

SHORT TAKES

Local Practices for Peace Among 'Violent' Pastoralists in East Africa

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Abstract

Pastoralists in East Africa have been represented as typical 'warlike' people. Some researchers attribute this 'warlike' behavior to the pastoral way of life and have taken a part in reproducing the negative image on pastoralists. However, pastoralists have also recovered peace by themselves after hostility has ended. Researchers should make efforts to examine local practices for peace not only to reexamine the biased representation of pastoralists, but also to make outside interventions exert positive influences to local communities. In this paper, I describe various cross-cutting ties among the Daasanach and neighboring ethnic groups. I then discuss how these cross-cutting ties relate to the process of inter-ethnic war and peace building, and argue that these ties have potential for peace-making.

Key words: Inter-ethnic relations, Peace-making, Conflict transformation, Daasanach (Ethiopia, Kenya)

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Introduction

Pastoralists in East Africa have been represented as typical 'violent' and 'warlike' people not only by neighboring agricultural communities and urban inhabitants but also by those who have researched among these groups. A lot of research focused on their 'violent customs' and analyzed the cause of war. Some researchers have attributed its cause to the pastoral way of life itself and have taken a part in reproducing the negative image on pastoralists. For example, Ferguson (1990: 37-38) wrote 'pastoralists may be prone to war' because 'they typically need to obtain some necessities from agriculturalists; they are often subject to environmental perturbations

which force them to capture new livestock or expand pasturage'.

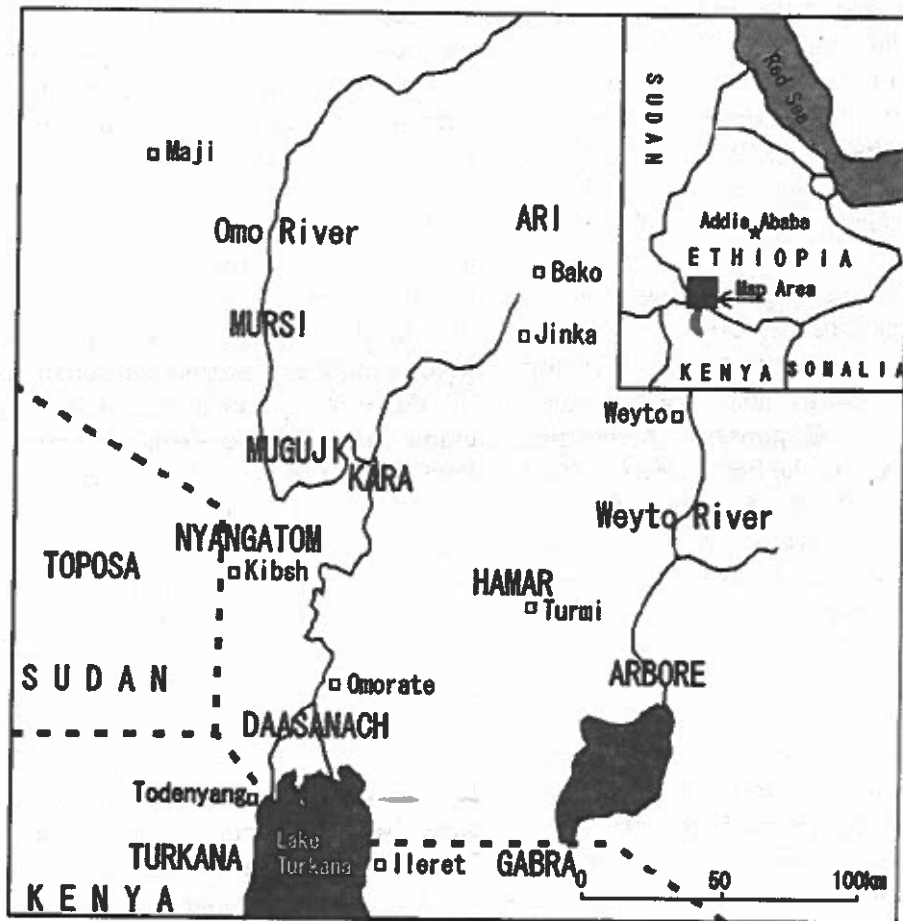
My own research since 2001 in the Daasanach[†], who are agro-pastoralist and occupy the region along the border areas of Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan, points to this representation of pastoralists as a one-sided view. Six ethnic groups live around the Daasanach (Figure 1). The Kara and the Arbore are 'our people' (*gaal kunno*) and keep amicable relations with us, the Daasanach say. On the other hand, the Turkana, the Nyangatom, the Hamar, and the Gabra, whose subsistence depends mainly on pastoralism, are *kiz* or 'enemy groups'. These later groups

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[†] According to the 1994 Census (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1996), the population of the Daasanach in Ethiopia was about 32,000. This does not include the thousands of Daasanach living in northwestern Kenya.

have fought with the Daasanach intermittently for more than half a century.



*Figure 1: The Daasanach and their neighboring groups
(Key: DAASANACH: ethnic group name; Omorate: town name)*

The Daasanach were conquered by the imperial Ethiopian army and incorporated into the imperial state in the late 19th century. Since then, the Ethiopian and Kenyan governments have had three negative impacts on inter-ethnic relation in this area. First, international and domestic borders arbitrarily formed by the governments discouraged trans-ethnic mutual visiting. Second, the Ethiopian government's officers organized the Daasanach as raiding parties to British East Africa Protectorate, so people were compelled to fight against

pastoralists of Kenya (Hickey 1984). Third, rifles were introduced to the area by Ethiopian merchants at the early 20th century and the intensity of violence has increased since then. In addition, the proliferation of automatic rifles caused by political upheavals in Uganda, Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia has worsened the situation since the late 1970s (Mkutu 2008). In 2006, 48% of Daasanach adult men (n=163) had rifles, mainly Kalashnikovs.

Nevertheless, many Daasanach have kept various amicable cross-cutting ties (cf. Schlee

1997) with the members of *kiz*. When a war ends, they come and go to each other's land, live together, and make friendships and kinship relations with each other. People have recovered peace by themselves every time after the war ended. Unfortunately, anthropologists have not shed proper light on such local practices which culminate in peaceful co-existence (cf. Fry 2006).

Today, external actors have intervened in this area to make peace. For example, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) initiated the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) project in the border area in 2003. In 2006, local NGOs, the Ethiopian Pastoralists Research and Development Association (EPRaDA) and the Riam Riam Turkana, began a collaborative project to mitigate conflicts among the Daasanach, the Nyangatom, and the Turkana.

However, intervention without an understanding of the local logic of war and peace will bring only confusion to the area. Richards (2005: 19) recently pointed out that it is important for anthropological research to emphasize the 'local potential for spontaneous peace.' Researchers need to make discreet efforts to examine it not only to criticize the biased representation on pastoralists, but also to make outside interventions exert positive influences to local communities.

In this paper, I describe the amicable trans-ethnic cross-cutting ties among the Daasanach and neighboring ethnic groups. I then clarify how they relate to the process of inter-ethnic war and peace, and argue the potential for peace-making which cross-cutting ties have.

Trans-Ethnic Cross-Cutting Ties with the 'Enemy'

Amicable trans-ethnic cross-cutting ties are classified into co-residence, trade, friendships, and kinship relations (Sagawa, In press). I will

show briefly in turn.

According to the Daasanach, there is no clear-cut territorial boundary with neighboring ethnic groups. In their language, the word that corresponds to boundary is *gaar*. For example, when they divide cultivation land among each household, they draw a line, or *gaar*, with a stick. *Gaar* can also refer to a certain wood or a dip that marks the border between villages and to stones that mark the international border. In short, *gaar* refers to physical objects used to mark a territorial and social boundary.

There are no such *gaar* with neighboring ethnic groups. Of course, they say 'A is our land, B is Turkana's land,' with reference to place names. The land between 'our land' and 'their land' is called *dieto* and is mainly used for grazing. In *dieto*, members who belong to different ethnic groups make livestock camps and use natural resources together, so I refer to *dieto* as co-resident land.

Pastoralists also come and go to each village for trade. Most exchanges occur via barter. For example, the Daasanach mainly trade agricultural products such as sorghum with the Turkana for their livestock and its products.

The main subsistence activities of the Daasanach are pastoralism and flood-retreat cultivation. The part of Daasanachland is the floodplain of Omo River. When the floodwater begins to retreat, people sow sorghum and then harvest it in the dry season. Although the annual rainfall is about 400mm, the fertile floodplain enables the Daasanach to produce abundant crops.

In contrast, the Turkana depend for their crop production only on uncertain rain-fed cultivation, so that they come to Daasanachland to get crops harvested in the floodplain. This ecological difference is one that promotes trans-ethnic mutual visiting.

Through co-residence and trade, a person forms a friendship (*beel*) with someone, who is compatible with him, to make their relation

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continual. I asked 169 adult men whether they have friend(s) belonging to other ethnic groups. 71% of them had and an average of 2.3 friends per capita. People across all age groups had them. When they form a friendship, they ordinarily make a gift.

An important characteristic of gift between friends is that it is not a one-time-only transaction. Initial gift is often not reciprocated immediately, so the gift recipient will visit the gift giver's village to offer a counter gift. Even if the counter gift had been done, most of transactions are not the 'equivalent exchange,' compared with the exchange rate of trade. Asymmetrical relations resulted from the transactions mediated by the time and/or the nonequivalent exchanges ensure the continual mutual visiting.

One Daasanach told me that both of the Daasanach and neighboring pastoral groups are people who 'give cattle skin' to others. In the evening, people spread cattle skin in front of the house, and they drink coffee, enjoy talking, and sleep on it. 'People who give cattle skin' means people who have good hospitality and entertain others without asking for immediate return. The person who is entertained would say to the host, 'You should come to my village with your wife to eat my livestock's meat'. Fraternity created from hospitality and mutual-visiting enable them to form equal and continual relation.

In addition, the Daasanetch have kinship relations, i.e., marriage and adoption, with other ethnic groups. From a sample of 170 adult men, I asked them whether they have 'near relatives' who married a woman from another ethnic group or who adopted another groups' member. In this context, 'near relatives' refer to a man's brothers, sisters and their children, his parents and grandparents, his parent's brothers, sisters and their children. Of these, 42% had a relative who married a

woman from another ethnic group, and 18% had relatives who adopted another group's member. For example, four of my informants married women from other ethnic groups while another two were born in Turkanaland, and were adopted by the Daasanach when they were boys.

Cross-Cutting Ties, War and Peace

How does the amicable relation change the antagonistic relations? Problems that stem from co-residence and mutual visiting trigger war. When the Daasanach lived together with members of other ethnic groups or visited other ethnic groups' lands for peaceful purposes, they were killed by *kiz* or vice versa. The killers were often youths who yearned for praise from community members as 'a brave man who killed enemy.' After such small conflict, both groups moved to each 'our land' from *dieto*, and made a symbolical boundary by sorcery (*muor*), and war occurred. Co-residence and mutual visiting gave youths opportunities to kill *kiz*, and the slain member's group started large-scale wars for revenge.

On the other hand, there are cases in which cross-cutting ties contributed to the alleviation of conflicts. In the Terle War around 1950, Nyangatom youths tried to attack the Daasanach who lived together soon after they had heard that Terle, a Daasanach youth, had killed a Nyangatom woman. Then, Lugute, a Nyangatom elder, persuaded the youth not to immediately attack the Daasanach, saying, 'I have a good Daasanach friend. I gave his baby my name, Lugute, and they live here now. You should not kill my people'. The youths accepted his word and postponed their attack until the next day. In the meantime, the Daasanach moved to the south with their livestock, and only one herd was raided in the next day's attack. Because one elder had an

intimate friendship with a Daasanach, the war remained on a minimal scale.

Cross-cutting ties are also necessary to form peace in the post-conflict situation. Battle would normally finish within one or two days. However, antagonistic relation continues and mutual visiting remains absent. Under such 'cold war' situation, the individuals who have cross-cutting ties with *kiz* visit to enemy's land for peace meetings or co-residence.

Peace speech meetings are held when one group visits the others following the battles. At the meeting, people frequently referred to the names of co-resident places or other groups' members: 'We lived and herded the livestock together in X place' or 'I ate the livestock meat with Y's father many times'. These testaments reminded people of the friendly relations before the war and persuaded both groups that a return to the pre-battle situation would be mutually beneficial. Their orations were persuasive because, as a matter of fact, they have recovered co-residence and mutual visiting every time after the war ended.

For the Daasanach, peace (*simiti*) does not exist without amicable trans-ethnic interactions. One elder talked about *simiti*: 'When the rain comes and the land becomes cool, we move with livestock and live together with the Turkana. Elders talk on many issues under the shade of a tree all the day. Youths herd together under the sun and take a rest together under the shade of a tree. If the Daasanach's herd starts to move when a Daasanach herd boy is sleeping, a Turkana boy would wake him up with an admonition, 'Your herd is moving. This is *simiti*'.

This notion of peace does not imply a passive condition of 'no war'. *Simiti* is a dynamic process in which people recover mutual visiting, renew old friendships, and form new social relations. In short, *simiti* means that individuals actively engage in amicable face-to-face interactions with others irrespective of

each ethnic attribute. 'No war' is just one requirement for *simiti*. Because individuals who have cross-cutting ties with *kiz* take the initiative in recovering mutual visiting against antagonistic relation in group-level, the inter-ethnic relation shifts from "no war" to *simiti* or from 'negative peace' to 'positive peace' (cf. Davues-Vengoechea 2004).

Conclusion

Trans-ethnic cross-cutting ties play important roles in mitigating conflict and recovering peace in the border area. At the same time, I pointed out that co-residence and mutual visiting between members of different ethnic groups sometimes resulted in conflicts and they escalated to large scale war.

The matter for peace making is not to negate trans-ethnic interactions as "a cause of war." We should be cautious about such facile idea, because we know the consequences brought by indirect rule of the British colonial government in Kenya. The colonial government established tribal zones to curtail mutual visiting among ethnic groups, partly because they regarded such relations as potential sources of conflict. A divide-and-rule policy might achieve a temporary state of "no war," but it has also aggravated a sense of exclusivity or 'tribalism' and antagonism among ethnic groups from a long-term perspective (Matusda 2000). In Ethiopia, ethnic federalism policy since 1991 seems to bring about similar consequences, the escalation of ethnic nationalism (e.g. Turton 2006).

In the field of conflict theory and peace studies, some scholars recently use the term 'conflict transformation', instead of 'conflict resolution'. Galtung (1996) discussed that conflict itself cannot resolve, but the process of conflict can transform to the direction of peace. Idriss (2005: 195) described that conflict is 'the unavoidable friction resulting from differences in human affairs' and, at the same

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time, 'is as much at the root of progress and innovation as it is of polarization and violence, depending on how those engaged in conflict understand and deal with it'. This idea enables us to consider peace, not by separation according to group attributes such as tribe and ethnic group, but through face-to-face interactions among individuals.

Considering conflict transformation approach, we need to examine how to prevent the escalation from, first, small conflict at individual level to collective violence at the ethnic group level. It will be the important task in the peace-making process to transform individual cross-cutting ties to more positive powers which prevent or mitigate collectivization of violence. Current and future interventions need to respect cross-cutting ties as 'local potential for spontaneous peace' and, at least, should be careful not to exact negative influences to these ties.

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