

Pastoralist Cosmology:  
The Organizing Framework for Indigenous Conflict Resolution  
in the Horn of Africa

"Ore Olarabal name Kule" (Maasai proverb)

"War is not milk" (translation)

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is an effort to provide some depth and context to recent work by many to resolve conflict in the Horn of Africa. A helpful trend is indicated by a posture of listening to local people describing their own efforts to end conflict and bring peace. But the collection of such stories and the extraction of peace formulas for later application elsewhere can soon become sterile and devoid of meaning unless the "facts" of any one situation are understood in terms of the values brought to that situation by the cosmology or worldview of the involved people. It is the linkages between this pastoral cosmology and current issues of conflict and change that we need to explore.

To adequately explore these linkages, however, it is necessary first to provide an overview of the present challenges facing pastoralists and move through a brief review of the pastoralist environment, economy, land policies, laws and the nature of common property systems. Such a review will provide the context for consideration of pastoral cosmology which will in turn be further illustrated by three case studies from Kenya. Key themes in the linkages between cosmology and these issues of conflict and change will emerge. Moreover, it will be demonstrated how the challenging situations facing pastoralists imperil pastoral cosmology. Yet it is that cosmology which offers the insights and resolutions to disarm those challenges while building a more sustainable future from that most commonly advocated.

These viewpoints arise from my experience over the past seven years serving as an administrator of a church-based, North American non-governmental organization (NGO) primarily focused on work with and among pastoral peoples in Kenya. I have had the high privilege to have lived, worked and formed friendships among the Maasai, Borana, Rendille, and Somali peoples. To a lesser degree, I have been involved and worked with the other pastoralists of Kenya's northern drylands, the Turkana, Pokot, Samburu and Gabra peoples. From these friendships, community development initiatives, readings and listenings, I have come to an interpretation and point of view from which this paper is elaborated.

#### OVERVIEW of the PRESENT CHALLENGE

A great deal has been written about pastoral development, problems confronting pastoralists, and drylands resource issues. All authors have their points of view, either deploring the extent of pastoralist-imposed misery through "overstocking" or the listing of "exogenous" factors attributable to the pastoralist plight. All have agreed that the drylands present enormous challenge if human and environmental welfare is to be restored and sustained. But until rather recently there was a pronounced "blame the victim" approach in discussions about the drylands. The searing images from the famines of the 1970s and 1980s, much of it from the Sahel, reinforced the notion that the pastoralist was largely responsible for these immense difficulties. This understanding spurred much inappropriate development that is only now beginning to be fully reassessed and understood. The human-made dimensions of the pastoral



plight are now more clearly seen as attributable to population growth, immigration, conflict and government policies. Though much debate surrounds the relationship between human activity and climate, decreased rainfall is now recognized as a critical factor in desiccation,\* in turn contributing to the human plight of dryland pastoralists. Thus, the previous failures of pastoral development which advocated an approach of overcoming pastoral "irrational" behavior and ignorance through the embrace of modernity is by and large past, at least among researchers and major donors.

While there are many differences among pastoralists, the commonalities they draw from a shared livelihood and similar environments permit some broad but helpful generalizations. The UN Nomadic Pastoralists in Africa Project was relatively short-lived but produced a perceptive review of pastoralism as a whole from West to East Africa. While identifying the pastoralist crisis, the report goes on to probe issues and suggest interventions that could improve pastoral life. Although cause and effect are intertwined, the report identifies six "main causes" of the crisis as:

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\*Desiccation is a much more precise and appropriate term here than the usual banner of "desertification" which has more political currency than scientific merit. The latter term houses concepts and processes of change in climate, soils and ecosystems as well as the connotations of "eco-disaster" and the imperative for policy change.



\* Climate and ecology - The lack of rainfall tends to set the array of vegetation over time, directly affecting livestock populations and pastoralists. Change in this parameter has worked to push pastoralists of the Sahel south.

\* Demographic growth - This factor contributes principally to the push of a growing farming population into the agriculturally more marginal lands.

\* Agricultural impasse - An increased demand for agricultural products has led to less fallowing and the opening up of more lands for agriculture at the expense of pasture land. These practices have led to disruptions in local level farmer-herder interchange. At another level, mega-project agricultural development has expropriated large areas of former grazing land.

\* Government development policies - Simply put, this factor is one of central control serving state interests rather than local interests. Additionally, mismanagement, faulty policies and international trade has worked to impoverish pastoralists.

\* Incorporation into the market economy - Essentially, this has been a double movement of increasing dependency and marginalization because

of national production/exchange structures and the resulting loss of control by pastoralists over the terms of trade.

\* Insecurity, wars, and conflicts - The interplay of political conflict, ecological stress and resulting food insecurity is present throughout the drylands. Pastoralists have borne the brunt of this crisis both as soldier and victim.

The report identifies the effects of the crisis, emphasizing the growing marginalization of pastoralists, the resulting environmental degradation and the downward spiral of poverty and vulnerability (Bonfiglioli, 1992). Much emphasis is now given to the above political and economic dimensions of the crisis instead of the simply ecological, as, for example, when the nation state is seen to favor agriculture and settlement at the expense of pastoralism (Bovin and Manger, 1990).

More specifically, a series of crises leading to losses and impoverishment among the Ilchamus pastoralists of Kenya has been studied. Following the drought of 1984, the phrase "new pastoralists" was coined to describe the growing number of stockless or near-stockless pastoralists clustered in and around prominent trading centers subsisting on famine relief (Hogg, 1988). A swelling majority of impoverished Ilchamus "new pastoralists" together with a small minority of very wealthy herders, describes the current situation in Baringo District where herders are increasingly giving way to farmers. The Ilchamus crisis is attributed to loss of pasture to European

settlers, market quarantines, farmer encroachment, use of communal grazing by absentee owner and the expansion of cultivation by herders (Little, 1987). The following statement, while applying to Samburu and Maasai pastoralists in Kenya, could equally serve to describe the situation among pastoralists elsewhere in Kenya (Sperling and Galaty, 1990).

"In sum, what we clearly see is the gradual truncation of pastoral relations and narrowing of their access to resources, in land use, labor and livestock networks. Such circumscription undermines the strength of a more collective specialized pastoralism - e.g. access to a range of pasture and an extensive shared labor pool - to the benefit of a privileged minority."

Nevertheless, the image of eco-disaster and collapse should be tempered by the realization of the complexities, cultural resilience and the possibilities of pastoral viability (Bonfiglioli, 1992). Moreover, if we have moved beyond blaming the pastoralist victim, neither will the victimization of pastoralists suffice.

## CONVERGING PATTERNS

A pattern of agreement over the trends regarding pastoralism and dryland policies have emerged in recent years. What are these and what is significant? Here, an overview of current thought on dryland environments, dryland economics, land policy, law and common property systems will be sketched. Much of this current



thinking is complementary and convergent if not hopeful in the face of undeniably serious challenges.

**Dryland Environments** -- Conventional range management had functioned as the environmental voice behind the multitude of livestock development projects sponsored throughout dryland Africa, particularly during the last twenty-five years. Expertise developed in North America and Australia was uncritically applied to Africa. Thus, the carrying capacity of a Texas beef ranch was applied to African pastoralist range land, and "overstocking of the range" by the pastoralists became a problem to be solved. Moreover, this overstocking was worthy of condemnation for it was seen to lead inexorably to a "degraded" range as the more palatable forage was consumed allowing "woody encroachment" to enter, usurping pasture for brush and forest where rainfall was conducive. This overstocking or overgrazing, it was thought, could be so severe as to lead to soil erosion and the spectre of "desertification" as a direct result of pastoralist mismanagement. In too many situations, these view and assumptions were wrapped in the certain knowledge of technological superiority where the concepts were "obvious" and in no need of testing. This simply allowed error and failure to persist. While some authorities raised dissent with these views, they were very much a minority (c.f. Sandford, 1983). Later in the decade, more attention was given to actually testing the assertions of overgrazing. No satisfactory evidence was found for either declining for either declining productivity or overgrazing in either Baringo District, Kenya or the Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania (Homewood and Rodgers, 1987). In a collaboration involving anthropologists and ecologists among the Turkana of Kenya, it

was found that the Turkana pastoralists do not pursue short-term gain at the cost of jeopardizing their resource base. Social institutions were found to minimize risk and protect certain resources from over-exploitation (McCabe, 1990). However, it is recognized that the provision of certain developments such as boreholes and veterinary care have removed some constraints on the potential for herd increase with the possibility for localized forage depletion (McCabe, 1990; Ndagala, 1990). Nevertheless, particularly in the higher rainfall drylands, vegetation change is seen as reversible and not simply "degraded" on the basis of conversion to brush and trees since these are then available for browse (Tiffen, Mortimore and Gichuki, 1994).

But by far the most influential development in rethinking rangeland ecology and management has been the gatherings of authorities from several disciplines who have met to define the status and trends for pastoral development from a resource management point of view (Behnke and Scoones, 1992; Scoones, 1995). Conventional range management understanding was seen to be fundamentally flawed for several reasons but at the center was the new thinking of multiple carrying capacities depending on the management objective. No longer was there assumed to be simply a single point of sustained "offtake" on a curve balancing the standing crops of both plants and animals as though the proverbial Texas beef ranch applied to African pastoralists. That such a ranch model does not apply to Africa is due to the absence of equilibrium conditions. In non-equilibrium or "event-driven" systems, it is the rainfall that sets the system leading to vegetation change and herd response in an episodic environment. Drought is a constant, leading to livestock death in mild droughts and



"crashes" in livestock numbers in multi-year droughts. This phenomenon is referred to as the "state-and-transition" model.

Ecological succession is now seen not as a unilinear path leading to a single plant community but a succession of movements due to a variety of causes which lead into different possibilities or "states." All of this simply describes what is well-known to pastoralists but is now belatedly being validated as "opportunistic management." High but fluctuating stocking rates and migratory patterns of forage exploitation allow pastoral management to survive and even to flourish, sustaining livestock numbers in good years well beyond the conventional range management recommendations.

New understandings about the importance of key resources and the depth of pastoralist knowledge in making use of these resources at timely intervals are coupled with the finding that no support is maintained for pastoralist rangeland degradation. While the drylands are seen as unstable but resilient, the consensus view from these deliberations is that no irreversible decline in livestock production or a truly degraded range condition (i.e. irreversible detrimental change) could be produced by this pattern of pastoralist opportunistic management. Finally, the last support to the conventional range management viewpoint has been eliminated by the findings from several comparative studies which demonstrate that pastoralism either equals or exceeds production per unit land area of commercial ranching in comparable environments (Scoones, 1992).

**Dryland Economics** -- Pastoral production, be it for milk, blood or meat, has the problem of continuity in an environment of uncertainty. The pastoralist seeks to



minimize the risk to both capital and productive assets though several time-tested strategies. The importance in "herd demographics" of maintaining a sizable proportion of females for milk production, is a key factor coupled with mobility of stock, species diversification, herd dispersion and herd maximization (Dahl, 1981). Thus, the path of continuity in production, even during the expected crisis, bridges the uncertainties of resource availability through a measured process of risk avoidance. And as noted above, when productivity is made comparable, pastoralist production equals or exceeds ranching output.

Livestock management is an elaborate and complex undertaking. These tasks involve herding, watering, bleeding, and herd health care plus the support activities of corral construction and maintenance, forage transport and the processing of animal products. Labor is dependent on the herd demographic structure, not just simply animal numbers. Moreover, large units of labor are required for the prime strategies of mobility and species diversification. To accomplish this work, all men, women and children are involved. Nevertheless, labor "bottlenecks" occur at times. Children can be "borrowed" for certain periods of labor, cooperative herding arrangements can be negotiated and additional workers can be hired. The ability to muster the required labor rests on the household's positions within the larger social structure. Reciprocal arrangements between the rich and poor can be negotiated because the former need access to cheap labor and the latter can then make a claim on resources which would improve their economic position. An overriding ethic of generosity and mutual aid makes shared labor more a norm than an exception (Dahl, 19981; Sperling and Galaty,

1990). These norms are significant and will be revisited when our focus shifts to pastoral cosmology.

Pastoralists have always been involved in a market economy. The relatively recent view of bringing the pastoralist into market production had more to do with a concern for access to resources by the politically powerful and an integration of the pastoralists into a cash economy than it did with markets (Evangelou, 1984). Many examples of pastoralist-farmer exchanges abound across Africa. Some authorities have emphasized the role of grain in this trade since while pastoralist production of protein is good, caloric intake can be improved. Hence, historically, grain has been important to pastoralists (Hjort, 1981) and has been obtained either by trade or purchase.

As the option for marketing livestock, milk or other products for cash becomes more widespread, the concern for prices and terms of trade grows. Where the price of livestock relative to grain, school fees or other highly desired goods is low, the terms of trade are not favorable to the pastoralist and, if persistent, will result in impoverishment. A careful study of the process and effects of Maasai livestock sales places great emphasis on the importance of the state coordinating "price signals" for a well-coordinated market to develop. While containing important insights on the development of livestock production and the effect of government policies on that development, the bias for development originating and spreading through central control is telling. For example, the vital ordering of market operations is effected through proper pricing that engages producer, consumer and all their intervening



agents. However, this market development process is viewed as being disrupted by cultural practices (e.g. gifts, loans and ceremonial uses) because the link between demand and production is diverted into these non-price activities. In the words of the study, "traditional Maasai social structure and cultural institutions fundamentally constrain development initiatives." Nevertheless, equally stressed is the importance of pastoralist control of land tenure, resources and productive assets. Moreover, the likelihood of pastoralists following the precedent of Kenya's small farmers in responsiveness to opportunities for profitable innovation is granted. For the transition to a livestock production for cash economy, market production and market consumption will need to build upon the other. And in that process, pastoralist initiative and their ability to self-impose controls over their resource use is vital (Evangelou, 1984).

**Land Tenure** -- Land policy, consideration of indigenous tenure systems and legal frameworks are experiencing some of the same profound shifts in thought and application as depicted in the preceding sections. In recent years, it was assumed that policies linking privatization, land registration and titling with the provision of credit would lead to the subsequent "take-off" for agricultural (or pastoral) development. Since it was assumed that individual control of land and resources would lead to more efficient production, an elaborate train of investment and political commitment was engaged to privatize land holdings which would in turn allow for the creation of collateral for further capitalization. This would positively affect production leading to increased levels of output for export. The corresponding hard currency inflows would then further stimulate investment, jobs and production. Hence, the conception of a



"take-off." It was thought that in this way another struggling country would be lifted from poverty to at least a sustained process of wealth generation. And yet these assumptions and development process are now seen as seriously flawed. A great number of African development projects have been premised on these points so the shift in thinking is significant.

These flaws derive from a common belief that indigenous tenure systems impede productivity (a parallel to the former mistaken notion of pastoralist overstocking and mismanagement!). Several studies in Kenya and elsewhere have laid this to rest (Green, 1987; Atwood, 1990; Carter, Wiebe and Blarel, 1991; Migot-Adholla, Hazell, Blarel and Place, 1991). This latter citation is the result of a comparative study of three African countries (including Kenya) which concludes that African indigenous land rights "spontaneously" move toward individualized rights from communal control "in response to increases in commercialization and population pressures." Thus, the cost effective measure which these authors advocate is, in fact, to strengthen indigenous land tenure systems while at the same time enacting various "enabling" measures for more efficient land transactions. While the study asserts "Questions remain about the suitability of indigenous land rights for ... extensive pastoral and livestock systems ...", intervention should occur only where demand for change is genuine. The empirical conclusion is that rather than indigenous tenure constraining agricultural productivity, the real culprits are the lack of rural infrastructure, market efficiency and information spread about productive technology" (Migot-Adholla, Hazell, Blarel and Place, 1991).

Ever since Garrett Hardin's provocative piece, "The Tragedy of the Commons," nearly three decades of pastoral development has drawn sustenance from his tragic depiction of individual herders, each independently pursuing separate welfare strategies by making use of the common pasture for individually owned livestock until the resource is extinguished and all the herders reap their own self-made destruction. As Hardin put it, "ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all." (Hardin 1968). So influential was Hardin's argument among academics, development practitioners and government workers that a variety of corrective treatments over the last three decades to correct this "tragedy" were prescribed, particularly in Kenya's drylands among pastoralists. These prescriptions fitted well with previous late colonial and post-independence government schemes whose goal seemed to be a properly sedentarized, services and loyal population where, as much as possible, private property regimes (whether as group ranches or individual holdings) were to be encouraged. This move was made under the assumption that the national economy would benefit as agricultural productivity increased due to the imposition of "modern" tenure and the "rationalization" of the livestock economy. It took nearly twenty years for the cracks in the "tragedy of the commons" to manifest itself. Apart from the increasing failures of pastoral development projects based on this vision and the increasing evidence from anthropologists and ecologists that sustainable resource use was often practiced by herders, economists



also began to weigh in, distinguishing both the individual and collective dimensions of economic rationality in pastoralist behavior (Livingstone, 1986).

A recent review of pastoral land rights in Tanzania has identified just how precarious those rights are (Tenga, 1992). As in Kenya, customary tenure exists with western property law as the dominant overlay. Pastoral land rights are a "peripheral system", in both a symbolic and literal sense, corresponding to pastoralists' lack of political power to protect their land tenure system. As in Kenya, a series of land acts, implemented on top of surviving customary tenure, has had the effect of creating great confusion as to the land allocating authority. This confusion enables proper procedures, if not justice, to be subverted especially when the interests of marginalized groups are at stake. This point is well illustrated in the case of the Barabaig pastoralists of Tanzania. The Barabaig were illegally dispossessed of their land for the state-sponsored development of several large wheat farms totalling in excess of 100,000 acres. Court action to overturn this action has met with a very limited success though a precedent has been established recognizing customary rights to land. Equally important has been the establishment of a community-based, Barabaig organization, "Bulbalda" (Lane, 1996).

Placing the difficulties of pastoral land rights in the context of "human rights" or "indigenous rights" in an effort to exert more influence in a state where pastoralists exercise little political power, can, however, entail its own pitfalls. Indigenous rights entail retention of traditional lands and resources as well as a certain degree of political autonomy. Yet human rights are seen to be universal for all peoples (c.f. the United



Nations Declaration of Human Rights). Given the system of sovereign states, indigenous peoples are represented by national governments which in many cases are enmeshed in the gutting of those indigenous rights. Moreover, a human right enforced by the state related to the right of free movement and settlement would give rights to those who occupy and maintain lands among indigenous people. Thus, pastoralist land claims based on "indigenous rights" will continue to be undercut by state interests, the politics of the powerful utilizing "human rights" particularly where the ethnic group of the powerful is served (Galaty, 1993).

In the face of these difficulties, what is justice and for whom is justice served? One could simply pursue "legal rights", engage a lawyer and argue on those grounds which do in fact allow for rights to land, even communal tenure. The importance of enlisting legal aid in challenging pastoralist land alienation has been noted (Lane and Swift, 1989). And yet the expense and difficulties of sustaining a legal case are immense. Parallel strategies involving both the legal system and community action may be more helpful. Lawyers themselves acknowledge this reality. In an ongoing land claims case involving the Kenyan Maasai of Loodariak Group Ranch, allegations of corruption in the granting of land title deeds to outsiders without consultation of the group ranch members has led to both court challenges and political action designed to overturn the current legal reality of Maasai dispossession in their own homeland (Galaty, 1994b). The experience of the Loita Maasai in pursuing the integrity of their forest from outside commercialization and control has also followed this same strategy of legal engagement and community education coupled with appropriate action

(Karbolo, 1994). It has been suggested that customary pastoral tenure and the social values that uphold it cannot be wished away. Statutory legislation or Constitutional reform to incorporate customary pastoral tenure must be pursued (Lenaola, Jenner and Wichert, 1996).

A few examples from elsewhere in Africa may shed more perspective on the foregoing East Africa discussion. A slow deliberate process of land tenure reform has been under way in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso over the last decade. In all, a decentralization of political control and the upholding of "traditional" land and resource tenure is in process. Since 1986, land tenure reform has been under way in Niger. A careful, consultative process has educated people to the issues. Radical tenure change has been rejected in favor of "elevating traditional tenure rights to formally recognized laws of tenure." However, this slowly moving process has "amplified the tenure insecurity" as people maneuver for favorable positions. While reliance is placed on traditional tenure systems for both the farmers and herders, the "Gestion de Terroir" ("the land to which you belong") approach calls for the development of management plans based on local level participatory process often at odds with the decision-making process derived from tradition (Lund, 1993). In Namibia, with its newly independent status, a Namibia National Land Reform Conference was convened to address land imbalances derived from its colonial and white settler past. In a dramatic departure from other African state practice, the Conference resolved that the San and Ovahimba (forager and nomadic pastoralist peoples respectively) were particularly disadvantaged and their land rights needed special protection (Adams and Devitt, 1992). From



Zimbabwe's grazing management schemes comes the model of co-management where it is recognized that both the State and local communities have interests in natural resource management. These grazing management schemes are viewed as viable common property regimes. This viability is, however, more likely to evolve where the resource is scarce and of central importance to the economic strategies of a majority of people. Thus, a co-management model creates some political "space" for local herding communities at the expense of some state control over resource management (Cousins, 1993).

**Common Property Systems** -- The study of common property systems by a growing array of political scientists, economists, anthropologists and policy planners provides additional support to changed perspectives regarding pastoralist land management and tenure. Property is seen as a claim to a benefit stream rather than a static entity. Moreover, the importance of social context in either validating or rejecting claims to benefits is highlighted. The joining of case studies from the field to theoretical formations of common property regimes remains key. For example, a forester at work among the Turkana helped convey to the wider world the importance of trees to these people and elaborated on the nature of access rights to the "ekwar", individually "owned" trees along river courses in the central Turkana area. Importantly, this researcher found that the owner had to maintain communal agreement that his rights were established by usage (Barrow, 1990). As a prominent resource economist puts it, "property is not an object but rather a social relation that defines the property holder with respect to something of value (the benefit stream) against all others" (Bromley,



1992). Tragedy with respect to the commons is avoided through the emergence of coordinated rather than independent actions of individuals (Ostrom, 1992). Several principles for the long endurance of these coordinated common property systems are manifest (Ostrom, 1990). Ostrom summarizes these design principles to include:

1) clearly defined boundaries - the group should be relatively small and stable with membership and group space easily identified by the members,

2) congruence between appropriation/provision rules and local conditions - usage of common property resources should parallel that available for sustainable harvest,

3) collective choice arrangements - generally participatory and egalitarian decision-making should avoid both unanimity (i.e. the danger of high transaction cost) and oligarchy or majority rule (i.e. the danger of high deprivation costs),

4) monitoring - information on resource conditions and others' usage is available at low cost,

5) graduated sanctions - infractions of rules are clearly coupled to punishments proportional to the severity of the offense,

6) conflict resolution mechanisms - approaches to peacemaking are actively pursued for the common good. The development of these methods is in particular seen as the key to achieving efficient and equitable performance,

7) minimal recognition of rights - recognition by larger political entities of the common property regime's legitimacy allows for its continuity and supports the establishment of more effective norms and rules over time,

8) nested enterprises (for common property systems embedded in larger systems) - long duration regimes may be part of larger structures that provide important inflows (e.g. capital) and outlets (e.g. markets) contributing to the stability of the system (Ostrom, 1990).

It has been noted by several observers that the inherent peacemaking and peacekeeping functions of these long-enduring common property systems are the key to achieving efficient and equitable performance (Ostrom, 1992; Bruce, 1993). Moreover, it has been persuasively argued that the state must take on more the role of facilitating conflict negotiation, mediation and arbitration for pastoralists among themselves (Scoones, 1995). Understanding traditional methods of resolving conflict and creating those state structures and commitments in support of these traditional methods is in many ways the linchpin of all of these preceding new paradigms which complement one another and converge in lines which fully support the importance of pastoral cosmology as the organizing framework for conflict transformation. It is to this cosmology that we now turn.



## COSMOLOGY

As used here, cosmology is the cultural worldview which defines a people's understanding of their spiritual universe and gives shape to their myths, rituals, social behavior and history. A cosmology situates a people within their environment in time and webs a series of relationships among themselves, with their God, and between other peoples. A people's cosmology is the essence of their identity. Its nurture sustains life.

Pastoralism is the dominant occupation in the Horn of Africa simply because the arid environment, with its scattered, inconsistent and often short and intense rainfall (when it occurs) permits no other consistent food harvest. The pastoralists largely obtain their food from their herds of cattle, sheep, goats and in the drier regions, camels. Some of these people cultivate agricultural crops where they can, most do not. Life in these environments is uncertain, dangerous and tenuous. Drought, disease and a certain measure of insecurity are all realities. In northeastern Kenya it is estimated that 80% or more of the population depends on pastoralism. Not surprisingly, the relationships of these peoples with their livestock is central to their sense of ethnic identity. More surprisingly, it is the pastoralists' cosmology of covenantal relationships which takes an environment, a people and their livestock and breathes life into it.

The Maasai have several variations of how they came to be keepers of cattle but they all revolve around God's decisive act in their remote past. God is seen both as the Creator of all things and one who goes knocking on the door to people's houses. In 1974, a Swedish anthropologist recorded an interview concerning primeval times with

an elderly Maasai woman. The following highlights illustrate how pastoral cosmology "breathes life." After God created the first Maasai, God spoke to them saying, "Pray to me so that I can help you." Sometime later, God blessed the Maasai with cattle sending them down from heaven on a long leather strap. God spoke to the Maasai, saying "come out and milk this cow because it is your food." The wild animals were subsequently given to the Dorobo, forest-dwelling foragers, and gardens and agriculture given to the Kikuyu, highland-dwelling farmers. God provides and people are to respond (Olsson, 1987).

As in this Maasai example, understanding how people view themselves in relationship to their world is vital in resolving conflicts. While we have emphasized the importance of cosmology, what is it that distinguishes pastoral cosmology? It is my interpretation that at the heart of pastoral cosmology is its covenantal aspects. People and the environment exist in a community understood as responsive to God who creates and sustains life. A multitude of relationships are embedded in this concept but it is hinged by the action of God in human history and in the gifting of communities with land, water, resources and livestock. Human response to these interventions is transmitted as a moral direction in the ordering of right relationships, among people, to the land and with God. When these relationships are rightly ordered, peace is the result. The people, their livestock and the land experience a state of well-being and abundance. Pastoralists would understand such an experience as God's blessings for people's behavior rightly lived. Moreover, the lack of such blessings would be attributable to behavior not aligned with the covenantal ethic of right relationships.



The connection between the covenantal emphasis on right relationships and peace is beautifully illustrated by the daily practices of the Gabra. Among these camel pastoralists of northern Kenya, prayers are said regularly each day by the mother and father upon waking ("God you have kept us peaceful during the night, keep us peaceful during the day."), when the livestock leaves home in the morning for grazing ("Go and spend in peace, and spend together with God"), when the livestock returns home in the evening ("Is the return peaceful?" with the herdsboy's or herds girl's response of "peaceful") and in the evening before sleep, the family will pray ("God you have kept us peaceful during the day. Keep us peaceful during the night.") (Kalacha, 1995). These prayers and practices of covenantal relationships are embedded among Gabra as everyday social realities.

These social realities and right relationships can mean the difference between survival and death. With a respectful and proper relationship between two clans, one clan is enabled to shift their herds to better pasture when drought has affected their normal pastures. The absence of such a relationship results in weak, emaciated animals unable to supply milk, meat, fat or blood imperiling people's food and their survival. When one family's herds are eliminated or severely reduced due to raids, disease or drought, other clan families provide gift animals to help in restocking. Such practices in maintaining right relationships are common and reciprocated as a matter of course.

The social understanding of what is and is not moral behavior is very clear. The consequences for the disruption of right relationships is also correspondingly very

clear. Right relationships permeate the whole of life among family, clan, people, between peoples, with the environment, and throughout with God. Nevertheless, conflicts and their resolution are part of this environment and etched in people's memories, traditions and storied places. These conflicts vary in intensity and effect with a corresponding variety in resolution outcomes. Misbehavior and crimes are committed at the individual level while some actions imperiling whole age sets are brought on by someone's careless behavior (Galaty, 1994b). Moreover, people raid neighboring peoples for cattle, sheep, goats and camels. Reprisals occur. Disputes and violent resolutions are often part of the social fabric in these pastoral drylands. Yet, all of these normal conflicts can be resolved through agreements stemming ultimately from the common cosmology of the people.

Pastoralist cosmology possesses a wealth of precedent and agreement on the process for handling conflicts, like those above, which vary with the severity of the case. Among the Borana pastoralists for example, murder will result in a fine termed a Qaak'e (thirty cattle for each man or woman) which is paid by the murder's clan members. Deductions can and often are negotiated by the involved elders on both sides. Crime, elder discussion and negotiation, restitution and finally restoration of community life is the norm in these events (Duba, 1995). Disrupted relationships proceed through a variety of stages all locally distinct but common in pattern. The sifting of the truth by community elders amidst the claims and counterclaims of contending parties will result at last in a judgement that provides restitution to the victim and restoration of the perpetrator to the community. Life may now continue in renewed



form. Among the Maasai, after agreement is reached on restitution, prayers are made to God for the forgiveness of the wrongs, to all Maasai people and blessings to the warriors. The covenantal understanding sustains and when wrongs occur, great effort is given to the restoration of covenantal integrity. Long prayers may be given but a typical closing prayer may end with these words:

Soloist: May our society be cream, may it be milk, may it be honey and beer, if elders and morans go back home today. May you meet them and your children in safety, may you leave here safely, may they greet your knees with joy ...

All: Let it be so, oh God (Sekuda, 1995).

Often the restoration and renewal of right relationships in a community is accompanied by certain ritual. Ritual is invoked to effect changes in relationships and is always performed with the common understanding of contending parties and community before God. These are public acts which serve to reinforce the community's relationships with one other and with God. Not only is the breached relationship confessed but ritual sacrifice is often used to cleanse the offender. The result is repair, restoration and reminder to the community of their people's traditions and identity and renewal by right action under God. This is all clearly illustrated in the very important Maasai ritual, "Olkiteng' Loo Lbaa", where a father will cleanse himself of the wounds ("Ilbaa") he has inflicted on others by the sacrifice of a bull. In this ritual, the father has certain parts of the meat fed to him and is anointed with the fat and meat about the face and chest. His children may now be circumcised as a result of this ritual (Sekuda,

1995). Moreover, while the above ritual is convened by the individual, ritual is quite often invoked at the corporate level to make agreements binding, ending violent, long running disputes between whole people groups (Note the reference to the resolution of the Pokot - Samburu conflict in the following case study, the Pokot story).

The depths of ritual covenant making have been explored among the Nuer, a cattle-keeping pastoral people of southern Sudan not unlike Kenyan pastoralists. "Nguot" is the concept which undergirds covenant making or the ritual which makes life together meaningful and acceptable as well as the penalties for abandonment of the covenant very clear. "Nguot" literally means "to cut a covenant". An animal is sacrificed, blood is shed and the meat divided among the covenant participants. Parallels in life and death abound for the choices in these rituals cannot be more serious. The dismemberment of the sacrificed animal would mirror the fate of the "nguot"-maker if he (or they) violated this covenant. Blood is life and so the sacrificial animal is denied life so that the covenant makers may "cut" their new life anew before God as a witness (Duany, 1992). These understandings for the primacy of right relations and peace as the result are shared by all pastoralists though expressed in the particularities of each pastoral people.

Other non-pastoralist scholars are beginning to support and validate the importance of pastoral conflict resolution although the source of these effects is not discussed. Conflict is inevitable but as many commentators note, the development of "conflict resolution mechanisms" within common property systems is vital to achieving "efficient and equitable performance (Ostrom, 1992; Bruce, 1993; Scoones, 1995).



While this analysis is couched in terms of pastoral cosmology, it is significant that these commentators from the domains of political science and natural resource management come to the same conclusion (with different terminology) that if society is to endure, then broad agreement must be obtained for the resolution of such conflict.

Yet, to apprehend merely the agreements which have brought peace without a sense of why that peace was resolved is like "understanding" the visible part of an acacia tree as the whole organism without grasping its rootedness. Both the facts of dislocation and the healing power of a people's own values to mend and rejoin broken relationships are needed for a full-bodied understanding of indigenous conflict resolution among pastoralists.

## CASE STUDIES

Three stories of conflict from Kenya's drylands have been selected to illustrate the relationship of pastoral cosmology to current issues of conflict and change. While pastoral traditions remain strong and deeply felt, modernity with its nation-state governance and the magic of "development" have eroded the capacity of pastoralists to exercise their own cosmological insights. One of the most pressing needs for pastoralists and their friends throughout the Horn of Africa is to stop this erosion and reclaim pastoral cosmology as the framework for conflict resolution and to improve the "terms of trade" between this covenantal understanding and the press of modernity.

**The Ewuaso Story** -- The Ewuaso story tells the tale of how pastoral cosmology, in this case from a Maasai community, was bypassed by politicians more concerned with their own wealth and power than the interests of the people they serve. It is the too-common story of normal grazing and watering disputes hijacked by the local representatives of a much more powerful nation-state rather than referred to the traditional process of mending disrupted relations. This story is particularly significant for those concerned with the reimagining of how the rich traditions of covenantal relations can inform an alternative modern process of conflict transformation. Significant themes for this reimagining are offered in the role taken by local churches.

The current story has precedence in conflicting land use claims by two Maasai sections, Ilkeekonyokie and Purko. Colonial authorities provided a boundary between these two sections to minimize these competing claims. Following the establishment of the Ewuaso Group Ranch in the late 1970's, it was claimed by Ilkeekonyokie leaders that the Purko wanted to cross this boundary. These same leaders, most of whom were of the "Iseure" age set, proposed as the solution a subdivision of the land along the boundary that would somehow make Purko incursions less likely. How this was to work was not made clear or referred to an "enkiguena", the traditional forum for elder discussion and truth seeking. Subsequently, the subdivision of land out of this group ranch along the boundary was made into thirty-four plots (the smallest about 2000 acres, the largest in the tens of thousands of acres) and given to these largely "Iseure" leaders. Power politics had been chosen over consensus and right relationships.



Increasingly through the 1980's, the call has been made for the subdivision of the remaining group ranch land. With that call, the "Group of 34" also asserted their claim to the remaining undemarcated land in addition to their previously granted plots. With the election of a new Group Ranch Committee sympathetic to the "Group of 34" in 1989, a new demarcation of 400 plots was made. Yet this demarcation was made in a very contrived and artificial manner to provide maximum benefit to the "Group of 34" (e.g. allocation to small children, wives and other family members of this group) and other "Iseure" age set members.

The implications for such a demarcation of group ranch lands would render the majority of residents without land in their own home community. This was too much. Many of these dispossessed residents as well as some beneficiaries from "the 400" went to court. Again, the choice was made for a perceived higher power benefit of the modern nation-state and not their own rich legacy of problem-solving. The action sought by the plaintiffs was the prevention of demarcation and the consequent dispossession of local residents in their own home areas. But as in so many other court cases involving land, the legal arguments were subsidiary to the surrounding political situation and were frequently "overtaken by events." By 1992, the demarcation slowed but by 1993 this already volatile situation ignited through the involvement of Kajiado District officials and the Land Control Board. People were told that title deeds to "the 400" were ready to be issued upon payment. But people who paid expecting to receive title deeds were instead issued with a receipt from the Land Control Board. In early 1994, the multi-age set residents, becoming known as the "objection group,"

discovered that no file for the Ewuaso land demarcation existed at the Ministry of Lands in Nairobi. It is this Ministry which has the authority over these matters. The "objection group" then requested a meeting with the Ministry of Lands so that they might hear the concerns and complaints of the wider Ewuaso community in these matters. While the Ministry authorized such a meeting, a senior politician in the area blocked such a meeting leading to a great alienation of most local residents from their political leaders.

This alienation was clearly expressed in the KANU elections of March, 1995. The political leadership was rejected and new people from the "objection group" won. However, government authorities alleged that irregularities occurred in the voting process and scheduled a new election for May, 1995. The same result was obtained and again rejected by these same government authorities. By this time the "objection group" was being called "KANU B" or the "chokora" (orphans, those who have nothing) while the doubly losing slate, those from the "group of 34," were being called "KANU A" (or derisively as the "meinosa," those who "eat and eat" without satisfaction). A stalemate of sorts followed with no movement in either the court case or the political arena. In October, 1995 a senior politician came to a nearby community for a political rally where KANU B people also appeared. This politician ordered the KANU B people to leave, which they were beginning to do when the police fired tear gas canisters into their group. In the resulting melee, several people received gunshot wounds and two women bystanders allegedly had miscarriages. Seven people from KANU B were arrested and charged.



The merits or demerits of further group ranch subdivision had clearly become highly politicized. As 1996 dawned, this senior politician (the one at the melee noted above) declared a desire for peace. This allowed for some movement to mediate this conflict that led to a group of ten KANU A, ten KANU B and five neutral elders being selected as a peace committee where no politics was to be discussed, only land issues. KANU B made their demands known; dissolve the group ranch committee and elect a new one, all adult men own land equally, and previous subdivisions become void. KANU A voiced the need to enlarge the group ranch committee and to keep the subdivision as it is. After several meetings and much discussion, the peace committee proposed: a new group ranch committee be formed with half KANU A and half KANU B, following formation of the new committee the court case blocking demarcation be removed, and other political matters remain untouched until land issues are resolved. Whether this proposed settlement will be accepted and prove binding is yet unknown. A positive sign has been the continued examination of the underlying land issues which are being seriously addressed. The five neutral elders apparently have exercised a powerful role in forging a concern for unity and the reshaping of a Maasai future. (Sakuda, 1997). Nevertheless, the effect of these incidents and the polarization of KANU into the A and B wings has spread well beyond Ewuaso into other Maasai communities where alienation also applies.

It is noteworthy that while in this community five different Christian denominations are present, they have acted in concert as one Church in a call for peace and unity. Respect and space is afforded to traditional leaders, many of whom

are devout Christians as well. The Maasai pastors and church leaders, traditional or not, have repeatedly called for discussions and the search for peace and truth quite apart from the political process detailed above. It is the firm conviction of many Christian Maasai that their prayers and pleas for peace have been answered without which this saga of politically-contrived dispossession would have led to loss of life. And it is this church stance of creating space for and encouraging discussions of the land issues that has furnished an institutional home for traditional conflict resolution, referred to by the Maasai as "enkiguena." However weak, it provides a telling rebuke to the flawed power politics at work in this land scandal.

**The Pokot Story** -- The Pokot people are divided into two occupational sub-groups, in the central region of Kenya's Rift Valley. Cattle and camel pastoralists occupy the drier lowlands to the east while their relations just to the west in the wetter highlands are farmers and sheep herders. But all Pokot, regardless of occupation are increasingly feeling beleaguered and politically marginalized. At issue are grazing and water rights which are in dispute both by the Pokot and Turkana. The resolution of these disputes stemming from pastoral cosmology has been overlooked or bypassed, as in the Ewaso Story. As a result of government's indifference or lack of appropriate action, conflicts are incited and fueled by armaments provided by prominent politicians on both sides. Enhanced political and economic power and the possible creation of new districts are the pay-offs for politicians eager to become important. The result? Scores killed and wounded, livestock stolen, households disrupted and impoverished



and the marginalization of distant pastoralists, whether Pokot or Turkana, continues. These costs seemingly matter only to the victims.

The current difficulty rises from a long history of raids and counter raids by these two pastoral peoples but has now become characterized as a "war." This characterization stems from the importance of dry season grazing reserves, long used by the Pokot, at Mt. Salili near Kapedo. Many years ago, missionaries established a school, clinic and church at Kapedo. Both Turkana and Pokot were attracted to this complex, particularly as food was distributed there in times of prolonged drought. An elite army unit, the General Service Unit (GSU) was stationed at Kapedo as a supposed "peacekeeping mission" between these traditionally antagonistic neighbors.

In the latter half of 1995, Turkana began moving further south to usurp traditional Pokot grazing land and water rights at Mt. Salili. When the Turkana forcibly prevented Pokot cattle from grazing or taking water and raped three Pokot women, the Pokot could not ignore this provocation. Yet Pokot pleas to district officials were ignored. Pokot raids were met by rapid GSU confiscation of Pokot cattle which were in part killed, butchered and eaten by the soldiers. Pokot Members of Parliament (all of the ruling party, KANU) seeking meetings with the President (also of KANU) were ignored. These events played into the hands of politicians, both Pokot and Turkana, eager to exploit the situation. Moreover, the government was seen either not to act, or respond too slowly to Turkana incursions while responding quickly and aggressively to any Pokot counterattack. No redress or evenhandedness by the government is perceived by the Pokot.

sacrifice of a cow. In both examples, the agreements were mediated by the active participation of the elders from both groups.

Significantly, the Pokot say that current efforts to resolve Pokot - Turkana disputes do not benefit from any binding agreement. The "agreements" are just words with no sacrifice and consequently not binding on the participants. The government officers know nothing of the "rules" of traditional conflict resolution and thus any peace agreement is doomed to failure. One cannot avoid the sense of government's genuine indifference to this turmoil and the scrambling, clawing efforts of would-be power brokers with their private militias, whether Pokot or Turkana. The welfare of distant pastoralists and their claims to land are simply not concerns of worth, confirming Pokot interpretations of history.

**The Wajir Peace Story** – A very different picture of government and elder involvement in the resolution of competing land use claims has emerged in Wajir District, home of Somali pastoralists (primarily the Ajuran, Degodia and Ogaden clans). [See (Ibrahim, D. and J. Jenner, 1997) in this document for a fuller treatment of this story].

The Wajir Peace Story is a significant example of what can be accomplished with good government and respect for the insights of pastoral cosmology. From 1992 - 1995, Wajir District was a war zone. This inter-clan conflict evolved from the normal frictions of Degodia and Ogaden disputes over grazing and water. A regional drought was worsening, complicated by the war and instability in Somalia with the consequent



influx of refugees to Kenya. As the conditions of conflict worsened with alliances forged between the Ogaden/Ajuran against Degodia/Borana, the government found itself increasingly unable to restore peace and order. As in the Pokot story, private militias operating under the direction of powerful politicians or whole clans exacerbated the problem. The conflict grew until the whole district was affected. The Ogaden/Ajuran group further allied itself with clans in Somalia and livestock stolen was removed to Somalia. Meanwhile the Degodia/Borana alliance sent livestock on to Ethiopia. This regional livestock movement helped secure the weapons which in turn accelerated the deadly destruction of the conflict.

Nevertheless, a women's group for peace was organized in Wajir at the height of this war. As with many pastoralists, women, while not fighters, often contribute a great deal to warfare by mocking songs of shame and derision goading men to fight. Alternatively, women can provide strong motivation for peace with songs creating the images and metaphors of a better life than the death and destruction of war. The actions and songs of this core group of women attracted other young, literate professionals and the "Wajir Peace Group" was formed. A "critical mass" for peace was achieved when clan elders, youth, business people and Muslim sheiks began to join hands. However, had not this initiative been met with the encouragement and support of a remarkable and resourceful district commissioner, the later successes might not have been achieved.

With the collaboration of both local leaders and government officials (including the police and military), agreements on the appropriate roles for each party were found

as all strove for peace and healing. The key was in the respect afforded to traditional conflict resolution by the government. Criminal offenses were treated as such and promptly handled. No longer was a killing seen as a clan matter for revenge. The government acknowledged "who knew the rules" for resolving such conflict and created the space for engaging those traditional systems, confining its role to the swift and pointed apprehension of the lawless. A poignant picture of this relationship was the engagement of clan elders encamped in the shade of a tree grappling with a crisis as government police and security personnel stood on the periphery. Several incidents like this gave confidence to all participants to continue until conflicts were wholly and traditionally resolved. It should be emphasized that this agreement was not obtained through words alone (as in the Pokot observation above) but with sacrifice and elder mediation. Moreover, this story also points to the capacity of pastoral traditions for both war and peace. But peace is always first and is the higher, more desired state of being.

**The everyday** -- The covenantal aspects of pastoralist life are so woven into everyday reality that they are almost hidden from view. These aspects are routine and thus seemingly unimportant. Yet, these everyday examples coupled with the illustrations in the preceding Cosmology section emphasize that pastoralist cosmology offers a rich diversity of resources for peacemaking. For example:

1) The greetings and responses of Somali, Borana, Gabra and Rendille pastoralists emphasize the desire for peace and health for one and their family.



2) Every nomadic Rendille encampment has its elders who open and close the day with prayers of thanksgiving and praise to God after receiving the blessing of milk poured on their sandals. It is these same Rendille who marvel at an outsider's assumption that life would be better for them in an environment less dry. "Why would we want to move when God has given us all we need here?"

3) Before milking, many Maasai pour a bit of milk on the ground in blessing, remembrance and thanksgiving that they are sustained by the food given to them by God.

4) A respected Borana elder, reportedly of 100 years of age, prays a traditional prayer to God asking for peace and blessings (each separately named). The joined group response amounting to "Amen" is said repeatedly with open palms to receive these blessings amidst the elder's fervent prayers. This reverence in right relations is termed "the peace of the Boran".

5) The Gabra people reckon time in cycles of seven where every seventh day or year begins a new cycle of days or years. But with the Gabra after a cycle of seven seven-year periods, a one year period of rest, thanksgiving and restitution is practiced in the fiftieth year. Debts are forgiven, property restored, and relationships made well. For the Gabra the last observance of this custom was in 1981 in the Western calendar. (Herr, 1992).

## THEMES

Cosmology is derived by people to fit their conception of who they are in their environment under God. These cosmologies are constructed and can be both dislocated and re-membered through myth, story and ritual. Perhaps because the environment in Kenya's drylands is so broadly similar, the cosmology described here is generalized but applicable for all pastoral peoples in the Horn whether Nilotic or Cushitic in origin and whether Muslim or Christian in religion. Pastoral cosmology is thus a source of unity despite the particularities of each people.

The heart and soul of this cosmology is centered in the covenantal dynamics of right relationships albeit with its own locally distinct ethnic identity. Because there is so much coherence in roots, conception and practice, the cosmological generalities are lifted out for consideration. Moreover, there has been more a "blindness to the forest" as the details of particular "trees of conflict" are analyzed and strategies developed making the generalizations all the more important. Nevertheless, the cosmology of the pastoralists is confidently offered as the sure foundation on which to base peace building in the region.

What then is the nature of this foundation? Why do some strategies for peace (or development or whatever) fail? What of those conflicts whose boundaries extend beyond traditional societies? And what is the importance of contrasting facts and values? It is to these questions that we now turn.

Pastoral cosmology derives from everyday necessities. What is it that gives life? And what takes away such life? Milk gives life but one needs to milk the livestock



to obtain this food. The livestock in turn obtain their food and the potential for milk from the environment but they must graze or browse to obtain it. Pastoralists assist in this food harvest by intelligent herding. And in a like manner God provides for his people with the gifts of life, rain and the provision of needed resources. Life is a series of created reciprocations or covenanting. This reciprocal chain begins and ends with God and the human relationship to God. To have life and peace and to have it more abundantly is the overarching theme. The following summary statements illustrate the covenantal dynamics of pastoral cosmology.

- 1) God's blessings give life.
- 2) God can either give blessings to a people or keep blessings from them.
- 3) It is a community's behavior that determines whether God gives these blessings or withholds them.
- 4) The ethic of right relationships preserves and sustains life whether the relationship is within the family, clan/section, toward other peoples, the environment, or God.
- 5) When right relationships are disrupted, their restoration can only meaningfully be effected through ritual confession and supplication to God.

One of the developments in the ongoing peace story in Wajir is an annual peace festival where local chiefs who have done the most to promote peace are honored. One of the banners at the 1996 peace festival proclaimed in Swahili, "peace is milk -- peace is development -- peace is life". Given the recent context there, where war had

replaced peace with an absence of milk, development and life, the covenantal framework of reciprocated blessing by both people and God is well illustrated.

It has become a truth of community development practice that "good development" occurs when the "beneficiaries" can be said to "own" the development whether it is a water pump, cattle dip or an idea. But why is some development "owned" and another not? Can one know ahead of time whether a given change, be it a conflict resolution strategy or community development initiative, will be deeply incorporated by the "benefitting people"? Yes! If the change can be seen and appropriated as life-giving, then it will be owned in proportion to its measure of adaptation to the people's cosmology. Cosmologically-friendly change is owned. Otherwise not.

And yet conflicts abound with wider roots than traditional societies can handle with their own cosmology and "rules". All three of the above case studies amply point to this truth. The modern nation-state has been imposed on pastoralist society and has unleashed powerful temptations for pastoralists themselves in the disruption of right relations. Nation-states often exclude cosmological insights by their pretence to greater power (note the contrast between "words" and "sacrifice" in the Pokot story). By the same token, the state can be a helpful facilitator in building peace. The state can play an enabling role in making conflicts less likely by appropriate administrative, legislative and constitutional changes. The latter two roles are beyond the scope of this paper but the first is well illustrated in Wajir. Consider these three examples:



1) In the Ewuaso story, both local and national politicians allied with the government have conspired to corruptly dispossess the Maasai from their own land. Rupture of the social fabric and political alienation are the bitter fruits of these broken relationships. And yet in that space the church and traditional elders are working toward a recovery out of their covenantal understandings. It is the church that has brought forward the Maasai custom of "enkiguena," truth-seeking, combining it with the concerns for responsibility, love and forgiveness in an effort to reshape an undivided Maasai community (Sakuda, 1997).

2) From the Pokot story, do government inspired "agreements" and impositions bring peace? Or does the convening of involved elders, ritual sacrifice and the "cutting of a covenant" bind the participants in the restoration of right relationships? Which brings the more enduring peace? It is clearly the latter and just as clearly not the intent of most government decision-makers to move in that direction. (The example from Wajir is a shining exception!) Moreover, it is what people believe (e.g. a Tugen President giving free rein to those forces in an effort to "finish the Pokot") which operates so much more powerfully than whatever the "facts" of a given situation are. Again, beliefs and values are the operative agents not "facts and agreements".

3) From the Wajir peace story, one can see the government initiative, in contrast to the foregoing examples, creating the space required for elder mediation out of pastoralist cosmology and to support that process as needed. Conflict resolution practitioners, particularly of the elicitive school, would concur stressing the importance

of this created space for discussions and the building on "contextual resources" (Lederach, 1996).

We have previously touched on the theme of "facts" and "values". This needs emphasis. The "developed world" places great importance on "effectiveness, objectivity and impact." We want things to work efficiently and well. And if they do not then we just need the right tool or a better part. These views are rooted in the cosmology of the developed, Western world. But sometimes knowing which tool to use is not enough. The largely utilitarian bias of consultant experts, whether for conflict resolution or development, can blind us to the beliefs and values of the "target people." Even where certain understandings about traditional conflict resolution have been obtained, they may be misapplied or poorly integrated without a deeper sense of pastoralist cosmology, the seedbed which "roots" all these "facts of the matter". It is in the wellsprings of this cosmology that life-giving water is to be found in the desert, water which will rightly restore, resolve and rejoin that which is broken.

To create a space for the flowering of these cosmological traditions and the discernment to know when traditional conflict resolution is not enough will take great commitment on the part of all players. In this quest it would be important to bear in mind that there is not one linear road to "the modern world" but potentially many "modern worlds." Thus, a stance steeped in the values and traditions of pastoral cosmology together with a clear-headed view of future change could serve as an alternative modernity to that offered as de-culturizing development largely benefitting



the rich and powerful while maintaining the pretension of representing "the modern world."

## SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

The following closing thoughts are offered to provoke further discussion and stimulate action in support of pastoralists throughout the Horn of Africa.

A) Pastoralist cosmology is of immense religious and philosophical interest in and of itself. Traditional societies rich in oral literature like these pastoralists offer a profound legacy of covenantal understandings which offer a wide diversity of peacemaking resources for all of those concerned with conflict in the Horn of Africa. Yet, these resources are woefully undervalued and certainly under-utilized by government administrators, non-governmental agencies and conflict resolution practitioners.

B) Pastoralists need friends as never before! While the resources, leaders and commitments were found in Wajir to produce that "good news" peace story, this has been an exception. The creation of pastoralist networks is vital. The Kenya Pastoralist Forum has sought to become a national voice for the welfare of pastoralists and has succeeded in providing good education on key topics, raising awareness and offering good counsel both to pastoralist communities and policy-makers concerned with the drylands. Local organizations allied to supportive outside agencies have sought assistance in court cases over land issues. More support and assistance is needed both at the level of court action and at the local level building consensus and support

for appropriate group action. Yet, perhaps the most pressing priority is the nurture of the traditional insights of pastoral cosmology. Such nurture is the road to sustainable development. This development would be noted for the confidence pastoral peoples have in their identity and the power of their traditions to restore peace given normal conflict. Such development would be owned because a new modernity at peace with pastoral cosmology is being created.

C) The creation of "space" for further dialogue is essential. For example, the churches have played a very creative, behind-the-scenes role in the Ewuaso story to bring people together and create the fora parallel to the government's mediation. More efforts like this are needed. The effect of this effort in creating space is to allow the insights and actions of covenantal dynamics to gain more credibility. As it is (e.g. the Ewuaso Story), the creation of this dialogue space has been done by those (i.e. church people from the community) with very little real political power. Attention must be given to redressing the power balance often blocking such space. Perhaps a fruitful next step would be to engage in some broad-based dialogue on this topic involving governmental representatives, bilateral aid personnel, pastoralists and religious leaders.

D) It is no wonder that pastoralist cosmology is so little recognized by the outside world. Such cosmology is difficult for the outsider to apprehend and comes from people at the outer margin of even the "developing world". Yet there are some hopeful signs that perhaps state governments will change the laws, structures, and even the state constitution itself to enable rather than further marginalize pastoralism.



It is being seen that the majority of meat production is the result of pastoralist labor. The majority of the wildlife populations reside on pastoral lands and the viewing of wildlife continues to be the biggest attraction for tourism, Kenya's largest foreign exchange earner. It is slowly becoming apparent that pastoralism will remain the dominant occupation in an environment that will support little else. And finally, there will never be enough investment to make productive use of all the labor currently comprising the pastoralist sector. However, measured investment in livestock-based business and industry, particularly in some of the larger trading centres, would help secure the interdependence of pastoralists in the rural areas with their neighbors in the towns where goods and services would be available. In short, pastoralists will largely remain pastoralists for the foreseeable future. Therefore, working to enhance and enable pastoralism to survive makes good sense economically, socially and politically. And that makes for peace, a new peace, not just of words but of sacrifice. A peace from the cosmology of pastoralists. And just maybe, we might find that a little application of their covenantal insights allows the rest of us to have life and to have it more abundantly as well!

## SOURCES

My informants for the case study material presented were:

### **The Ewuaso Story**

F. Nkitoria Sekuda; Coordinator for SIMOO, a small grassroots NGO in the Oloshoo-oiber area of Kajiado District.

Rev. Stephen P. ole Mparingoi, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Ewuaso oo Nkidon'i, Kajiado District.

Moses Sakuda, a seminary student at Eastern Mennonite University and a Maasai from a community neighboring Ewuaso. He was asked to preach at a Christmas service, 1996, where opposing groups in the conflict had gathered.

### **The Pokot Story**

Jonathan Akeno, Material Culture Project Facilitator, Kositei Catholic Mission, Baringo District.

Steven, Pokot herdsman in the Cherangani Hills near Mt. Sondag, West Pokot District.

Moreover, a piece by Peter Kamau in the Daily Nation newspaper of February 14, 1996 entitled, "A 'War' that Refuses to End" provided corroborating and supplemental detail.

### **The Wajir Peace Story**

Dekha Ibrahim; Secretary of the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, Wajir District.

Mohamed Elmi, Coordinator for Wajir Office, Oxfam (UK and Ireland).



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