by year, and also new congregations are starting. This has happened because of the work of the early missionaries who started the work of God” (quoted in Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 36).

Many of the tributes listed above used Western measures of success, including education and quantified church membership growth. BCMS missionary David Webster concurred that many Pokot embraced the Western example set for them by the missionaries, not as result of power and hegemony, he explained, but as a result of growing interest in something new and as a symbol of change and personal conversion. For example, David explained that Sunday services in Amudat were strongly Anglican in form, to the chagrin of the missionaries, who would prefer some uniquely Pokot elements in the church services (Webster, 2013, p. 131). However, in other places in Pokot, many Pokot converts began to negotiate Anglican church practices to include Pokot cultural elements, illustrating their agency in a hybridized acceptance of Christianity. BCMS Philip Price explained, “Coupled with this new fellowship was the emergence of a new

pattern of hymnody, one entirely Pokot. Previously the missionaries had translated western hymns into Pokot and utilized western tunes. But now the Christians were using their own tunes with their gay rhythms, and using their own style of poetry and expression” (Price, 1970, p. 49). David and Philip’s examples show a range of Pokot acceptance and subsequent negotiation of the message and practices of Christianity.

By virtue of his long tenure as a missionary in Pokot, Catholic Kiltegan missionary Leo Staples looked back from 2019 through the changes that have occurred since 1953. To Leo, progress and a Christian perspective were the marks of Pokot acceptance of the mission message. “Let me put it this way, they had no interest in education, or in religion that would have been brought by Europeans at the time but now they all understand the importance of religion and they are eager for it. They are coming to us now to help and they are ready to contribute themselves. They are giving of themselves now to build and to construct Churches and schools and even give plots free of charge. That is wonderful – that is real growth in Christ” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). He explained that in his old age he was approached by Pokot people who are now grandfathers who he knew as children; they would say, “‘You Baptised me. You prepared me for Confirmation, you married me!’ It’s the emphasis they put on the spiritual things in life, not on the material. So that is wonderful for me, when I see the things that they appreciate. The whole growth of the human person. That is what satisfies me. What else could I have done for them?” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Upon a visit to Leo’s mission, Catholic priest and writer Michael Ryan commented on Pokot demeanor as proof of their acceptance of the message brought by the missionaries, “What we experienced was so rich and varied – the enthusiasm and joy with which people celebrate the Eucharist, the great

spirit of friendship and mutual respect between the Kenyan priests and religious [people] and the missionaries” (Ryan, 2002).

While Leo never emphasized numbers of converts, the number of Pokot men who had been ordained in the Catholic Church, while small, expressed a growing acceptance of Christianity as well as acceptance of the Catholic tradition of celibacy amongst priests, a culturally foreign practice. “Three men now [have been ordained] – one is in my own Society, St. Patrick’s Missionary Society. He was ordained in June last year. His name is Robert Psinon” (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019). Likewise, Leo remarked on the surprising shift in Pokot culture and perspective that was exhibited in women accepting Catholic vocation,

In our case, the last thing we would have expected within the Pokot culture was Pokot Sisters. Their antipathy to girls’ education, meant you would not expect Pokot Sisters... Nowadays all Pokot are paying fees for their children. Even parents are now paying for those girls whom they know will probably become a Sister and enter Religious life. They are willing to pay and send them for courses and allow them to become Sisters. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

Pokot women tended to be more receptive to the Christian message overall; however, the acceptance of Catholic sisterhood as a valid life choice communicates an acceptance from young Pokot women that requires a significant rejection of Pokot culture—the emphasis on motherhood and its invaluable link to the community structure—and an acceptance of individual agency for women.

For the unaffiliated missionaries Dick and Jane Hamilton, the Pokot narrative of acceptance reflected a theological understanding of their conversion and their transition of belief systems. Jane did not highlight specific numbers of converts but instead focused on the purpose behind conversion—expressed in binaries of good and evil—indicating that Pokot acceptance of the message was indeed a shift in a spiritual reality for the new followers: “Thousands of Pokot have now understood and have claimed Jesus’ sacrifice as their own. For the Christians there are

no more appeasements to angry gods for the sickness of their children; no more fear of displeasing a god that they did not understand; no more darkness. Now they have the perfect light of Jesus Christ freeing them from centuries of fear and superstition” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 39). Likewise, Jane described how Loitaluk, a Pochon Christian, drew from Pokot tradition to explain the Christian principle of unity:

One Sunday at the end of the communion service, Loitaluk stood up and said he had a question: ‘Which is stronger, the blood of Christ or the blood of the Sapana sacrificial cow?’ he asked... Loitaluk’s question about the blood of Christ had arisen because he assumed that the blood of Christ would bind Christian brothers together in the same way that the blood of the Sapana cow bound together the age mates. But he saw division and quarreling and gossiping against each other, even among the missionaries. His words to the congregation that morning were, ‘Those of us who take communion together are like the Sapana group who eat the feast together. That communion feast makes us one. There should be no quarreling or division among us.’ (Hamilton, 2019, p. 141-2).

Loitaluk’s short sermon not only described the acceptance of the Christian message in a theological manner, but it also reflected on Pokot traditional beliefs in a positive light (unlike Jane’s quote above), drawing connections between the two. Loitaluk’s message illustrates a rejection of the missionary binary and an example of Pokot initiative in negotiating Christian theology in a Pokot place.

Unlike Loitaluk, Asilong elder Jacob perceived the results of Pokot acceptance of the mission message as a rejection of a part of Pokot culture, a part he deemed as destructive. “Initially we had no peace here. Now we have a lot of peace. And the word of God has done a lot. The word of God has done a lot. We fought and fought with other tribes with no end. Our fathers fought with no end. And the fight that we have now is the word of God. When people hear the word of God it helps their souls” (Jacob, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018). Jacob’s perspective of proof of Pokot acceptance was a change in culture, illustrated by Asilong transitioning from a violent to a peaceful place.

The various representations of Pokot acceptance of the mission message reflect the extent of hybridity resulting (or allowed) in the understanding and practice of Christianity among new converts. For well-established, highly liturgical churches, like the Catholic Church and to a lesser extent, the Anglican Church, converts were welcomed into a highly prescribed, globally shared practice of church. Catholic missionaries in Pokot, particularly Leo Staples and Tom McDonnell, would press the edges of their practiced faith to find room for a more Pokot style of Catholicism, one that included dancing to build trust between a missionary and his potential followers and embracing the local language so soon after Latin was considered the best way to communicate religious rites. In a nondenominational setting, many missionaries came from a conservative, low-church background and encourage hybridity of Pokot expression of Christianity but stressed correct belief of the Christian message. In both representations of the message, Pokot culture was the proverbial chessboard where resistance, ambivalence, or acceptance of the mission message was negotiated.

Hybridized acceptance of the Christian message in Pokot and other areas in Africa has led to an increasing Africanization of the church and complementary responses from Western church leaders. In December of 1993, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, “publicly apologized in Nairobi on behalf of those missionaries who had condemned all aspects of African spirituality and traditions. He conceded that some facets of the culture were completely compatible with the teachings of Christ, even though some of them may have been incompatible with European culture, traditions, and values” (Maathari, 2009, p. 178). Likewise, in 1995, Pope John Paul II apologized to Africans “for the sins committed by missionaries” particularly those that demonized all African beliefs and culture (Maathai, 2009, p. 178). The

church in Pokot and around Africa continues to negotiate with the message of Christianity as it was brought by the missionaries.

### *Culture Change*

Place is the geography of culture, a dynamic layering of beliefs, practices, and history (Cresswell, 2004). The place of Pokot is always changing, a fact well-documented by missionaries and residents alike. Some see the culture change as inevitable and yet passively arrived at, but most identify a source, whether good or bad or ambiguous. Catholic Kiltegan missionary Father Michael Dillon explained, “By 2000, change had come. A lot of the traditional ways of doing things, dressing, living, communicating, had been influenced by the missionaries” (Michael Dillon, personal communication, 5 April 2019). Like Michael, Asilong Chief Nicholas saw the change as positive. He reflected with dismay at the prior “backwardness” of the place, “When I came here ten years ago, I only found one institution called Asilong primary school. And the community were dressing with sheeps [wearing the traditional goat skins]. They had not started putting on clothes like shirts and long trousers” (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 October 2018).

Culture change brought by missionaries faced a variety of responses from the Pokot community, particularly in areas of disconnect (as discussed in chapter 4). Pokot pastor and scholar John Mondi believed that among missionaries, especially AIM missionaries in East Pokot, there was a common belief that a culture “needs to be vacuumed to create a space for new things to come” (John Mondi, personal communication, 8 May 2019).



**Language.** An unexpected area of Pokot resistance to missions was found in the translation work of the BCMS missionaries Lawrence and Annette Totty, AIM missionary Tom Collins, and their associates. While faced with a variety of Pokot dialects and funds for only one translation, the translation group faced considerable resistance concerning the orthography they chose to employ when writing the Pokot Bible. Annette Totty vented her frustration and passion for the translation work in a 1956 letter. She downplayed the Pokot resistance as the province of only two Pokot youths with outlandish ideas (representing the Devil in this account) while declaring the Western experts and even God to be on her side.

On the one hand we had 24 years of hard toil and over £500 of money sacrificially given to the S.G.M. for printing, on the other we had these two youths wanting to change everything. They kept changing what they wanted and they did not agree amongst themselves. What they wanted was completely fantastic. They wanted to write words with only consonants. To say that we did not discuss it with them or try to make a compromise is completely false. I say it without any shame whatsoever. I looked upon this whole problem as an attack of the Devil to prevent God's Word from getting to the Suk and I believe he used these two youths. We have a band of praying people at home praying that God would change these two Youths' hearts so that they would allow His Word to go forth and I believe God will yet work (if the commission will only let Him). This does not mean that we did not discuss it with the two Youths. We did many times. We appealed to Dr. Tucker of the Oriental School of Languages and he wrote a Memorandum offering four suggested improvements. These they refused. He then invited them to consult with him when he again visited Africa. They refused. He then wrote to them and said 'Don't be swelled headed and anti-European'. The position now is that a Government Official is to come as a Commission and settle this problem. (Totty, A., 1956)

By the early 1970s, the resistance to the Tottys' and Tom Collins' Pokot orthography had increased to the point of being largely rejected by the Pokot. In 1975, the Anglican Bishop asked the Tottys' mentee and friend Rev. Daniel Tumkou to work full-time on a new Pokot translation. Pokot resistance became Pokot initiative and ownership. In addition to the Pokot Bible, the mid- to late- 1970s saw work being done to produce a Pokot hymn book. "It is hoped that the new Hymn Book will bring together Christian songs from different places and different

denominations into one book,” a hybridized, Christian, Pokot initiative (Tumkou and Payne, 1981, p. 28-9).

No such disagreement appears to have occurred concerning the Kiltegan Catholic translation project. The difference in approach and time period are likely the cause. The Kiltegan translation project came much later than the BCMS’s and engaged a team of literate, educated Pokot at the outset. Such a community of Pokot was unavailable to the BCMS decades prior.

**Drunkenness.** The fermenting of grains and drinking of local beers were common in Pokot before, during, and after British control of East Africa (Bianco, 1992). Because of its prevalence, drinking and drunkenness became a common topic at the contact zone, often coming under mission condemnation. Bianco (1992) illustrated how the drinking habits of some Pokot conflicted with Western systems introduced by missionaries, in this case that of running Ortum Hospital: when a local “dresser” finally returned from holidays, he was “‘half-sick [from beer] so Sister M. Regis [a registered nurse] and Dr. Murphy [the hospital's first physician] are working fulltime and overtime’ (HRS 1/16/58)” (p. 135). Many Pokot chose to resist and ignore the missionaries’ finger wagging, but others accepted the message brought by the missionaries, a message of the evils of alcohol abuse and the alternatives provided by the church.

BCMS missionary Philip Price related the words of a Pokot man who recognized the validity of the missionaries’ condemnation of alcohol abuse and the addictive nature of alcohol, “‘I want freedom from *komun* [alcohol made from millet]. It dominates my life,’ he said. ‘All our quarrels come from *komun*. Oh, I want Jesus to save me from *komun*’” (Price, 1970, p. 454).

Many of the men in Asilong drank alcohol to drunkenness. Asilong resident and church member Noah explained how alcoholism became such a big problem in the community within the last twenty years:

There was this Uganda president called Museveni. He took away the guns from the people. He took from the Pokot people, and he took from the Karamoja people. The first people were the Pokots, and guns were still in the hands of the Karamoja. When the guns were taken away from the Pokot, something that replaced the guns was the brewing of *komun* (alcohol). The local brew called *changa* came now to replace the guns. People drank and drank and drank. Then churches started to come into the villages. People started going to the churches. Fewer people are drinking because of the churches. (Noah, quoted in DuPont, 2017)

Noah understood the influence of the church on drinking in Asilong because it affected him personally. “I drank a lot of local brew and Tusker [a Kenyan beer]. When I was taking those kind of brews, I would come home at night. I sleep at home at night until nine in the morning. I’m not even hungry; I don’t care that I’m supposed to eat. I wake up at nine; I take my animals for water and disappear again to drink around eleven. I stayed in that lifestyle until I started going to church.” Noah explained that he was selected to be on the borehole repair team, created and led by FoA missionary Andy DuPont. Noah said that he and the team would “go repair the boreholes and when we are finished, we go back to drinking.” One day he came to the church to charge his cell phone<sup>130</sup>. While he was waiting, he visited with Asilong residents Rael and Samuel, who asked him when he was going to come to church. “I said, ‘not yet.’” Their response drew heavily from Christian imagery and binaries of good/evil: “They told me, ‘you are walking in a way that is not pleasing. What is leading you is a devil’s spirit, and God’s spirit is calling on you. You are walking in darkness now. You are not walking in the light of God.’”

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<sup>130</sup> Asilong was officially off the grid until the late 2010s when the Kenyan government provided electricity to the area. Solar panels were installed by Friends of Asilong to power the church and later Asilong Christian High School. Community members, both those who attend and do not attend the church, often used outlets in the church to charge their personal cell phones.

Noah reflected on their message of Christianity and decided that he wanted “to be born again.” The three of them “waited and waited” for Pastor Julius Sawe to return from the primary school, and he prayed with Noah to accept the message of Jesus. After that, he stopped drinking and began to attend Asilong AIC Church (Noah, quoted in DuPont, 2017).

According to Noah, at least in Asilong, drinking in excess filled a void left by the outlawing of cattle raiding by the government. From my perspective observing life in the village, the men have little to fill their time since their primary cultural roles of protection and cattle raiding have been taken away. The church offered an alternative cultural aspect to help counteract new habits of alcohol abuse and fill the void left by changing livelihoods in the place of the Pokot.

**Polygamy.** Unlike drunkenness that was more widely condemned in Pokot as a harmful practice, the practice of polygamy was a cultural mainstay. As Western Christian missionaries pushed for monogamous marriages, Pokot Christians often concurred although the resistance from their community could be significant. Annette Totty shared the following story in a 1945 letter concerning the struggle between traditional polygamy and Christian monogamy:

The Lord has answered prayer for Esther one of the women. Her husband Stanley although a Christian for a number of years wanted to take another wife. Esther expostulated with him telling him that he had brought her to the Lord Jesus, and now he wanted to turn his and her children back from following the Lord. The women prayed and God dealt with him until he told Esther that he would give up the idea and that he realized it to be sin and that he was beginning to backslide and would return to the Lord. (1945, May 14)

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the BCMS mission in Amudat, particularly through missionary Ruth Stranex Deeth, recognized that the school girls, many of whom had accepted Christianity, would be faced with “a tension between their Christian faith and their tribal loyalty,

which they would have to work out for themselves” (Webster, 2013, p. 163). Ruth commented that the Pokot response against polygamy might affect the girls’ futures and participation in the culturally emphasized role of motherhood: “The Christians found that their faith might demand that they remain single while their friends married” (Stranex, 1977, p. 29).

According to Pokot pastor and scholar John Mondi, “polygamy was not handled well” by the missionaries of East Pokot (John Mondi, personal communication, 8 May 2019). As a Christian convert himself, John did not resist the principle of Christian-based monogamy; it was the manner in which missions handled promoting the principle that he found problematic. He claimed, “The mainline churches that had missionaries (Anglicans, Africa Inland Church or Africa Inland Mission, Lutherans, Pentecostals and Roman Catholics) in East and West Pokot had one common formula to deal with polygamous marriages among the Pokot nomad; ‘they outrightly condemned polygamy and upheld monogamy as the type of marriage supported by the Scripture’” (Mondi, 2016, p. 77-8). Wholesale condemnation of polygamy would ensure a high level of resistance among the Pokot, especially in the earlier decades of the missionary presence in the region. In fact, Annette Totty cited that it was the church’s disciplining of Elijah Masinde for polygamy that led to his rejection of Christianity and to him starting *Dini ya Msambwa* (Totty, n.d., p. 51). While John Mondi’s perspective resisted the missionary approach to polygamy, other Pokot Christians embraced the Christian ideal of monogamy as presented by Western Christian missions.

Part of polygamy in Pokot involves “old men,” who have accumulated wealth and can afford more wives, taking young girls as wives. The *Kablelach* program, pioneered by Catholic Kiltegan missionary fathers, that empowered local leadership among the youth around Ortum identified the marrying of young girls as a practice that needed to stop. With pressure from the

*Kablelach* group, “A local chief was prevented from taking a young Form 1<sup>131</sup> schoolgirl as his third wife. She was not consulted about her marriage” (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 2019). Likewise, education has been a strategy used by missionaries to delay marriage for girls. Catholic Kiltigan Father Michael Dillon explained that Pokot girls who had gone to school were challenging traditional ways of life, especially related to marriage (Michael Dillon, personal communication, 5 April 2019). In the opinion of Asilong resident Naomi, who likely concurred with the missionary perception of drinking, drunkenness played a role in polygamy and forced child marriage: “The men used to go to the drinking areas called *Lokarima* and the men would stay there and drink the local brew, many, many men. And then they, if you had a daughter and marrying daughter, the man would come and say I want to marry your daughter.” Naomi explained that the men would take the girl, without her consent, by force. Naomi could speak to this phenomenon because she was also “taken” and is the fourth wife of a very old man. If the girl tried to run away, Naomi explained, the men would do some rituals that made you return. “You come back alive with things biting you and biting you.” According to Naomi, school and the Christian God were the cures to this problem: “School is good because no one can force a girl to marry. God is there. The issues of just coming and grabbing you for marriage is disappearing. It still happens but not as it used to” (Naomi, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018).

Asilong resident and fifth wife of Jacob, Rebecca, concurred with Naomi. Rebecca, who is considerably younger than her husband, explained how polygamy demeaned the value of women: “When you take a second wife, you leave the first wife. She has no one to take care of her. When you take a third wife, the second becomes worthless to you. And they do their own

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<sup>131</sup> Kenya follows the British system of education, meaning a Form 1 girl is equivalent to a ninth grader in the American system and thus fourteen or fifteen years old.

thing. The problem keeps adding as you add wives like that” (Rebecca, quoted in DuPont, 2017). She then transitioned quickly to the “enlightenment” brought by the message of the church, implying it to be the salve for the wound:

Many of the men have not gone to church. When the women received Christ and became born again, they were enlightened; they put their kids in school. The reason the kids are in school today is because of the efforts and energies of the women. When you put your girl in school, the men become very fierce and they say, ‘How will I get animals for the dowry? How long will I wait for her to bring animals?’ We are still fighting with men and convincing them to put our girls in school. (Rebecca, quoted in DuPont, 2017)

In Rebecca’s opinion, the ambivalence to the message of the church, particularly the pressure toward monogamy and child marriage, was illustrated through men and women’s struggle with agency, power, and perspective. In many ways the struggle between the sexes corresponds to the struggle between tradition and mission-led progress. Women, in larger numbers, accepted the message of the missionaries because of the liberation it brought them, encouraging education of girls and discouraging polygamy and child marriages.

**Material Cultural, Rituals, and Rites of Passage.** Like the cultural norm of polygamy, other cultural rituals and practices came under fire in varying degrees from missionaries. The Pokot response was equally varied from a strong and sometimes violent resistance to ambivalence to wholesale acceptance. The practice of female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) was one of the most highly contested practices as missionaries (and government officials<sup>132</sup>) tried to extinguish it. Other rituals and practices also became places of Pokot resistance and negotiation with the missionaries.

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<sup>132</sup> Kenya passed the Female Genital Mutilation Act in 2011, outlawing FGM and imposing “harsh penalties on those involved in cutting girls and women, including a minimum fine of \$1,800 or three years' imprisonment.” The law was upheld in 2021 after a 2017 petition against the prohibition of FGM was struck down (Yusuf, 2021).

BCMS missionary Philip Price related a story of Pokot ambivalence regarding FGM. The story reiterated the struggle between the new guard and the old, the young Christian converts and the traditional elders.

Because of their unity in Christ they were strong; they had a joy and power in their hearts which their neighbours lacked, a joy that was dependent on Jesus, and not linked to numerous tribal feasts and ceremonies. It was because they kept themselves apart from these functions that the Devil first attacked them now that they were standing as a Church upon their own feet. Two of the Christian girls, Lois and Chepkite were of marriageable age and therefore due to enter into adult initiation rites which included circumcision. As Christians they felt that they could not take part in these. They felt they owed allegiance to a new Lord and Master which was incompatible with the spirit-worshipping rites of their traditional upbringing. The local elders were furious. (Price, 1970, p. 56-7)

AIM missionary Art Davis discussed the violent resistance that Kenyan missionary Rev. Njau faced when he spoke against FGM: “Four times the traditional Pokot attempted to kill Rev. Njau.... Early on, when the traditional elders saw that fewer female circumcisions meant a loss of income that comes with that practice, another attempt was made to get rid of Njau” (Davis, 2011, p. 102-3). Likewise, to illustrate the ambivalence but changing culture around FGM, Art told the story of a girl who was sent by her mother to live with a Christian family in another village to avoid circumcision. The girl finished high school and got a government job. Her father, who had opposed his daughter and wife’s actions, began bragging about her success (Davis, 2011, p. 118-9).

Catholic Kilitegan missionary Leo Staples explained one strategy the Catholic Church in West Pokot was developing recently to combat FGM. The strategy was to establish a school, described above, for girls who would refuse to undergo FGM. The premise relied on a response from the Pokot families of both boys and girls to reject the practice (Leo Staples, personal



communication, 23 June 2019). Leo alluded to the success of the project, but no specific statistics or stories were supplied<sup>133</sup>.

Asilong resident and church leader Rebecca reflected on traditions, including FGM, that she perceived to be wrong in light of the message of Christianity. “There were many, many rituals being done that was not in line with God’s word. There was tradition, *Sapana*, FGM, the girls were being circumcised. Many, many rituals were being done. And those things, God kept on changing them” (Rebecca, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018). Pastor Julius Sawe also explained the cultural transition around FGM and the role the schools played. Education, according to Julius, only became possible because of the boreholes dug by FoA, which enabled the population to become less nomadic. “When the people became settled, people started to send their kids to school. When you move every month, you cannot go to school... The children when they did not go to school were a part of a culture that was not really humane, things like FGM, which was so rampant in the area. At school they were taught things against FGM. They went home and told their parents what they’re doing is not right, against human rights” (Julius, quoted in DuPont, 2017).

Asilong Chief Nicholas concurred that more Pokot were exchanging traditional rituals like FGM for what he perceived as progress, but his perspective identified the government collaboration across the Kenya-Uganda border and a political initiative for education as the impetus for change. He explained, “We... have reduced the practice of FGM. We cannot say totally finished, but it is reduced. The practice of forced marriage has reduced. Now the problem that is still [exists] is early marriage. Early marriage is still within my area of jurisdiction. This

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<sup>133</sup> A similar strategy was by pioneered among the Maasai by Priscilla Nangurai, the headmistress of Africa Inland Church Primary Boarding School in Kajiado, Kenya. Nangurai explained, “We need to tread carefully since female genital mutilation is deeply rooted into the culture. We can end it through education, advocacy and religion” (Nzwili, 2003).

practice will only stop when basic literacy will go into each and every family” (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 October 2018).

In addition to FGM, missionaries highlighted two aspects of traditional Pokot life and culture that condoned violence: wife beating and cattle raiding. As Pokot converts, often women, began to make a stand for their newfound beliefs, the response from traditionalists was often swift and brutal. Jane Hamilton shared several stories that illustrated the tension and negotiation of the Pokot response to the mission message and influence. Jane’s story of Elizabeth, described above, bears repeating for its relationship to both wife beating and cattle raiding. Elizabeth reacted in sadness at the return of a war party led by her husband. The party would celebrate the kills of their enemies made during the raid. “Elizabeth had come to believe that the killing was wrong. Once, she had voiced her feelings when he [her husband] was getting ready to go on a raid, and he beat her so badly that she lost the sight in one eye...” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 72-3). Elizabeth’s acceptance of the missionary message stood in stark contrast to her husband’s resistance of it, “thus causing a great gulf between the two of them” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 72-3). Conversely, Jane explained, “As Jesus began to work in the hearts and lives of Pokot men, gradually they turned away from cattle raiding. On one occasion a group of several thousand armed warriors, from Karamoja in Uganda and the Pokot from Kenya, came together for a peace meeting along the border” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 40).

In another example, Jane told the story of a Pokot man who had accepted the message of Christianity and subsequently chose to resist violence, including culturally acceptable wife beating: “A renowned warrior who had accepted Jesus and was trying to live by the teachings, but sometimes it was just hard. He came to the door of Pastor John’s house and threw the offending wife into the front room. ‘Here,’ he said, ‘If I can’t beat her then you deal with her.’”

Conversely, Jane explained, “Pastor John had some serious teaching to do with Grace [the wife] about submission and respect” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 125).

AIM missionary Art Davis shared the following story, like Jane’s story, to reveal the tension between cultures: “In Pokot tradition, when a person touches a dead body, he or she must remain in isolation in the hut or village for one month.” A woman named Mama Cheptaran came to church after burying her baby. Art described her husband’s response: “In great anger Alemongora came to the church group who were meeting under a shade tree and forcibly dragged his wife out, beating her mercilessly for not following the cultural rules. He used the Pokot stick called *likup* which has a sharp curved point at one end, intended to crack a skull open or gouge out chunks of flesh.” Mama Cheptaran, or Rebecca as she liked to be called after her baptism, “never wavered in her faith” (Davis, 2011, p. 117).

After such a shocking story, Art shifted the narrative of Pokot acceptance to tell the story of Lobonge and his struggle negotiating the competing cultures of the missionaries and traditional Pokot. Upon accepting Christ, he and his friends decided, “We must remove our mudpacks, ear rings and necklaces..., and we must do what the Bible teaches.” After Lobonge and his friends cut off their traditional mudpacks and shaved their heads, they presented themselves as true Christians to Art and a Pokot evangelist. However, not long after, Lobonge felt “a strong spirit” taking him to a traditional ceremony. Art explained, “Things that are done at these ceremonies are immoral, degrading and full of pagan prayers to the dead, the cows, etc.” After this setback to his faith, Lobonge repented and became a successful businessman, father, and member of the community. “For the past 20 years, Musa Lobonge has stood firm in his faith” (Davis, 2011, p. 123-4). The response of Lobonge and some of his friends was a full acceptance of the standards laid out by the AIM missionaries and other church leadership, which

left little room for hybridity. John Mondí's mother's experience with the AIM missionaries was similar to Lobonge's. John explained,

My mother and other first Christian converts, for instance, had to undertake some radical decisions if they were to be considered serious Christians. Women were asked to shave their traditional muddy hair, remove their traditional beads, and cut the bracelets (*trimoi*) they wore on their wrists. Wrist bracelets (*trimoi*) were made from a certain skin and were equivalent to wedding rings and indicated that every woman wearing it was a married woman. The only time a Pokot woman would shave her hair and remove her beads is when her husband died. So when the Pokot people saw the first church advocating for women to perform such practices, they concluded that the new religion wished that all men were dead so that their wives could go to church. Due to this initial clash between Pokot cultural practices and the early missionary approach to evangelism, most of the Pokot people, particularly men resented Christianity, seeing the church as belonging to women, children, the school going (*Psukulen*) people and the weak in society. (Mondi, 2016, p. 37-8)

Like the AIM missionaries, the Catholic Holy Rosary sisters praised the Pokot schoolgirls' departure from their traditional appearance: "The girls are very anxious to wear European clothes and lay aside the skins, beads and heavy earrings normally worn by Pokot women. Some of those who have had their ears pierced in five places for the five traditional earrings have gone to the hospital and had the holes sewn up again" (Radharc Films, 1966).

In Asilong, the prevalence of "traditional" attire has decreased, particularly over the past ten years of Western missionary work. In 2016, FoA board member Laura Lesniewski noticed that almost no Pochon wore traditional clothing to the Sunday morning church service. Presuming that Pastor Julius encouraged this, she asked him about it. Julius explained that the culture had shifted to view Western clothes as nicer, more dressed-up, more appropriate for church. The *shuka* (a piece of cloth tied over the shoulder) was relegated to home and working with animals. Laura's perception of intentional mission influence and overstep was actually a reflection of changing fashions—possibly unwittingly influenced by mission presence—within the dynamic place of Pokot.

Traditional rituals, like attire, have also been relegated to more out of the way places around Asilong. While the rituals are still preformed in some areas—according to Pastor Julius, “You can hear them at night”—many rituals have been abandoned in most of Asilong “because of the church” (Julius Sawe, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018). Asilong resident Rebecca’s response to some of the rituals, once she became a Christian, was one of fear (although it was unclear what the object of the fear was). People would come to her house and ask for milk for certain ceremonies. Before they would come, she would run off into the forest and pray that God would protect her (Rebecca, personal communication, 4 Oct. 2018).

In addition to the cultural elements of language and the practices of drinking in excess and polygamy discussed above, material culture (seen in Pokot attire), rituals and rites of passage (particularly FGM), and general cultural practices (especially wife beating and cattle raiding) were places of negotiation at the contact zone. While the missionary perceptions and strategies regarding these elements, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4, began to influence the place of the Pokot, the response of the Pokot to the overall messages of the missionaries underscored their agency and illustrated the ambivalence of the communities at the various contact zones. The process of culture and place is a dynamic layering of perception and reaction, creating a narrative of discrete but connected stories of placeness. Next, we shall examine how Pokot response to the people and message of missions led to their complex, layered, and multidimensional response to the development brought by missions at the contact zone.

### **Response to Development**

In addition to evangelism (the message of Christianity), missionaries brought development to Pokot. While the missionaries’ approach to the strategy of development was

strongly dependent on the perspective of their mission organization and the individual's perspective of the people and place of Pokot, the Pokot response was equally as varied. Pokot agency and negotiations were imperative to the place making narrative in the greater story of the contact zone of Western Christian missions and Pokot. As missionaries brought development through education, medical services, agricultural innovation, and water provision, the Pokot responded in a way commiserate with their world view. Foreigners or *wazungu* were initially perceived with suspicion and sometimes fear until trust could be built and their message of development was perceived as having value. The initial response to mission development, and one that continued through the decades of mission interaction in Pokot, was a fear of land loss.

### ***Fear of Land Loss***

Missionaries entered Pokot largely after the colonial government had established and solidified previously negotiated and contested tribal boundaries. Even though the Pokot did not officially lose any territory to *wazungu* settlers, their land was both stressed by other ethnic groups who had been forced off their land and the constant redrawing of boundaries. Only four years before the Tottys arrived, the colonial government reallocated 400 mi<sup>2</sup> of the highland area near Lelan to West Pokot to provide important grazing grounds for the Pokot (Cowley, 1937), implying this land was off-limits for the Pokot for a time. Likewise, even after all of the shifting and shuffling of land, colonial officials in 1955 found “the separate administration of the one Suk tribe by three different administrative units” (presumably Uganda and the counties of West Pokot and Baringo in Kenya) to be “regrettable” (Minutes, 1955). The borders of Pokot finally resembled their current position by 1970 when the Karapokot area officially returned to Kenya

from Uganda<sup>134</sup> (Nangulu, 2009). In addition to the Western imposition of borders and boundaries, colonial officials attempted to reconstruct Pokot cultural norms around land and land use to fit a Western ideal (Visser, 1989). For example, agricultural schemes spearheaded by early colonial officials transformed open land, important for cattle grazing, into fenced areas off limits to cattle and goats (Waller, 1999; Patterson, 1969). In view of the high value placed on livestock and the pastoral livelihood and the subsequent value of land, it is unsurprising that *wazungu* were met with suspicion in Pokot based on the Pokot's fear of land loss. This fear directly affected the Pokot perspective of development initiatives brought by missionaries.

Fear of land loss drove the Pokot perspective of the first missionaries. In 1932, BCMS missionary Stanley Housden wrote to his home constituents about the struggle to overcome the wary perspective of the Pokot, "We consider we won the confidence of those who visited us to quite an extent, for the natives regard us with a good deal of suspicion, as they think we have come to steal their land. Slowly they are realizing that this is not the case" (Housden, 2 November 1932).

When missionaries began to request land to accomplish their strategies of development, the resistance was not just focused toward the project but the land it required. Anthropologist Barbara Bianco (1992) related the story of an elderly Pokot man who represented Ortum on the West Pokot African District Council during the 1950s. As the Kiltegan Catholic missionaries began to plan to build a hospital, the man explained that the local people "did not want any hospital. Cheposepoi [one of the clans that owned the land] were refusing. They said, "We will just go to Kapenguria [hospital]." I said, "How can you refuse a small area?" They were saying, "Where will our cows graze? You know those Europeans just fence everywhere, so where will

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<sup>134</sup> See Nangulu (2009) for a more detailed description of the colonial history of Pokot divisions and boundaries.

our cows graze?”” (Bianco, 1992, p. 130). Bianco related another man’s suspicions, “People did not know where the Sisters and the other Europeans came from... They thought that the Europeans had no land at their place and that they had come here for the land. They did not know that the Europeans came to help them” (Bianco, 1992, p. 130).

At times, the resistance to missionaries using Pokot land was simply that the land already had a use in the perspective of the Pokot. After being pushed out of Kinyang due to the Kolloa Affray and persistent drought conditions, AIM missionary Tom Collins began searching for a new location for a mission station in 1954. Following his initial resistance against allowing missionaries in the area, a local chief named Alexander acquiesced, informing Tom and his missionary associates “about an area with a big flat rock which the Marakwet used for sharpening spears before they went off for battles against the Pokot. It was a cursed place. The chief reluctantly agreed to offer that place for the mission station, and left them at their own risk!” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 174). In other words, it’s cursed, so you can have it. Possibly because of its perceived identity as a marginal place, the land had less value for the local people but more value to Tom: “The location provided the potential for outreach to a wide range of people in the immediate location” (Phillips and Collins, 2003, p. 174-5).

RCA missionaries Bob and Morell Swart faced similar resistance from local Pokot when they proposed clearing land for a runway. The land contained trees that had both economical and religious value. A Pokot man “had a bee log in that tree and was not going to permit workers to chop it down. The matter finally was settled through the chief, and the man moved his bee log to another tree away from the strip, his source of honey still intact” (Swart, 1998, p. 302). Also,

right in the middle of the strip were two other controversial trees. Some years before, goats had been sacrificed in religious rites under those trees, and superstition held that if they were cut down, the people who had made the sacrifices would die. So the chief said he would find out whether the people were still around, and if they were, another



sacrifice would have to be made to remove the curse. [The conflict was resolved]. The strip was completed by the end of February 1981. (Swart, 1998, p. 302)

The contact zone illustrated a conflict of perspectives of the use of the land. The Pokot perspective was at times negotiated and at times trumped or invalidated by the missionary perspective. For the RCA planned runway, Pokot resistance to mission development required the chief to negotiate the use of space and the changing nature of the place at the contact zone.

In Asilong, the land for Asilong Christian High School (ACHS) was ceremonially bequeathed to Friends of Asilong for the express purpose of building a high school. Despite the community's initiation and determination of the land transfer and use, the fear of foreigners appropriating Pokot land continued. FoA sought to reappportion the land, shifting the school property away from a creek bed area but otherwise not changing the amount of land to be used. The issue was hotly debated at a community meeting in 2018, and the community refused the proposition based on fears that the Western missionaries were trying to take over and possess Pokot lands. A community elder commented on an argument for the reappportioning that was put forth by the ACHS principal:

What the head teacher was proposing, I am also grateful, but the time of addition is not now. We shall sit down and we shall see where we decide to add. Why so soon? This land is ours and this institution is ours. As that time will reach, we will be called for the same, and then we shall say it is agreed this way. And then let us have a break until the environment has been squeezed so we can say where to add. (Asilong elder, community meeting, 6 Oct. 2018)

The elder communicated the sense of communal ownership of the missionary project and affirmed Pokot agency in negotiating changes of place through development in Asilong. Asilong resident and mother Naomi explained the Pokot mindset<sup>135</sup>, emphasizing the value of land as it

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<sup>135</sup> While it is outside the scope of this research (partially because of some of the details are sketchy), it is interesting to note that a group of men in Asilong, have taken charge of "ancestral lands" as self-appointed managers. In doing so, they have attempted to sell some of the land in Asilong that is communally owned. Rumor had it that some land had been sold to the Chinese to help build an economic center in Asilong.

relates to their most valuable asset, their cattle: “Some say the *mzungus* have come, and they want to take our land where we graze our animals. They say they will take the land and start building houses. They say even if it is for our children, they value the animals more” (Naomi, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018).

### ***Response to Development: An Introduction***

In addition to the fear of land loss, the Pokot response to development began like the response to the missionary message: they were not interested. As Catholic Kiltegan missionary Leo Staples explained, “when you don’t see a value to a thing, you will never want it” (personal communication, 23 June 2019). Asilong elder Lotiamaruk somewhat comically described, “When we were young in this area, we could smell somebody who was civilized. He is smelling something bad. But we see now they were using soap and bathing. It was the smell of soap that was smelling that we could not accept” (community meeting, 6 Oct. 2018). Pokot pastor and scholar John Mondri (2016) relayed his grandmother’s articulate perspective of mission-led development in Baringo County.

[I] am glad there are still Pokot men who are still paying attention to the old ways of living, they move away to preserve the core of the Pokot culture that is being chopped away every single [day]. They have said no to Christianity, the way of school (*psukulen*), and the life dictated by *ropiyen* (money) rather than *kiak* (livestock) and sending children to school especially *tipin* (girls). Churo has changed to a shopping center but I wouldn’t like to see the church grow beyond Churo, otherwise there would be no Pokot way of life because the church and school will kill it. (quoted in Mondri, 2016, p. 50).

In keeping with the perception of the Pokot as conservative and proud people that dominated the missionary and scholarly discourse before Kenya’s independence, examples abounded of Pokot resistance to the missionaries and the development they brought.

As time passed, trust grew between the missionaries and the Pokot, and the perception of development improved; the general response to development began to change. Despite his grandmother's assessment of mission-led change, John Mondri articulated the ambivalence he felt toward development, "On one hand, you'd love to see the preservation of culture. On the other, it's nice to see the East Pokot catch up with the rest of the country" (John Mondri, personal communication, 8 May 2019). Taking it a step further, Asilong elder Vitalis explained a common perspective of development, "Let's focus about how the development shall come. We shall have to change as time meets us where we are" (Vitalis, community meeting, 6 October 2018), the subtext communicating a call to Pokot initiative.

In Ortum, the Catholic Kiltegan missionaries, particularly Tom McDonnell, desired to empower Pokot initiative through the *Kablelach* movement in the 1970s. Tom led "participatory workshops" organized around "listening surveys": "we did not go with a set of questions, but rather listened to people in places where they gathered; by the water holes, the market, the animal auctions, when playing games under the trees etc. We noted what made the people more emotional, what angered them, what did they complain about ... in listening we determined their 'felt needs'" (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019). The Pokot young people approached these workshops "with energy and commitment; they were excited, energised and moved to act." The *Kablelach* youth identified areas of needed change in their community, unearthing

emotive themes such as poor leadership, uneducated leaders; girls being married off without having a chance to finish school, even primary; few girls in secondary schools; poverty, an analysis of the causes of poverty; sickness caused by the use of dirty water; famine, lack of food; ignorance among the adult population and the need for adult literacy; ethnic conflict and cattle raiding especially with the Turkana and Marakwet etc. Relevant scripture passages would always be used in each learning session. (Tom McDonnell, personal communication, 19 May 2019)

These youth responded to the mission-led discussion of development with a sense of responsibility, acceptance, and initiative.

In Asilong, the community members I interviewed spoke highly of the mission-led development initiatives; however, many are still resistant to and suspicious of outsiders. For example, rumors in the community spread about Pastor Julius Sawe (a non-Pokot but ten-year Asilong resident) and Jacob (a community elder, school board member, and strong supporter of Friends of Asilong). It was claimed that Julius and Jacob were getting kickbacks from FoA. Likewise, the Kenyan (non-Pokot) contractor building Asilong Christian High School was blamed by a group of young men for causing the drought in the area through witchcraft. During the COVID pandemic, many in the community expressed a desire for the contractor and accompanying workers to stay out of Asilong (Julius, personal communication, 3 July 2020).

Some Asilong residents expressed an ambivalence not toward the mission-led development but toward the way it had been managed. On 5 October 2018, a community meeting was called by the chief to discuss issues at the contact zone of the mission-established Asilong Christian High School and the place of Asilong. A Pokot youth spoke up as a representative of many of the young men, “These people need transparency. If there is something going on at the school, just call the community and talk with them because they will be happy to see” (community meeting, 5 Oct. 2018). Peter, who called himself the land coordinator of Asilong, also spoke about the need for transparency. He criticized the school for allowing an illiterate man (community elder Jacob) on the Board of Governors. Likewise, both young men who spoke underscored their desire to directly benefit from the development. “If you can employ these people, they will be happy. We give you the land for free, and we did not require you buy the land. We have the stone and the marram, the stone, for free” (Michael, community meeting, 5

Oct. 2018). The other young man requested sponsorship for the children attending Asilong Christian High School as well as employment.

At a separate time, a group of Pokot men answered my questions about change and development in Asilong as they relaxed in the shade of a tree. These men, who largely eschewed church and education for their children, stated,

In the coming years, we want all our children to go to school... After they finish going to school, we want them to develop our area. They become rich and come build their houses in our area. We want our children to come and build for us a market and schools. And when they come, they build hospitals for us. When the hospital comes, we will really come and sit down, and give out land. (Asilong men, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018)

The men's statement superficially appeared to support Pokot-led development initiatives, but in reality, they spoke of a hypothetical time when wealth would fall in their laps, provided by their hypothetically educated children.

While some Asilong residents are still suspicious of or indifferent to the *wazungu* missionaries and the development they bring or unhappy with the way they bring it, others communicated a response of acceptance of the progress and changes they witness. Asilong elder Jacob (the man demeaned in the community meeting for being illiterate) reflected,

If I compare what used to happen before and now, it's like we are wiping what was before, we are wiping it away. Many of the things we used to do before really was not helping us. We were just eating animals, there was nothing else here. Only animals, animals and cows. And when we had drought, all of them die. Even goats, even cows. And we just look at each other. When our [business] was just animals, almost all animals die.

Jacob was reflecting on a great drought that had plagued the area before he was born:

All the animals, all of them died. There was no food and the hyenas were all moving around here and eating, and the lions were here, and they were eating people. There were some caves where people went and hid themselves just to hide their food from the lions. Of course, there were no cows. Now they call that day the dark period. And what is happening today, we see a lot of progress. We appreciate it. Today we don't depend only on animals. There are many things we depend upon. We know how to look for food and

look for things, not only animals. The things that used to happen before, they are now going and new things are coming. Good things are coming and happening.

Jacob finished his monologue with an eye to mining “gold and other materials from the ground” to sell, growing a more diverse economy (Jacob, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018). Jacob was reaching beyond the “cattle complex” (Herskovits, 1926) to embrace culture, place, and livelihood changes. Noah and Rebecca agreed with Jacob concerning the good progress instigated by the missionaries. Noah explained, “I see Asilong is heading in the right direction. When the church began, the primary school also came in. The boreholes came in. I tell God thank you. Then we got a secondary school. This area is going in the right direction” (Noah, quoted in DuPont, 2017). Looking to the future, Rebecca stated, “I see a lot of hope in the coming years. I see that we shall have doctors here, we shall have teachers here, even professors. I have a lot of hopes that God will work wonders in this area for things to happen” (Rebecca, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018).

Jacob continued his thoughts, explaining the trajectory of progress as it related to the missionaries.

If you look around and see the grass roof houses, it’s because people moved around. If you see lack of water and fighting, it’s the same thing. If you build your house here and there is no water, how will you survive? Close to maybe 20 years, now we are staying. We now have a school and a church. And when the church came in, good development started following us... Andy came and a guy named Simiyu. Laura and Sam were coming also. They brought the boreholes, and we were very happy. People became clean, even myself. And we have a secondary school nearby. This area is moving on and on and on. And we are so thankful. Children are going to church. When peace came and there is no fighting, people are going to church. Sam, Andy, and the rest, we just have to hold our hands together. The government was not even concerned with us. When the secondary school came in, the government started coming in. Things are falling into place. We are waiting on our children. They are now in school. It’s good you came now, you can see so many grass like houses. But when you come in years, you will see a difference. (Jacob, quoted in DuPont, 2017)

For Jacob, iron sheet roofs were signs of significant and welcome progress, something he had employed on his own “modern” rectangular house, had seen proliferate in Alale, and looked forward to in Asilong. Jacob underscored what Andieme, Dietz, and Kotomei (2008) had found in their research that missions were viewed more positively as agents of development. For Jacob, collaboration or “holding hands together” with FoA was the way forward for Asilong.

In addition to Jacob, two other elders communicated Pokot acceptance of development initiated by missionaries. Asilong elder Lotiamaruk spoke of cooperation, “Let us become one and become blessed with visitors. And when we shall move, joining hand in hand, we shall be raised by God to become high. And when we shall become raised by God’s grace, we shall now have the fruits of our dreams. A cow, when it is dried up, will you just be looking all the time at the udder expecting it to be lowered down? Will you go and see that animal and still expect milk? No.” Chief Nicholas, in his translating, explained that Lotiamaruk was calling the community to focus on the future, work with the missionaries, and have “one vision, one end.” Because “if we shall be left behind, then we shall take longer to prosper” (community meeting, 5 Oct. 2018). Another community elder extolled the missionaries for their help: “If it was just us, we could not manage.” He suggested that the community might “quarrel” if it was in charge of the development of the high school. “Right now, I cannot quarrel because it is assisting my children. And I have seen that you have constructed wonderful buildings. And our children are studying inside. That is why I am thankful” (community meeting, 5 Oct. 2018). Congruent with his support of the missionaries, this elder reiterated that the development was occurring on “our land,” and the community was responsible for its stewardship. Indeed, Lotiamaruk also called the community to steward its own future development. As Chief Nicholas paraphrased, “The black old man said don’t look at your closest shadow but look at your farthest shadow, either west or

east, to understand what is your future there” (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 October 2018).

It is worth noting that Chief Nicholas, when asked about Pokot development, stressed the work of the government and African NGOs, not mentioning the work of Friends of Asilong. Other than the government, the chief explained, “Asilong has benefited most from NGOs. One called Acted assisted Asilong to construct the girls’ dormitory at the primary school.” Nicholas mentioned the work of Julius Murgor’s NGO, Pokot Outreach Ministries, and the county government in bringing water to some nearby villages. Likewise, the telecom giant Safaricom constructed the boys’ dormitory at the primary school (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 October 2018). Unlike many of the community members, Nicholas, a public servant, looked to local NGOs and the government for development, emphasizing their role and deemphasizing the role of missions in the developmental trajectory of Asilong.

### ***Education***

Arguably, the Pokot response to education has undergone the most change of any of the mission-led strategies of development. Intense resistance to formal Western education was a nearly ubiquitous response that BCMS and Kiltegan missionaries commonly faced in the first decades of their mission work in Pokot. As time passed, Western institutions of education took root in the landscape at the contact zone, and Pokot communities and individuals negotiated their perspectives of education, a navigation continuing through the present day as many do not attend school past a primary education. Two reputable sources report a starkly different reality of education. As related above, the Socio-Economic Atlas of Kenya (2016) reported that in 2009 51% of primary-aged children in West Pokot attended primary school with only 5.6% of



secondary-aged students attending school. Whereas by 2018, the county of West Pokot reported “a gross primary school enrolment of 89 percent and a transition rate of 66 percent to secondary schools” (West Pokot County, 2018, p. 27). While I am skeptical that the disparity between these numbers is only the result of a nine-year increase in enrollment (the reliability and accuracy of the data collection methods and the data itself needs to be assessed), it is clear that the Pokot perspective of education has undergone dramatic changes.

BCMS missionary Annette Totty dedicated her missionary career in Pokot to education. Her obituary states that she “supervised and developed the primary school [in Nasokol] as well as those in strategic centres throughout the district. The Tottys trained ‘Teacher/Evangelists’ to man them, although in those early days education was bitterly resented by the tribal elders” (1998). After the establishment of the boys’ school, Annette and fellow missionary Jessie Bryden set their sights on establishing a girls’ school in 1934. According to Annette, the colonial District Commissioner was a strong supporter of girls’ education and

promised to call a *Baraza* or *palava* and instruct each chief to bring one girl to our school from his location... We sat beside him whilst he propounded his scheme of starting a girls’ school. We thought how pleased they would be. Instead of which there were angry exclamations. First, one old man got up and pointed his spear at my husband and said, ‘If Bwana Tot takes one of our girls to school I will spear him’ and sat down. Then up stood an old woman – she divested herself of every stitch of clothing and spat on the ground and shouted, ‘We will not send one girl to school’. The D.C. feeling that discretion was the better part of valour decided to break with the meeting, but we didn’t leave it there. (Totty, n.d., p. 25-6)

Annette told the story of the first young girl who came to the school on her own, but her father retrieved her, beat her, and tied her to a tree. The girl’s father then cursed the Tottys but was surprised the next morning when they had not died. They explained, “Oh! You see our God kept us from your spell” (Totty, n.d., p. 27). Intrigued and pleased by the Tottys’ description of the Christian god, the father allowed his daughter to attend school. Annette continued, “Later

another girl came. She was also beaten by her father, but she also managed to stay. Doggedly we hung on to our girls' school, with Miss [Jessie] Bryden looking after them" (Totty, 1980, p. 7).

In 1942, the boys' school was well established in Nasokol. Annette wrote, "We had fifty boarders and thirty-six day boys... The boys are easy to teach as they love to learn. Their naughtiness occurs out of school when they work for their keep" (Totty, A., 1942). Conversely, the girls' school only boasted an attendance of fifteen, and "was closed down as a result of the behavior of the Girls – we discovered that boys were visiting their dormitory during the nights after having picked the lock. This resulted in my expelling all but three of the Girls and this combined with the fact that funds were inadequate decided us in temporarily closing the school" (Totty, L., 1942). Interestingly, despite championing the place of girls and women in education and condemning the demeaned place of females in Pokot society, the girl students were punished for what appears to be misconduct from the boys.

As the provision of education continued to be limited and uneven, Pokot response remained ambivalent. BCMS missionaries continued to struggle with their Pokot partners to improve the reputation of education in Pokot. BCMS missionary Philip Price described a conversation with Solomon, a Pokot teacher who had gone through mission schools: "He was worried at the backward state of his own people and wondered what could be done to improve their way of life. We agreed that it was important that those who had been educated, particularly those who were Christians should be willing to live among their own people and try by their good example to improve their way of life" (Price, 1970, p. 43).

Philip likewise mentioned that education did not always function as he and Solomon planned: "Too often when children received some education they tended to despise the primitive way of life of their parents, which was sad, especially when they claimed to be Christians"

(Price, 1970, p. 43). Pokot perspective often diverged between the uneducated who despised education and the educated who despised the ways of the uneducated. The former was holding onto place as they knew it, staying true to a conservative, Pokot worldview while the latter was preparing to find their place in a new, larger economic and cultural system brought by colonialism and championed after independence. BCMS missionary Ruth Stranex Deeth examined the same phenomenon but through more of a nostalgic lens:

Children at school drift slightly apart from the village children. They miss out on important tribal events and become engrossed in different worries, such as school fees, uniforms, examinations. They may arrive back at the village during a school holiday to discover their playmates going through the tribal rites to be recognized as adults: ceremonies useless in themselves but exciting in their build-up and significance. (Stranex, 1977, p. 30)

While early AIM missionaries in Pokot abstained from educational work with a focus almost wholly on evangelism, AIM historian Stephen Morad (1996b) shared a story very similar to Annette's stories above, revealing Pokot ambivalence to mission-led education in the early 1950s.

One time a certain Pokot girl got saved, and [AIM missionary] George<sup>136</sup> took her to school and paid the school fees. At the school she had to leave the traditional dress and wear a school uniform. When her brother heard of this, he was furious. He came with a *panga* [machete] to kill George. The brother was not able to recognize his sister in the church, so he became convicted that what he was doing was wrong, and went home again. When the girl went home for the holiday, her uniform was taken from her and she was forced to wear the traditional clothing again. When she came back to school, she got a new uniform. Her brother later came and returned the uniform that had been taken from her at home. (Morad, 1996b, p. 129)

The Catholic missionaries perceived a similar response from the Pokot concerning education. Kiltegan missionary Fr. Michael Dillon explained that introducing education was the

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<sup>136</sup> George Kendagor was a Kenyan missionary with the AIM, working in West Pokot (discussed in chapter 3).

first hurdle to development in Pokot: when the missionaries asked the Pokot people if they wanted a school, their response was

‘no, no, no.’ Would you like to have a hospital? ‘No, no, no.’ When we asked them if they wanted a church, they would say ‘what is church? We don’t know this thing.’ They did not want any change. They were happy as they were and wanted to stay that way. The first 10-15 years were very difficult to find anything that the people were interested in (Dillon, personal communication, 5 April 2019)

Although a school was established at the mission station at Ortum almost immediately, almost all the girl students initially came from outside Pokot.

Head Mistress Sister Aloysius explained in a Radharc interview her perception of why the “backward” Pokot resisted education: “The women don’t want their little girls to come to school, but to mind the goats. They have a lot of work like that to do at home... Some of the girls who have made it through school have become second and third wives. They have no Catholic gentlemen to marry” (Radharc Films, 1966). Likewise, Fr. Michael Dillon explained that in the 1960s and 1970s the people believed girls should not go to school, “but little by little they came. The girls would go home and tell their parents they liked school and liked what they were learning” (personal communication, 5 April 2019). The Pokot’s perception of education for girls began to change. Along with that change came a shift in the Pokot perception of the Catholic Church and the place of girls and women within it, knowing that a vocational commitment to the Catholic Church accompanied a vow of celibacy. In Leo’s perspective,

For a Pokot Girl to give up the privilege of having a family – it’s tremendous really. Now there are twenty-three Pokot girls fully professed as Religious Sisters. The marvelous thing about it is that they have become missionaries all over the world. That is the magic of God’s grace. Fifty years ago girls weren’t even thinking of going to school, and now when they go... to be Religious Sisters, their own parents are happy. Some - mostly happy. Then when it comes to the [experience] of their Religious Profession, they go long distances to celebrate. Nowadays all Pokot are paying fees for their children. Even parents are now paying for those girls whom they know will probably become a Sister and enter Religious life. They are willing to pay and send them for courses and allow them to become Sisters. (personal communication, 23 June 2019)

Father Leo Staples reflected on the change of perspective toward education that he has seen over his decades in Pokot.

They're so happy now that they have been educated themselves. Time and time again, they will come along and say Fr. Leo (they wouldn't mention me in particular, or they might – they might be Protestant people) but they would say only for the Catholic Church we would still be herding goats and here I am now – 'I'm a Professor in University', 'I'm a Doctor'. They have entered into all the different professions. They will say, 'This is what education did. It started in a small school. It didn't mean much at the time, but look at the fruit that it brought, and now I am educating my children.' (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

The change has not only benefited the individual, in Leo's opinion, but the Pokot's acceptance of education, particularly mission-led education, has helped them progress in comparison to the rest of Kenya. Leo explained that in his early years with the Pokot, "They were perfectly happy in their isolation. They had no education" (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019).

Whereas by 2019,

They are competing with one another to get the best education possible... All want to go to school. That's a wonderful change. Marvelous to see. Wonderful to see. That is why they are the envy of many who laughed at them before. They were a laughingstock – many would say 'Those people, they are a hundred years behind us!' Through no fault of their own, they were behind. They were denied the eyes to see that there was a different world outside. (Leo Staples, personal communication, 23 June 2019)

In his Facebook tribute to Fr. Michael Dillon, Patrick Pkiach, "a resident of West Pokot," declared, "Father Michael Dillon, was a great blessing to Pokot... Together with Brother Tom McDonnell they played a major role in the setting up of Ortum Boys Secondary school in 1977, St. Cecilia Girls [in] Chepareria, etc. Fr Dillon also saw the establishment of St. Catherine, Chepnyal and a host of other schools both secondary and primary. These early garland leaders of faith transformed our society to the extent of making our area an educational powerhouse" (posted to West Pokot News on Facebook, 8 Feb. 2021).

In Asilong, the growth of the primary school and then the request for the building of the secondary school illustrated the steep increase in education and approval of education. Asilong resident Naomi explained that the community heard about this thing called school in Makutano, but they did not know what it was. “We used to sell our milk in the market, and if we saw someone wearing a trouser, we would all run away. If our children go to school, they would wear these long things” (Naomi, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018).

Asilong resident Gladys was in the first class in Asilong primary school around 2001. She described, “Asilong was a bush before. There was no school. There were no teachers and no classrooms. The kids were so dirty. There was no water. We didn’t have lights. We used natural light to study. In the beginning we used to [meet] under a tree. The tree was our shelter. The mudwalled classes were built in class 4. The wind took it away” (Gladys quoted in DuPont, 2017). FoA missionary Andy DuPont described how the school grew from there, mirrored by the growth in the church: “The primary school went from having three buildings, three classrooms, to four to five, and now they have 8 plus the ECD, Early Childhood Development... The school was growing from just 30 students to over 300 students very quickly. The church grew from a very small base of 15 or 20 or so to now 200 or more.” (Andy, community meeting, 6 October 2018).

Before FoA came to Asilong, Rebecca described,

There was a missionary called Emmy [Chepkemoi] who came... And that missionary started now advocating for people to put their children to school. And a few children went and boarded in the school... There were five, then there were six, then there were ten. God works like that. We were looking for a teacher for the kids who were there then, and Emmy was walking to talk to men in the villages, telling them, ‘Allow your children to come to school.’ And change started coming in as people were bringing their children to school. Our first children to go to school are now in colleges. (Rebecca, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018)

Missionaries and “church services are trying to make people understand the benefit of taking children to school” (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 October 2018).

After FoA made clean water more easily accessible through the digging of boreholes, the Asilong community reciprocated by giving the missionaries some land. As told by Jacob, FoA responded, “‘What do you want us to do?’ And we told them we need a high school... Then we all came to agreement, and we became very grateful and very happy, and we agreed. That is why we gave out this piece of land where we are. And Andy and the team said, ‘We shall do what we can manage here’” (community meeting, 5 Oct. 2018). Prior to the building and opening of ACHS in 2017, secondary students had to travel far to go to high school. Rebecca explained,

They used to go to Kitale, Makutano, Eldoret or some other place, far for us. Sometimes it was difficult for parents to visit their children in school. But now we have our own secondary school within our area. When they call parents from the school, they just walk in. That is a huge change to have a secondary school in our area. You just walk in, no transport that you need. That is what I see that God did. (Rebecca, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018)

Jacob, Rebecca’s husband, concurred, speaking approvingly of the missionaries’ work: “What you people have done here, there is nothing that your children will benefit from this institution. It’s our children. Our children will benefit from this institution. Forever” (community meeting, 5 Oct. 2018). Gladys concurred, thanking the members of FoA “that we have a secondary school. People love that school so much” (quoted in DuPont, 2017).

Chief Nicholas and Rebecca agreed: women empowerment and improved conditions for women came hand-in-hand with mission education. Nicholas declared, “The church is coming to make more changes for children to go to school through women, women empowerment to be in church services. They learned a lot to change their lives. This has made Asilong a great change that children have gone to school” (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 October 2018).

Likewise, he believed that child marriage will only stop with improved literacy. Rebecca also surmised that educating girls helped put an end to polygamy and the marriage of young girls to old men, and this was due to the women's initiative to approve of Western education and negotiate with their husbands to send their children, especially their girls, to school. Naomi explained that she is "praying to God" that her daughters will go to school "and that they will move on with their lives." Harvesting and juicing aloe vera is one of the few economic opportunities for uneducated women in Asilong. "It can take the whole day. You work a lot in the sun, cut the aloe vera, and put it upside down. It's hard work for women. I don't want my children to do that" (Naomi, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018).

Gladys explained the ambivalence of the Pokot response to education, especially for a girl:

When I was young in Sakat [a village in the Asilong area], there was a lot of difficulty in life. A lot of people did not go to school. I wanted my dad to let me go to school so I could afford what other people buy. I told him I would go to school, and he accepted. Life is changing from that time up until now. Many parents like school and are eager for their kids to go to school. It was not common to go to school. People would think if a girl goes to school, they are losing. They could earn their dowry early if the girl does not go to school. These people need an example. (Gladys quoted in DuPont, 2017)

Gladys hoped to be that example as she plans to open a clinic in Asilong after attaining a nursing degree. However, "not all families have accepted or have received that information and acquired, they have not acquired," in the words of Chief Nicholas, meaning many community members are still resisting education for their children and have not acquiesced to sending them to school (personal communication, 8 October 2018). Like Helen and Gladys mentioned above, some residents find more value in the dowry<sup>137</sup> that their girls can bring in than the costly

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<sup>137</sup> Interestingly, the relationship between education and the dowry system in Pokot runs counter to many places in Africa. In many places, a girl's education is reflected in a higher dowry (see Ashraf, Bau, Nunn, & Voena's 2020 article, *Bride Price and Female Education*, in *Journal of Political Economy*, 128(2), 591–641).



education that lowers their girls' "value" in the form of bride price. Pastor Julius concurred. He explained that even though the

Government of Kenya requires that all children be given an education, [in] areas like Asilong, there are many, many children who don't go to school... The men and the culture here are really after dowry. You can only take one or two boys to school. They don't have money to pay school fees. [However,] school fees are not the main problem, they don't see the purpose. About 30% are appreciating primary schooling. (Julius Sawe, quoted in DuPont, 2017)

In keeping with a common perspective in rural African communities, Naomi explained that some who accepted education and sent their children to school did so with economic prosperity in mind: "They used to say children who went to school could provide iron sheets for roofs. If my child could come build me a house with an iron sheet roof, that is good. If my child could build me a house with an iron sheet roof, I won't have to go look for grass." Pastor Julius explained Naomi's meaning, "Iron sheets were something they had never seen. If you build a house with iron sheets, it means you have achieved a lot." Naomi continued her description of the hopes of economic prosperity that accompanied acceptance of education, "If your child goes to school, he or she could buy you a car and give you money. Others say what is this money? [However] people began to put their children to school. Those things are coming slowly, slowly and reaching here" (Naomi and Julius, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018). Naomi's explanation not only illustrated the changing Pokot response to education but also the community's perspective of the place of Asilong as lacking (poverty-stricken) and remote. Education and mission involvement have resulted in connecting Asilong to the larger world. Gladys explained how technology through the provision of laptops in the schools has had an effect on students: "Even the laptops have really contributed a lot to us. [FoA missionary] Andy has motivated us to use the laptops. They can just google things in English or Swahili. They're really learning new things" (Gladys quoted in DuPont, 2017). Jacob's goals for education

concurred with Naomi's perception of the communities' goals but were even loftier: "We have now children in the secondary school. They are in school. We are waiting for our children. When they pass well, we say, 'Okay these our children, take them. Take them to America. Let them go and study there.' When they come back home, they come and build big houses in the area" (Jacob, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018).

Education has shifted as a place of conflicting strategies at the contact zone to one of ambivalence and hybridized acceptance. While some still hold onto their traditional ways, stressing the importance of continuing educational rites of passage, prioritizing pastoralism, and eschewing religious change, others see education, as provided by missions and encouraged by the church, as progress toward a better future. For those who have embraced education, they look forward to more gender equality, better economic opportunities, more amenities in the community (like roofs of iron sheeting, a clinic, or a market). In Asilong, these amenities are seen as products and byproducts of Western Christian missions and also providential provision by God. Accepting education, even with a view to Pokot initiative and negotiation of the provision of education, means leaving distinctly Pokot elements of culture, like a cattle-focused society and isolation from the world economic system, behind and negotiating place in new ways.

### ***Medical Development***

Like education, missionary endeavors into health care were initially resisted by the Pokot. BCMS missionary and nurse at Amudat Hospital Ruth Stranex Deeth explained, "While the hospital was being built, Peter [Dr. Cox] travelled around talking to Pokot elders under thorn trees – and they began calling him 'Coggis' because they couldn't pronounce an 'x'. They weren't impressed with the government plan to build them a hospital. With a shrug of the

shoulders they told ‘Coggis’, ‘Bring your medicine if you want!’” (Deeth, 2017, p. 23).

However, Pokot acceptance of mission-provided medical assistance came relatively quickly.

Catholic missionary Leo Staples discussed how trust had to build with the Pokot in order for them accept modern medical treatments and subsequently be open to an evangelistic message. Fr. Michael Dillon explained that at the beginning no one wanted to go to the hospital, that it was two or three months before anyone even ventured near the hospital. However, he explained, some people came to the hospital who were dying. People left their sick at the hospital figuring they would die within days. The doctors treated them, and some got well. “Something marvelous happened” (Dillon, personal communication, 5 April 2019). Trust began to build. After the hospital began to see some success, expansion of the mission to outstations “mostly came through the medical medium,” explained Leo Staples (personal communication, 23 June 2019). By the 1960s and 1970s, mission-provision of medical services began to be more trusted and missionaries perceived a growing demand. Holy Rosary Sister Dr. Marita Malone explained that Pokot elders around Ortum approached mission presence and education with ambivalence at best but more quickly approved of and appealed for medical services. “They would only tolerate a missionary organization coming into their territory if the group was willing and able to open a hospital” (Malone, 2018, p. 158). The AIM Radio program announced in the 1960s, “The people are always eager for medical help. There is a government dispensary in one area but the other would like a dispensary” (AIMb, n.d.).

The *Kablelach* youth movement embraced the message of health from the mission perspective. The youth developed into leaders, Leo explained, who promoted medicine and monitored the health in the community by, “Telling them what to do to stay healthy and bringing

medicine to them. They influenced the growth of ‘healthy living’ among the people. They were a wonderful group. They were inspirational” (personal communication, 23 June 2019).

Similar to the Catholic missionaries, BCMS missionary Dr. David Webster remembered that the Pokot response toward mission-led medical services was largely positive: “The hospital was always popular, and served a very wide area... Our medical work was very much welcomed by the people. Although they often carried out their sacrifices and traditional treatments in parallel with our medicine we never experienced hostility” (Webster, personal communication, March 2019). Interestingly, David noted, “The more painful and unpleasant a treatment the greater their trust in it” (Webster, 2007, p. 56). Unaffiliated missionary Jane Hamilton commented on the same phenomenon.

As medical services expanded from Amudat Hospital, community ambivalence and political positioning was reflected in at least one community’s response. David Webster described, “On our previous medical safari to Katabok, at the eastern foot of Kadam, we had promised the people we would build a dispensary there” due to the presence of a borehole and a sizeable population. David, with visiting family members and colleagues, set to work at constructing the new dispensary in the outstation area of Katabok in 1972.

The only people who refused to make themselves useful were the local Pokot for whom we were building the dispensary. They were quite content to watch. On the next building trip, a month later, when we had to pump water and mix mud for the walls, we insisted on some help from the Pokot men, and they condescended. They considered what we were doing to be women’s work, and beneath their dignity. (Webster, 2013, p. 196)

The dispensary finally opened to much fanfare. “What a sight awaited us at Katabok! Over 500 people had gathered, in all their best tribal finery. As we arrived the men began to dance, rhythmically jumping into the air to the clapping and high-pitched singing of the women... Their song was telling the story of the day... It went on without a break for over two hours.” Many

spoke, including David who used the opportunity to share the gospel. “Then came the Akapolon, the Government appointed Head Chief. As I rather feared, he used the occasion for a harangue about paying poll tax and wearing clothes. The crowd got angrier and angrier, and began to shout him down” (Webster, 2013, p. 196-7). In the end, a Pokot elder prayed repeatedly for David and “for the effectiveness of our medicine, for good supplies, for safe travelling. He and the other elders chased away diarrhea and other illnesses with a waving of their arms” (Webster, 2013, p. 198). Despite the community’s ambiguous feelings toward the construction, the final development of the dispensary was viewed enthusiastically by the Pokot as a mission endeavor (not a government one).

By the 1970s, Pokot acceptance of informal Western medical care reflected the acceptance of formal medical services. Unaffiliated missionary Jane Hamilton described the crowds that gathered after she treated a baby with a sore in the late 1970s: “Immediately a line formed of mamas and babies with skin sores. The line quickly turned into a crowd pressing me against the mud wall of a hut and I was trapped there treating skin problems until my ointment and my endurance were gone. I fled back to the car surrounded by mothers begging for help for their babies” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 27-8). Until they could build a formal dispensary, Jane’s training and resources were in high demand. Likewise, Kathy Tierney called herself “a glorified medicine cabinet,” as she is freely and frequently sought out for medical advice, services, and supplies (Kathy Tierney, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2019).

By the time Western missions reached Asilong, the benefit of Western medicine was largely accepted by the community. Asilong resident Esther explained that she perceived a positive shift in Pokot perspective around health and death, “There has been a drop off of child and mother mortality rate because of the closeness of hospitals. They used to kill their goats and

do their rituals in the hospital. If someone dies, you pull the person and throw them in the bush. Now you lay the person in a decent way” (Esther quoted in DuPont, 2017). Promise of a clinic, previously from Julius Murgor’s nonprofit and currently from the Catholic Church or FoA working with the AIC has been welcomed by the community. In fact, tension between some groups has occurred over who will first bring a clinic to the community. The self-appointed “ancestral land” elders sold land to a local Catholic sister for the purpose of building a clinic; however, the deal was quashed by FoA missionary Andy DuPont acting on behalf of Julius and other church and community leaders. Andy contacted Catholic Kiltegan missionary Bishop Crowley and discussed the community conflict around and questionable legality of the deal. In 2020, the clinic has yet to be built, but FoA is still planning to work with the AIC to rehab the building built by Julius Murgor into a clinic staffed by Asilong resident and member of the first class at Asilong primary school, Gladys.

The resistance to mission-led medical services was quickly replaced by nearly wholesale acceptance by the Pokot community. While the prevalence of hospitals is still sparse on the landscape, most Pokot welcome the expansion of medical services, mission-led or otherwise. Future study into the traditional medical treatments that still persist (and are successful) and the extent to which these relate to traditional religious beliefs would help augment this study and help preserve local knowledge toward a hybrid and Pokot-centric understanding of health and medicine in the place of Pokot.

### *Agriculture*

The Pokot have been (mostly) pastoralists for over a century for a variety of reasons including climate and competition for scarce well-watered areas. Colonial, and to a much lesser

extent, missionary influence attempted to push the Pokot into cultivation, resulting in significant resistance. Asilong pastor and local missionary Julius Sawe explained that this pattern existed as recently as a decade ago: “When I came in 2009 it was there. They were being given maize [seeds] by the government. But they weren’t planting. Wheat, millet and sorghum was being planted in 2009, no maize. They fear that if they plant, they will leave it for the Karamoja or animals to eat it. Now they can plant more” (Julius Sawe, quoted in DuPont, 2017). Availability of water (discussed below) made the difference and allowed for a more sedentary population, resulting in new Pokot negotiations of culture, land, and livelihood.

Control of the land for pastoralist people in Africa, including the Pokot, is increasingly contentious (and largely outside the scope of this dissertation), with Western ideals of land partitioning and ownership as well as farming becoming more ubiquitous. Pokot pastor and scholar John Mondi described, “Land is being annexed, not formally but speculatively, by the elites. There is fighting, conflict, and tension between those who still embrace the old ways of a nomadic lifestyle and those who see that mixed farming and more sedentary lifestyle. People are not ready to tie their cows” (John Mondi, personal communication, 8 May 2019). The Asilong “ancestral land” elders, mentioned above, are a prime example.

RCA missionaries Larry and Linda McAuley commented on the “cross-roads” of Pokot culture and livelihood, focusing on the church’s place at these cross-roads. During a community development or CCMP meeting, Pokot ambivalence surrounding agriculture and land use was revealed:

One thing the group discovered during our discussions is that the Pokot community is at a sort of cross-roads right now. These traditional herders are gradually changing and broadening their economic activities with more farming. As they become more settled and less nomadic they are more interested in developing their homes, planting fruit trees, and making kitchen vegetable gardens. BUT – they still like to have lots of goats and cows for milk, meat and blood. Young boys used to be with the herds all day but now

most of the youngsters are in schools (a good thing). So the animals are left to fend for themselves – and they eat any and everything in sight – including fruit trees and vegetable gardens. The shift from herding to farming has many cultural implications. Their animals have defined them as a people for many generations. Pray that the Christians will be a creative and helpful influence as they work out how to live in this emerging new reality. (McAuley, March 2015)

The same tension, explained by the McAuleys in Alale, was also experienced in Asilong. Farming (as well as other mission-led development initiatives) thrive best in a sedentary culture. However, Asilong pastor and local missionary Julius Sawe explained, “Settling also provokes challenges and misunderstanding. They began to do farming in their areas. Animals get into people’s farms and it causes conflicts. Small conflicts of settlement” (quoted in DuPont, 2017).

The Pokot response to farming initiatives, whether government- or mission-led, still reveals significant ambivalence. This response, unlike in other areas of development, is not based on religion or morality but on a changing landscape. A Western preference for farming<sup>138</sup>, which enables further Western development in more sedentary population with a more diverse economic foundation, collides with the so-called “cattle complex” (Herskovits, 1926), which provides the basis of the cultural landscape in Pokot. The contact zone of Western agricultural initiatives and Pokot pastoralism introduces a place of continuing Pokot negotiation of development, culture, and sense of place.

## *Water*

The importance of water in Pokot is hard to overstate. The arid and semi-arid environment makes water a precious commodity. For water-related development projects initiated by missionaries, the Pokot response was almost unanimously one of approval. One

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<sup>138</sup> While pastoralism has been prioritized largely due to the climate of Pokot, increased access to water sources through borehole drilling and a general trend of increased yearly rainfall (Arukulem, 2015) has made cultivation an increasingly more suitable agricultural option.



exception was the water provision scheme of the RCA missionaries in Alale to cap a mountain spring and pipe the water to the lowland people, described above. While the lowland Pokot recipients of the clean water much approved of the scheme, the highland Pokot, described by Morrell Swart as a criminal element, due to their practice of illegal farming, strongly resisted the scheme. Morell explained, “We learned shortly after it was completed that the mountain-dwelling Pokot had offered sacrifices to ensure that the project would fail and we’d all leave” (Swart, 1998, p. 309).

The RCA project in Alale notwithstanding, each story of mission provision of water was accompanied by a grateful and accepting Pokot community; however, the interaction at the contact zone was not without its challenges. Sometimes water was all the Pokot desired from the missionaries. Asilong Chief Nicholas described a group of “well-wishers” who wanted to do further development in a village near Asilong after promising a borehole. The community resisted, fearful of “land-grabbing” foreigners. In Nicholas’ retelling, “They say ‘Eh? We only needed water! We don’t need anything to be constructed. We only need water! You just drill for us water!’” (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018). Likewise, the existence of the boreholes in Asilong began to build a sense of dependency on those who dug them. When the boreholes broke down, the people were dependent on outside help. The problem was addressed by FoA. Missionary and retired engineer Andy DuPont created a well repair team who he trained over the course of three years to repair community boreholes, with the added benefit of providing the team a profitable skill to market to nearby communities.

In Kiwawa and Asilong alike, the provision of water was the basis for the relationships that would grow between the missionaries the Pokot community. Water, as a mission strategy, was overwhelmingly accepted by the Pokot and led into further missionary work in sharing their

message and providing other development. Unaffiliated missionary Jane Hamilton described how the Pokot in Kiwawa responded to the missionaries as a direct result of their water projects: “The British had drilled wells during colonial times but almost all were broken... As Dick began to fix the wells, the men who had been aloof to the white strangers began to come and interact with us. They told Dick: ‘We see you love us because you love our cows’” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 44). Water, even more than the emergency aid they provided, would help the Hamiltons build trust at the contact zone: “As we began to provide water wells and medical help, we were welcomed in the villages and sometimes invited to traditional ceremonies and celebrations” (Hamilton, 2019, p. 39).

For the members of FoA, the digging of ten boreholes was originally meant to be the only engagement with Pokot. However, water led to a growing church which led to increased education, with FoA’s continued involvement. Pastor Julius Sawe, who joined the community in concert with the boreholes, explained the impact of water on the place of Asilong.

The boreholes had a huge impact on the life in Asilong. There was no way the school could survive without water. In 2009, people were still moving from place to the other. Women used to carry water from very far distances. 2008, 2009, people began to settle. A settled life in this community began. People started building their homes for a long time. Now there are people who have lived in the same spot for more than 5 years which was quite unusual. And the main reason is there are boreholes. They have access to water. So now I can say they now began to have an organized life. Their children can go to school nearby. They go back home. The animals can drink water close by. So their life is organized, and they can say the boreholes had a huge impact on their life and economy of Asilong up to this day. (Julius Sawe, quoted in Dupont, 2017)

Each interview of Asilong residents revealed an element of culture change instigated by the provision of water at the contact zone. Several residents underscored the peace that came with the water. William explained, “This was our land initially. This was our land. When we were in these lands before, there was no water. There was only one borehole, the colonial borehole. During those days with only one borehole, the bees would really sting people. And the

water was not enough because there were many people and people were many” (William, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018). William reiterated the community’s possession and connection to the land as he recollected the conflict that the lack of water incited in the region, too many people in this sparsely populated landscape for the water resources available. On top of the human violence that arose out of the lack of water, bees would swarm around the one existing borehole, becoming aggressive due to its scarcity. Naomi described what life was like with just one borehole, “It was very dry. We used to fight each other. There was one borehole. Jerry cans for carrying water were destroyed because we were pushing and pulling to get water. A time like this, you’d come and make a line, one borehole for the whole village. So around 7 at dark we lit some fires around the boreholes. And bees were coming looking for water. Bees were chasing us. When the sun came up just like that, we would send all of our children to come and stay close to the boreholes just to avoid the bees” (Naomi, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018). The group of Asilong men who I interviewed agreed, “We truly believe that this area has changed. When there was only one borehole there were many things they would see. With one borehole there was fighting. The bees used to sting people” (Asilong men, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018). An Asilong woman spoke at the community meeting to share her gratitude for the missionaries’ work, especially noting how Pastor Edward Simiyu “was called by the spirits of God” to the area, “And I am very pleased that God targeted Simiyu with concern and Jacob’s Well and the team that assisted us. I am very grateful. We were not in peace here before because we were being disturbed by water, insecurity, and we could not even take our children to school. May God bless you people, Jacob’s Well team and the entire group of friends” (community meeting, 8 Oct. 2018). Water has changed the culture in that “Now we had the energy to live in this area in peace” (William, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018).

Just as the new boreholes meant water, the prevalence of water meant more time.

Rebecca described how much time gathering water took, mostly for the women and children. For

Rebecca, the ease of water gathering meant more time for church and church activities.

With only one borehole,

If you go to search water at 7pm, you'd stay there up until 7 in the morning. Cows, men were coming to fetch water for the animals all the night because I think there were many animals. People would light fires around the borehole taking care of the animals from hyenas and giving them water. It was difficult for them to go to a church on Sunday because there was no water. They had to go and stay there the whole day. So it was difficult for them. They could just hold each other's hands and kept on praying. And were telling God, 'God open for us doors that we may have water.' And God heard our prayers and boreholes started coming to our area. And when the boreholes came in, like Jacob was talking, peace started coming. People have time to fellowship in the church we are in now. (Rebecca, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018)

Naomi concurred that the water was a result of answered prayer, which led to an increase in church attendance: "Now it was joy, and many, many people start to come to church. People said that people prayed, and we now have water; let's go to church" (Naomi, personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018). Rebecca and Naomi's words reveal a perspective that water was not a missionary development strategy but a gift of God.

In addition to peace and more time, water enabled the development of the Asilong area, specifically in the area of cleanliness and health. Gladys, as a nurse-hopeful, focused her comments on medical improvements,

And I want to thank you for the boreholes. Now we have enough water. We only had one borehole. All night people were busy. We had to go to Suam with cattle and bottle. It was so hard. We had no water to wash clothes or to bathe. We'd only bathe once a week. People are very happy. Cholera is no longer there because of hygiene. We used to have to use animal urine to wash plates. (Gladys quoted in DuPont, 2017)

The focus group with the Asilong men under the tree revealed another change that has affected health: "We have separate water for people and for animals" (Asilong men, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018). Esther, too, commented on cleanliness and implied health,

“Water! We are now drinking very clean water. People are living close to the boreholes. They had only one borehole and you could stay there for two days. Now we have a lot of water. We don’t drink surface water anymore” (Esther quoted in DuPont, 2017). Chief Nicholas concurred, “And after having these boreholes we have really appreciated that each and every family is now clean. At least they know how to bathe, at least they have the bathrooms that are being used;” however, he and the public health office were still working toward better latrines to “reduce the water born illnesses in the community” (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 October 2018). Another aspect of the health promoted by a convenient water supply related to the strain of carrying water long distances. However, the Asilong men under the tree insisted that more wells were still needed for the health of the women in the area, “They fetch water near the school. Women carry water on their heads which is a challenge to them. Women are having problems with their backaches because of carrying water. That’s the challenge. When you go to your land, you can share that we still have three areas that need water. Solar, we want the wells to be solar” (Asilong men, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018). In addition to reiterating their acceptance and appreciation of the mission-funded boreholes, the men communicated their reliance on the mission to provide them.

Water enabled the population of Asilong to settle, altering their semi-nomadic lifestyle. In Jacob’s words, the change has been wholly positive, “This area wasn’t a nice area in years past, under the sun. There was no water. There wasn’t a place that somebody could build a house like this [indicating his permanent, concrete house with iron sheeting roofing] and stay there for many years before moving from one place to another, migrating, moving from one place to another... When there was no water, we moved to a different place” (Figure 5.1) (Jacob, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018). Water affected the built environment. As the population

became more sedentary, houses could and should be built with more care as they needed to last longer. Likewise, because of the number of boreholes, the group of Asilong men noted that they could have their homes nearby. Because they did not need to travel as far away as Kacheliba to fetch water, “now we have seen a lot of changes” (Asilong men, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018).



*Figure 5.1: Asilong elder Jacob, a friend, and wife Rebecca sit in front of their modern house. Asilong, West Pokot (Photo credit: author, 2018)*

Staying put also allowed for education to increase. Children did not have to travel to gather water, and schools had the water they needed to function. Jacob explained, “Even our taking children to school is because of the water that came here. Even the teachers coming from far would never come here if there wasn’t water. We are so grateful” (Jacob, personal communication, 5 Oct. 2018).

Chief Nicholas connected the prevalence of water to the material culture of attire: “Water has made Asilong more clean in such a way that the mode of dressing has changed. And out of the mode of dressing, they used to put on one set of clothes for more than ten days and see if they could wash them. Now they can wear clothes for probably two days and then they wash. So the hygiene has improved” (Chief Nicholas, personal communication, 8 October 2018). For the Asilong men under the tree (Figure 5.2), the change of clothing was symbolic of both internal changes in the people and external changes in the place of Asilong, “We used to just wear *shukas*, but now we wear clothes. We have changed. We look at ourselves, and we have changed... When we were young, it was different. Now, we are growing and seeing changes.” For instance, they said drawing from a Western Christian binary, “We’ve seen a lot of light where darkness used to be” (Asilong men, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018).



*Figure 5.2: Asilong men under a tree; Pastor Julius Sawe standing in white shirt to the right. Asilong, West Pokot (Photo Credit: author, 2018)*

## **Place**

The place of Pokot is dependent on the fluid nature of culture. The place holds the layers of history even as one story overlaps another or somewhat obscures it (Ashcroft, 2001). The response of the Pokot to the Western Christian missionaries at the contact zone introduced another layer (Cresswell, 2004). As missionaries worked out and through their perceptions and devised and implemented strategies, the Pokot were constantly and actively negotiating the mission messages. The religious and developmental changes that the missionaries introduced shaped the landscape and place of Pokot; however, the previous layers of meaning and history



are not erased from place. When I asked my interviewees what were the significant places in or around Asilong, I got immediate consensus. “Kokibwe, the mountain. We have the border at Kokibwe. The border,” said the Asilong men under the tree (personal communication, 8 Oct. 2018). Naomi and Helen concurred, “Chercherkot, the border, Kokibwe. We take our goats there” (Figure 5.3) (personal communication, 7 Oct. 2018).



*Figure 5.3: A view of Kokibwe mountain from Asilong Church AIC; primary teaching housing in the foreground. Asilong, West Pokot.*

*(Photo Credit: author, 2018)*

While shifting, the identity of the place of Pokot is still one of centrality although on the literal periphery of Kenya. The national border, imposed upon Pokot, has no meaning other than

the place the Pokot take their goats, the grazing grounds of their herds. The church, the school, the wells, brought by the *wazungu* missionaries, are perceived as good and helpful by most Asilong residents, but the greatest value of this place is its proximity to the better watered uplands of Kokibwe and Chercherkot. The shift in culture, however, can be heard in Jacob's description of Pokot, a place that moved under the pastoralist's feet: "People have always moved from place to place. There has not been a specific place that is your home. You move from place to place. And there was not water. Very hot sun. There's a river called Suam. It's the only river that would flow. If you cross into Uganda, there's another river. Those were the only two rivers" (Jacob, quoted in DuPont, 2017). The geography is the same, but the place, the home of the Pokot, has changed.

## **Conclusion**

The conservative worldview of the Pokot, as described above by anthropologist Barbara Bianco (1992), persists, and change comes slowly, illustrating Pokot "thoughtfulness and wisdom" (p. 178). The message and the mission brought by decades of missionaries have been negotiated by the people of Pokot through the lens of their culture and the general fears of land and culture loss. Each negotiation, from resistance to ambivalence to hybridized acceptance, has left its mark on the place of the Pokot.

The message and the development brought by missionaries were unevenly accepted. The Pokot, typically hospitable to the Western Christian missionaries who moved into their communities, took their time responding to the visitors' mission. At first, the pride the Pokot felt for their worldview and culture, as described by anthropologist Harold Schneider (1959), kept the missionaries at an arm's length. However, the perceptions of the missionaries (see chapter 3),

the increase of globalization, and the opening up of the closed district reiterated and emphasized the areas of perceived lack—spiritual, cultural, and developmental—in the place. The messages received from outsiders began to influence the Pokot view of Pokot. Christianity promised not only access to a new economic system and worldview, personified by the missionary wazungu, but it also legitimized the value of the Pokot language and a more equitable view of the sexes, which was particularly appealing to Pokot women. Development provided, among other things, medicine for health and longer life (again disproportionately beneficial for women), education for economic prosperity in the ever-advancing global system, and water for the livestock. Each element brought by the missionaries in each contact zone provided a place of nuanced negotiation, of ambivalence and hybridity, reflected in the shifting sense of place of Pokot.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

As I left the village of Asilong at the end of my last visit in 2018, our adept driver, Boniface, took us south through Kacheliba, on the winding and treacherous road up the escarpment, through Makutano and out of West Pokot. This time, though, as we entered Kacheliba—right about where the police outpost is and infrastructure for a check point and road barrier exist—I was struck by the significant road work being done. Chinese companies lined the main road, and by now in 2020, nearly the entire road from Asilong to the bottom of the escarpment is paved. The road up the escarpment will be completed later. Filippello (2017) related that he rarely travels to Africa without a friend or colleague asking about the roads. “Whether busy or not, roads also have played unique roles in the making of world history. As instruments of mobility, they have enabled humans to connect with one another and engage in cross-cultural exchange” (Filippello, 2017, p. 11). Roads represent the visible and invisible network that connects and changes places. First rail and then roads were built by the British to bring the British from the coast to the inland of Kenya. A push of colonial development through Pokot was the building and maintaining of roads. Missionaries prized their Land Rovers for their ability to traverse the West Pokot landscape, navigating both on and off roads. While missionaries used the ambiguous network of roads and paths around Pokot largely to evangelize, colonial officials used them to visit locals, tax residents, and manage new development schemes within the constraints of Pokot’s identity as a closed district. This colonially imposed identity delayed Pokot’s integration into a larger network and slowed development by prohibiting almost all interaction with nearby ethnic groups and only allowing a few permitted missionary or

government workers to enter. Even after independence, visitors were limited to those who felt they had something to offer to this perceived remote area of lack.

Pokot continues to function on the margins of Kenya (and Uganda) as a peripheral place to outsiders, while remaining a central place to residents. For many years, the Pokot have seen themselves as outside of the larger national system, speaking of “going to Kenya” when they leave their homeland. Those with dual citizenship with Kenya and Uganda could just as easily be viewed as citizens of neither country. Those outside of Pokot likewise viewed Pokot as separate from the rest of the country that officially contained it. Now Chinese involvement in Africa’s economy has made inroads (pun intended) into Pokot, that “remote” and “backward” outpost. Interestingly, roads in Pokot become more traveled and travelable as the culture of the Pokot becomes more sedentary and less nomadic. As Western development enters Pokot by the literal roads and proverbial networks of globalization, reflected in an increase of schools, hospitals, markets, churches, and even iron sheet roofing, the place of the Pokot will increasingly feel the influence of outsiders. However, belied by my continual use of the passive tense, these changes are not just happening to Pokot. Pokot as a people and a place has agency, an agency performed again and again at the contact zone. Likewise, as outsiders looking in, we must resist the binaries between the nostalgia of a bygone culture and a myopic push toward progress. As evident by this story of mission-Pokot interaction, place is an ongoing event, a locus of struggle and negotiation intersected by the passage of time.

### **Scholarly Themes of the Study**

This study has sought to explore both the historical and human geography of the contact zone of Western Christian missions and Pokot. The study is a story of people, place, and

perception beginning with the British-centric cultural climate—political and religious—as it set the stage for missions in Pokot. From there, the story opens with an introduction to mission organizations and missionaries who, alongside Pokot, are the main characters of this story. Their perceptions of Pokot, built upon their own cultural background, would build a sense of place of the contact zone, or the mission field to which they felt called, for their readers and themselves. This perception of place informed their strategies of evangelism and development, altering the landscape and place of Pokot. In return, in their place, the Pokot people responded with resistance to, ambivalence of, and hybridized acceptance of the place the missionaries perceived and the one they enacted upon. Through the story of the contact zone emerges themes of place. While place studies could and can examine any number of relevant aspects of a region or locale, this study underscores the vital importance of not overlooking the strands of history and religiosity that help characterize a place.

### ***Geography***

This study builds on and illustrates the work of numerous geographers. The theme of place, as described by geographers Tim Cresswell (2004) and Doreen Massey (1994) as well as scholars from various related fields, including Ashcroft (2001), Gupta & Ferguson (1997), and Casey (1996), grounded this study as uniquely geographic. The place of the contact zone as described by Pratt (1992) gave a specific focus for this place study. The story of the contact zone between Western Christian missions and Pokot builds a clear illustration of place theory in practice, adding to the discourse with a focus on history and religion in a way lacking in geography's scholarly discourse. As a region, Pokot has been largely neglected by geographers. My study adds a qualitative and descriptive human analysis to Ton Dietz's (1987, 1991, 1993;

Dietz & van Haastrecht, 1983; Andiema et al., 2008) extensive descriptive geographical analysis of Pokot's development and economy. My methods of drawing from the missionary discourse and augmenting with interviews of missionaries and Pokot individuals elevates this study to a geographical history/story, replete not just with trends and themes of geography—well described by Dietz—but living and particular examples of those themes.

Geographical scholarship in postcolonialism and development through Cheryl McEwan's 2008 book by the same name described another key theoretical foundation for my study. McEwan (2008) expertly described a postcolonial approach to development projects that informed my discussion of mission development initiatives, particularly in chapter 4. As Sidaway (2002) notes, "This combined frame: 'post-colonial' and in pursuit of 'development' forms a very powerful discursive grid" (p. 17). McEwan points out, "The notion of 'development' was used to justify the imposition of forms of social control because native peoples were cast as backward in comparison to Europeans. They thus needed to be developed and modernized through education and labour" (McEwan, 2008, p. 84). While this postcolonial perception of development is certainly illustrated through the mission story in Pokot, the nuances described through the unique responses of missionaries (for example, Father Tom McDonnell's community development initiative, *Kablelach*) and Pokot individuals (such as the Asilong community requesting a secondary school from FoA) speaks to that "very powerful discursive grid" in a new way, a way that combats essentialism not just in the portrayal of the subaltern (the Pokot) but also in the description of the missions and missionaries.

While geographical scholarship certainly framed and directed this study, voids in geographic literature in the areas of history and religion were addressed by historical scholarship.

Likewise, my study draws on, illustrates, and adds to the historical discourse by telling the ninety-year story of the contact zone in Pokot.

### *History*

The historical lens gives postcolonial theory a place to be employed usefully. The purpose of postcolonialism is to reclaim history from a myopic perspective (western, white, colonial, etc.) for all people. From the words of Derek Gregory (2004), postcolonialism “is in part an act of remembrance. Postcolonialism revisits the colonial past in order to recover the dead weight of colonialism: to retrieve its shapes, like the chalk outlines at a crime scene, and to recall the living bodies they so imperfectly summon to presence” (p. 9).

Place is an event where time intersects with space, building layers of history on a foundation of geography. The story of missions, a snapshot of the past 90 years, is only one strand in a complex and multidimensional placemaking story; however, understanding a historical context allows us to not just understand a place but to contextualize current events, cultural practices, and myriad interactions at contact zones of every kind. Likewise, an examination with a postcolonial lens of the historical layers of place in Pokot illuminates a foundation of belief systems and development and traces how and why these may have shifted or changed. Understanding the history of missions at the contact zone with Pokot allows for not just a discrete ethnography but a wider view of the place of Pokot in a globalized, connected world.

Missionaries, drawn to the “remote” or to the “uncivilized” or simply to “those who have not heard” the message of Christianity, trickled into Pokot beginning in 1931. The history that they were a part of has changed like the place but there is value in viewing history from as many perspectives as possible. Following the lead of historians like Strayer (1978), Spear (1999),



Maddox (1999), and Harries (2007), this study adds to the academic discourse that considers the missionary movement as a significant and unique part of history. My goal in the telling of this history was to make room for the perspectives of the people in the places they inhabited using Spear's (1999b) model. He suggested that a "broad" understanding of the "process of mission in Africa" is only possible through a narrow examination of "historical context" and relationships at the contact zone (Spear, 1999b, p. 38). Like the Pokot individuals the missionaries met at the contact zone, each missionary should not be essentialized into a stereotype. History, with a postcolonial approach, can give each character in the story a voice, missionary and Pochon. This study introduces the reader to the likes of Lawrence Totty, Jane Hamilton, Leo Staples, John Mond, and Asilong elder Jacob and his wife Rebecca to see that they are humans, products of and agents in their environments and cultures, examples of and against cultural and historical generalities. Each character is a thread in the greater story, illustrating the dynamism of perspective, interaction, and place.

In terms of place and landscape change, historians, like Strayer (1978), recognized the unique role of missions and missionaries in the economic, political, and institutional development history of places like Pokot:

In terms of institutional development they [mission communities] gave rise to schools and churches of both an independent and an orthodox variety. They participated in most of the political crises of the colony and reflected within themselves many of the tensions and conflicts of a colonial society. They were in a position to channel and direct, if not control, those multiple processes of social and cultural transformation that everywhere accompanied a measure of economic change. And they served both to bind colonial society together and to erode its structures and values. (p. 2-3)

As we have seen in this study, the development of Pokot was initiated by missions with greater significance, scope, and local approval than government—colonial and independent—initiatives. Understanding the complex relationships between missionaries, political officials, and the Pokot

population at the individual level through time builds on the historian's premise that missions are worth studying. Employing both a postcolonial and a decolonial lens to the study of the contact zone means that in history, the subaltern answers back, negotiates with what might be viewed as the hegemonic powers, and responds with agency.

### ***Religion***

While academics are apt to look at traditional religions to somehow point to a cultural starting point and to quantify current religiosity through church attendance or adherence to certain rites and rituals, the fluid nature of culture and place require all of these religious elements to be respected, described, and explored. In that vein, the spread of Christianity has been largely overlooked in geography. Kalu et al. (2010), Spear (1999), Carey (2011)—all historians—and many others underscore the need in academia to allow for Christianity to be viewed apart from its colonial and even missionary source and as a possible anticolonial force. In a review of a colleague's book, Sanneh underscores the importance of Christianity in nonwestern places: "The worldwide resurgence of Christianity is a vigorous movement in our day, and it coincides with the waning of the religion in what is now a post-Christian West. The attention of writers representing a variety of approaches has been drawn to the subject as the pace of developments in post-colonial societies shows no sign of slackening" (quoted on back of Jenkins, 2002). By neglecting this area of study, geography fails to provide a geographical perspective of religiosity, supporting and empowering the voice and perspective of the subaltern, while developing a truly multidimensional approach to place studies.

While history is a noble and essential postcolonial pursuit, the analysis of current religious trends and religious studies fits well with decoloniality. Kalu (2010b) reveals a decolonial perspective of studying the spread of Christianity:

As the gospel (that is universal) travels as a pilgrim through many cultures, it is experienced and translated into many indigenous cultural symbols. The indigenous principle blooms as the inculturating pathway. This inculturating potential cautions us against homogeneity because hearers interpret with the lenses of their indigenous worldviews. This perspective privileges indigenous agency: the initiative and creative responses by local actors. (p. 31)

Chapter 5 employs Kalu's perspective to allow the Pokot's words to speak for themselves. For example, again and again, Asilong residents thank God, not the missionaries, for the spiritual, cultural, and developmental changes that are occurring in their community. The decolonial lens must let them, resisting a Western need to retell their stories in light of colonial or missional influence.

To essentialize Christianity as a Western opiate, a colonialism of the spirit, is to embrace the colonial device of the binary and to refute the possibility of subaltern agency. While Fanon claimed, "The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor" (quoted in Carey, 2011), Carey (2011) responds, "While most churches employed rhetoric that boosted Anglo-Saxon and British virtues at the expense of heathens and pagans, the argument that all colonial religions were therefore vehicles for British cultural hegemony is not sustainable" (p. 25-6). In support of Kalu and Carey, Spear (1999) points to the common mission strategies of translating the Bible into the local language and sending local converts out as indigenous missionaries: "In the course of this indigenous missionary movement, the Christian message shifted subtly from that of a profoundly nineteenth-century European Christianity to a twentieth-century African one, rooted in vernacular Bibles and the catechists' own cultural

interpretations, thus sowing the seeds for the development of African churches to come” (Spear, 1999a, p. 7).

This study is not meant to be either a defense or an indictment of missions in Pokot. Each missionary memoir and letter is enough of a defense, and the works of numerous scholars, including Mondri (2016), Sanneh (1989), and Ngeiywo (2018), present clear, articulated indictments of specific and general mission perspectives and strategies. What I hope is abundantly clear is the importance of understanding missions in relationship to but distinct from Christianity and colonialism, and in doing so, disentangling the unholy trinity of colonialism, missions, and Christianity. Each has its own story, its own role to play in the development of Pokot’s sense of place. The interchange of influence, ideas, and aspects of culture between Western Christian missions and Pokot has had and continues to have profound and lasting impacts on the place, religious and developmental, of Pokot. The field of geography needs to catch up in its approach to religiosity at the place of the cultural contact zone. My hope is that this study will help fill this void in geography, particularly within African geography where such studies are even more limited.

### **Practical Application**

In addition to the academic impact of this study, I have made a case that a practical application exists as well. Locations deemed as “remote” are the source of intrigue and curiosity from outsiders. For those who feel they have a role to play in these places (missionaries, government officials, NGOs, etc.), frustration at cultural differences and resistance from locals can impede successful exchanges. This study illustrates a new method for understanding a contact zone, a place where outsiders and insiders meet, and thus improving the ability to assess

the health and sustainability of a project or interaction. While my assumption is that the method is best used in contact zones where Westerners—missionaries, aid workers, military, development officials, etc.—are working in nonwestern places with nonwestern individuals, the method might have a wider scope. The essence of the method is to use a descriptive, seemingly scholarly analysis to inform practical decision making, similar to McEwan's (2008) connection between postcolonial theory and development.

The method follows the organization of this study. First, ascertain the outsider's culture and history. As chapter 2 describes, each person coming from the West to engage in a nonwestern place must understand what cultural, political, and organizational assumptions they are bringing. Likewise, look at how the outsider's home and institutional culture describes the contact zone, using words, pictures, tone, etc. What are the perceptions of the contact zone seen from the home location? Second, one must ascertain the perceptions of the people who have worked or are working in the contact zone. Like chapter 3, workers in a contact zone reveal their perceptions through their words, actions, and attitudes. How do the perceptions and cultures of the previous step inform and engage the people on the ground at the contact zone? Third, perceptions inform strategies as seen in chapter 4. An examination of the strategies being used or planned on being used reflect the perceptions, stated or unstated, of the workers at the contact zone. The strategies will involve the locals in either a top-down or grassroots way. What are the strategies of the organization? How do these strategies reflect perceptions in effective and ineffective ways? How are locals incorporated into the strategy phase? Fourth, the responses of the locals—resistance, ambivalence, or hybridized acceptance—convey their perceptions of the outsiders at the contact zone. As seen in chapter 5, these responses can be gathered through the perceptions of the outsiders, interviews with the locals, and participant observations at the

contact zone. The result is a report that shows the network of perceptions and connections (and disconnections) between the outside organization, the Western individuals working for the organization, the work itself, and the locals. The report would be an evaluation of the contact zone, which could be used for educational or training purposes as well as in assessments of the health and trajectory of the organization and its projects.

### **Future Research**

Like any place study (or, likely, any study at all), the offshoot potential is nearly infinite. A small (but lengthy) account of a small group of missionaries working with a small people group has ballooned into a significant story of history, legacy, place, and perception, but there are still more stories to tell to augment this one. The largest and most obvious, in my opinion, is the story of the indigenous missionaries and evangelists who were the backbone of the missionary movement in Africa and especially Pokot. Unfortunately, due to illiteracy, cultural customs or constraints, and the de-emphasizing of the nonwestern voice for decades if not centuries, many of these stories have been lost. However, oral traditions might still exist in churches and families of those touched by these individuals. The story of Western Christian missions in Pokot is not complete with the likes of Laban and Sarah who worked tirelessly with Tom Collins (and without Tom when he was required by the colonial government to leave his post), Daudi Kasiwatoi who worked alongside Philip Price, and Emmy Chepkemioi who preceded Friends of Asilong in the village of Asilong. These nonPokot, African missionaries deserve as much if not more attention than their Western colleagues. In addition, the Pokot evangelists equipped by the missionaries to spread the message throughout Pokot are fascinating characters in the greater story. Unlike the African missionaries, the names of the Pokot

evangelists are often obscured in the memoirs and historical record, but it is these individuals that deciphered the missionary message and disseminated it from and for a Pokot perspective.

Additionally, this study offers opportunities for replication and comparison in different communities throughout Kenya and Africa. Starting with the other centers of BCMS activity around Lake Turkana, as pioneered by A.B. Buxton, and continuing to other pastoralist regions and even other rural communities around Africa, the history of specific ethnic groups and missions could be explored and described. Understanding how different pioneering missions and missionaries set the stage for evangelism, church growth (or lack of growth), and development around Africa will help further fill the void in geographic scholarship and build a more complete picture of religious place.

### **Final Thoughts**

As the place of Pokot shows the impact of Western Christian missions, so do the missionaries show the impact of Pokot. John Benson, a student of geography and the son of Lutheran missionaries in Tanzania, explained,

We who have lived these lives of missionaries and MKs [missionary kids] now live where we live but live our lives influenced very much by where we have been. Casey sees the body as influencing us both in an Outgoing way in that our body ‘goes out to meet the place-world’ in which we now live, as well as in an Incoming way where our body ‘bears the traces of the places it has known. These traces are continually laid down in the body, being sedimented there (Casey, 2001, p. 414). (Benson, 2015, p. 7).

In the same vein, BCMS missionary David Webster concludes his memoir about his time in Pokot and Marakwet this way:

But in a small way, as we look back to our years in those beautiful countries, and among such lovely people, we feel deeply humbled and privileged to have had the opportunity to do what we did. We experienced a way of life that has all but gone. We lived and worked in situations where one could make a real difference – where one’s presence could mean the difference between life and death for many people. That is a huge privilege, and a

great responsibility. We lived among people for whom the gospel was truly liberating, and who were hungry to hear god's word. People whose lives were precarious, and who lived from day to day with the possibility of death... We received and learned so much from those we lived among – lessons in loyalty, responsibility, and courage... We experienced faith that is real and practical, not just cerebral. (Webster, 2013, p. 320).

The contact zone is more than a dialogue between missions and Pokot. It has personal and global reverberations. The missionaries outlined in this study were likewise affected on a personal and even bodily level, as Benson explained (2015). While place reflects the lengthy story of the contact zone and the perspectives and strategies of those who met there, no one walks away from the contact zone unchanged.

As missionaries have come and gone over the past ninety years, they have acted on their perspectives of the place and people of Pokot in evangelism and subsequent development initiatives. These perspectives have embedded Christianity into the place with a spectrum of caveats about culture and approach to God. As time has passed, Western Christian missionaries in Pokot have found themselves in increasingly Africanized environments. The message and strategies of the previous mission endeavors have been negotiated through an African if not Pokot lens, and the African Church has taken on the qualities of Sanneh's "World Christianity" as "the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian and that had no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the gospel. World Christianity is not one thing, but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective idioms, but in any case without European Enlightenment frame" (2003, p. 23). The challenge presented by my study is to recognize the power of perception and the power of agency on both sides, and to trace its outcome on the story of place.



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## Appendix A

### Interview questions for missionaries

#### *History:*

What drew you to mission work and particularly mission work with the Pokot?

Describe the history of your mission's work among the Pokot.

What did you expect to accomplish in Pokot? Were these expectations met?

Did you undergo training before beginning your mission work?

How long do you think you'll work with the Pokot? (How long did you work with the Pokot and what made you decide to leave?)

What do you think your legacy or the legacy of your mission will be?

#### *Perceptions:*

What was your first impression of the Pokot and the place of the Pokot? How would you describe the people and the place at first?

Were you prepared for what you experienced? In what ways?

What do you think of the Pokot and the place of the Pokot today? How is it different from your initial perspectives? Why did it change (if it did)?

What specific changes have you seen in the population you work with (dress? Lifestyle?)?

#### *Contact zone of cultures:*

What voids in the place or the culture do you see? How has missions addressed these?

What strengths in the place and the culture do you see? How has your work or the work of your mission responded to these?

How did the Pokot people respond to you at first? Did that change over time?

## Appendix B

### Interview questions for Pokot

Did you grow up in this area?

Did your parents grow up in this area as well?

What areas are the most meaningful or significant? To you and/or the community?

How has the landscape changed from when you were a child?

What caused these changes?

How has the place of Asilong remained the same?

Before the DuPonts and people from Jacob's Well started to come to Asilong, were there other missionaries you remember?

Why did they come?

What did the community think about them?