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## LOST OPPORTUNITY: PEACE BUILDING INITIATIVES IN CONFLICT PRONE AREAS

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### **ABSTRACT**

Kenya has had ethnic conflict since the inception of multi-party democracy in 1992. In Molo Division in Nakuru County, a number of governmental and non-governmental reports underscore the social and economic ramifications of the violence. However, serious and sustained peace building efforts have been lacking in an effort to reconcile a society that has been fractured. This paper argues that there have been a number of opportunities that should have seized to reconcile citizens, but such opportunities were lost. The task of peace building has largely been reduced to mere calls for peaceful coexistence, without interrogating the fault lines that open the possibility of fresh ethnic outbreaks and violence. This paper critiques previous and current peace building initiatives in Molo Division. Data collection used focus group discussions, oral interviews, questionnaires and written documents, and analysis used the Coser Lewis conflict theory. The various peace initiatives have failed to address the issues that led to ethnic violence. Memorialization, restitution and restoration of land rights, creation of job opportunities for the youth and profiling of all victims of ethnic violence are critical ingredients for sustainable peace not only in Molo Division, but other parts of the country that have been affected by ethnic violence.

**Key words:** *Peace, Initiative, Conflict, Opportunity, Coexistence*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Kenya has been a theatre of periodic ethnic conflict since the inception of multi-party democracy in Kenya in 1992. An excellent case is Molo Division, in Nakuru County, which has experienced three major waves of violence- 1992, 1997-8 and in 2007-8. The extent of the social, political and economic consequences of the violence has been documented in a number of reports such as the National Council of Churches in Kenya (1993) report, the Kiliku Report (1993), the Akiwumi report (1999) and more recently, the Kenya National Human Rights Commission as well as the Commission of Inquiry into the Post Election Violence (CIPEV) (2008) popularly known as the Waki Report. The wretchedness that has been imposed upon the victims by the violence in the period 1992-2008 demands that measures be put in place to mitigate the consequences of the conflict. Most importantly, and if past experience is anything to go by, effort must be made to ensure that the area will not relapse to ethnic violence in future.

### **Statement of the problem**

Various peace building actions and approaches to prevent, reduce, transform and help people recover from violence have been initiated. However, evidence shows that to a large extent, the approaches adopted by the various peace agencies in the area have not succeeded in securing enduring peace among the various ethnic groups that reside in the

area. There have been a number of opportunities that both the government and non-governmental organizations should have seized to reconcile citizens; yet, such opportunities were lost. Therefore, this paper seeks to analyze the effectiveness of the existing peace building initiatives and suggest strategies that can be adopted to secure enduring peace in the area.

### **Research questions**

This paper will be guided by the following questions;

1. How have the victims of ethnic violence been treated since 1992?
2. Have the victims of ethnic violence received meaningful support to rebuild their lives?
3. What are some of the opportunities that the organizations have had to reconcile citizens?
4. Has the government and non-governmental organizations used the opportunities they have had to make the process of re-integration successful?

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the role of both state and community based peace initiatives in ensuring sustainable peace
2. To establish whether the government and non-governmental organizations have used the opportunities they have had to make the process of re-integration successful
3. To suggest strategies that can be adopted to secure enduring peace in the area

### **METHODOLOGY**

The paper uses a qualitative design which gives a narrative description of the state of affairs as it exists. It will use a case study of Molo Division which is very significant in capturing the exact details the role of both state and community based peace initiatives in ensuring sustainable peace in the area and whether the government and non-governmental organizations have used the opportunities they have had to make the process of re-integration successful. Desk top review, Focus group discussions and oral interviews were used in the collection of primary data. To carry out the interviews, a purposive sampling procedure was employed.

The researchers organized four focus group discussions- one in each of the four locations where this study was carried out. Each focus group discussion had 7 respondents. Care was taken to ensure that respondents in Oral interviews were conversant with the undercurrents of ethnic violence in the area since 1992. A total of twenty eight informants were interviewed. Government Reports, books, journals, newspaper articles as well as reports from non-governmental bodies were also used to complete the above mentioned primary sources. Overall, the data was presented descriptively.

### **Theoretical framework**

This research was guided by conflict theory. The theory has a long history, from Ibn Khaldun and Thucydides in the classical world, Karl Marx in the 19<sup>th</sup> century while Wright Mills, Ralf Darendorf, Irving Loius, Lewis Coser, Herbert Marcuse, Randall Collins and Andre Gunder Frank constitute contemporary conflict theorists. This theory has been found appropriate in the analysis of racial conflicts, class wars, strikes, student power movements, revolutions and peasant uprisings. The underlying assumptions of conflict theory are:

- (i) There are seeds of conflict embedded in every social structure
- (ii) The social universe and its component elements are in a state of flux
- (iii) Every part of society is constantly changing
- (iv) Every society experiences at every moment social conflict; social conflict is ubiquitous and
- (v) Human beings are sociable but conflict prone.

### **Study Locale**

This study was done in Molo Division, Nakuru County, Kenya. It is mainly inhabited by the Kipsigis, Ogiek, Agikuyu and the Abagusii. The Akiwumi's Commission noted that this ethnic diversity had been a source of tension and ethnic conflict pitting the Kalenjin (Kipsigis and the Ogiek) on the one hand and the Kikuyu and the Kisii on the other. According to the 2009 census, according to the 1999 population census, the Division has a population of 542, 103 people. The Division is part of the larger Nakuru County. The Division has been affected by three waves of ethnic violence: 1992, 1997 and 2008. The Commission of Inquiry on the causes of ethnic clashes led by Justice Akilano Akiwumi (1999) noted that in Nakuru County, Molo and Olenguruone Divisions were the most affected by the 1992-1993 clashes. Indeed, Molo Division was among the few areas declared security operation zones under the Preservation of Public Security Act by President Daniel Arap Moi on September 2 1993 (Akiwumi, 1999:133). This

study was done in selected locations of the Division namely; Turi, Mukinyai, Kapsita and Sagaitim. According to the Kenya Land Alliance Report (2009), Turi, Kapsita (within Elburgon) and Mukinyai alone received a total of 2231 returnees after the 2007-2008 ethnic violence.

## **RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

### **Critical Analysis of the Role of State Sponsored Peace Initiatives**

The State plays a critical role in the maintenance of domestic peace because it provides most of the institutionalized agencies and processes of social change (Morgenthau, 2012: 532). It is within this logic that after every wave of violence, the government established police posts manned by the Administration Police (AP) in several parts of the Division so as to keep peace in the area. Such a state sponsored peace process had inherent weaknesses. First, victims and residents of the area were categorical that the state was an accomplice in the violence, implying that they could not trust the same state to maintain peace. In the light of evidence obtained from the Akiwumi (1999: 132) and CIPEV (2008: 91) reports, such fears were not misplaced.

Secondly, the state failed to appreciate the fact that violence had engendered conditions that would make the conflict self-reproducing. For instance, the creation of many unemployed youths who moved to Elburgon, Molo and Njoro towns made them easy targets for recruitment into ethnic militias. On the same note, the destitution that followed displacements and dispossessions created deep feelings of resentment and bitterness among the locals. Moreover, the fact that no attempt was made by the state to identify and bring perpetrators of the violence to justice has cast doubts on the credibility of any state sponsored peace initiative, Alfred Otoigo, (Oral Interview, 01/12/13).

When the coalition government was formed after the 2007-08 violence, the state through the Office of the President, attempted to take over humanitarian relief and reconstruction from international agencies and the Kenya Red Cross. Consequently, the Ministry of State for Special Programmes was given the responsibility of assisting the Internally Displaced Persons. The ministry launched a poorly conceived, organized, and timed *Operation Rudi Nyumbani* (Return Home) and the related operations *Tujenge Pamoja* (Build Together) and *Ujirani Mwema* (Good Neighborliness) using the provincial administration to manage them. The administration police could not properly support the exceptionally challenging resettlement and peace building tasks and at the same time deal with broader security concerns (USIP, 2010: 7). In fact, it can be argued that the presence of camps for the Internally Displaced Persons- camps that were littered across the Rift Valley province was not only an indictment to the political class and an embarrassment to the state. Therefore, the camps had to be dismantled. This might explain the urgency with which *Operation Rudi Nyumbani* was executed.

The government ordered the provincial administration to dismantle refugee camps without adequately preparing the ground for their proper reception and re-integration with the communities in the areas they had been evicted from. Under such circumstances, both the displaced persons and their former neighbors were not adequately prepared to live together again, Mungai Thuo, (Oral Interview, 10/12/13).

To help displaced families re-start their lives, the government gave them ten thousands shillings each through a process that was characterized by corruption. Many victims of the 2007-08 violence in the areas where this study was done did not get the money, even after making a lot of effort, Rufai Abengi, (Oral Interview, 10/12/13). A number of government officials and a people masquerading as IDPs appropriated the money meant for the victims. In a survey done by the Kenya Land Alliance, it was found out that the majority of the 2,746 displaced people interviewed did not receive start-up capital of 10,000 or 25,000 shillings. In one location of Kuresoi, a chief had allocated compensation to his supporters, including young people involved in the violence (Kenya Land Alliance, *Land Data Survey Report*, 2009:9).

The government has also used the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) to reconcile ethnic groups living in the larger Nakuru County. An independent constitutional commission, the NCIC brought together more than one hundred elders mainly drawn from the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities. The commission engaged elders from the various ethnic groups separately where the elders highlighted injustices meted on their respective communities since the colonial period. After a year of such meetings, a joint eight-point peace plan was developed and a peace accord signed on 13 May 2012.

Among the resolutions made by the elders, on behalf of their communities, was a promise to respect each other's culture, traditions and freedoms enshrined in the constitution. They also pledged to develop and support a dispute

resolution mechanism, avoid derogatory statements, condemn violence and put to task politicians who preach hatred (The *Sunday Nation*, 29 April 2012). Evidently, the failure to include youths and elders from the village level may hamper the success of the commission's efforts. Yet, it is the youths who do the actual fighting while the elders are known to 'bless' them before they go to war against other ethnic groups (USIP, 2009: 11). With such challenges, government sponsored resettlement and peace initiatives have ended in failure.

### **Community Based Peace Strategies.**

While the state is indispensable in the maintenance of domestic peace, it is not in itself sufficient (Morgenthau, 2012: 531). Other players such as religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, community workers are also involved in re-membering post-conflict societies. At the community level, apart from the government initiative discussed above, no efforts have been made to ensure inter-ethnic harmony in the four locations where this study was done. However, in other parts of the larger Molo such as Kuresoi and Likia, the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru and the provincial administration police involved the residents in electing elders and youth from every ethnic group in the area to oversee peace meetings and reconciliation, Douglas Mutiga, (Oral Interview, 10/12/13). The committees have achieved some significant results especially in the Likia zone, near Njoro. A collaborative effort by Muslim, Christian and Hindu leaders, the Likia and Beyond Peace and Conflict Re.solution Council has been active in peacebuilding activities (USIP, 2009:9).

Notable among community based peace initiatives was the campaign by Carol Teachers Training College choir. The choir was established after the 2007-08 violence. At the height of the violence in 2008, some youths attempted to burn down the college, which is located at Rongai, East of Molo Division. After the situation returned to normalcy, the choir began outreach programs to create an awareness on the importance of ethnic harmony.

As a way of engaging the youth in meaningful activities, the college started elementary computer lessons for youths in the area. The choir organized periodic peace caravans in Molo, Kuresoi, Njoro, Kericho and other areas to preach ethnic harmony. The group goes to churches, market places, schools and other public places to perform skits, poems, songs and dances that emphasize on peace (The *Daily Nation*, January 30, 2012). The choir and the college at large is no longer involved in peace building activities, perhaps, due to the illusion of peace that now prevails in the area. Yet, conflict theorists remind us that conflicts can be latent until that moment when a combination of circumstances brings them to the surface (Abraham, 1981: 112). While the efforts done by the various agencies discussed above cannot be ignored, the general situation in Molo Division reveals that more effort needs to be made to secure enduring peace in the area. The fact that some of the displaced still live in refugee camps attests to the failure of the peace processes. The following section discusses some approaches that can be used to achieve this end.

### **Strategies that can be adapted to Secure Enduring Peace in the Area** **Memorialization**

Memorialization refers to the process of creating a memorial for purposes of perpetuating the memory of a person, group of persons, incident, event or era. Given that memory is significant to the writing of history, lineage and group identity, memory is often contested and can be itself a source of conflict. However, memory, as perpetuated through processes such as memorialization seen in national monuments and commemorative celebrations can assist survivors of human rights violations, through symbolic reparations, to begin the process of healing; and assist the previous divided society in processes of reconciliation.

The purposes of memorialization initiatives include truth-telling; seeking justice; building a culture of democracy; commemorating previously marginalized histories and heritage; and recognizing victims and survivors of human rights violations. Memorialization can take a variety of forms, for instance, renaming of public facilities, plaques, exhibitions, museums and monuments. It is sometimes categorized within the transitional justice discourse as forming a subcomponent within the area of reparations (i.e. symbolic reparations).

Memorialization has been applied in Chile, South Africa and Rwanda (Kenya Human Rights Commission, *Transitional Justice in Kenya: A Tool Kit for Training and Engagement*, 2009:58). Besides state-level support for memorialization, survivor groups initiated and participated in various memory projects which included designing and sustaining memorials and sites of memory, including former torture centres, recording names and details of those who died or were victimized during a conflict, and organized events on key historical dates. The fact that survivors, states and truth commissions recognize the significance of memorialization further highlights the positive potential of memorialization within post-conflict societies. After three waves of violence, it may not be practically possible to

bring perpetrators to retributive justice. Perhaps, time has come for residents in Molo Division as well as policy makers to give the concept of memorialization a chance. Admittedly, there are several obstacles to the successful implementation of memorialization initiatives. They include: inadequate information, the lack of empirical information on and around memorialization as a process within transitional justice may result in ad-hoc, uncoordinated and unmonitored memorialization efforts that may serve only the needs of specific groups.

For any memorialization initiative to achieve its objective as a peace-building mechanism there needs to be some level of consultation by the initiators or sponsors of the project with the community that they seek to empower through the project. In this regard, a top-down approach to memorialization should be avoided. The ethnic groups that have been in conflict need to own the initiative for peace-building in the area to succeed. Perhaps, residents, government and others who are interested in peace in the area can borrow a leaf from members of the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luhya, Luo, Kisii and the Turkana ethnic groups who came together to reconstruct the Kenya Assemblies of God (KAG) church at Kiambaa in Eldoret that was set on fire on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008, during the post-election violence. Seventeen people were burnt to death, eleven died on the way to the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital in Eldoret while fifty four were treated and discharged (CIPEV, 2008: 48). Previously a predominantly Kikuyu congregation, the church has been renamed Kiambaa Unity and Reconciliation Church so as to reflect the need for inter-ethnic cooperation and harmony in the post-conflict period. The church has been instrumental in peace initiatives in the greater UasinGishu County (The *Daily Nation*, 24 October 2012).

Politicization of memorialization is another potential challenge, it is important to note that many memorialization initiatives are government funded and often become tools to further political agendas and consolidate the power of the ruling faction. The effect is usually a memorial that is distasteful or offensive.

Finally, given that most initiatives are built with an aim of ensuring permanence and spanning generations, memorialization often run the risk of becoming irrelevant to future generations which may not understand or appreciate its context and value. This is especially the case where there are no educational programs aimed at reinforcing the significance of the memorials to future generations.

A good example of an event that can be memorialized to foster inter-ethnic harmony is the Sachang'wan Accident. On the evening of January 31, 2009 an oil tanker overturned and burst into flames and burnt to death more than 130 villagers who had rushed to siphon the oil at Sachang'wan town centre, 60 kilometers from Nakuru town on the Nakuru-Eldoret highway. Torn apart by inter-ethnic violence since 1992, the incident temporarily provided an opportunity for inter-ethnic co-operation. According to an informant, this tragedy helped to forge inter-ethnic harmony in the following way:

During the 2007-2008 Post-Election Violence, every ethnic group buried its own people. But in this tragedy, many families in the Mukinyai- Kibunja-Sachang'wan area lost a member while others lost several members. Since it was practically impossible for many families to handle the pain and the logistics of interring their dead, the elders and church leaders came together and agreed that we should bury our dead in an organized manner. We could bury a Kisii today, a Kikuyu tomorrow and a Kalenjin the following day. For the first time in many months, we were free to walk into our neighbor's homesteads and they could also come to our homes. We mourned together, we wept together. . . the speeches made during the funerals were very solemn, all of us regretted our past animosity, for the first time since 1992, my bitterness was gone, we had been combatants for a long time, we now shared in the same fate, we were united in grief (Wakaba, Oral Interview, 10/12/2013).

With the support of the government, such a date, marked every year, would prove critical in enhancing inter-ethnic harmony in the area. It is worth appreciating that a plaque bearing the names of those who were burnt beyond recognition and were consequently buried in a mass grave was constructed at the site of the accident. The event provided an opportunity to construct a collective memory and a shared narrative of ethnic violence. Such a narrative, reinforced with a commemoration every year, would eventually replace the selective ethnic narratives and memories that make violence in the area self-perpetuating. Both the state and non-state actors ought to have gone beyond the mere construction of a plaque and turn it into a powerful symbol that cuts across ethnic groups that live in the area (TabutanyChumo, Oral Interview, 04/ 12/ 13).

Another way in which the tragedy united the various communities was the fact that since many of the victims of the fire tragedy had been burnt beyond recognition, families whose members were missing accepted the government's

proposal to bury the remains in a mass grave at the scene of the accident. A plaque bearing the names of the deceased was erected at the scene after the highly publicized ceremony attended by high ranking government officials who included the president, the prime minister and the vice-president. The importance of commemorating the incident has continued to decrease with every passing year. While residents in the area have continued to remember the accident in the subsequent years; the state has not taken a leading role in these annual memorials (The *Standard*, February 1, 2012). Yet, it has been observed that the proper creation and promotion of memorials is a pivotal component of reconciliation as this is the terrain in which divisive identities and myths are created, contested and destroyed.

### **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation can also be used to bring inter-ethnic harmony. Truth telling, that means, a full accounting of the past, including the identities of both victims and perpetrators is necessary for reconciliation. To build reconciliation, individuals and institutions need to acknowledge their own role in the conflicts of the past, accepting and learning from it in a constructive way so as to guarantee non-repetition. Religious leaders can be useful agents of reconciliation. It has been noted that churches and mosques can emphasize the re-discovering of a new conscience in individuals and society through moral reflection, repentance, confession and rebirth. For reconciliation to succeed, the residents of Molo Division must actively initiate the process. The Kiambaa experience mentioned above provides some insights:

Those interviewed (by the Daily Nation journalist) say that whereas they recognized the chief mediator Koffi Annan's role in midwifing the peace process, (at the national level) the peaceful coexistence realized at the grassroots has largely been due to the residents' efforts. One, they argue, must own the reconciliation drive for the initiative to be meaningful (The *Daily Nation*, 24 October 2012).

### **Restitution and restoration of land rights**

Many victims lost their lands and also their documents such as title deeds which were either burnt or misplaced. It is imperative for the government to facilitate their replacement so that the victims who lost land can recover their land rights. In situations where it is impossible for victims to go back to their former lands, the state can compensate the victims in accordance with the current market rates for land. This will enable the affected to reconstruct their lives. Besides loss of land and land rights, in areas like Mukinyai and Kapsita, victims of violence have been embittered by the fact that they could identify iron sheets, bicycles, television sets and cattle stolen from them in the course of the violence. Voluntary surrender of such property to their owners would go a long way in restoring ruptured ethnic and personal relationships. The success of restitution would be determined by the effectiveness of reconciliation. Bearing in mind that the expectation of restorative justice is a key component in building sustainable peace (Morgenthau, 2012: 526).

### **Significant cultural and attitudinal change**

To overcome negative ethnicity, there is need for residents in Molo to change how they relate to, and direct their attitudes towards one another. The culture of suspicion, fear, mistrust and violence need to be broken down and opportunities and space opened up in which people can hear and be heard. Similarly, the cultural basis of violence ought to be dealt with. It was in the appreciation of this fact that the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK), Gender Equity Network and Genesis Art Creation organized a joint initiation ceremony comprising of the Kalenjin, Kikuyu and the Abagusii in Molo and Kuresoi in December 2012. The initiates were first trained on peace building (<http://m.news24.com/kenya>, March 3 2012). If sustained, such an approach will in the long run prove vital. Circumcision ceremonies are important avenues for confronting violence; a young man had confided that:

It is during the circumcision ceremony that youths are trained on how they can develop to be real warriors and how they can exterminate other communities (their enemies). During this rite of passage from childhood to adulthood they are taught that if they can kill there would be no either spiritual or emotional impact has they would be purified later after killing (USIP, 2009:11).

The Agikuyu and the Kalenjin, who have been the main protagonists in the conflict, are both inclined to the Warrior Tradition, discussed in detail by Ali Mazrui and Michael Tidy (1977). In both ethnic groups, the circumcision of young men and their subsequent seclusion from the society is laden with military meaning. Upon initiation, young men enhance the military capital of their respective communities, Oral Interview (KibossLetio, James Mungai, Oral Interview, 10/12/2013). This implies that for any peace-building efforts to bear fruits in the long run, it must address the cultural dimension of the conflict. Dahrendorf, posits that conflicts emanate from the very nature of social structure and that there are seeds of conflict embedded in every social structure (Dahrendorf, 1973: 102).

### **Creation of job opportunities for the youth**

Although unemployment is not unique to Molo Division alone, two decades of intermittent ethnic conflicts in the area has compounded the challenges faced by youth in Molo. Many of them were unable to pursue education to higher levels, making them unable to compete against their contemporaries in other parts of the country. Moreover, as noted by CIPEV, (2008: 35, 36) many of them moved into towns. Desperation has made them available for hire by politicians bent on using violence to win elections. Besides, they have become easy recruits by ethnic militias and vigilante groups. The government should devise ways of economically empowering the youth such as building of roads and planting trees to restore the forests that have disappeared in the course of the conflict as well as assisting the youth get funds through the *Uwezofund*. A source of income for the youth would be a sure way of dissuading them from being recruited for violent purposes. A wage/salary are one of the ways of addressing the differential distribution of desirables – desirables that have been identified by conflict theorists as a perennial source of conflicts within and among societies (Collins, 1975: 60, 89).

### **Profiling and compensating of all victims of ethnic violence**

To resettle and build houses for victims of violence, the coalition government engendered feelings of victimization and marginalization among the Kalenjin. A journalist with the *Standard* newspaper noted that: “the government’s efforts to resettle one community while ignoring another was causing disquiet, threatening fragile peace. Residents (Kalenjin) were unhappy because they were viewed as aggressors who never suffered from the violence “if your neighbour gets something and you get nothing, you ask yourself why” (The *Standard*, July 15, 2011). To eliminate such perceptions, it would be prudent for the government to profile all victims and compensate them.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This paper has attempted to highlight and critique some of the peace initiatives that have been operational in Molo in the period 1992-2013. Government supported and community based approaches to peace have been interrogated. A key observation is that a peace initiative constructed from above and imposed by either the state or non-governmental organizations have failed to deliver peace in the area. It is also clear that there is lack of coordination between the government and non-state actors in the processes which has in turn jeopardized the prospects for sustainable peace. It has also been argued that there are mechanisms such as memorialization, restitution and restoration of land rights that can be adopted to further the agenda for peace in the area. To realize sustainable peace, grassroots or bottom – up approaches ought to be adopted. The net must be cast wide enough, to bring on board all actors, chiefs, traditional healers, faith based organizations, politicians, political parties, the civil society, women, youth among others. It is only then can the residents of Molo Division experience genuine peace.

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