THE NATURE ROLE AS BASES FOR CONFLICT CREATION AND RESOLUTION WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY URBAN SOCIETIES.

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ABSTRACT

It is well established that culture is an essential part of conflict resolution. The main premise is that all African culture plays a vital role in shaping individual and societal responses to conflicting events and in contributing to the social context that maintains the cultural messages we received. Two things are essential to remember about culture, they are always changing and they relate to the symbolic dimension of life. This paper explores culture and how culture works in creating conflict in North rift of Kenya. It sees culture as sources of conflict add to the existing pool of knowledge from a unique perspective of the *Pokot* culture and same can be used for conflict resolutions.

Keyword: Culture, Conflict, Society and Urban

INTRODUCTION

Our culture is an embodiment of our identity. Culture shape the way we talk because of the ethnic tribe that choose the language we speak. Because we have different culture, we are bound to have differences in our way of life.

The role of culture in conflict creation can be seen in different ways since culture and conflict have connections; cultures are embedded in every conflict because conflicts arise in human relationships. Culture affects the way we name, frame, blame and attempt to tame conflict whether a conflict exist at all is a cultural question. Culture is an essential part of conflict resolution; culture is like an underground river that runs through our lives and relationship giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgment and ideas of self and others. Though cultures are powerful, they often unconsciously influence conflict and attempts to resolve conflict in imperceptible ways.

CULTURE

Culture is the way of life of a people as Clark (2012) puts; "it includes socially acquired knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs, and habits … Culture is a life thought system, which influences the people's lives, activities and behavior towards others"

As a total way of life of a people; cultures are more than language, dress, and food, custom. Cultural group may share race, or national but they arise cleavages of generation socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, ability and disability, political and religious affliction, language and gender to name only a few.

According to Imran (2018) culture is the fabric of every society, what binds society together. Culture is human activity and the oldest of human character because it shapes the way

we communicate. Imran further stated that culture is a social heritage that is passed on to generation. It is a complex of ideas that distinguish people from animals.

Two things are essential to remember about cultures, they are changing and enacting our identity, cultural messages from the groups we belong to give us information about what is meaningful or important and who are in the world and in relation to other identities.

Cultural messages simply are what everyone in a group knows that outsiders do not know. They are the water fish swim in, unaware of its effect on their vision. They are a series of lenses that shape what we see and don't see. How we perceived and interpret and where we draw boundaries LeBaron (2003).

Le Baron added that cultures are a shifting set of starting points that orients us in particular ways and away from other directions, each of us belong to multiple cultures that gives us messages about what is normal, appropriate and expected, when others do not meet our expectations, it is often a cue that our cultural expectations are different, we may mistake differences between others and us for evidence of bad faith or lack of common sense on the part of others, not realizing that common sense is also cultural, what is common to one group may seems strange, counterintuitive, or wrong to another.

Cultural messages shape our understanding of relationship and how to deal with the conflict and harmony that are always present whenever two or more people come together, writing about or working across cultures is complicated, but not impossible. Culture is multi layered- what you see on the surface may mask differences below the surface. Culture is constantly influx- as condition change cultural group adapt in dynamic and sometimes unpredictable ways

Culture is elastic- knowing the cultural norm of a given group does not predict the behavior of a member of that group who may not conform to norms for individual or contextual reasons.

CONFLICT

Conflict is also said to be an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive scare resources and goals from others in achieving their goals. It could be also a disagreement or a clash of interest between two parties (Best 2006).

Conflict means clash, contention, confrontation, a battle or struggle or quarrel (Nwolise, 1997). Coser (1956 cited in Otite 2001) defines conflict as a struggle over values and claims of scarce status, power and resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.

CULTURES AS A CAUSE OF CONFLICT

The pattern of conflict in the North Rift of Kenya involving mostly the ethnic community of the *Pokot* and their neighbours is a complex one. Scholars have interpreted various factors that contribute to violence and conflict in the region. According to Nganga (2012), in Kenya, pastoralist communities occupy the largest percentage (70%) of the country's total land area. The population of the livestock keeping pastoralist communities in Kenya is estimated at about 20% of the total population of the country. Most of these people occupy the vast arid and semi-arid region of northern Kenya. The northern Kenya pastoralists are nomadic ethnic groups that are highly mobile.

These are mainly *Tutkanas, Samburu, Pokot, Borana, Rendile, Orma*, and Somali clans. They move from one area to another in search of water and pasture for their livestock. Their movements are not restricted to one area or even country. They move into and out of the neighboring country such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. These movements are one of the major sources of misunderstandings and conflict between them and their neighbours. The vastness and remoteness of the area, inadequate roads, networks and scarcity of resources goes hand in hand with lapses in security occasioning frequent misunderstanding and conflicts among these pastoral communities. The *Pokot* community is seen as hostile and aggressive by their neighbours. Often the *Pokot* are the ones who raid their neighboring communities, causing conflicts.

The Pokot community lives in the Pokot Districts North Rift Valley of Kenya. The *Pokot* attitude and perception of cattle can be compared to that of gold or money in modern society. Their perception of richness or wealth on cattle, their traditional rites are cattle centered, and their food is mainly livestock oriented (blood and milk). Every generation is taught to perceive a cow as an important treasure that the community cannot do without consequently, this leads to desperate searches for livestock using all means available. For example after a circumcision ceremony there is always a dire need for cattle to pay dowry during marriage.

The *Pokot* and their culture in search of identity, the value of cattle and how this forms their worldview. Apart from life being centered along their cattle, we have other important variables that actually dispose the *Pokot* community to look livestock as the only solution to their problems thereby making cattle rustling conflict the normal way of life in North Rift Region.

There are various reasons attributed to causes of conflict within the Pokot borders in the North Rift Kenya. These are culture, limited resources of pasture and water, political incitement and moranism. Most of these causes are based on the concept of "we" and "they". The Pokot people have no word or term of a visitor. Anybody who is not a Pochon- one of them described as an enemy. This is used to differentiate an insider "we" Pokots and the non-Pokots "they" .due to this perception, therefore, all the cows belong to "us" insiders and not to "them" outsiders. This is also embedded in their myth of creation story which has it that God created the first Pokot man and gave him the cattle. They usually use this kind of explanation to justify cattle rustling. They don't call cattle rustling stealing since they believe that they bring them back to where they belong. This kind of thinking is part of their cultural belief system, and it is passed on from one generation to the other.

In an interview with some Pokot elders, Nganga confirmed that cattle rustling take place because of prestige and fame. This is because riches in Pokot culture is based on how many cattle one owns not by how much money one has in his bank account. They also said that there has been a cycle of revenge and counter revenges from their neighbors hence creating an endless cycle of rustling. This has made it a very dangerous venture due to the proliferations of small arms from the unstable neighboring countries such as Sudan, northern Uganda, and the Somalia. When asked who is responsible for raiding, James who is a Christian said, "The young warriors are responsible. The cultural practice has been used to prove their courage after undergoing the rite of initiation into adulthood. They are expected to go and bring home the lost cattle. Also we have to blame the culture of dowry. For a young man to get married one has to pay a lot of cattle and their parents cannot afford these. They are advised to go and raid or no marriage for them."

Peter also confirmed the same sentiment. When asked the cause of cattle rustling, he said, "An educated Pokot woman is very expensive,

A cattle rustling is a cultural aspect of the *Pokot* founded on their myth of origin and a belief that all cattle belong to them. This research found out that the cultural belief in raiding is perpetuated by people (seers) who have an economic and political interest in promoting the very cultural system that places them in a powerful position.

In other words, do the *Pokot* seers play a central (main or primary) role in perpetuating the cultural belief? (1) That raiding is acceptable (2) Raiding is to be rewarded by consulting a seer. And how can the *Pokot* cultural belief that all cattle are theirs by transformed? This is based first on the assumption that cattle's rustling is cultural practice and all cultures are dynamic and can change. Secondly, that education is one of the tools in conflict transformation and can be used to bring about that change.

In the recent past, there have been numerous efforts to try to understand and manage conflicts in the North Rift, especially among the *Pokot* and their neighbors. Indeed these enterprises bore considerable fruits but did not completely resolve conflict in the region.

Clark (2012) argues that "…cultures are the shared values and assumptions on which rests the customs, norms and institution of any particular society. These world views formed are tactfully communicated through myths of region, narrative stories, linguistic metaphors, and cautionary tales."

Seul (1999) notes that; "culture is an essential part of conflict and conflict resolution. He argues that our culture is like underground rivers that run through our lives and relationships,

giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of "self" and :other".

Though cultures are powerful, they often unconsciously influence conflicts. Thus anyone who attempts to resolve intergroup conflicts must be aware of their cultural beliefs. When we talk of culture, it is more than food, clothes, and customs. It is quite possible for culture groups to share race, ethnicity or nationality but they also arise from cleavages of generations, social economic class, sexual orientation, ability and disability, political and religious affiliation.

It is important to note that cultures are not fixed; they are in the state of flux and change they relate to the symbolic dimension of life. Bearing the fact that the symbolic dimension of culture is the place where we are constantly making meaning and enacting our identities. Cultural messages from the groups we belong give us information about what is meaningful or important, and who we are in the world and in relation to others. It gives us our identity.

It can arguably be said that most attempts to solve the conflicts among the *Pokot*s and their neighbors in the North Rift Kenya have, in a way, overlooked the effect and influence of the *Pokot* culture. Their culture which is deeply rooted in them and passed from one generation to the other gives them their world view. The *Pokot*s perceive things and interpret issues based on what they hold in their culture.

The value of cattle which is embedded in *Pokot* culture has been the cause of conflict and how the place of a cow in building a harmonious community has turned to be the cause of conflict with their neighbours. Cow to the *Pokot* is the greatest valued animal. It is practically the life line of the *Pokot*. It is their source of livelihood. From the cattle they get food that is milk, blood and meat. They make their household items such as cups from the cattle horns and

plates from their hide and skin. It is also from the cattle that the *Pokot* get to pay the bride price of their wives and pay fines for the mistakes they commit in the society and give cattle out as gifts to their beloved ones. The wealth of a *Pokot* person depends on the number of cattle he owns. Cattle define a *Pokot* person's status. A *Pokot* with many cattle commands respect from the community and his family is held with a lot of dignity.

A *Pokot* child is taught the value of cow, how to love and take care of them and how to defend them against any aggressor, be it wild animal or human being. They are also taught the myth of their origin and how God in *Mtelo* (a *Pokot* sacred mountain) gave them the cows. This makes them feel that the cow is sacred because it was given to them by God and they have to cling to it even if it means death.

The concept of "we" and "they" has succeeded in keeping the Pokot community and their traditional practices such as "ptengowo" and "menjo" (clitoridectomy for females and circumcision of males respectively) intact. These practices are surrounded with a lot of secrets aimed at shielding the outsiders (they) from knowing what goes on, since they are referred to as enemies. The secrecy mainly involves oath taking during the seclusion period after circumcision.

In his book "Beyond War" Douglas Fry advances an argument that we can transcend violence even in the worst form of conflicts. He provides a new dimension by "surveying another set of disciplines namely cultural anthropology." He calls for an exploration into cultures and their social mechanisms for sidestepping group violence. This will reveal the mistake in classifications that have given rise to the erroneous labeling of certain societies as warlike. This kind of labeling of the Pokots as warlike by their neighbors has always made them feel hated by others and thus influenced the need to arm themselves against their perceived enemies. The

researcher assumes that this is not a true form of the Pokot culture; they are not war-like, since the word Pokot or Pochon denotes peace. Even their greeting, poghisio (how are you) calls for an inquiry if there is peace and the response kalya (there is peace) means affirmation of the prevailing peace.

Scholars have further held that cultural messages simply refer to what everyone in the group knows that outsiders do not know**.** Le Baron (2003) asserts to cultural influence; "they are like the waters fish swim in, unaware of its effect on their vision. In shaping our values, cultures contain starting points and currencies".

She postulates further that culture is largely below the surface. "Cultures are a shifting dynamic set of starting points that orients us in particular ways and away from other directions". When others do not meet our expectations, it is often because our cultural expectations are different. Cultural messages shape our understandings of relationship and of how to deal with the conflict and harmony that are always present whenever two or more people come together. Le Baron believes that culture is multi-layered. What you see on the surface may mask difference below the surface. Therefore, cultural generalizations are not the whole story and therefore are no substitute for building relationships and sharing experiences, coming to more others more deeply over time.

However, culture is constantly in flux as conditions change. Cultural groups adapts in dynamic and sometimes unpredictable ways. Therefore, no comprehensive description can ever be formulated about a particular group. Any attempts to understand a group must take the dimension of time, context and individual differences into account. Le Baron describes well why some conflicts become more violent than others. I would describe her explanation on culture and

world view as the lens in which we perceive reality. Our cultures influence our way of thinking and our response to issues.

When two different parties view the same reality they might end up giving different interpretations, which might become the source of their conflict. The truth behind is they perceive it from two different world views. In her detailed explanation of world view and culture and their effects in conflict resolution and prevention, Le Baron postulates many important points. Two of them are very important in relation to understanding *Pokot* culture and world view.

Le Baron says world view can be resources for understanding and analyzing true stories, rituals, myths and metaphors used by a group, we can learn efficiently and deeply about group members' identities, which they see themselves to be, what matters to them and how they make meaning. When we do this each side to a conflict, places of connection and divergence may become clearer, leading to a better understanding of the conflict in conflict in context. World views with their embedded meanings can be the seedbed from which new shared meanings emerge. These shared meanings may arise as people co-create new stories, designing rituals and find inclusive metaphors to contain their meanings.

CULTURE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TRADITIONAL JUSTICE MECHANISMS

In Kenya, there is increasing reliance on informal conflict management mechanisms due, in part, to lack of faith in the judiciary and the sheer expense of court procedures-not to mention the general inability to pay advocate fees due to poverty. An example of the infusion of traditional mechanisms in modern conflict management is the system of elders under the Land

Disputes Tribunals Act, 1990. Under this Act, there is a requirement that all disputes relating to land be referred to appointed elders at the local level, whose decisions, on matters of fact is final. Nganga (2012).

COUNCIL OF ELDERS

The primary indigenous conflict resolution institution is the council of elders. The institution of elder is very much in use even today but somewhat weakened as the elders are unable to enforce the punishment meted out. In study of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms conducted in 2004 among the pastoralists *Pokot*, *Turkana*, *Marakwet* and *Samburu*, obtained the same information. Most traditional societies had a council of elders. Which was the premier institution charged with the responsibility of managing and resolving conflict? The institution of elders was greatly respected. Elders were seen as trustworthy and knowledgeable people in the community affairs thus enabling them to make informed and rational decisions. Their age gave them accumulated experience and practical wisdom useful for making decisions which were not only for the parties to the conflict but also for the better good of the whole community. The council of elders used to sit and adjudicate disputes. The primary consideration was the need to maintain family harmony and peaceful co-existence in the society. As much as possible, the process encouraged reconciliation of the parties. Ruto, & Masinde,(2004).

INTER-ETHNIC MARRIAGES

Ruto & Masinde again see inter ethnic political marriages as another common mechanism employed in traditional African societies. The creation of bonds between two communities through marriage helped to eliminate fighting between members of these communities, for it was

an abomination to fight with one's in-laws. One of the ways by which the conflict between two principle clans was diffused was between inter-clan marriages

THE GACACA 'TRADITIONAL' DISPUTE SETTLEMENT MECHANISM

It has become common wisdom that the word 'gacaca' means 'justice on the grasses. In fact, the name Gacaca is derived from the word 'umugaca', the Kinyarwandan word referring to a plant that is so soft to sit on that people preferred to gather on it. These gatherings were meant to restore order and harmony. The primary aim of the settlement was the restoration of social harmony, and to a lesser extent the establishment of the truth about what had happened, the punishment of the perpetrator, or even compensation through a gift. Although the latter elements could be part of the resolution, they were subsidiary to the return to harmony between the lineages and a purification of the social order. . Gacaca represented both the justice of proximity and a handy mechanism to relieve the pressure on the ordinary court system. Despite the introduction of some formal elements and its instrumental relation with the overarching judicial structures, the conciliatory and informal character of the Gacaca remained the cornerstone of the institution since decisions were to a great extent not in conformity with written state law Lamle, (2015).

COMMUNAL LIFE

Communal life is another structure that plays a vital role in the management of conflict within Africa. It is a structure where it is an opportunity to exchange labour. You farm for me and I in turn farm for you. It also helps young men build houses for each other. It encourages people in their community be their brother's keeper: they build and clear roads, markets paths together. Communal life facilitates bonding between the people where togetherness and oneness

is seen amongst the people. This explains why sorrows, joy and celebration are a communal or corporate thing. It is done or borne together with the family and extended relations. Lamle also said, the individual can only say "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am grateful" is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good.

RESPECT FOR ELDERS

Another structure is the respect for elders which is a very important principle used for peace building in Africa. The grey hair is associated with wisdom and so elders are respected because of quantum of knowledge they possess. And because of their experiences and knowledge in life, they transfer to the younger generation who look up to the older ones. This is because it is in the family that one learns how to exercise authority and submit to authority and from the family; these virtues are translated to the state.

ETHNIC GROUPS ALLIANCE

These reduce the possibility of conflict between the tribes in question. Different ethnic groups sometimes agree to enter into alliances to protect each other from aggression from other groups. They view themselves as members of one group and jointly repulse attacks from other group(s) that were not part of the alliance.

CONCLUSION

Since culture is so closely related to our identities (who we think we are), and the ways we make meaning (what is important to us and how), it is always a factor in conflict.

Cattle rearing did play an important role in Pokot Rift of North Kenya conflict, this is because from the beginning of the creation cattle rustling was an important flaw, we can only understand why the culture of cattle rustling has carried all along centuries by understanding the *Pokot* world view. As mention earlier, the world view of a group influences them on the way they do things and behave; viewing the *Pokot* culture as a "Lens" within which they perceive their world.

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