

RECONSTITUTING THE BALALO COW ECONOMY DEBATE (Volume 1)

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**TRANSITIONAL
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GOVERNANCE**

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Just and Peaceful Transitional Communities

Abstract

Drawing from the current debate on nomadic pastoralists, particularly on the Balalo, we observe that the bigger problem is that, the Balalo and the nomadic pastoralists' cow economy, are not able to articulate the rationale of their occupation from a policy language. Besides, nomadic pastoralist economy has since been an informal and not a formal sector and consequently, not understood and considered therefore as economically unviable. We argue that nomadic pastoralist economy is nevertheless, a system that is not anarchic or backward and therefore, not different from other modes of the economy. As a system, it is coherent and rational, with different parts, including a grazing corridor, which once disturbed results into multiple challenges. This is what we are witnessing today, with the case of the Balalo nomadic pastoralists. Similarly, the social, economic and ecological features that enable pastoralist economy and the contribution of the pastoralists to the national economy cannot be considered in isolation, because it is an integrated system. The indigenous economy and knowledge as well as scientific / capitalist economy and knowledge, are all co-existent within the landscape of cow economy. For example, the ecological value of cow and animal movements has been observed as extremely important. Consequently, there is a need to establish: **Uganda Livestock Authority (ULA)** and a research based **Uganda Livestock Research Institute (ULRI)**, to reinforce the appreciation of nomadic pastoralists as well as, cow economy.

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Framing

Introduction

The Balalo experience as nomadic pastoralists must first be examined through the dominant narrative of their history and of nomadism generally. We argue that the concept of nomadism was constructed by the logic of capital and relegated to an inferior status. Much of the Balalo's (also spelt Balaalo) troubles can be traced to the statist belief that nomadism is antithetic to the modernization of agriculture (Muhereza 2010:1). It should be noted that in the name of advancement, capitalism has facilitated the commodification, enclosure, and territorialization of nature. Common pool resources, such as the Balalo's traditional grazing land, have been redefined in terms of capital or capitalization as large-scale agriculture, bio-fuel production, eco-tourism, and so forth. This logic of capital rationalizes the Balalo's forced eviction, displacement, and dispossession. Furthermore, we argue that there is a radicalised image of the Balalo that originates from the construction of their ambivalent identity. The term Balalo was first constructed to connote 'settlers' as opposed to 'natives' and has increasingly become a derogatory label that implies 'backward' and 'stranger.' This imagining of the Balalo, as we show, is a simplistic narrative that does not go beyond the surface. We argue that while the 'settler' and 'native' frame (Mamdani 2012, 1996, 2002) is thinkable in the Balalo discourse we should transcend this dichotomy.

In this paper, we begin by questioning the dominant narrative that the Balalo are troublesome invaders, by unraveling the Balalo's historical presence and ethnic composition. In acknowledging their common identity based on 'othering,' we underscore the government and media's precarious claims. Second, we then expand on the central forces that shape the Balalo's construction by investigating their political ecological context and the divergent perspective towards land between them and farmers. Finally, we conclude by recognizing the Balalo's contribution to the Ugandan economy despite largely existing outside formal economy.

Contextual Framing of the Balalo Episode

In December 2010, the Ugandan government evicted 640 Balalo families with about 20,000 heads of cattle from Buliisa District through *Operation Justice* commanded by General David Tinnyefunza – now David Ssejusa (Muhereza 2010). The families were evicted from the land on and around the Tullow Oil

Prospecting Block 2 in the Albertine Graben, in the villages of Bugana, Kabolwa, Kataleba, Kicoke, Kigoya, Waiga and Waisoka, in Buliisa Sub-County, Buliisa District. The government claimed that the Balalo were trespassing and had illegally bought indigenous land in addition to causing grief and security concerns. The government affirmed the customary claims to land of the indigenous communities and urged the Balalo to leave whether or not they lawfully purchased the land they were claiming (ibid.). The *Operation Justice* intended to combat retrogressive nomadism yet only succeeded in sending the Balalo into perpetual motion across the country, drastically increasing tensions wherever they landed (Muhereza 2010). Forced into a permanent state of displacement, the Balalo were henceforth labeled as 'foreigners', 'settlers', 'Rwandan refugees', and 'trespassers', seeking to grab land. This widely held stereotype based on "otherness" has since deprived the Balalo of claim, history, and identity.

In July 2008, Balalo representatives had applied for a judicial writ to stop the evictions in the case of *Grace Bamurangye Bororoza & 53 others (applicants) vs Dr. Kasirivu Atwoki & 5 others (respondents)*. However, the High Court of Uganda in Kampala dismissed the case with cost. The applicants then filed a Notice of Appeal with the Court of Appeal of Uganda later that month.¹ The Court dismissed the case and ruled that the applicants had sued the wrong people in suing Dr. Kasirivu Atwoki, General David Tinnyefunza and four others. The judges advised the applicants to sue the Attorney General. Lacking court intervention, *Operation Justice* relentlessly pushed the Balalo out of Buliisa District. Some Balalo relocated to Kyarusesa in Kyangwali sub-county in Hoima District, while some to Kiryandongo, Masindi, Nwoya, Apac, and West Nile districts, among other other places (ibid.). This eviction and relocation precipitated complex recurrent evictions and relocations, sometimes in a circular mode of exit and return to the same places. Such episodes of exit and return have become a complex phenomenon with different navigational tactics, an area we shall treat in a separate article. In this article, we follow the Balalo's subsequent mass displacement and relocations following their December 2010 eviction from Buliisa District.

Local leaders across Uganda have since openly voiced their opposition to the Balalo's presence and forced their removal when possible. For example, local

¹)Under Civil Application no. 44 of 2008 (arising from Civil Appeal no. 45 of 2008 and High Court Civil Application no. 347/2007

politicians in Acholiland in northern Uganda announced, "the invaders [Balalo] should leave the area..." adding, "We are not going to allow our land to be grabbed (Peril of Africa 2018). In November 2016, the Local Council Five Chairman of Gulu District issued a two-day ultimatum for the Balalo to leave and return to where they had come from. In August the same year, the district Executive Committee passed a resolution calling for the Balalo who were destroying locals' gardens to leave Palaro sub-county in Gulu (Ibid.). Previously, in September 2016, residents of Koch Goma in Nwoya district and Puranga sub-county in Pader, had complained that Balalo cattle were destroying their crops. Likewise, the neighbouring Alur community in Nebbi District across river Nile accused the Area Resident District Commissioner for not doing enough to stop the Balalo from entering their area. In February 2012, 30 Balalo and their herds of cattle were forcefully evicted from Ubongi sub-county in Moyo District.² In 2010, about 50 Balalo families were evicted from Arua District. Repeated evictions from neighboring areas collectively present an impossible and tense situation for the Balalo, which has escalated to the point of violence. In 2007 and 2008, local residents in Apac District in Lango sub-region attacked several Balalo and killed a number of their cows, a number that ranged between 20 – 60 cows (ibid.).

National media has not only taken notice of the conflict, but reflects the conflicting narratives of the Balalo's culpability for the conflict. Noticing significant tension, national private newspaper *The Daily Monitor* printed the story "Gulu evicts Balalo over farmlands" in 2016. The article reported that Gulu District, led by Chairman Martin Mapenduzi, seized Balalo cows after residents complained of alleged encroachment on their farmland. Mr. Mapenduzi stated, "...we are giving them [Balalo] two days to leave the district with their animals and relocate somewhere else..." The phrase "somewhere else" is ambiguous, suggesting that their origin is widely unknown. *The Daily Monitor* also noted tension in the neighboring district of Kitgum, where the Balalo were evicted from Lolwa and other places in Orom sub-county after locals demanded their relocation. On October 2017, Ugandan President Museveni pledged that the Chief of Defense Forces would investigate the Balalo in an article called "Museveni warns Balalo pastoralists in Acholi" run in the nationally owned newspaper *The New Vision*. Local and national leader's

rhetoric rejects the Balalo's presence without offering a solution and instead contributing to a cycle of displacement, tension, rejection, and relocation.

In 2013, the High Court in Masindi District heard a fresh application by the Balalo and ruled that they had been unlawfully evicted from legally purchased land (Muhereza, ibid.). However, the adversarial nature of courts forced the Balalo's complex reality into a reductive narrative with two sides. One side acknowledged the Balalo community's legal land purchase and therefore their legitimized presence. On the other side, the state argued that the Balalo had illegally purchased land in Buliisa. We contend that both sides are over simplistic. The complex issue of the Balalo is the capital creation of commodification, enclosure and territorialization of what used to be the Balalo cattle corridor and grazing land. The pursuit of capitalism has turned this common pool grazing resource into capital, in the form of large-scale agriculture, bio-fuel production, eco-tourism, and so forth. This logic of the capital has since driven and rationalized forced eviction, displacement, and dispossession of the Balalo. Given this, we point the political ecology debate that elaborates on displacement and depletion of common pool resources within the logic of capital. We also articulate the herders' psychological purview of pastoralism and subsequent reconstituting of borders, which comes into tension with the settled life of agrarian crop farmers.

Method

Our qualitative research design establishes the descriptive, historical, and analytic focus on 'the Balalo question' through analytical data, up to 2019. We utilize historical accounts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Balalo's migrations. As the Balalo question is politically sensitive in Uganda, we spoke to around ten members of the Balalo community, approximately six host community invitees, and approximately 15 other members from the host communities, all of who were randomly selected. Importantly, we also conducted participant observation of Balalo interactions among themselves, with the invitees, with the wider host community as well as the Balalo relocation process between host villages. Interviews and participant observations were not spatial or bounded in a specific case scenario but rather utilized to provide a national picture and discourse of the question. Our primary research has been paired with relevant scholarship and critical analysis for a comprehensive understanding. In the next section, we make use of existing scholarship to engage with the construct of who is a Balalo in its

²) Moyo district borders Acholi from the east, Arua and Nebbi from the south

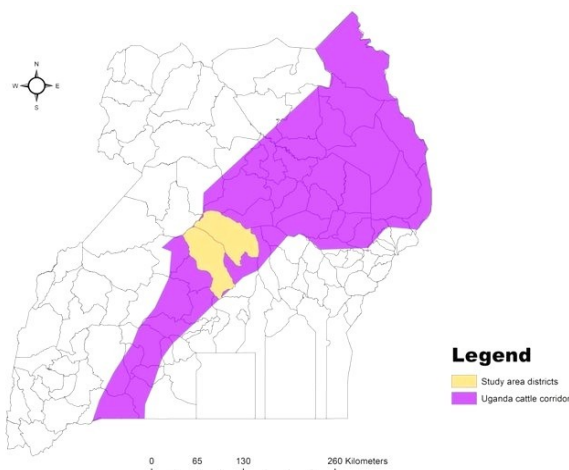
historical and perceptual sense by critiquing the widely held construct and offering a more critical perspective.

The "Balalo" as a Construct

In this section, we contest the oversimplified narrative of the Balalo as foreign intruders and subsequently complicate the Balalo identity and relation to others. We do this first by documenting the Balalo's historical presence in the region, contrasting their historical reality with distorted popular discourse, and by examining the substance of the Balalo common identity through the concept of 'kinship network rationality.'

Historical Origins

The Balalo are comprised of many ethnic groups, including the Banyarwanda, who, despite being commonly categorized as 'outsiders' have a long history in Uganda (Karamura 1998:11). In 1894, Uganda was designated a British Protectorate and a diverse array of kingdoms and communities were grouped within an imposed border (Mamdani 1995:91). In 1910, an Anglo-German boundary agreement expanded Uganda to include the Banyarwanda in Kisoro District (Karamura 1998:210). Throughout the colonial period, British and Belgian administrators redrew the regional map and shifted parts of the Uganda cattle corridor to the present day DRC (Rugadya 2009:15). This drawing and re-drawing of borders caused continuous movement and blurred distinctions among ethnic groups (Helle-Valle 1989: 64). In particular, the Banyarwanda were divided between Uganda and the DRC, resulting in a trans-frontier community (Mamdani 2002:494).



Source: M.L.A. Rehmani, 2018

Contemporary Balalo are therefore comprised of a cocktail of ethnic groups. Depending on the perspective, the Balalo could be said to include any combination of the Bahima, Basongora, Batuku,

Banyarwanda, Banyabindi, Rwandan Tutsi and the Bashambo ruling class of Mpororo (Karamura 1998:11) (Rugadya 2009:16-17). According to the Cross-Cultural Foundation, the Basongora and Bahima's common language and cattle keeping tradition grants them the shared label of Balalo. Meanwhile, Richard Businge³ and Atuhumuza observed that migrants from the West and parts of the D.R. Congo, particularly those engaged in cattle keeping, are often considered Balalo. Across the border in the D.R. Congo, the Balalo designation includes the Basongora, Bahema, and Banyamulenge ethnic groups. The Balalo therefore identity encapsulates various ethnic groups, many of whom also have a claim to a long history in the region (Ibid).

Pastoralists migrating from the north settled the interlacustrine region, including modern Uganda, around the 15th or 16th century (Karugire 1980:2 cited by Jo Helle-Valle 1989:20). This early settlement is supported by archaeological evidence of the Chwezi Dynasty (New Vision 1987c:6-7 cited by Helle-Valle 1989:20). However, there is otherwise limited recorded history of these early settlers, as their nomadic lifestyle did not leave a significant physical imprint (The Cross Cultural Foundation of Uganda 2014:14). Uganda therefore lacks a "systematic account of the history" of this early period (1989:18). The Basongora claim one of the oldest kingdoms in the Rwenzori region,⁴ stretching from the Mulamba Hills to Virunga in the D. R. Congo, and cite a genealogy of up to about 23 kings (Rugadya 2009:16). Meanwhile, the Banyabindi have photographic evidence of their forefathers guiding European explorers around 100 years ago. However, according to common narrative, the Banyabindi sold their land to the Bakonzo in the 1960s (The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda 2014:13). The Balalo's complex composition discounts the reductive narrative perpetuated by politicians and the media that the Balalo are outsiders imposing themselves on an indigenous community.

While there are no stable identification criteria of who a Balalo is, there are micro-constructions in popular media (Assche 2008:115). This constructed consensus is based on a taxonomy of division and exclusion. It is widely believed that the term "Balalo" comes from the Luganda⁵ derogatory word "Mulalo" meaning backwardness, stupidity, or a stranger who does not assimilate. The Balalo label once primarily referred to

³) Field Interview 16th February, 2018

⁴) Specifically near Nyakatonzi, Bukangara and Rwehingo

⁵) Luganda is a language spoken by the Baganda in Central Uganda.

group's common cattle keeping occupation. However, settled communities' negative reaction to their migratory lifestyle shifted the label to foremost connote backwardness and stranger. These contingent constructs were superimposed on the Balalo as a reductive label that framed their identity in opposition to settled farmers. Mamdani calls this dichotomy the 'native-settler complex' with the settler construed as stranger. The label of 'stranger' therefore brands and politicizes indigeneity without regard to racial or ethnic distinctions (Mamdani, 2007:7). 'Balalo' is therefore foremost a derogatory and otherizing grouping of individuals hailing from various ethnicities and origins.

Subsequent national discourse demonstrates that the labels of 'backward' and 'stranger' are easily amplified to that of 'enemy' and 'threat.' Former Minister Chris Rwakasisi in the Obote II government⁶ said of the Banyarwanda, "If a dog produces a puppy in a cattle kraal, does it become a cow or does it remain a dog?" (ibid.: 224). Similarly, President Obote himself is quoted in the *Uganda Times* in 1982 as castigating the Banyarwanda (ibid.: 230), which was a way of trying to deflate the already fragile situation by blaming the group. Moreover, due to the Banyarwanda's inclusion, the Balalo are collectively considered "persons of Rwandese origin."⁷ Distrust was even more clearly articulated by the Obote II Minister of State Edward Rurangaranga when he suggested, "people posed as Bahima whereas they were Banyarwanda" (Karamura 1998: 234-237). This definitional ambiguity has facilitated the ostracization and distrust of Balalo, a term that can conveniently incorporate groups that powerful actors sought to marginalize. Mamdani summarizes the permanence of negative perceptions; "...set apart, treated apart, remaining apart.... once a refugee, always a refugee hence the child and grandchild of a refugee in Uganda was also a refugee (ibid. 224). In this way, 'settler-native' dichotomy, with its own enunciated narratives about the Balalo, feeds into the perception of a threatening crowd without home.

Kinship Network Rationality

Comprised of a multitude of ethnic groups from different origins, it is their unbelonging and risk-taking that most defines the contours of the Balalo's social group. Our conceptualization of kinship takes a step

away from the two historically applied anthropological definitions of kinship groups. First, there is Meyer Fortes' definition that restricts kinship to genealogy, which he calls 'actual connectedness' in his work *Kinship and the Social Order* (Strathern 1973:21). H.W. Scheffler and R.M. Keesing also employed this limited definition. Second, there is Ernest Gellner's kinship grouping by linguistic attributes (ibid.). For our purposes, we take our cue from D.M. Schneider's frame of social relationship that uses social categories rather than blood relation to define kinship (ibid: 24). J.H.M. Beattie further defines this social category to individuals sharing political, legal, and economic norms, as is supported by most American and British social anthropologists (ibid.). Common culture is also frequently included in this definition.

Our social relationship framework specifically uses Julian Pitt-Rivers' concept of consubstantiality, a practice of relationship or co-existence not linked to physical reproduction (Dousset 2013:2-4). Fundamentally, Balalo relationships are based on the risk-taking necessary as constant migrants. The Balalo share social cues with explicit and implicit risk-decisions. The Balalo therefore form kinship ties through an intensely reciprocal relationship manifested through group reasoning, decisions, and a sense of security or protection. The Balalo's displacement makes them connect, coordinate, and act conjointly as a network of kith and kin (Ronfeldt 2006: 10). It is precisely their existence within precarious circumstances that reinforces their feeling of belonging among each other (Ellis 2017: 1, Wellman 1990:198). We refer to this form of cohesion through shared unbelonging as *kinship network rationality*.

The Balalo's kinship network rationality defies international borders and results in transnational communities tied together by identity and commerce. This transnational identity is evident in Bundibugyo District, where the Bahema pass through with their cattle from the D.R. Congo before continuing on within Uganda. Despite being called the Bahema in the D.R. Congo and the Abatuku, Basongora and Bahima in Uganda these groups share language, culture, and livelihood. They regularly form economic contracts to graze cows and receive payment from milk and milk products. For example, the Bahema could bring about 1000 heads of cows each from the D.R. Congo to Bundibugyo, Uganda to be grazed by the Abatuku, Basongora and Bahima. A liter of milk in Uganda is about 2,000 Uganda shillings on average. 10 cows can produce an average of 30 liters of milk per day. This means a Balalo can earn up to 60,000 Uganda shillings per day and 2.4 million per month. This is a significant

6) Milton Obote was the President of the Republic of Uganda. Obote I was from 1962 - 1970, Obote II was From 1980-1985

7) Interviewee, Field Interview 11th January, 2018

amount of money, particularly when the lack of jobs in the region is taken into consideration. It is these potential profits that then motivate herders to migrate throughout Ugandan seeking fresh pastures.

Reconstituting the Balalo Debate

Depletion of the common resource pool debate: Political Ecology Thesis

Historical analysis reveals that the Balalo label is more a derogatory “othering” that seeks to imply backwardness and stranger than a reference to a homogenous group that shares a common history. In this section, we argue that depletion of the cattle corridor, once a public resource, and the subsequent displacement of the Balalo further contributed to their marginalization and negative characterization as wandering foreigners.

We first take a very brief overview of political ecology literature to situate the Balalo conflict within the relevant scholarship. Political ecology literature has taken an increasingly politically centered perspective in reaction to political institutions’ increasing control over land access. In 1935, Frank Thone’s seminal work “*Nature Rambling: We Fight for Grass*” first introduced political ecology as a field. Anthropologist Eric R. Wolf expanded the concept in his 1972 work, *Ownership and Political Ecology*, by exploring the interplay between politics, economics and social relations (Parajuli 1998). Peter Walker notes two distinct traditions, the structuralist approach in 1970s and 1980s, which centered ecology, and the post-structuralist approach, which centered politics (ibid.). We build on the post-structuralist approach, which analyzes power, politics, and economy. Walker summarizes this view as, “whereas cultural ecology and systems theory emphasize adaptation and homeostasis, political ecology emphasizes the role of political economy as a force of mal-adaptation and instability.” Therefore, we use political institutions’ capitalist interactions with the natural environment as our primary means of explaining the Balalo’s physical and social marginalization. Piers Balikie reinforces this point in “*The Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries*.” Balikie argues that land degradation in Africa was a colonial ploy for land appropriation to service capital, rather than the problem of over-exploitation by Africans (ibid.).

The common pool cattle corridor’s transformation to national parks and private property is directly linked to the Balalo’s perpetual displacement and marginalization. Steady elimination of the Basongora’s grazing land began under British colonial

administration. Initially, the Basongora lived near lakes Edward and George in the Nyakatonzi, Bukangara and Rwehingo regions. However, in 1906, the British colonial government created a game reserve that was later designated as Queen Elizabeth National Park in 1952. Meanwhile, the Basongora in the D.R. Congo regions of Virunga and Mulamba hills lost their cattle grazing land to Virunga National Park. The Mubuku Irrigation Scheme then further reduced available land in the Bukangara and Rwehingo regions (Rugadya 2009:15-16). Similarly in 1984, Lake Mburo National Park was established and most of the Bahima were displaced without meaningful alternative resettlement. Furthermore, the colonial government took 80% of Bagungu land in present day Bullisa for the Murchison National Park and Budongo Forest Reserve, leaving only 20% of the land for indigenous cultivation. In 2004, this remaining 20% became a point of contention between displaced ‘marauding’ Balalo and the local Bagungu (ibid.). Over the last century, the dedication of large swaths of land as parks has rendered much of the former cattle corridor inaccessible.

Uganda’s trajectory of formalizing property rights increasingly restricts land ownership to one individual. Exclusive land ownership clashes with the local social reality of seasonal, fluid, and communal systems of land tenure commonly found in rural Africa (Musembi 2007). Regardless, Western land tenure concepts are pursued under the assumption that countries should ‘advance’ from communal land rights to private ownership (Idib.). This view not only assumes that private property is a more desirable system but also operates on an oversimplified dichotomy of communal versus private land ownership (Idib.). This oversimplified continuum is both reductive and harmful, as it stems from the colonial-era belief that Western institutions and conceptions of rights are preferable as well as transferrable (Idib.). In the case of the Balalo, the harms of this transition to formalized individual ownership becomes clear as the Balalo are excluded under a narrow and inflexible definition of land tenure.

Postcolonial Ugandan governments have continued to chip away at remaining common lands for political and economic means. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, common grazing lands were converted to either government or individual ranches, particularly in the Mbarara, Masaka, Rakai and Nakasongola regions. The government has also since parceled out the Basongora, Bahima, Batuku, Bafumbira and Banyabindi land into Ibuga Refugee Settlement, Ibuga Prison Farm, Hima Army Production Unit, Mubuku Prison Farm, Hima Cement, s copper mining belt and

so forth. In 2000, the National Resistance Movement government resettled these communities by degazetting some of the land but it was still inadequate relative to the amount of past displacement (ibid.). Privatization and government seizure of land expanded in late 2000s to include Aswa Ranch in northern Uganda among other areas. Decades of significant land privatization and government seizure have increasingly encroached on the common lands that made nomadic communities more vulnerable.

The Balalo's ongoing displacement brings them therefore into contact with various forced migration concepts that must be clarified. The first important distinction is between a refugee who crosses international borders and internally displaced persons within a country. Second, there is involuntary resettlement, in which individuals are forcibly relocated to a new location as compared to forced eviction, which is only concerned with their removal (Himmelfarb 2012:11). Importantly, communities displaced by war or natural disasters have the possibility of returning home, while those displaced by dam construction, game parks, mining or oil drilling, do not have such possibility (ibid.). Michael Cernea⁸ specifically describes forced migration as a loss of access to common property, landlessness, and homelessness (ibid: 14). In his view, seemingly isolated instances of forced relocation are a product of deeper and ongoing power relations. Therefore, these power relations are the common analytic of political ecology, which views production as simultaneously economic, political, ecological, and social (Himmelfarb 2012:21). We take this more comprehensive view of forced migration, which, "overcomes the tendency toward economic reductionism in forced migration literature" (Himmelfarb 2012:21). At various times, the Balalo have been refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrants who have been evicted, resettled, informally driven away. However, it is a singular power inequality underlying these various manifestations that is ultimately responsible the Balalo's precariousness.

The Balalo's displacement is not as simple as a coordinated government program aimed to persecute but is instead a result of political and economic power relations (Foucault 1977, Escobar 1995). Tension between settled agrarian communities and the Balalo reveal that "...contested meanings of 'community', and 'conservation' are rooted in the politics of resource

allocation ... broader 'communities of interest' have asserted resource claims often in opposition to geographic communities proximate to the resources" (Khan 2013:466). In this way, the construction of a national Ugandan identity has shifted the power to allocate resources from the proximate community to the national government. The government and dominant population now hold the *center* while the Balalo and other marginalized groups are relegated to the *periphery*. The capitalist construct of the "*center-periphery*" induces the periphery as a vacant and backward wasteland (ibid.) that requires development to reach modernization. The center-periphery dichotomy is only one piece of a wider internationalization of capital and endless commodification (Moore 2011). Adding an additional layer, nature is therefore reconstituted as capital (Robertson 2006: 367). Likewise, Marx shifts the concept of scarcity to "*under-production*", which re-interprets the resurgence of underproduction, such as an insufficient flow of cheap food, fuel, tourism, etc. It also rationalizes the invasion of nature as a means to sustain the productive circuit of capital (Moore, 2011). The Balalo and their grazing land were therefore determined inefficient use of land and relegated to the periphery economically and socially.

Government desire to harness grazing land for capital growth defines the Balalo and the government's dynamics (Toly 2004:47, Escobar 1996:56). Grazing land, like any nature valuation within the logic of capital, creates a particular social relation of production. Resultantly, grazing lands develop the tendencies of acquisition, isolation, and displacement as necessary externalities of capital (Burkett 1995). In this capricious competition, both landscape and people are displaced from their original form of grazing land and spontaneous societies into a value vector. The Balalo were subsequently excluded from the equation and left to wander to the spaces not yet visible to capital. It is in this sense that Smith describes capitalism as 'jarring' and 'quixotic', a sacrosanct separation of nature and society. This separation becomes a socially imposed necessity in which capital's transgressive power makes no nature and no people independently intelligible outside contingent capital discourse. Capitalism makes nature and surrounding people in its (capital) logic (1984:1,7,8, 70). Capitalism has defined the Balalo on an interpersonal level in addition to their macro-level social placement. To examine the production relation we call to mind Marx's maxim;

In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite necessary relations, which are independent of their

⁸) Michael Cernea is a development sociologist with the World Bank who developed the Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction model.

will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure... (Marx 1976b:3, cited in Jo Helle-Valle 1989:26).

As evidence to this, the Balalo's landlessness requires them to care for the host community's cows in exchange for grazing land. Host families allow the Balalo to keep the milk and milk products as payment. The settled community views the Balalo as the lowest social strata based on this economic relationship. Comparatively, agrarian farmers believe themselves to be superior on account of their cultural and political institutions. Moreover, the Balalo's less sophisticated household arrangements among the cattle has led outsiders to wrongly conclude that they live in a primitive state of nature.

A political ecology lens sheds light on the capitalist and state forces underlying the Balalo's increasing ostracization and decades of displacement. The depletion of common pool resources not only shapes the Balalo's physical landscape but also reveals herders and farmers' contrasting mental landscapes. The Balalo's psychological conceptualization of pasture redefines borders away from the perspective held by agrarian farmers, resulting in misunderstanding and conflict. Having interrogated the Balalo's negative portrayal in popular discourse and their political ecological context, we now unpack the Balalo's heterodox categorization of land to further account for the marginalized status. To move towards this aim, the next section explores the Balalo's fluid conception of land and its ownership specifically in regards to grass and pasture.

Land is Grass, Grass in Land: Seeing like a Pastoralist

Drawing on ethnographic study of mundane everyday practices and conflicts between pastoralist community of Uganda (Balalo) and the agrarian community (farmers), we challenge the mainstream notion of 'bounded border' and re-root an existential registry in which borders actually move, with their momentary stop created by the agrarian communities, stops the shifting border, while pastoralists move the border, with the movement shifting it. We conclude that these competing spatial perspectives are in dynamic movement with each other, making 'border' and 'boundary' as a concept and practice, swing in a pendulum motion, making them both ambiguous and precarious.

While the herdsmen do not conceive of pasture as bounded, the agrarian settled communities occupy a statist notion of bordering and view it as a stable and concrete reality. Therefore, crop farmers see the pastoralists' mobility as trespassing and a conflict to spatial centrality. Furthermore, 'bush', 'wilderness', and 'grass' are synonymous attributes of a territorial terrain with less sophisticated connotations and simply offers the animals a wider range of food choice. It is this difference in perspectives that forms the conceptual and attitudinal conflict over boundary and bordering. The section that follows enhances this and shows both the perspectives and the tension generated.

Border and Bordering: The Herdsman Perspective

Herdsmen challenge the notion that borders are bounded and spatial in their effort to navigate the unmarked bush streets for grass. To the Balalo, borders are constituted around the availability of grass and experience land as a feed point rather than a bordered area. Grass, which here refers to all vegetative species that cows eat, therefore becomes the defining topography of the landscape. Land collapses into a single space of grazing that is unmapped and not categorized into grazing, garden, farms, and so forth, but one zone for feeding animals. James Mulalo expressed this view when he said, "Why stop my cows when they are grazing?" If they have eaten from what you call 'your garden' and you want compensation I will pay you."⁹ In addition to their unique distinction between grass and not grass, herdsmen view land as either "pastures" of edible vegetation and the "bush" or "wild" where non-edible plants grow. Gardens, crops, farms, or abandoned land are all folded into the pasture-bush continuum. These designations are therefore fluid and not necessarily given. One therefore needs to plot the debate within a continuum of two axis, the crop farmers' and the pastoralists' notions, and how they emerge from the specific constructions of borders and bordering. As the herdsman has a different landscape, so has the crop farmer.

As a result of their particular conceptualization of land, administratively delineated territories are opaque constructs that occupy a different logic outside the herdsman's 'cow-grass space'. To the herdsmen, gardens and farms are a construct and an imposition by farmers. Moreover, bordering is a construct that, although conceivable, is artificial and should continuously be re-negotiated. Cows cross over to greener and better grass and not necessarily to a village

⁹) Field Interview. 17th January, 2019.

or district. They therefore present a moving border, their momentary stop creating a border and movement shifting it. Subsequently, bordering cannot be reduced to a statist administrative construct with specific grazing territories. In the herder's psych, there is not any territorial crossing-over to require permissions from the communities and local leaders. Herdsmen have a different concept of borders and see territorial boundedness as illogical as well as contradictory to the cows' need for space. Therefore, we argue that the current conflict between the nomadic pastoralists Balalo and local communities in Uganda is based on this capitalist tendency to divide land. In the next section, we engage with the crop farmer's perspective and their border notion. It is this difference in perspectives that forms the conceptual and attitudinal conflict over bordering

Crop farmer and Bordering

The nature of the crop farmer's livelihood, inherently ties land to a clear and stable territorial map. This logic of stability makes statist concepts such trespassing, territory, and border, a commonsense. In this framework, acts of crossing over, trespassing, and de-territorialization are inherently confrontational as they challenge crop farmers' agrarian constructs of a given physical, cultural, and linguistic site and identity constituted by a border.

Specifically, the idea of land as a parcel, commodity, inheritance, identity and social becoming (Shipton 2007) in a crop farming agrarian life reconstructs land as a "thing" (Bohannon 1973) that is or supposed to be bounded and owned. These claims mark the dominant regime of fortressing, walling, or terrestrial marking (Carr 2015). The commodification of land and its contents, like crops, makes trespassing an economic notion similar to theft. Defined territory subsequently requires cultural or legal protection from trespassers. Trespassing is therefore a constructed and not a natural concept. Whereas border and bordering is within the neo-classical spatial territorial regime (Genova 2017), our traditional view of land falls within the agrarian crop farming view of a garden and farm.

Land's seasonality makes the herdsman and farmers' dialectically opposing views even more dynamic and complex. While land is bounded in a stable spatial territory, it nevertheless reproduces certain plural tendencies that make it a matter of conflict. Land takes a multiplicity of forms due to its agrarian value as well as its transformation during various seasons. In the first case, farms have agrarian value as a result of the land's worth as well as its agricultural potential. While land that is not a garden or farm is simply land in its

singular sense, it maintains the potential to be plural through its seasonality (Whyte 1997). It is this dual meaning that makes it a potential site of conflict, as agrarian communities view crops as clear borders and pastoralists may view the same land in another sense. It is this symbolic notion that frames "trespass" as a construct.

The second instance of land's multiple meanings arises as changing seasons dictate its use, categorization, and therefore who has access. During agricultural off-seasons, terminologies such as border and trespass collapse. It is this is the period of time the Acholi metaphorically describe as "dyel oro" (goats in the dry season), when animals are free to graze without limitations. Under these circumstances, the land is entrapped in its singular form as bush or wilderness and shifts back towards categorization as grass. Border perception collapses and frees itself from the concept of "trespassing", making the concept ambiguous and therefore meaningless. Meanwhile, the wet season of planting and harvesting returns the land into a bordered piece with gardens and farms that cows cannot trespass, causing confusion to both the cows and herders. This routine seasonal reversal bewilders the herders who see it as selective judgment targeting them. Divergent categorization of land forces herders to traverse this difficult terrain. Drawing from persistent narratives against the pastoralists, and their lack of capacity to articulate their relevance in the economy, the section that follows, seeks to argue that the current problem with the pastoralists is a result of their displacement in relation to both the depletion of common resources pool.

Balalo, Pastoralists and the Economy

Nomadic Pastoralist Economy

We complete our analysis of the Balalo's location within Ugandan society by challenging the narrative that nomadism is both backward and antithetic to modernization. Generally, the Ugandan government operates under the assumption that nomadism is "positioned at a different evolutionary stage" (Toon 2008:166). The doctrine of capitalism and modernization as opposed to nomadism is not only simplistic but also bad metaphysics. It is bad metaphysics because it offers an ahistorical and stationary reality about the Balalo. Instead, nomadism and pastoralism are products of historical process of capital rather than a natural human condition (ibid.). The statist view of nomadism as backward and a non-progressive economy is relentlessly obstructive. Nomadism is not primordial or a given but a

constructed power relation within the logic of the capital, inherently tied to economic pressure and administrative decisions. Therefore, nomadism must be considered in the context of the depletion of the common resource pool. It is in this context that we have witnessed evictions, displacement, and subsequent derogatory image about the pastoralists as 'Balalo'.

In referring to the Balalo as 'remote', we seek to invoke a sociological concept of relative understanding and familiarity rather than a spatial or geographic reference (Harms & Hussain 2014). From this perspective, remoteness is constructed, fluid, and defined within the construct of the capital. In light of this, we need a positive narrative of pastoralism, its extensive livestock production, and the related products it generates or supports. Complaints of the Balalo's nomadic lifestyle 'causing' confrontation should therefore be critically examined. The narrative must shift from viewing the Balalo's livelihood as backward to acknowledging their significant contribution to Uganda's economy. The Balalo's productive value therefore makes them worthy of respect, from a capitalist perspective.

The facts clearly show that cattle rearing and products are a significant sector of the Ugandan economy. As agricultural output slows in other sectors, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimated that Uganda's cattle population went from 5.5 million in 2002 to 11.4 million in 2008 (UBOS 2009). In 2009, livestock contributed 3.2% to the total GDP, at approximately 1,069,407 billion Ugandan shillings (about \$526 million). At this time, the livestock contribution was larger than the GDP derived from cash crops or fishing and only marginally smaller than the contribution from forestry (IGAD 2013). Importantly, smallholders and pastoralists dominate the livestock sector, owning about 90% of Uganda's cattle (Turner 2005). A notable 1.7 million Ugandan families depend on rearing cows for their livelihoods. Furthermore, 85% of milk and 95% of beef consumed in Uganda is from cattle raised by smallholders, particularly pastoralists (UBOS 2008). These numbers clearly demonstrate not only the Balalo's significant economic contribution, but also that decreased grazing land and increased conflict will negatively impact Uganda's sizable cattle industry.

Uganda's dairy industry is also evidence of Balalo contribution to the Ugandan government's economic goals. Dairy was listed as one of the top 10 commodities in Uganda's Development Strategy and Investment Plan 2010-2015. Cow milk production in 2008 reached 1,458 million litres, up from 1,320

million litres in 2005 (UBOS 2009). The Dairy Development Authority (DDA) projects milk production rate at 8% annually with a per capita consumption at approximate of 58 litres per person annually (DDA 2008). The National Dairy Strategy suggests this is still a low amount compared to Kenya's 100 litres per person per annum (NDS 2011-2015). By 2012, about 1.3 billion litres were offered to the market, 70% went directly to the market, while 30% was used for domestic consumption and feeding calves. UBOS and the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) puts Ugandan exported milk products in the region¹⁰ as follows: 6,555 metric tons in 2009, 10,803 in 2010, and 14,187 in 2011. This amount was valued at about \$38 million for the three years (UBOS & MAAIF 2012).

Societal pursuit of rational capitalization has created the Balalo's nomadic life through displacement. The harms of viewing capital through a limited lens are evident in the Balalo's exclusion from society despite their economic contribution. Like the moral fixation with notions of 'good man and 'good woman' that gets destroyed in the face of violence experience (Fine 2000:12), the unreality of dogmatic 'capital' whose utility of furthering transformation comes into question in the face of national evictions and conflicts. It therefore becomes worth asking if we have overrated a limited perspective of 'capital' and 'modernisation.' Authentic transformation has to start from the argument of human agency (Norberg 2010), which is not compatible with 'uprootedness' and 'superfluousness'. Ultimately, respecting the rights of the Balalo is not just the government's obligation but an essential input for a healthy society and economy. Ignoring Uganda's status as a predominantly agricultural country is simplistic. It should also be realistic regarding the available potential and factor of production, which is land. Land should not be conceptualized in the logic of capital but realistically placed in the domain of crop farmers and pastoralists, as they are the two sectors that are sustainable drivers for transformation. The Balalo should therefore be appreciated not from the perspective of capital but instead by indigenizing the logic of capital by making use of locally available resources.

Nomadic Pastoralist Ecology

The bigger problem is that, the Balalo are themselves not able to articulate the rationale of their occupation from a policy language. Besides, pastoralist economy

¹⁰) East Africa Community-EAC, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa - COMESA

has since been an informal and not a formal sector and as a result, not understood and considered therefore as economically unviable. Otherwise, pastoralist economy is a system and not anarchic or backward and so, not different from other modes of the economy. How does a system operate of function? A system is coherent and rational. As such, we need to be aware of pastoralist economy as a system with different parts, including a grazing corridor, which once disturbed, results into multiple challenges, as we are witnessing today, with case of the Balalo pastoralists. Similarly, the social, economic and ecological features that enable pastoralist economy and the contribution of the pastoralists to the national economy cannot be considered in isolation, because it is an integrated system. Similarly, the indigenous economy and knowledge as well as scientific / capitalist economy and knowledge, are all co-existent within the landscape of cow economy. For example, the ecological value of cow and animal movements has been observed as extremely important. It is observed that cows that are mobile, have high quality meat and milk compared to sedentary cows. Secondly, sedentary cows, like other sedentary animals, degrade environment compared to mobile cows and animals (International Livestock Research Institute, 2000; UNDP, *Pastoralism, and Mobility in Drylands*. Draft 9 (26 March, 2003).

Conclusion

The Balalo claim a presence in the region that predates the modern state of Uganda, yet they have been collectively categorized as unwanted outsiders by the government, media, and general population. Sharing neither ethnic nor regional background, the Balalo's 'unbelonging' and shared risk taking forms the basis of their common identity, in what is called here *kinship network rationality*. Political ecological analysis reveals that the dramatic reduction of common grazing land as well as the divergent perspectives of land and borders held by herders and farmers have contributed to the escalating conflict. By refusing to adopt the settled agrarian lifestyle of their compatriots, the Balalo challenge statist definitions of *borders*, *trespassing*, and *belonging*. The Balalo instead follow the logic of grass versus wilderness that reflects their occupational needs, rather than seemingly arbitrary formal administrative boundaries. Despite the fact that their nomadic pastoralist lifestyle is simply a basic requirement to find fresh pastures, the Balalo have been met with open hostility and outright violence for decades. The Balalo therefore engage in a precarious dance with host communities as they tentatively arrange a semi-truce, remain aloof from the village, and eventually accept their inevitable removal. While

the Balalo have been forced in the margins of Ugandan society, they play a central economic role through their production of meat and milk products. The Balalo's defiance of the narrative that nomadism is backward and unproductive, throws into question the commonly accepted belief that modernization requires the commodification of land.

Consequently, the Balalo re-introduces us to the long held cow economy in the interlacustrine region and shows its durability in both the history and economy, while at the same time contributing to the modern economy of Uganda. Second, it is now scientifically proven that sedentary cows, like other sedentary animals, degrade environment compared to mobile cows and animals. That means, we as a country, need to appreciate the important of the cattle corridor and provide better facilities that enhance cattle movements within the corridor. To sustain this, the country needs to establish two important infrastructure; a national legal body to govern livestock in the country; **Uganda Livestock Authority (ULA)**, and a research based **Uganda Livestock Research Institute (ULRI)**.

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