

# Pastoral conflict in Kenya: Transforming mimetic violence to mimetic blessings between Turkana and Pokot communities

*Ryan Triche\**

## **Abstract**

Livestock raiding has been a source of conflict amongst and between pastoral societies in Africa for hundreds of years. However, more recently, these raids have become more violent and have triggered much more organised retaliations. Many times raids themselves are perceived as motivated by ethnic dimensions. The following paper looks at tensions and conflict between Turkana and Pokot communities in rural Kenya. The paper first traces the historical context of cattle rustling and livestock raiding between pastoral communities within Kenya. It then identifies contemporary factors driving exacerbated tensions: access to resources, profiteering, and weapons proliferation. The paper further explores the systemic nature of the conflict through analysing livestock raiding as a conflict spiral dictated by negative reciprocal actions. The spiral is ultimately maintained due to mimetic violence structures that are in place. It then offers prescriptions and potential solutions to the conflict, which are centred on transcending the relationship from mimetic violence to mimetic peace and reconciliation. Ultimately, by empowering local pastoral communities in the

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\* Ryan Triche is an African regional specialist focusing on governance, conflict mediation, human rights, and the responsibility to protect. He is currently undertaking graduate studies at Seton Hall University's School of Diplomacy in New Jersey, where he is concentrating in post-conflict reconstruction and sustainability. He received his B.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2013.

form of multi-ethnic coalitions, and promoting broad-based interest groups, cultural transcendence can reverse the conflict spiral into a relationship of mutual reciprocity and mimetic peace.

## **Introduction**

While the terms ‘cattle rustling’ or ‘livestock raiding’ may conjure up images of a grand, romanticised period of American history and the Wild West, today these terms have a much more imminent, destructive, and abhorrent connotation to pastoralist societies within Kenya. The practice of cattle rustling has been a part of pastoralist society in Kenya for generations; however, in recent years, livestock theft has become increasingly violent and infused with more dangerous weapons (Kenya Human Rights Commission 2010:7). Perhaps the biggest testimony to the escalating violence of livestock conflict is the event which occurred in Suguta Valley, Samburu District, in November 2012, when forty-two Kenyan police officers were killed in conflict with suspected rustlers (Greiner 2013:216). In such a turbulent region, where small, internal conflicts can quickly expand to state and regional strife, it is important to understand the history, context, and driving causes behind pastoralist clashes.

This paper explores the context of pastoralist clashes in Kenya by focusing on the situation between two ethnic groups which are oftentimes involved in violent conflict with one another along their respective land borders: the Turkana and Pokot peoples. The rest of this piece is divided into three main sections. The first explores the historical context of livestock raiding within Kenya, spanning from pre-colonialism and continuing through independence. The second section analyses developments as well as previous attempts at peacemaking. Finally, by identifying several issues of contention between the parties, I offer several potential solutions which could alleviate the situation, manage ongoing conflict, and ultimately restore peace to these communities and rural Kenya as a whole.

## **Historical evolution: From *rungus* to AK-47s**

Pastoralist communities in East Africa have traditionally been built upon nomadic peoples, migrating along with their respective herds in search of lands to graze. Pastoralist communities are often credited with the increased

movement of people southward throughout African history (Iliffe 1995:16). It is noted that on many occasions, pastoral warfare and cattle rustling served mainly as a tool for resource and land expansion by these societies. There were often institutions in place to curb widespread violence. Typical weapons were *rungus*, wooden clubs commonly found in East Africa, and bows. There were also laws of conflict declared by clan and community elders which prohibited phenomena such as violence against women and children, and contained peace mechanisms. During early periods, these conflicts were often seen as a form of redistribution and balancing of wealth between communities, in which one community would take cattle from another when they were short on livestock, and vice-versa; it was reciprocal in nature (PRAGYA n.d.).

Following independence, pastoralist communities in Kenya saw increasingly violent conflict with one another, and the spread of modern weapon technology contributed to more deadly conflicts. Many African scholars pinpoint as a cause of these recurring conflicts the fact that colonial administrators were pushing these ethnic communities out of their historical homelands to make room for farmland (Murunga and Nasong'o 2007; Kanyinga 2009). These communities now found themselves clamouring for new territories in strange lands, where they were often at odds with the previous inhabitants. Notably, the Turkana and Pokot communities adapted to these colonial policies by adopting 'transhumance forms of pastoralism' in which they generally abandoned a nomadic lifestyle for themselves, but maintained nomadic herding of cattle (Kenya Human Rights Commission 2010:11). This adaptation shifted the battlegrounds from the communities themselves to the grasslands on which the cattle were grazed; the rustling of livestock thus increased.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a trend of democratisation sweep across the African continent. A change occurred in the nature of East African cattle rustling – the raids became commercialised. Previously, stolen livestock had been utilised for bride wealth or redistribution of herds; however, beginning in this era, livestock raiding became incentivised for monetary gain and organised crime syndicates arose (Greiner 2013:220). Similarly, during this period, clashes between communities became increasingly politicised. The democratic movement that had swept across much of Africa had caused a response by the

party-in-power at the time to turn to *Majimboism*, a form of federal regionalism which disguised ethnic mobilisation and party support under territorial claims (Greiner 2013:221–222). The previously localised raids and clashes were now often seen as blossoming into full-scale ethnic conflicts. A conflict spiral of cattle rustling became embedded in which one ethnic group would respond to another's raids with their own, in an endless conflict spiral.

## **Contextualising the conflict**

### **The parties involved**

The Turkana people number roughly 800 000 within Kenya, occupying about twenty-four territorial sections. They constitute around 2 percent of the entire population (African Studies Center n.d.). Being pastoralists, their primary commodities are livestock, including cattle, goats, camels, and sheep. They thus rely heavily on following the rains and tend to migrate around temporary camps or villages within a somewhat fixed area. It is important to note that oftentimes the herdsmen also migrate to other territories with permission of the Turkana hosts concerned. Age is a key factor in the organisational structure of Turkana society, and commonly there is a generational structure of leadership, with elders taking the helm in mediating disputes and directing trade defence. Authority is generally decentralised, and while there are clan leaders, small communities generally decide collectively on actions to take. For defence purposes, enforcement is generally granted to village warriors and their age-mates (Mathew and Boyd 2014:59). It is important to note that although there has historically been a warrior sect of Turkana society, increasingly this role has become voluntary for purposes of raiding, and is generally a large-scale community effort.

The Pokot community is organised in similar fashion to the Turkana. Pokot society is based on patrilineal heritage and is organised around a clan entity living in a village-style setting. They are pastoralists similar to the Turkana community, and thus rely heavily on livestock and migratory patterns. Again, age is an important organisational structure and a generational top-down approach is manifested in many aspects. However, scholars such as Michael Bollig

(2000) note the evolution of lineage in economic matters. Issues such as trade (including livestock) have deviated from this organisational structure and are now characterised as decentralised, and more individualised—an outcropping of a free market society. No one individual seems to dominate authority, and actors are generally free to decide their own affairs (Bollig 2000:358–359). This trend seems to parallel what is seen within the Turkana community.

### **Multi-dimensional factors of conflict: Profiteering, resources, and small arms**

Recently, scholars and other external actors have begun to identify access to resources as a legitimate issue of dispute between the two communities and pastoral societies as a whole (Kenya Human Rights Commission 2010; Cheserek et al. 2012; Boone 2013; Gleditsch 2013). The region in which the Turkana and the Pokot reside is semi-arid, receiving little overall rainfall. Thus, the groups must jostle for access to limited watering holes that are available to graze their cattle. Quantitative analysis actually suggests that violent raids increase during rainy seasons, as actors compete over newly discovered aquifers. Data over time indicate that the frequency of raids and their level of violence increase with rainy seasons and recede with drought-like conditions (Witsenburg and Adano 2009:520). These results support the notion that pastoralist communities find themselves in disputes over limited availability of resources with which to graze their cattle and support their own well-being. Perhaps even more alarming is the discovery of oil deposits in the Turkana region close to the border of the Pokot community. Both regions laid claim to the deposits, and another point of conflict about access to limited resources is therefore identifying itself (PRAGYA n.d.:30). Oil could prove profitable to the community which takes advantage of land-leasing arrangements, and thus there is a lot at stake for both Turkana and Pokot.

A significant issue which has led to further deterioration of stability within the pastoralist region has been the influx of modern weaponry. Most of the illegal weaponry originates from border areas of Uganda, Ethiopia, and Somalia. It then reaches these pastoralist communities often through criminal gangs, and this further fuels the regional violence (Kenya Human Rights Commission 2010:26).

Thus, cattle rustling becomes profitable for these illegal arms traders, and leads to an extension of conflict throughout the region. The interconnected nature of Turkana-Pokot conflict can clearly be exhibited with the nature of profiteering through illegal weapons. As the conflict has evolved over time from small-scale conflicts fought with basic clubs and bows and arrows to more retaliatory, full-scale assaults undertaken with advanced small arms, the conflict spiral has become more and more evident between these communities. If a herdsman purchases illegal arms to protect his livestock, opposing factions will do the same, fearing his actions are aggressive in nature. I find striking similarities between the build-up of arms of pastoralist communities and the nature of Soviet-US relations in the past. The main difference is that these actions lead to physical violence between pastoralist communities, thus a 'hot' war.

### **The underlying issue of reciprocity: Mimetic violence**

Though factors driving pastoral conflict within Kenya have long been identified, sustainable peacemaking has been absent, and continues to appear distant from the contemporary situation. I argue that the main impediment to peacemaking is the notion of reciprocity, in this case negative reciprocity. There remains within the conflict an embedded situation of negative responses to negative actions. Each response builds upon the last, and a conflict spiral erupts. What began simply as a cultural raiding practice has blossomed into increased armament, contestation over resources, and ultimately violence itself.

Historically, pastoral communities within East Africa operated on communal grazing lands rather peacefully. Because grazing lands could only be used for several months of the year, arrangements on land sharing had to be made between nomadic peoples and other communities. Reciprocal institutional arrangements were born in which some communities allowed grazing on their lands during certain periods in return for grazing rights in neighbouring regions (Ngaido 2005:[1]). In fact, reciprocity was the key mechanism which enabled collective action in traditional societies. However, with the onset of colonial land policies and the encroachment on pastoral grazing lands by administrative policies, reciprocity was interrupted. There could no longer be an internal guarantee of reciprocity. Similarly, cattle were previously a cornerstone of reciprocal

relationships in pastoral societies. Cattle would be traded for bridewealth, which would strengthen kinship and communal bonds because of future interactions; however, the commercialisation of livestock has eroded potential reciprocal arrangements involving cattle. Cattle raided for markets cannot be entered back into a reciprocal market (Krätli and Swift 1999:9).

The conflict situation in pastoral Kenya today revolves around the notion of negative reciprocity. Turkana and Pokot societies respond negatively to one another's actions – violence begets violence. Cattle were indeed raided throughout the history of East African pastoral societies. However, these raids were more of a form of wealth redistribution through cattle. There were customary rules in which cattle raids were limited to times of need, were small in number, and generally characterised by little violence. However, as rules began to be increasingly violated during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these raids escalated in intensity (Krätli and Swift 1999). Victims responded with raids of increased intensity, and the conflict spiral was born. Krätli and Swift (1999:21–22) note:

Ultimately, escalation is prompted by one group's perception that the raiding practices of the other group have become 'excessive', a fuzzy and subjective notion which may change according to a number of variables....Inter-tribal co-operation ceases and daily social life and economic routines are disrupted. Such escalation can be interrupted only when both parties feel that the balance of power has been re-established, that is when the peace process is not seen as a sign of weakness of one of the parties...

Clearly, group perception has been co-opted by the effects of livestock raiding. Each group perceives the other's actions as increasingly hostile and as aimed at cultural and social targets rather than commercial livestock targets alone. What is essentially a financial conflict erupts into full-scale ethnic war. The contention between Turkana and Pokot communities goes beyond a simple conflict spiral. According to the Structural Change Model (Pruitt et al. 2003), any refraining from an escalated response is generally perceived as weakness, and groups fear that failing to respond will invite further encroachment and aggression (Pruitt et al. 2003:97).

In this model, the emphasis is on the transformative effect that the actions of one party have on another within a conflict. Of particular emphasis in this case are the psychological and group change effects that the Structural Change Model elicits within its application. The Model notes four emotions specific to psychological changes: blame, anger, fear, and image threats. While these emotions can indeed cause a condition to deteriorate, they are not permanent structures. Rather, these emotions are temporary and only exist so long as the Model is applicable and present. These emotions often have a negative effect on groups by reducing caution, diminishing empathy, creating the perception that relations are a zero-sum game, and ultimately making it easier to scapegoat the other through reduced communication and negative perceptions.

Both studied communities have indeed undergone psychological changes. Blame and anger are typical community mobilisers for an aggressive response. Each community tends to become polarised around emotional responses to livestock raiding, which they see as a direct attack on their economic well-being, their security, and ultimately their community. However, fear is also an emotional factor driving conflict escalation. When raiding communities increase their armaments, nearby communities respond with a reciprocal increase in the capacity of their own weapons. This act of defence is seen by the initial party as an act of aggression, and thus a security dilemma is born. Finally, hostile perceptions of the other continue to erode the situation in rural Kenya. Each community identifies the actions of the other as stemming from some innate, negative identity trait of that party. These perceptions are what shifted the conflict from individual levels to communal levels. One act of greed by a raider or group of raiders becomes equated to communal aggression. The victims respond by coalescing their own community members around the notion of ethnic identity. The situation is reciprocated continuously with each instance of livestock raiding.

While previous scholars tended to identify the factors contributing to pastoral conflict as related to profiteering, access to resources, and small arms proliferation, I state instead that these are symptoms of a much larger Structural Change Model of conflict. This situation within the conflict has essentially embedded negative reciprocity as a norm. Communal actions are gauged by exogenous

factors rather than internal decisions. These actions have consequences of their own which contribute to similar effects on the receiving end. One community's hostile actions are mimicked on the receiving end, in a never-ending cycle.

Within situations of these communal patterns of violence, in which negative reciprocity changes the structure of beliefs and perceptions of the others, the situation can, and must, be further defined. René Girard delves into the topic of violence throughout humankind. He notes that what was once unanimous violence (erupting for a cause of desire which spent itself) can, over time, lead to the same desire of the victim group. Thus, rather than a desire as the root cause of conflict and competition, the cause becomes the violence itself, which paradoxically, is not a rational desire (Girard and Gregory 2005:160-162). In this instance, I will implement the term mimetic violence as it fits the mould of Girard's theory. While cattle rustling between communities originally occurred out of wants and desires to simply increase resources through illicit means, the reciprocal actions have continued to transform. Armed responses to incursions are no longer driven for a reciprocal desire for cattle, but rather for a mimetic desire of 'violence begetting violence'. Any actions of the other groups in these cases are viewed with a biased lens that is often influenced by the notion of mimetic violence. Understanding the nature of mimetic violence is vital in order to implement prescriptions; however, so too are understanding past attempts at mediation to identify what factors, if any, can be applied within the framework of the Structural Change Model relating to mimetic violence.

### **Past attempts at peacemaking**

Previous peacemaking efforts have been concentrated on the surface factors driving the conflict between Turkana and Pokot communities, which I argue are actually symptoms of a much more systemic conflict model. One attempt at peacemaking focused on the communities themselves. The focus was placed within pastoral communities to forbid raided livestock from being retained by the actors conducting the raid. Furthermore, women stolen during raids could not be taken on as brides of the raiders (Krätli and Swift 1999:32). On one hand, the approach was successful in that it was effective in removing the raiders from physical ownership incentives of raiding. The grassroots approach provided

local agency in which cattle rustlers were much more likely to obey their own group's instructions than to endure exogenously imposed sanctions. On the other hand, however, the project led to unforeseen consequences. Raided cattle were allowed to be given to elders or sold for weapons. Essentially, what occurred was the militarisation of raiding in which village elders became patrons of raids; they would support large-scale assaults for benefits. Furthermore, raiders sold cattle that were raided on the market and purchased weapons for themselves to conduct future raids. Thus, I argue that because the effort failed to remedy the systemic nature of cattle rustling, alleviating one factor of conflict shifted resources to others.

Another peacemaking effort aimed specifically at community solutions to Turkana conflicts enjoyed some successes. However again, Grahn and Akabwai (2005:21-22) note that communal solutions are not effective at solving systemic problems within a conflict.

Peacemaking efforts at the macro-level have encountered problems as well. One author explains that state-led peacemaking initiatives often fail due to corruption, lack of legitimacy, low resources, and ultimately institutional weakness. In a government in which ethnic politics are deeply embedded, attempts at mediating ethnic conflict disputes tend to exacerbate social tensions (Mahmoud 2011:159-161). Groups see government action as a continuation of ethnic biases and thus respond to mediation attempts in the same way as they do livestock raids – by polarising defence along their own communal identity.

Attempts at reducing access to small arms have often similarly failed in the past. Kenya itself has a regionally strong stance against small arms proliferation. These weapons are largely outlawed within the state. However, the local incentive to maintain weapons trade exists due to pastoral conflict. Thus, weapons are purchased from neighbouring states with more lenient weapons policies. The Regional Centre for Small Arms and Light Weapons (RECSA) has already sponsored the destruction of over 100 000 small weapons (Lamb and Dye 2009:79). The effectiveness of such projects is often questioned, however. High costs of undertaking such large efforts mean that the destruction of weapons themselves is often dependent upon external sources of funding. In this situation, the government is not a stakeholder and thus has little incentive

to partake. Scholars note the continuing spiral of an influx of illicit arms and the ensuing destruction (Lamb and Dye 2009; UN Office for Disarmament Affairs 2011; Mkutu 2008).

Previous attempts have all fallen short on their mandate to instil sustainable peacemaking efforts. I argue that these attempts have failed due to the fact that they focus on *symptoms* of negative reciprocity rather than trying to interrupt the conflict spiral. Similarly, initiatives have often focused only on one track of diplomacy, such as the local or state level. By narrowing the scope to one track, the negative pull of the conflict model simply gains traction in other areas which are not being focused upon. These past attempts seem to point to the need to instil both multi-track diplomacy initiatives as well as some sort of peacemaking which involves reducing negative reciprocity.

### **Integrative solutions and mimetic blessing**

Pruitt et al. (2003) offer several types of integrative solutions, two of which I find are directly applicable to the conflict situation between Turkana and Pokot communities. Pastoral conflict in Kenya indeed maintains conflict symptoms due to access to resources. One posited solution is 'expanding the pie' (Pruitt et al. 2003:194). In this scenario, the total access to resources to both parties is increased. If access to a consistent water supply, grazing lands, or oil revenues were increased, contention over resources would diminish as a conflict driver. I thus posit that there must be local capacity-building efforts to improve local infrastructure as well as reach revenue-sharing agreements between the governments over newly discovered oil sources. These revenues must be shared not only with the government of Kenya, but between pastoral communities themselves. By implementing these reciprocal institutional arrangements, mimetic blessings can return to govern pastoral society as was previously the norm before colonisation.

While the recognition of communal land rights in the 2010 Constitution of Kenya was a step in the right direction, there is yet to be seen any legal respect for practical reciprocity. Past colonial and early independence allocations of land cannot be undone. However, both the government and pastoralist communities themselves must evolve in order to balance communal access to

resources with respect to physical land boundaries and revenue points. I suggest that communal lands and pastoral grazing spots must be officially demarcated by the government in order to form a quantifiable and measurable regional territory. Communal grazing lands would enable the continuation of a pastoral lifestyle while reducing issues of contention along cross-border raids and cattle rustling. Thus, any instances of livestock raiding would no longer be viewed as an ethnic, group-based conflict, but rather as an individual property violation. Judicial courts would be more able to provide effective remedies and arbitration. These remedies would similarly apply to disputes over resources. Claims to access could successfully be justified through the judicial system. I also argue that arbitration should entertain the idea of implementing profit sharing of resources between the communities in dispute. The exact share would be determined through legal procedures.

As Wily (2011:752-753) criticises, legal mechanisms are useless when they are not enforced in practice. Turkana and Pokot communities themselves must force the hand of the government in recognising legal access to communal lands. I posit that in order to successfully push for rule of law, these communities themselves must coalesce around unions based on non-sociological variables. For instance, Turkana and Pokot businessmen could form a coalition or interest group around cattle herding, agricultural trade, or any number of relevant markets. These unions have the added benefit of requiring levels of reconciliation and mimetic blessings in order for individuals to effectively engage with one another across social boundaries. As has been evidenced countless times in democratic, market-based economies – money talks. While elites may be able to ignore pressure from broad ethnic communities with varying interests – communities in conflict with one another – they cannot ignore the influence of a concentrated lobbying group with a significant amount of market share. Just as Kimeri-Mbote (2013:2) notes the need to provide local communities with tools to manage a legal framework, I argue a bottom-up approach of dissemination of legal information and advocacy could provide local agency. NGOs could prove paramount in providing agency as well as facilitating the cessation of mimetic violence through mutual blessings and increased interconnectedness.

Paired with this solution is that of ‘cost cutting’. Here, parties concede on issues when costs in doing so are reduced, often due to compensation (Pruitt

et al. 2003:197). I argue that Turkana and Pokot members can agree to install mutual land-sharing arrangements during set periods in return for more internal enforcement against cattle raiding. Though land sharing may incur costs for original communities grazing herds at these locations, overall costs are reduced because internal sanctions decrease cattle raiding, and thus costs to defend against raids lower the cost of grazing in general. One study found that in pastoral societies, internal sanctioning against raid violators is essentially a public good. When sanctions and enforcement are initiated from within a community, societal costs of 'shirking' on norms are increased (Mathew and Boyd 2014:61-64). Cattle raiders not only face economic costs but social costs such as loss of bridewealth and communal respect. Thus, internal sanctions are a notion which I argue should be implemented in order to increase the cost of livestock raiding and reduce the cost of positive reciprocity.

At a macro-level, the proliferation of illicit small arms in Kenya is both a product of porous borders and of market incentives. While at first the task may seem monumental, reducing the costs of arms regulation is indeed achievable through both communal and state cooperation. I first conclude that Kenyan law enforcement can no longer be absent from the region. The police must increase their presence within rural pastoral grazing lands as well as along the borders between neighbouring states, especially Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda. While allocating funding to this mammoth task may initially seem daunting, evidence indicates that indeed it is actually less costly in the long-run to harden borders and increase the costs of illegal arms trade than continuously destroying armaments and dealing with the aftermath of deadly pastoral rivalries (Mkutu 2008). Along with a physical police presence, I contend for a strict training regimen for border officers in order to ensure that the rule of law and respect for individual rights are respected.

The least costly means of addressing illegal arms proliferation within pastoral communities of Kenya is simply to dis-incentivise the trade altogether. The fact that Kenya's strict weapons policy is so unusual in the region creates market mechanisms in which illegal arms are smuggled into the nation. High demand drives high prices, and smugglers are more willing to risk their livelihoods to transport and propagate arms. Here, I propose regional integration and

participation in small arms limitations. Kenya's policy towards arms sets a precedent for neighbouring states. However, unless these nations adopt similar policies, arms trade will only increase the more Kenya solidifies its position. East Africa must harmonise a policy framework aimed at reducing illegal small arms. The African Union and East African Community, I argue, could provide viable forums from which to launch these initiatives. A uniform regional approach to dissuading illicit arms trade is necessary in order to effectively diminish market incentives for trade to begin with. The local effects would be a decrease in violent conflicts between pastoral communities. Even if all other factors remain constant, conflict between Turkana and Pokot societies will be less organised, more slow to develop, and ultimately less deadly.

For both internal sanctioning and external arms agreements to be effective, overarching cooperation must be facilitated at first through ushering in a norm of mutual reciprocity. A local community's decision to sanction cattle rustlers internally is only legitimate if that community expects neighbouring communities to do the same. The historical lack of authority and accountability of the Kenyan government within pastoral regions has infused a sense of impunity to livestock raiders. By simply increasing the presence of authority within rural communities, the government can signal a reversal in trends, garnering legitimacy in the perceptions of locals and commencing a new trend of mutual reciprocity in that the government will protect livestock in return for local communities also dis-incentivising raiding. Again, this relationship is mutually beneficial – costs are reduced at both a communal level and the state level. Finally, for regional cost-reduction of arms control to occur, states must signal to one another the legitimate intentions of their stance on weapons trade. Kenya's difficulty has arisen because illegal weapons trade is more profitable due to the vacuum created. There is no system of reciprocity in the region, and neighbouring states have done little to harmonise arms control. It seems as if mutual relationships must be built from the communal level so as to bypass governments and instil a cross-border relationship. By bridging gaps locally, these communities can influence domestic policies to fall in line with the aspirations of regional communities as a whole. Cooperation must stem from community-based cooperation, reconciliation, and ultimately a cultural shift away from past mimetic violence.

Many anthropologists and sociologists note the difficulties present when local communities undergo cultural shifts (Lee 2004; Bobo 1988; Moreland and Levine 1982)). Oftentimes, a schism erupts between younger and older generations. Intra-group conflict can occur, especially when pressures of cultural norm shifts are exogenous. The external pressure of these norms is felt within the pastoralist communities themselves. With such a powerful external force, a solution must come from within.

Girard himself illustrates mimesis with a pessimistic view. For him, mimetic violence exists as a long-term response to the natural desires which contribute to unanimous violence. I find a fault with the fact that a natural response can lead to the paradox of these desires being replaced simply with the desire of violence or vengeance. I thus offer that indeed there exists an ability to transcend the conflict and implement mimetic blessing. Imitation of violence drives the conflict spiral to reach this mimetic pinnacle, but if instead of violence, actors imitated and reciprocated rational behaviour and good intentions, the cycle can indeed be broken. Furthermore, when mimesis of rationality replaces mimesis of violence, conflict itself is no longer a desire of communities. It is thus less likely that isolated violent behaviour would be perceived as an attack of identity. I therefore draw emphasis on this possibility, and focus on the actual transcendence of mimetic violence and the shift to mimetic blessing.

How could the transformation of mimetic violence to mimetic blessings be facilitated in the context of pastoral communities who have such a long and contentious history? Elizabeth Cole notes that history education and a pedagogy that takes history seriously are vital in order to promote progressive learning of the past. She explains:

What is critical here is not only the effect that these approaches to history can have on the formation of actively engaged, critically thinking citizens, but what they can offer to post-conflict settings where the history of the recent conflict is simply too sensitive and politically difficult to discuss openly... (Cole 2012:237).

Cole and others offer education as a way to bridge a gap from the past to current generations and to successfully construct progressive and mutual reciprocity between contentious groups. Education regarding cultural history

can tread lightly where the government and official mediation cannot. Bekerman and Zembylas (2014:57) note that in conflict settings, teachers must move away from the epistemological setting induced by the state and into a more critical, ontological perspective. The state and nationhood, they argue, pre-determine the identity of instruction teachers take. Grassroots approaches successfully enshrine shifting critical assessments to peace education, and can enable education to shift away from an identity created by the state (Lahai and Ware 2013).

While Cole explained that educational approaches and history teachings are vital to reconciling and transcending conflicts between communities, I wish to take her recommendations one step further. In a developing multi-ethnic nation such as Kenya, which lacks funding for educational reform and overhauls, and also has a history of a politically polarising ethnic force, attempting to implement a new practice could prove ineffective or even disastrous. An education policy focusing on negative emotions and ‘ethnic tragedies’ could prove destructive to the tensions between Pokot and Turkana communities. An ethnic-based education policy without proper institutions or plans in place can degrade already tense emotions between various groups. This ethnic pedagogy is deemed by scholars to have contributed to a large part of Balkanisation and ensuing violence in Assam, Cyprus, and Sri Lanka (Lange 2011).

There must be implementation of multi-track diplomacy in order to increase the capacity of the state to both enforce rule of law and increase local access to remedies. A multi-faceted coalition would ensure that dissemination of information and education policies are balanced. I suggest providing local NGOs with state-sponsored resources to disseminate information to local communities and elders. Still, the state has the largest potential for capacity to oversee access to resources and aid in curbing weapons proliferation. For this reason, the state is still a stakeholder and thus must serve a role in this coalition of reconciliation. Finally, I assert that these grassroots organisations should provide classroom instructors. Local schools could offer optional classes related to ethnic history which emphasise the connections and relationships shared by *all* pastoralist communities. Where the government fails to transcend ethnic boundaries in mediating conflict resolution, empowered local organisations can

combine with education in order to bridge social gaps and promote mediation, reconciliation, and ultimately a peaceful and respectful pastoral environment.

Can empowering local organisations in such a way actually alleviate systemic ethnic politicisation in Kenya? By conditioning the allocation of resources to multi-ethnic coalitions and NGOs which respect ethnic diversity, donors begin to set a bottom-up precedent of interest-based coalitions formed around ethnic unions and based upon participation rather than contention. The ultimate goal of conditioning aid to groups who promote these values is to create an environment in which multi-ethnic coalitions of unity, paired with interest-group participation in policy advocacy, become the norm. By institutionalising broad, cross-cultural relationships, mutual reciprocity is introduced into the system, which also has the effect of dis-incentivising violence. As Boehmke and Bowen (2010:667-668) note, interest-based advocacy correlates with an increase of democratic values. Bienen and Herbst (1996:27-28) also support this analysis regarding Africa and note a decrease in ethnic politics and rent-seeking. By providing agency to local organisations, not only can ethnic tensions between pastoral communities be reduced, but also the systemic ethnic politicisation in Kenya itself. The catalyst in this case is the transformative nature that local cooperation can have in promoting mutual reciprocity and ultimately mimetic blessings.

Reconciliation is vital to shifting the spiral among Turkana and Pokot communities from mimetic violence to mimetic blessings. Scholars such as Vamik Volkan (1998) argue that by reconciling differences between parties, all the results of the violence cannot be undone, and that the situation cannot be exactly the same as it was before the violence. Vern Redekop (2011), however, asserts that pairing spiritual reconciliation with focusing on personal connections may contribute to emergent creativity, which can indeed transform previous relationships among parties. Similarly, the multitrack peacemaking initiatives I posit, by pairing local and state-sponsored efforts, allow for the emergence of new principles in reconciliation. New norms emerge from multitrack approaches of reconciliation. Meta-requisites like implementing education to bridge cultural gaps as well as internal enforcement mechanisms of justice promote emergent creativity. The conflict spiral between the feuding pastoral communities is not only terminated, it is transformed into a spiral of mimetic blessings. With these

blessings in place, a positive peace can ultimately be reached, which can erode negative reciprocity and transform the situation into one of mutual reciprocity and blessings.

This analysis thus seeks to expand upon mimesis within the realm of conflict. I have attempted to steer discussions away from the notion of the ‘inevitability’ of mimetic violence within a conflict spiral, and rather to raise questions as to how these conflict situations can be changed into relationships of mimetic blessing. Mimetic violence with its reciprocal behaviour that occurs not so much for material desires or resources, but simply for the desire of vengeance itself, has to be counteracted. How can the desire of violence and vengeance be a rational response within any one society? Thus, this study aims to provide evidence for the fact that not only is mimetic blessing possible within society, but it can serve as a means to end conflict through a natural state of rationality. The dehumanisation that occurs due to mimetic violence, alongside the other psychological and group factors that drive pastoral conflict within Kenya, can indeed be reversed when the conflict environment is transformed.

## **Conclusions and a way forward**

The factors driving the pastoral conflict between the Pokot and Turkana communities in Kenya are related to profiteering, small arms proliferation, and access to resources. I have illustrated that these conflict drivers are actually inherent symptoms of a much larger systemic nature to the conflict. Livestock raiding between these communities is based on an age-old custom of reciprocity. Whereas, long ago, reciprocity was a beneficial tool for maintaining resources through institutions, the onset of colonial policies diminished access to land and decreased incentives for land-sharing arrangements. The practice of livestock raiding was transformed from a reciprocal tool of wealth distribution to a reciprocal vice of profiteering. Negative reciprocity was officially embedded within the system and maintained through structural change in psychological tendencies and perceptions of the ‘other’. A conflict spiral and security dilemma developed in which raids dictated an escalated armed response along communal identities. The situation continues today and is cyclical in nature.

The solution advanced within this article is to implement multitrack peacemaking efforts. Internal enforcement, cross-cultural cooperation, and increased state accountability can contribute to a positive peace. Simultaneously, cooperation is important at both a communal and a regional level. The geopolitics of state cooperation in East Africa cannot be discounted. In order for mutual relationships to occur, a bottom-up approach must evolve which is driven by eroding the cycle of negative reciprocity and replacing it with a transformative structure based upon healing, inclusiveness, learning from the past, and overall cultural openness.

Education can be implemented as a tool to instil a sense of reconciliation. This reconciliation itself, which may be brought forth by a coalition of grassroots as well as state organisations, may lead to the emergence of creativity. Transcendence between communities can occur as the result of new norms emerging which fundamentally alter the conflict and become irreversible. Ultimately, emergent creativity can transcend conflict norms and transform the situation from a conflict spiral of negative reciprocity to a positive peace building upon mimetic blessings. Increased cooperation between pastoral communities as well as increased state capacity will raise the welfare of all the parties involved. Emergent creativity paired with mutual reciprocity is paramount to constructing an environment of mimetic peace and ultimately spearheading peacemaking efforts between the Pokot and Turkana communities. With spiritual and cultural reconciliation, these communities can arm themselves not with defensive mechanisms against perceived aggression, but rather with tools of cohesion, understanding, and ultimately a sustainable peace.

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