

Imagining A Future Peace: Local Level Community Perceptions In Molo South Rift Valley, Kenya

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Abstract: In the backdrop of past instances of ethno-political violence, the communities of Molo sub-county in Kenya's Rift Valley region continue to live in suspicion and fear of further outbreaks of violence. Although they cooperate in social activities, send their children to the same schools and work together in their farms, they have no confidence in the peace that they currently experience. These communities co-exist in a state of 'negative peace' (Galtung, 1997). Despite numerous transitional interventions towards peacemaking conducted by the civil society and the government, these communities' interactions have been marked with fears of hateful violent attacks and revenge, while they trend on mistrust in their dealings with each other. The ethnicization and politicization of the land issue continue to fuel disgruntlement. This paper examines the perceptions of local level community actors with regards to future peace with a case study of Molo sub-county, South Rift Valley Kenya. The paper argues that peaceful co-existence has remained elusive in the Molo sub-county area since the advent of ethno-political violence in the early 1990s. Although there have been multiple attempts to diagnose the causations of these conflicts and probable solutions, yet the dream of positive peace has remained a mirage.

Keywords: Peace, Ethnicity, Politics, Conflict, Victims, Perpetrators

I. INTRODUCTION

This study contributes to ongoing scholarship discourse that examines the dilemma of sustainable peace in post-conflict contexts with fieldwork carried out in the South Rift region of Kenya and specifically in Molo sub-county. Conflict analysts have diagnosed the ensuing tensions to be a product of unresolved land conflicts, competition for political office and the rise of ethnicized politics (Kanyinga, 2009; Kamungi, 2009; Mueller, 2014). It has been so because past initiatives were elite-driven and short-term oriented without tangible outcomes. This paper, drawing on primary evidence discusses the perceptions of local actors of the nature of the existing peace and what a future peace should look like. Since 2013, the region has been in a period of some "negative peace" linked to a newly found "marriage of convenience" between two previously rival political communities, the Kikuyu and

Kalenjin. Whereas this marriage of convenience has persisted post 2017 election cycle, our field findings discover local peace to be elusive. The so called marriage of convenience, emerging from The National Alliance (TNA) and the United Republican Party (URP) coming together as Jubilee coalition is variously interpreted as a ploy to defeat the then International Criminal Court (ICC) process that investigated the 2007-2008 electoral violence. This Alliance also referred to as "coalition of the accused" won the 2013 presidential contest while in the process calming the cycle of electoral violence in the former Rift Valley Province of Kenya. While this coalition was seen as a peace ticket especially in the Rift Valley region, local everyday peace remains elusive (Mueller, 2011; Lynch, 2008).

What explains the lack of sustainable peace is the puzzle that this study hopes to unravel drawing on the imaginations of what future peace would look like to these communities.

This paper is structured as follows: The first part explores the everyday perceptions of what peace means to these two local communities in Molo sub-county. The second part captures their perception of what a future peace should look like, in other words the ingredients of sustainable peace; voting with the locals – political realignment with the hosts, local level reconciliation, ethnic zoning, social interactions including inter-marriages, mixed ethnic schools. The third part looks at the potential setbacks of the proposed peace strategies. The fourth part concludes.

II. CONTEXTUAL PEACE

There exist different ‘peaces’ such as positive or negative peace, temporary and sustainable peace and immediate and future peace. The researcher observed that respondents showed higher preference for what she refers to as “practical” rather than “theoretical” peace, which according to the respondents is utopian and therefore unachievable. Although their preferred peace is not long lasting, they praised it for enabling them to conduct their daily lives, such as farming, taking their children to school, and generally cohesive interactions. Respondents reported that their relationships were still fragile as they continued to treat each other with caution explaining that: *“We ask them why they keep attacking us and destroying our property and their answer is always; ‘ni shetani’ (it’s the devil). She continued to say: “These people are not remorseful because even in our daily interactions they warn us of evictions in 2022 if our people in Central Kenya do not vote for Ruto” (35 year old Kikuyu woman).*

This kind of utterance is evidence that peace in Molo sub-county remains elusive. One respondent, a teacher living as an IDP in Molo town after an arsonist attack during the 1997 political violence on his farm praised the current relationships between these two communities. His view was that although he no longer lived in his farm, the situation was conducive for farming as he, together with other victims, had become accustomed to living in town and commuting to their farms daily. He added that due to the peace of mind that he experiences by living away from the farm, his farm yields were now higher than they were previously when he lived in the farm.

These examples point to a form of peace that the local communities continue to enjoy. Unlike liberal approaches to peacebuilding that makes assumption that peace can be universally understood, diverse concepts of peace create the notion that there are various types of peace. The recognition that peace is contextual and that there exists different kinds of peace lead to the legitimacy of different versions of peace (Galtung, 1997; Ginty & Richmond, 2013). The various understandings of what peace is may be traced to the works of pioneers in the field of peace and conflict such as Coser (1956), Curle (1971) and Galtung (1969; 1997), whose definitions of peace were based more on what it is not rather than what it is. An example is one definition that expresses peace as the absence of war or violence and a lack of unity and harmony. Thus the concept peace is rather ambiguous both normatively and conceptually.

The current peace experienced by these communities does not match Johann Galtung’s peacebuilding framework in which he distinguishes between ‘negative peace’ and ‘positive peace’. He refers to negative peace as the absence of violence brought about by the enactment of a ceasefire. However, positive peace is earned through restoration of relationships; the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole population; and the constructive resolution of conflict (Galtung, 1997). These communities however appreciate negative peace as good enough for fixing immediate relational problems. The communities did not show any strong commitment to cultivate what Johan Galtung refers to as ‘positive peace’. This is because as long as there were no evictions and physical attacks, whatever type of peace they accessed was satisfactory for them. Although respondents voiced their frustration and weariness of consolidating wealth only to watch it go up in flames every five years they exhibited no willingness to invest in the transformation of social system and culture change, which are important ingredients for peacebuilding. Respondents were more interested in the assurance of non-attacks and the unhindered continuation to work their farms even if they could not live there. They were more interested in the ‘security’ that would help them to go about their daily lives than with lasting peace. They were also comfortable living together even though each community was suspicious of the other. Therefore they saw conflict management as a priority, and negative peace as good enough as long as there was absence of war.

In describing the nature of current ‘peace’ and its prospects, one respondent, formerly working for the local authority in the town told the researcher that:

“People remain suspicious and afraid of one another. Everyone is now alert; ... we will not be caught unawares like we have in the past. There are reports that Kalenjin politicians are holding secret meetings and they are openly making ethnic political appeals... but unlike 2007-2008 when our militia used machetes, and other crude weapons, we have now acquired guns” (Respondent: former Area Chief).

Similarly, another respondent, associated with the organizing a group of a hundred Kikuyu youth to attack the Kalenjin at the height of 2007-2008 skirmishes that resulted in scores of the youth being slashed to death by their opponents stated:

“... Let no one cheat you, this is a well known fact to the local government officials and Kalenjin and Kikuyu elders; both communities have now acquired guns; the communities are preparing; they are arming themselves and are swearing that this time they will not be caught unprepared. Violence will be worse in 2022 as Kikuyus will not vote for Ruto. But we will not be caught unawares like in the previous clashes ... we are now ready, we will no longer depend on help from outside.... we have armed ourselves” (Respondent: Businessman/Politician).

Another respondent cautioned that the present peace is held together by a very thin thread especially because Ruto is a more powerful partner in Jubilee than Uhuru and thus, *“if for some reason Ruto changed his mind and deserted the coalition, 2017 would see greater violence than in previous instances” (Respondent: Clergy, Molo Town).* In this regard, the Kikuyu women respondents committed to not upset their

“hosts” so that they can build on the gains made in the other in their daily lives, one respondent informed the last five years of the peaceful Uhuru-Ruto Government. But they doubted whether the Kikuyu in Central Kenya would vote for William Ruto come 2022. Asked whether they would cast their votes in Ruto’s favor, the Kikuyu women were unanimous:

“... For us Kikuyus living in Rift Valley we know the pain of losing lives and property, and of living in fear of attacks and evictions. We’re tired of burying our young men and watching fire destroy what we work so hard for. ... We will definitely vote for Ruto in 2022 for the sake of peace. The problem is the Kikuyu of Mount Kenya region; they don’t seem to understand what we go through. If Ruto does not win, Molo and its environs, and indeed most of the Rift Valley will no doubt see a return of violence. In fact they have started threatening us with evictions incase Ruto does not crunch presidency...” (Respondent: Senior Clergy).

Another respondent commented that: *“although we dislike Ruto due to his prominent role in ethno-political violence especially in 2007-2008; and for his corrupt deals which are a threat to the country’s economy, we will vote for him because of our desire to live peacefully”* (middle aged Kikuyu woman). This respondent added that the Kalenjin were already threatening them (Kikuyu) with eviction if Ruto does not win the 2022 election. Another respondent said that the Kalenjin showed a lot of generosity to the Kikuyu people in their bid to erase memories of the atrocious past. But again due to the suspicion that these two communities held each other with, he continued, *“but one cannot tell for sure whether they are remorseful as they are still threatening us with evictions in 2022. In fact an old slogan ‘ukitaka kufukuza ndege, choma kiota’ (if you want to chase away a bird burn it’s nest) has now resurfaced* (Respondent: a Kikuyu primary school teacher). The respondents attributed this slogan to the ODM 2007 campaigns meant to evict the Kikuyu from Rift Valley. All these are pointers to the fact that peace remained elusive amongst these communities.

III. RE-IMAGINING A FUTURE PEACE

Asked what, in their perspective, were additional strategies towards community healing and reconciliation, a respondent, mostly representing the Kikuyu view was positive that indigenous mechanisms using community elders would achieve positive results. He opined that if the elders of both groups were left alone without political interference, they would influence a new relationship amongst their people. He suggested that:

“The elders of both sides should retreat from their communities, probably into some thick forest without any external influence such as media, politicians, religious leaders, brokers, and any other speculators.... these leaders should be forced to move away from people and only return when they have solutions that can correct the ensuing relational problems” (Respondent: former Area Chief).

In suggesting that community dialogues needed to be enhanced, some respondents, specifically Kalenjin IDPs, gave examples of how grassroots processes in the North Rift and specifically Eldoret where community level negotiations had

brought about positive change. While lauding the government and the CSOs, especially religious bodies for their many interventions, they saw the Eldoret-type processes as more promising than past top-bottom interventions instituted by the government because they were participatory positing that:

“Elders were representing the views of their communities in those meetings... and even when they planned to build memorials, they went back to their people to seek guidance on where these monuments would be erected. The elders led their communities in returning looted goods including land that they had grabbed from other communities. Our elders can help us to co-exist peacefully with each other (45 year old Kalenjin man).

Another view was that communities should be taught that violence affected everyone so their efforts should be towards prevention or support for each other when tragedy strikes. One respondent narrated how the Sachangwan fire incident had brought communities together:

“All communities were affected in this fire that left over a hundred people dead. Our leaders agreed that if the Kisii people were burying their person on a certain day, everyone else would attend and give support. They did not allow two different communities to bury on the same day. We all carried each other’s pain, even if they were from a different community. In the same way, all of us have counted losses through this violence; no community has been spared. We can work together and bear each other’s pain” (Respondent: Kalenjin Businessman).

One respondent was of the view that guided grassroots reconciliation processes, with financial and technical support from the government and NGOs would bring healing; *“but this must be done in the absence of political interference. Again, for success, any manner of compensation discussed must include the return of land that was taken away by the Kalenjin from the Kikuyu”* (Respondent: Businessman/ Politician). This is the kind of peacebuilding described in Lederach’s bottom-out peacebuilding approach, which seeks the participation of the top, middle and bottom level actors (Lederach, 1997; Ginty & Richmond, 2013).

One key informant was of the opinion that;

“In order to create lasting peace, Kenya needed to adopt the Rwandan Gacaca courts model, a mixture of restorative and retributive justice. We need indigenous mechanisms where communities are empowered to set up their own panels, which can punish, reward, and even give amnesty, but these processes must be free from politics” (Respondent: Official, National Steering Committee).

This view was supported by another key informant who cautioned that;

“Although restorative processes are slow and time consuming, if we genuinely want lasting change, it is the way to go, there are no shortcuts. ... Again, since trauma can hinder reconciliation, trauma healing and psychosocial support is needed to build the resilience of these communities” (Respondent: Officer, NPI-Africa).

The clergy felt that churches needed to do more inter-community evangelism in order to bring back mixed-ethnic churches, which form a good ground for intermarriages and other forms of inter-communal cohesion. The researcher had hoped that respondents would show enthusiasm for sustainable

peace. But what one respondent after another yearned for was a 'peace' that would help them in their everyday lives, rather than lasting peace. They summarized the ingredients for their desired kind of peace as their responsibility which included; voting with the locals – political realignment with the hosts, community driven reconciliation processes, ethnic zoning, social interactions including inter-marriages, and mixed ethnic institutions. These elements of peace are discussed in detail below.

IV. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RE-ALIGNMENTS WITH THE 'HOSTS'

Lynch (2006) blames both Kenyatta's and Moi's regimes for enforcing ethnic thinking. She observes that, "many Kenyans understand issues of ethnicity to be central to local and national level politics, thus the tendency amongst Kenyans to view everything through ethnic lenses" (pg. 61). Ethnicity is central to every facet of Kenyans' lives whether development, education, employment, and even justice. Drawing evidence especially from the Rift Valley, the author terms ethnicity as a politically relevant signifier in contemporary Kenya since "Kenyans can, and do, contest, revive, create, negotiate and renegotiate their ethnic identity" (p. 49). The author discusses how ethnic communities can either decrease or enlarge based on selected memories and past events. The changeability of the term also makes it possible for concerned parties to deliberate and negotiate ideas of who constitutes a friend and foe at the time, who is ours, and who is not.

These views were supported by voices from the field, for example, one respondent, a teacher from the Kikuyu community narrated how his fellow Kikuyu burnt his house on suspicion that due to his friendship with 'the enemy', he leaked their secrets. He confessed to the researcher that he had close associates in the Kalenjin community, and he could not help telling them whenever the Kikuyu planned to strike them just as they also revealed their plans to him. When his house was torched, his Kalenjin neighbors put the fire off.

Similarly, the Kalenjin IDPs evicted from Kikuyu-dominated settlements in Nyandarua and Laikipia, in the Rift Valley, reported how their kin in Ndarugu Farm, in Kedowa, Kipkelion East, acted coldly towards them when they returned to their "ancestral land". They told the researcher that their kin, who had previously settled in Ndarugu referred to them as "*Chemng'ende*" meaning (bean-eaters), an offensive nickname for the Kikuyu. Their kin saw them as having come to occupy their land just like the Kikuyu did. He complained that to date, they are not considered for any leadership roles in the community because they are termed 'outsiders'.

Additionally, the researcher met 84-year old man, the only Kikuyu who was spared during the 1992 evictions in Ndarugu Farm and interrogated him on the reasons behind his non-eviction while all the other Kikuyu left the area. In response he quoted a Kalenjin saying: *ngiwe kap kipamchii iam chii* meaning if you visit a family that is eating human flesh, you eat with them. He said that he had aligned his interests to theirs since he's the one who came to them. As a businessman, he explained that most of his clients and workers

were Kalenjin. Due to his close friendship with the community, he had become assimilated through marriage to a woman from the Kalenjin community. In his compound stood some makeshift shelters where Kalenjin squatters, who referred to him as 'Mzee' due to respect, lived after their houses had been demolished. The researcher also gathered that previously, the Kalenjin had good relationships with the Kisii community, whom they had referred to as *Kamama* (meaning in-laws). But on realizing that, just like the Kikuyu they harbored land buying interests, their relationship changed and have since been evicted alongside the Kikuyu. In addition, one IDP narrated how due to fear of attacks and eviction, and for the sake of peace, she gathered Kikuyu women and together to campaign for a Kalenjin rather than a Kikuyu candidate Member of County Assembly (MCA). She explained that:

"During the last elections, for safety, I formed a group of Kikuyu women and we went round campaigning for a Kalenjin MCA rather than our own. These people are serious, for us to survive here we must lie low like envelopes... When this candidate won, both communities celebrated together, you could not distinguish between a Kalenjin and a Kikuyu ... we were all celebrating" (Respondent: a Kikuyu IDP).

These examples are indicators that the term ethnicity is subjective and fluid, and can change within varying situations. They are also representative of the views that in order for the Kikuyu community to experience peace, they have to re-align themselves with the 'hosts' firstly politically, and secondly socially.

A respondent who doubted whether peace would ever come through any other means rather than the Kikuyu aligning their interests to those of the Kalenjin whose main focus was on winning elections in 2022 rather than trying to correct the past. Some respondents, especially from the Kalenjin community dismissed the importance of dialogue meetings since 'they had already reconciled and therefore they should move forward not backwards'.

V. ETHNIC ZONING AND DISPLACEMENTS

In the Rift Valley, notions of spatial ownership and entitlement are expressed and animated during the political campaigns to remind 'the guests' of their secondary citizenship status in the region, especially in regard to political behavior. Furthermore, much of the conflict was shaped by the natives' desire to punish and evict 'bad' guests who betrayed their 'hosts' during elections (Jenkins, 2012). The Kalenjin IDPs expressed their displeasure with the Kikuyu, terming them as disrespectful to their host community. They particularly were unhappy with the Kikuyu's culture of occupying locations and replacing their native names to with those imported from Central Kenya in total disregard of the host community's feelings. This could be a case of ethnic hegemony as the Kalenjin were also busy renaming farms into their local names.

The Kalenjin community was also unhappy with how, during political elections, the Kikuyu occupying Rift Valley voted alongside their 'people' in central Kenya, rather than together with their host community. Therefore, the native-guest metaphor is applied in Molo where the Kalenjin see the

Rift Valley as their ancestral land, thus everyone else living there is an intruder, “a guest” who must either comply with the local rules or return to their native land. On the other hand, the Kikuyu respondents complained that the Kalenjin were determined to wipe out “foreigners” from some regions through forceful acquirement of their land through intimidation. This can be understood in terms of what Dunn (2009) refers to as autochthony, to refer to ‘politics of belonging’, dividing the society between ‘genuine’ and counterfeit occupants of a given location, leading to the relegation of ‘subordinate citizens’. Politics of belonging are strengthened by notions of who occupied certain areas ahead of another, with the earlier resident claiming native status. In Molo sub-county, the ‘non-natives’ complained that Kalenjin children were socialized that the Kikuyu community were *vunyo*, *meaning enemy*, and one time they will return to their home in Central Kenya. Respondents also faulted Kalenjin elders’ role in inciting their youth against the Kikuyu and enforcing violence towards land acquirement.

Further, respondents from the Kikuyu community complained that boundaries were demarcated in such a way that disadvantaged them politically, first making it impossible for a non-Kalenjin candidate to win a parliamentary seat in the area and two, zoning them off such that in the case of attacks they would not escape. In making this claim, one respondent said that the Kikuyu community had surrendered to the ‘natives’ for survival.

Naming land as a key issue in Kenyan political conflicts, Klopp and Kamungi (2008) trace narratives of peoples’ political identities back to the 19th century when British colonialists claimed large tracts of fertile land in Central and Rift Valley. Subsequent regimes of both Jomo Kenyatta’s and Arap Moi did not correct these anomalies, but acted in ways that set the Rift Valley ethnic communities politically against each other. Both Kalenjin and Maasai communities, the ‘natives’ of Rift Valley, campaigned against the Kikuyu residency in the region, as the community was perceived a threat to Moi’s political regime especially at the onset of the multiparty era in 1990. Similarly, (Rutten and Owuor, 2009) point to land as a key structural factor underlying ethnically driven electoral and political violence in Kenya dating back the colonial era. They discuss how Kenya’s colonizers grabbed Kenya’s most fertile land for their settler population while ‘natives’ were displaced to ‘ethnically’ defined areas.

At independence land was allocated along class and ethnic lines entrenching deep resentments amongst ethnic groups, whether landed or not. Ethnic interests were, therefore, based on land, an essential economic and cultural resource that dictates the composition of political alliances around elections. The land issue in the Rift Valley, therefore, forms an important part of Kenya’s historical injustices. Githigaro (2017) cites class and ethnic competition that pitted the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin land- buying companies against each other in post-independence scramble for land. He samples a particular instance where a group of 20,000 Kikuyu peasants were caught up in competition with a (Kalenjin) Sindenet Farmers Company, a land-buying company for land in the Rift Valley. The issue was too big to be tackled by the local land board, and thus the final decision to give the farms to Sindenet was made by the Cabinet. This example is proof

that the jostling between these two communities in relation to land issues is not a new phenomenon. Kameri-Mbote and Kindiki (2008), blaming Kenya’s recurrent violence on unresolved and politically aggravated land grievances suggest that violence over land can be avoided by exploring alternative ways of making wealth and minimizing speculative practices on land.

However, while land is mainly viewed and utilized as an economic resource, it is also true that communities’ attachment to land runs deeper than this. One respondent bitterly narrated how her father and brother, both murdered on the same day were buried in a shared grave in a public cemetery, yet he owned land. This goes against one central Kenyan cultural practice of burying their loved ones, especially men, at ‘home’, meaning in their land.

Respondents, especially those from the Kikuyu community decried the politics of boundaries, which, according to them were drawn in such a way that a non-Kalenjin could not win a parliamentary seat in that region. They cited some incidents pointing to the fact that the Kalenjin had schemed to systematically displace the Kikuyu from some farms, including some such as Muthinji, Mwaragania, Githima, and others, bearing Kikuyu names, and renaming them to Kalenjin native names. One key informant opined that:

“The Kalenjin are still trying to evict Kikuyus, but this time not through violence but using intimidation rather than force. The Kikuyu are selling their land to them and fleeing as the 2017 elections approach. There are many farms which are now purely Kalenjin-occupied after the Kikuyu were either evicted through violence or intimidation such as Matunda, Olenguruoni, Rongai, Jogoo, Turbo, and Burnt Forest among others” (Respondent: Former Molo MP).

Another respondent, on explaining how Molo sub-county was ethnically zoned posited that the Kalenjin were busy cleaning up farms formerly owned by the Kikuyu and renaming them.

“They are no longer using force, they make sure you are not at peace to an extent that fear causes you not to value your land any longer, and you finally give up and sell it to them mostly at throw-a-way price. The Kikuyu are now trying to sell back to the Kalenjin so that they can move to Kikuyu dominated areas for peace of mind and to escape the persistent fear of attacks” (Respondent: (IDPteacherKik-M01).

A Kikuyu women leaders focus group accused Moi of planting *bad seeds* (hatred) amongst the communities during his presidency. They gave an example of how under his leadership billboards to usher people into certain towns were mounted, citing one at the entrance of Molo town that read: *“Welcome to Kipsigis land”*. They perceived such messages as responsible for deepened polarization amongst already divided communities in the area.

VI. CONVENING OF ELDERS

Previous top-bottom peacebuilding processes went largely unnoticed by majority of the respondents, with only a few mentioning the ICC and TJRC processes. A few others only

had a media relationship with these interventions. Some had hoped, for example, ICC would curb impunity while others complained that it had victimized their leaders who had protected them during the 2007-2008 violence. The supporters of both the Orange Democratic Movement and the Party of the National Unity perceived each other as 'enemy'. However, all the respondents positively recalled the role of grassroots level interventions, led by religious and community leaders, and including CSOs working on the ground. Respondents reported that they had consulted traditional wisdom and spirituality for healing; with some seeking cleansing from community leaders as the burden of guilt weighed them down. Others had repented and had been prayed for at religious crusades and had since moved on.

Further, some participants of the violence, both victims and offenders, were reported to be in need of trauma healing for what respondents referred to as 'mental illnesses'. Respondents associated the deaths and other misfortunes on those deemed perpetrators as curses due to their aggressive roles in the violence. This thinking points to the participants' beliefs in the traditional system of curses and taboos as an effective tool towards healing and reconciliation. Respondents further praised participatory grassroots dialogues initiated in the North Rift region of Kenya for their effectiveness in redressing victims, especially those of the 2007-2008 post-election violence.

Since past initiatives failed this study recommends that these communities delve deeper into their traditional dispute resolution methods which are likely to have far reaching effects than the western-type resolutions. Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms (TDRMs) are entrenched in Article 159 of The Constitution of Kenya, 2010 and their application is respected amongst native groups. Before the advent of Eurocentric justice systems, African traditions held community harmony in higher esteem than individual interests. These views were articulated in terms such as Ubuntu in South Africa and Utu in East Africa. These values are at the heart of social harmony in African societies and are a key pillar in resolution of conflicts (Muriithi, 2009)

These mechanisms are well understood within cultural settings and are inexpensive, fast, and easily accessible in resolving conflicts. Although these mechanisms are no longer pure due to contamination with aspects of colonialism, evangelism, and globalization, they may still be well placed to resolve disputes amongst communities due to their non-state centric nature, and therefore, enjoy a level of legitimacy amongst people. Due to their participatory nature, drawing from the wisdom of the natives, their spirituality and other traditional beliefs make them more suitable than the western type justice systems utilizing both restorative and retributive justice (Nkwi, 2013). This view is supported by Paffenholz (2013) who challenges Lederach's middle-out approach arguing that case studies have found that grassroots level (Track III) activities have huge impact on their local environments even in the absence of a trickle-down effect from middle level (Track II) This takes us back to the important place of bottom-up interventions, which have worked in the African context either on their own or alongside external processes.

The researcher sought respondents' views on whether

community leaders involvement with peacebuilding initiatives had positive implications towards healing and reconciliation. Their answers were affirmative with one of the interviewees explaining that:

"Our village leaders and pastors did a lot of work. When violence broke out, we all ran to the churches for safety... Pastors encouraged families who lost their members and conducted decent burials for them ... Although the village elders have become corrupt and keep extorting money from villagers who need help, some were instrumental in bringing back the calm although you could not tell which side some of them belonged to. All the time they are asking for money..." (Respondent: Businessman/Politician).

Another respondent spoke very positively about the village elders saying that: *"this are the people who kept talking to youth to stop fighting each other. They resolved disputes between communities and continually told youth not to stay at the shopping centers..."* (Respondent: 33-year old Kalenjin man).

In describing the role of women at community level, one respondent remarked:

"... Besides their caregiving roles, women also filled in the gaps of medical care especially in saving babies' lives since hospitals were not accessible. There's one particular woman, Mama Abot who played the role of a traditional birth attendant among the Kalenjin women. If it was not for her good heart, many mothers and babies would not have made it" (Respondent: Kalenjin man – community leader).

Women's efforts in calming the violence were recognized as they continually talked to the young warriors against carrying weapons around as this aroused the rival group's anger. Another respondent talked of a Kalenjin woman who was so touched by one Kikuyu woman's fate, how she literally carried her to her house, consoled her, fed her and put her to sleep, and then prayed for her all night. Women were also said to have spent a lot of time praying for peace under dire situations.

Another respondent praised the role of Mungiki, a local militia whose members are all from the Kikuyu community saying:

"Without the intervention of our young men Molo would have been flattened. Mungiki helped us very much and we are thankful to our ethnic leaders for funding them as each member was paid Kshs300 per day. They were dressed in Kenya Army Uniform so they complimented the role of the Kenya Army who were mainly from Kamba and Somali communities since even the army was divided along ethnic and political lines" (Respondent: former Pastor, Apostolic Faith Church).

Thus the role of the community-level interventions in seeking reconciliation was well felt and appreciated on the ground, although full healing has not been attained. Each respondent had something to say about village level initiatives carried out by civil society organization and NGOs, and some of the interventions conducted by the government. But it was surprising to see that some respondents, especially the survivors of violence, knew very little or nothing at all concerning the major interventions conducted at the national and international levels, especially the TJRC. Both the government and civil society organizations led initiatives,

which included the TJRC and the ICC processes, the resettlement of IDPs, and multi-leveled dialogue forums were discussed at length.

VII. POTENTIAL SETBACKS FOR PEACE STRATEGY

One key informant termed the role of government in peacebuilding, both at the preventive and resolution stages as weak and hailed CSOs for their bid to bridge the gap. An official of the National Steering Committee (NSC) on Peacebuilding commended the work of past transitional justice initiatives and specifically the TJRC recommendations, but decried the lack of implementation of its recommendations. His view was that *“even with so many peace players on the ground, there was little to show for it because programs were rushed and conducted at the superficial level, mainly to set the correct mood ahead of elections. Unfortunately, most of these interventions have no far reaching effects”* (Respondent: Senior Officer, NSC). He blamed the problem partly on development partners who gave earmarked donations for processes they deemed as important rather than for countering the real problems on the ground. Asked what he perceived as the main achievements of NSC as a coordination body, his response was that the Secretariat had done a lot in coordinating peacebuilding processes. But he also expressed his frustrations at the duplication of activities and felt that CSOs needed to define their roles better and talk to each other more for better results.

Asked whether truth telling was possible between the two communities, the Kikuyu women welcomed this move but doubted whether their Kalenjin counterparts, due to what they termed as ‘their secretive nature’, would agree to open discussions. One respondent was of the view that *“Kalenjin women know nothing ... the only word in their mouth is “mong’em” (meaning I don’t know).... and even if they would want to talk, their husbands would keep them away from the talks because they hold the Kikuyu in very high suspicion”* (Respondent, elderly Kikuyu woman). The women also said that due to the Kalenjins’ strict hierarchy of authority, women would find it hard to open up especially on issues of ‘security’ nature.

“But for us, we want to talk, we want them to know how we feel, we want to know why they hate us so much.... We want to explain to them how we acquired our land, we were not given this land as they purport; we bought with hard earned money. Some of us sold our small parcels in Central and invested here. If they opened up, then we would be very happy neighbors as we continue co-existing” (Respondent: 35 year old Kikuyu woman).

Another interviewee, who did not view meetings between perpetrators and victims important suggested;

“We should move forward and not backwards ... any process that would remind people of the pain they suffered would not be necessary. Why should people reopen wounds and subject themselves to more pain. There is no need, we have already forgiven each other” (Respondent: middle aged Kalenjin man).

This view was supported by other Kalenjin respondents, one of them interjecting *“even family members collide, shetani*

anawaingilia (the devil comes in) but that does not mean they hate each other, after a short time you see them laughing with each other. Why waste time with things that have passed... even our leaders are now reconciled” (Respondent: 28 year old Kalenjin woman).

Other respondents insisted that the communities were still suffering, raising the issue of cattle rustling, which have taken root since the 2007-2008 PEV. They attributed this phenomenon to the fact that the PEV opened doors to a culture of cattle theft as young men stole cows without any restraint, slaughtered and feasted on them. This trend is now out of control and both communities, especially the Kikuyu who have very few cows are suffering huge losses and inconveniences. The Kikuyu women told the researcher that for safety, they kept their cows inside the houses they lived in throughout the night. Respondents from each community blamed the other for acting under oath, thus were skeptical that any meaningful talks would take place.

Another view was that from the Kikuyu community was that; *“the only talks that would make sense to these people would be to agree to a strategy of how we will vote for them, and especially for Ruto in 2022. That is what reconciliation for them means, nothing else”* (Respondent: Former local level politician). To show how deeply ethnic hatred was entrenched in politics of the Rift Valley region, they discussed how tensions rose between the Kalenjin and the Kisii when Kenya’s Chief Justice Maraga nullified the August 8th Jubilee win citing illegalities and irregularities. They also added that anyone touching their leaders was an enemy. The group also said that during the repeat elections of 26th October 2017, individuals from communities deemed supporters of the National Super Alliance (NASA), together with those who had during the August 8th election which was nullified had supported NASA were forced to vote for Uhuru Kenyatta in the repeat presidential elections which NASA boycotted.

These women also doubted whether Kalenjin women would talk and especially about reconciliation. This is because, even though they worked together in farms, and their children attended the same schools, they still joked about the eviction of the Kikuyu if they did not vote Ruto in as Kenya’s next president in the 2022 general elections. This is because there exists a gentleman’s agreement between President Uhuru and Deputy President Ruto to support each other for a ten-year term each. Again, this is an indication of high levels of mistrust between the two leaders, which has been cascaded to the grassroots. One respondent told the interviewer that the only reconciliation that would exist between the Kikuyu and the Kalenjins was allowing Ruto and his people political hegemony in the region. She gave an example saying that *“during the last elections, for safety, I formed a group of Kikuyu women and we went round campaigning for a Kalenjin politician rather than our own”*. *These people are serious, for us to survive here we must lie low like envelopes”* (Respondent 40-year old Kikuyu woman). Another respondent doubted whether the Kalenjin would waste time meeting with the Kikuyu since, in his opinion, all their focus was on winning elections in paying the political debt of 2022 and not trying to correct the past through reconciliation programs.

Asked what would be done to the ‘perpetrators’ for sustainable peace to be attained, the members of a Kikuyu

focus group lamented that just like those who burned their houses in 1992 and the 1997 still walking around freely, nothing would be done to the implementers of 2007-2008 violence. Further, they saw the demand for justice as a recipe for future cycles of violence, which hurt and therefore needed to be prevented by all costs. One respondent, said that the fact that the perpetrators were not tried in court does not mean nothing was done to them and added:

"These culprits were summoned by the elders, this is even worse than appearing before the court because the elders can decide to curse you" (Respondent: Kalenjin high school teacher). Speaking symbolically, one respondent posited that; *"by taking Uhuru and Ruto to The Hague, everyone who had participated in the violence was also in the Hague. These people were not sleeping until the case was terminated"* (Respondent: former local politician, Molo Town).

In response to whether those who committed crimes were remorseful, another respondent replied that; *"these people are very hard-hearted since from young age, they are taught that we stole their land. This is what their elders and politicians have fed them with. They believe we are here by mistake so by evicting us they are doing the right thing"* (Respondent: middle-aged Kikuyu woman). In addition, another respondent was of the view that the Kalenjin believed that the Kikuyu had to leave the Rift Valley in order for them to feel that justice was done. But one respondent had a different view that:

"The Kalenjin are remorseful, when they see what happened to their own children, I think they feel bad that they started the violence.... in fact, some of them felt very sorry for us when they saw us trying to salvage what was left after our houses were burned down, they would come up and help us" (Respondent 50-year old woman).

In support of this sentiment, one respondent narrated how a Kalenjin woman had rescued a Kikuyu woman who was in shock after her husband and son were killed. To support the fact that the perpetrators were remorseful, the respondent narrated how the Kalenjin woman carried the distraught Kikuyu woman to her house, fed her and put her to bed and the whole night prayed for her. A different perspective was presented by a respondent who explained about the pressure that Kalenjin youth were subjected to in order to 'reclaim their stolen land' for future generations; meaning that even the youth were remorseful as those who were killed or afflicted in different ways were and remain their neighbors and childhood friends. This point is an indication that the perpetrators were themselves victims of cultural and political systems that were too powerful for them.

Respondents from the Kalenjin community were optimistic about the current and future peace experienced by the two communities. Asked whether in their opinion the perpetrators were remorseful, one respondent said: *"these are our sisters and brothers, we eat and drink together. They don't need to be remorseful ... we forgave them long ago and they know that"* (Respondent: Kalenjin primary school teacher). Asked whether they had ever met to apologize to each other, another respondent in the group said that they met all the time. *"We work together in the farms so we meet all the time even on the road and no one harbors bitterness against the other. We have reconciled and we are now one community"* (Respondent: Kalenjin youth leader). To emphasize that the

two communities were reconciled and that no one needed to be remorseful, another respondent explained that they used the same water point and women were all very happy drawing water together. He also added that; *"since 2007, intermarriages between these two communities have increased ... even my sister has gone to them..."* (Respondent: Local Area Chief).

However, respondents from the Kikuyu community were not as positive in their answer to the question whether the perpetrators were remorseful. One respondent said that it was hard to tell whether they were since when they asked them why they had previously attacked them and destroyed their property their simple answer was always; 'ni shetani' (it's the devil). *"In a way you can tell they are not remorseful because even now in our daily talks and interactions, they keep warning us with evictions in 2022 if our people in Central do not vote for Ruto"* (Respondent: 30-year old Kalenjin woman). A former politician from the Kikuyu community however doubted whether the Kalenjin were remorseful since their greatest interest was still to evict the Kikuyu from what they saw as their own land. To support his view, he said that the Kalenjin were slowly displacing the Kikuyu from neighboring farms that bear Kikuyu names such as Muthinji, Mwaragania, Githima, and others, and renaming them to Kalenjin native names.

One respondent was of the view that Ruto was remorseful especially going by his words: 'never again'. He interpreted these words in addition to the fact that he was severally captured in the media in emotional states as an indication that he regretted his role in the organization of post-election violence. But the respondent also added that:

"Ruto might just have been playing politics, you never know with these politicians because they are saints by day and devils by night. ... When people like Governor Mandago threaten the Kikuyu openly about a political debt they owe, they are talking on Ruto's behalf" (Respondent: former Local Politician).

This respondent was reacting to the dynamics shrouding the Uhuru-Ruto coalition which came out in a speech during a burial ceremony in Kapseret location demanding that: *"The Kikuyu community must vote for Deputy President William Ruto in 2022 to pay off political debts of the support given to Uhuru Kenyatta by Ruto's followers during 2013 and 2017 elections"*.

He added that it was not easy to tell whether youth who carried out the violence were remorseful since they followed their political and cultural leaders without questions. He gave an example of how Peter Kenneth's losing in the Nairobi Gubernatorial nominations was welcomed with celebration among the Kalenjin. This is because in their view, Kenneth was being groomed as a possible Kikuyu presidential candidate to compete with William Ruto in 2022, meaning that the Kikuyu vote would not go to their person – the present Deputy President. This is a clear indication of the height of suspicion that even the Jubilee coalition is working with. For the people at the grassroots, the words of their leaders determine their actions, whether constructive or destructive. One respondent, claimed to be the only Kikuyu who survived the 1992 evictions, has lived in Ndarugu farm for 61 years spoke metaphorically saying: *"we are just vehicles, our*

leaders are the drivers, they determine the direction we go to. If they call us to peace, we will be peaceful, if they tell us its time to arm ourselves, we believe they know what we don't so we heed" (Respondent: 81 year old Kikuyu elder).

Another respondent, a special education teacher was of the view that:

"The perpetrators were so remorseful that some even opted for traditional cleansing rituals from the elders. These incidents haunt them, some have even gone mad and others have died.... Others are faced with all manner of trouble in their families and I am sure they carry a heavy load around" (Respondent: 40 year old Kalenjin teacher).

Members of a focus group made up of Kikuyu women said that whether Kalenjins were remorseful or not, their biggest pursuit was to get the Kikuyu out of Molo. They said that since both parties had lost lives and property in the past atrocities, the Kalenjin were now using intimidation rather than force as they were still determined to displace 'foreigners'.

"We are now freely selling land to them because when you find you have no peace, you just give up that land and go to a place where you can live with your people. Presently no Kikuyu in their right mind will buy land in some of these farms, we are all trying to sell our land to them. It seems like in future there will be no single Kikuyu here" (Respondent: middle aged Kikuyu woman).

VIII. CONCLUSION

Utilizing responses from the field, this paper explored the everyday perceptions of the meaning of peace to the Kalenjin and the Kikuyu communities in Molo sub-county, who have been caught up in unending conflict. Respondents from the Kalenjin community were generally positive in the effectiveness of the current peace and were of the opinion that relationships between the two communities had normalized. However, respondents from the Kikuyu community viewed the current peace as unstable and based on their counterparts getting what they wanted rather than a negotiated peace. Additionally, the researcher sought to capture perception of what a future peace should look like and what the ingredients of sustainable peace would be. The Kalenjin opined that peace depended on moving forwards, not backwards, and on the Kikuyu paying the existing political debt by voting for William Ruto's presidency in 2022. Similarly, the Kikuyu felt that future peace depended on them voting with the locals and realigning their political ambitions with those of their hosts. They also saw local level reconciliation as based on ethnic zoning; where each community lived together and away from the other, while social interactions including inter-marriages and mixed ethnic institutions were strengthened. Although all these strategies were already in place, remained elusive since the Kikuyu community, being the minority group, were afraid of demanding justice as this would trigger renewed violence. Therefore, they felt that their place as guests was to always please their hosts for peace to ensue. This peace is therefore conditional and not sustainable.

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