

# Working Paper Series n°5: Narratives of Peace and Conflict



## **A narrative approach of Motherhood and Conflict Resolution among the Nilotic Lwoo Ethnic Communities of South Sudan**

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**Abstract:**

Today, the role of mothers is somehow confined to family and/or home boundaries and yet in view of traditional African motherhood, this role extends beyond family circles. In a traditional African society, mothers play both direct and indirect roles in peace and conflict resolution process including post-conflict rehabilitation. Emphases are put on a mother's role as a 'peace-maker', 'conflict-keeper' and 'peace-builder' but generally, this role is utilized in influencing socio-cultural practices. They are viewed as the first and most valuable school in life and they strived to teach their children positive values and ethos essential in building a decent society. Using narrative inquiry, this paper will analyze interviewee stories and narratives on traditional motherhood role in conflict resolution among the Nilotic Lwoo ethnic communities of South Sudan. Further narratives will be drawn from other Nilotic Lwoo communities in east Africa; evaluating their relevance to contemporary conflict resolution. In doing so, this paper will argue that a mothers' role goes beyond bearing and child rearing and this role is particularly essential in maintaining peace and achieving conflict resolution. The paper will examine three different stages of motherhood namely: pregnancy and childbirth, children upbringing and menopause demonstrating that these stages can be exploited to positively influence connections in social and political inequalities in contemporary conflict resolution. To be specific, it will focus on a cultural aspect of motherhood for example, '*Loketio*' or '*Logetio*', a traditional pregnancy support belt utilised in conflict-prevention, peace-making and peace-building. It will seek to demonstrate how these cultural norms, practices and beliefs can be harnessed to create peaceful communities and resolve conflicts in the contemporary world.

## Introduction

Branch (2011) in her work on the Pokot-Marakwet inter-ethnic conflicts introduces us to '*Loketio*' or '*Logetio*' 'pregnancy support belt' that can be utilised to encourage or discourage conflicts. Branch indicates that Loketio was utilised in preventing Pokot-Marakwet inter-ethnic conflict from escalating. She explains that the Pokot and the Marakwets often raid each other but in March 2001, up to 53 Marakwet women and children were killed by the Pokot who came to the victims' village to revenge a cattle raid conducted by the victims a month earlier. She explains that the Marakwet had sold off the raided cattle immediately after the raid and did not keep them. Pokot men were disappointed they did not find any cattle and thus massacred the Marakwet people when they invaded their village. Pokot men, still disgruntled, planned another raid on the Marakwet community. Pokot women, on hearing about this planned raid second time round, refused to support their sons and husbands by removing their Loketio and refusing to wear them. Pokot men abandoned planned raid on the Marakwet community and further invasion was prevented.

Adding to this, Kilo, a Nuer-Masai interviewee gives us a more elaborate explanation on how Loketio can be utilised to encourage war as well as in conflict-prevention, peace-keeping and peace-making. He explains that Loketio is a women's belt that is traditionally utilised to tie around the belly from the time of pregnancy and throughout life. In his description, Nilotic communities that utilise Loketio include the Masai, Turkana, Somburu, Pokot and Marakwet. This belt is made from a bull's skin that is killed ceremoniously. It is decorated with cowry shells and or beads. In utilising it, Kilo demonstrates that men are obliged to follow women's decisions. He explains that when women are in favour of war, they will wear it but when they are not, they will remove it (see Kilo's account page 3). Wearing Loketio symbolically implies that men are protected and will not be killed in battle but will be successful and return home-to their families; not wearing it means those men, husbands and sons who insist on going to battle will be killed.

He narrates that:

‘Historically, we share or fight for pasture and water. We use Loketio to prevent conflicts between tribes. Things like Logetio are important, they stop bad acts. When a mother removes Loketio and just like the womb opens in child birth; it is believed she exposes her sons to the elements which include curses or even death. When a mother passes on, beads or cowrie shells from her Loketio is sawn into the son’s belt, hat or bangle. He will wear this at all time for his own protection and safety. Women wear it to keep families and communities at peace. In the event of cattle raids or inter-ethnic conflicts; when women are in support of invasion, they wear Loketio. It gives men reassurance that they are protected, and will be successful in their raid or battle’ (Kilo, interviewed April, 2013).

In support of Kilo’s account above, field notes from focus group I conducted amongst the Nilotic Lwo demonstrate that its major function is peace, for women wear it each and every single day, from pregnancy until they die. Field notes below demonstrate that the colour of beads and cowrie shells are white. White colour in these cultures signifies peace. All kinds of decoration on ornaments or belts such as Loketio are created by women and have a purpose or meaning. This in itself supports the argument that Nilotic Lwo women’s lives revolve around peaceful living. This is so because they make it in the night, after daily chores. It is a mother-daughter bonding time; the daughters learn to art and craft as well as peace cultural values.

‘Women make them in the night after domestic duties, when the cows have gone to sleep. They use white shells for Loketio. It is our culture to use white colour. All the girls have to learn to make it from their mothers’ (Focus group, interviewed 1 15/02/2014).

Before I discuss the Loketio and its significance in motherhood and conflict resolution, it is important to explore the significance of cows’ skin, beads/cowries, their colours as utilised by mothers in decorating Loketio itself. I would also like to point out that each of these items symbolise peace and can be utilised in various ways to achieve it. Thus, mothers’ commitment to this sort of traditional craftsmanship requires careful examination of individual items utilised. In support of this, Lederach says:

‘...such pregnant moments do not emerge through the rote application of a technique or a recipe. They must be explored and understood in the context of something that approximates the artistic process, imbued as it is with creativity, skill, and craftsmanship’ (Lederach 2005).

I begin by exploring the significance of cattle, whose skin holds a great significance. Among most if not all Nilotic Lwo ethnic groups of east Africa namely: Dinka, Nuer, Annuak, Acholi, Luo, Masai, Turkana, Samburu, Pokot and Marakwet, cattle play a very significant part in the lives of people and the traditional Nilotic lifestyle centres on them. Traditionally, cattle, children and ornaments such as cowrie shells and beads are measures of a man's wealth and his peaceful ways. Each of these ethnic groups possesses religious beliefs that denote that all the cattle on earth belong to them. Each claim that cattle were given to them by God, which belief though less practised by some ethnic groups today cause cattle raiding. Any raids, first time or revenge are traditionally considered to be an act of 'taking back' what is rightfully theirs Pavitt (2001). Cattle raiding cause intermittent conflicts among these groups and other non-Nilotic groups who keep them. Much as cattle ownership can cause conflicts, it can also be a source of peace and conflict resolution.

Further to the above belief and practise, cattle offer food, economic, and cultural security thus the need to pile stock. Abundance of cattle implies community has enough food supply; can trade it with other goods; and that they can perform socialising cultural events that help unite, maintain peace and harmony within and between communities. Once slaughtered, animal's or cow's skin is traditionally worn for human skin protection, thus a cow offers security both in its life time and after life. Although animal skin is used to make other items namely: mats, drums, bracelets and ropes, we can infer to these animal skin products, for instance cow skin hat, cosset and or belt to offer protection for human body parts (head, chest and stomach). In agreement with Lederach's view quoted earlier (see page 3), and as will be analysed, mothers' creativity, inspiration and craftsmanship in the utilisation of cow skin items becomes second nature, not rote. Significantly, their applications to conflict resolution processes produce pleasant surprises.

### **Cow skin, cowrie shells and beads**

Just like cattle, cowrie shells and beads are traditionally a measure of a man's wealth and status Biggs (2006) but are also utilised in religious practices and symbolism

intended for peace and conflict resolution. A cow's skin decorated with cowrie shells and beads produce attractive and sacred items (hat, cosset and or belt) or ornaments which bring pride, honour and credit to communities. During consultation with the spirit world or gods in times of unrest, in ceremonies/rituals cowrie shells and beads are placed on babies' eyes for purposes of health, good sight and peace. These items are not just brightly decorated but each colour, design and shape represents some aspect of the community for instance the number of homesteads within the village (represented by geometric shapes); types of animals owned by the community for example cattle, sheep and goats; and the owner's interests or preferences for example favourite colour or animal. In this context, they are not only a person's possession but a representation of that person's life, family and community; postulating universality of peace, even in the modern world.

These traditional beads take long to collect and or make and thus since contacts with Europeans, they were replaced with European glass White beads, traditionally made from ivory, shells, clay or bone clay is a common colour used in decoration. White colour among these communities not only represents peace as mentioned earlier but milk, which is consumed daily for nourishment. White cowries and beads on decorative items also represent sustenance, health, purity and peace. We can infer to this that decorating a cow's skin with white beads and cowries as seen in skin hat, cosset and or belt overall symbolises protection, wellness, well-being and peace. In my view, utilising these items in conflict resolution point to the significance and need for these processes to focus on sustainable peace. It is this sustenance that mothers embrace by utilising these meaningful items in craftsmanship.

As mentioned above, the length of time it took to collect and make these ornaments made them very valuable in that anyone who possessed them, and committed an offence had to give them up for compensation. Compensation in traditional Nilotic Lwo communities is justice. The act of surrendering one's such valuable items for compensation depicts the pain and suffering endured in the process of its making/collection. This aspect of endurance or sincerity is what the elders (arbiters/negotiators/mediators) must witness in the offender during a conflict resolution process. Thus, achieving peace and conflict

resolution among the Nilotic Lwo is an enduring patience, an aspect which contrasts conventional time-line based processes.

As seen here, Nilotic Lwo ethnic communities have always had close ties with their environment (both plants and animals). Utilising a bull or cow skin, beads and cowrie shells during conflict resolution processes is thus natural. Although these items in some of today's communities may not be considered very valuable and respected compared to the past, and where peaceful living is desperately needed, members can still reflect on their history and find contemporary representative value. We can infer that sustainable peace and conflict resolution cannot be imported but rather is best cultivated from within the community. The significance of animal skin, cowrie shells and beads do not stop at well-being, peace and protection but go further into conflict-prevention, peace-making and peace-building as will be discussed in the way mothers utilise Loketio.

### **'Loketio or Legetio' Pregnancy support belt**

Referring to focus group field notes (see page 3, 8), Loketio provides a perfect example where Nilotic Lwo symbolic beliefs and practices can be harnessed to create or keep harmony at family, community and inter-community levels. Woven by women as demonstrated in the focus interview above, Loketio typically contains white cowries which represent sustenance (milk) and peace. Similarly in other Nilotic Lwo ethnic groups such as the Dinka white beads represents peace whereas among the Anuak, blue colour (often blue coloured beads woven in necklace) represents security, protection and peace. For the Anuak it is highly likely that their settlement around rivers influenced their belief in what colour must represent peace, something the rivers offered to the community. A similar belief whereby blue represents the blue sky, a home to the gods who bless humans with peace, is held by the Masai.

Just like most of other traditional jewellery pieces, Loketio which also indicates a woman's marital status is worn throughout life. Wearing Loketio at all times in my view emphasises need for happiness in the family and continuous existence of peace within and between communities. In motherhood, Loketio enhances a woman's duty and responsibility as a peace actor. This cultural but also natural commitment is to their

families' peace and harmony, to begin with; and extends throughout the community into neighbouring communities. This demonstrates how Loketio can be exploited to positively influence connections in social and political inequalities in contemporary conflict resolution. Given the communal nature of indigenous conflict resolution, the use of Loketio can potentially pause problems in its application due to men's 'invisibility'. In the narratives, there is very limited evidence that men are involved in the Loketio making and wearing. However, interview responses show that although it is women who weave, wear and practically utilise this item on daily basis, men are culturally obligated to respect women's decisions not to wear or to wear.

### **Motherhood in Nilotic Lwo indigenous conflict resolution**

Motherhood in Nilotic Lwo indigenous conflict resolution is not any different from literal meaning of motherhood itself. As indicated by psychologists Gergen and Davis (1997), motherhood is nurture that is not confined to nuclear family. It embodies maternity, family and community relationship which extends to inter-community relationship just as evidenced in utilisation of Loketio. In performing their daily activities, mothers demonstrate unarguable goodness, justness and inherent worthiness that in reality enables them deal with everyday life issues with ease, conflicts inclusive. In the absence of theories specifically addressing the importance on motherhood in indigenous conflict resolution, we use specific cultural practices that can be utilised in these processes. In this case among the Masai, Pokot and Marakwet and right from conception, mothers choose to 'wrap' their unborn foetus with Loketio belt. When babies are born, mothers take the responsibility to weave items, believed to offer protection, health and peace into their children's bracelets, belts, necklaces and others. These items are not only mere representation of reality but can be utilised in times of need by individuals to change the course of events from bad to good, for example political, social or conflicts.

Ultimately, the above traditional Nilotic view challenges the thinking that motherhood precludes indigenous women's positive contribution in communities' peace processes; a thinking that has led to massive campaigns and support for indigenous women through 'facilitation', 'participation' and 'empowerment' by the international community. I do disagree with this negative connotation of motherhood or ordinary women. Based on

interview responses, this thinking is far from true as we shall uncover that women or mothers play a central role in family, community and inter-community peaceful living and inter-ethnic co-existence. Today, we also acknowledge that the role of women in resolving modern day conflicts is less evident and that motherhood in itself often falls prey to violence. In my argument, the starting point for conflict resolution even in the contemporary world is motherhood. This traditional role in my view can naturally influence peace-building which can in turn effect peace-making and peace-keeping in times of need.

Interviewee narratives demonstrate that in performing their daily activities and in interaction with children, they stress attributes of peace which in Nilotic Lwo context includes (wellness, caring, sensitivity, fairness, kindness, honesty, respect, patience, generosity, responsibility, purity, forgiveness and integrity). It is these attributes that are harnessed during indigenous conflict resolution processes, through decorative cultural items such as necklaces, bracelets, hats and belts. Here, I can infer that mothers are stewards of peace values. Thus motherhood in my view is a natural role that must not be ignored in that it offers great potential in dealing with the modern day peace and conflict resolution challenges. It is a foundation for family, communal and inter-communal peace. Next, we discuss various ways through which mothers can utilise Loketio to bring about peace.

### **Motherhood, Loketio and Nilotic Lwo indigenous conflict-prevention**

*To begin with, the initial purpose for which mothers utilise Loketio is conflict prevention. This is demonstrated in focus groups field notes I conducted.*

‘.....they will use it in their husbands’ homes every day. They use it to tie around their wastes to keep the baby, keep family together and to control men.’ (Focus group, interviewed 15/02/2014).

As mentioned earlier, mothers or wives have to be informed of planned raids and/or agree with men over it. Their refusal to support aggression, demonstrated by refusal to wear Loketio, prevents men from executing their plan thus conflict-prevention. At times when men are determined to go for raids or battle ignoring women’s plea not to, women will

investigate and find out what routes men plan to take. Once this is discovered, they will mark the routes through which warriors will pass, strategically dropping their Loketio along the way. When men on their journey find these items, they will withdraw and return home. Just like many other symbolic items, beliefs and practices, Loketio practise is not universal to other Nilotic Lwo ethnic groups of South Sudan rendering it limited in its applicability, except for other peace symbolic items such as the *Dang* ‘rod’, white and blue beads necklaces that South Sudanese Nilotic Lwo groups have historically utilised to bring about peace.

In South Sudan’s current situation where conflicts often escalate through cattle raids, revenge and political disagreements, interviewee narratives demonstrates that these communities, who are from common ancestry, are traditional enemies! Lederach (2005) asks a question on how communities can move on from generations of violence to a new horizon? In my view, the answer to this can be in the utilization of traditional items such as Loketio or an equivalent in conflict prevention. This is because although they fiercely fight each other, economic course such as trade often unite these neighbouring communities. The uniqueness of Loketios’ contribution to peace and conflict resolution is in the belief, purpose and respect that is accorded to it by its owners. As noted in an interview with Petero, who says that ‘...we have this system...people believe in it, so it works. Although this may offer complication for South Sudan where cultural values have eroded over time due to intermittent conflicts and dispersion over the past three decades, usefulness of such indigenous peace artefacts offers even greater need for the revival of cultural practices. Today in South Sudan (for example with reference to the current conflict), some South Sudanese I interviewed hold the view that peace and conflict resolution can be achieved through political means. In my view, politics may only be useful in initiating dialogue among the leaders but in order to achieve conflict resolution in a deeply cultural society like South Sudan and; where conflicts are ethnic or take ethnic trends, cultivation and use of positive cultural values/items can only be beneficial.

It may not necessarily be Loketio but other items believed to be of symbolic value to South Sudan. For instance white coloured beads weaved in cossets, bracelets and necklaces among the Dinka; blue coloured beaded necklace among the Anuak; and the

‘Dang’, prophet Ngungdeng’s rod that is believed to be a symbol of peace among the Nuer. Although these customary beliefs could be harnessed in times of conflict, the problem with South Sudan situation is that there is a discourse in cultural beliefs and every day conflict resolution challenges. Much as the society is deeply cultural, not much attention is paid to the cultural symbols and beliefs in relation to how they can be utilised in the modern day conflict resolution processes. These communities in my view should reflect more on their rich cultures; draw out some useful aspects that can be utilised in the current context as evident in other Nilotic Lwo communities such as the Pokot and Marakwet communities.

Pokot-Marakwet inter-ethnic conflicts mentioned earlier demonstrates how ordinary women can be at the heart of conflict resolution as they can mobilise fellow women not to wear the belt thus influencing socio-cultural beliefs and practices of raids and other forms of violence. This is contrary to the current view held by the UN department and African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) that local women need to be ‘empowered’ and ‘facilitated’ in order to be able to ‘participate’ in conflict resolution ACCORD report (2014). Thus today, women’s involvement in peace and conflict resolution is manufactured and promoted in a high profile manner. These high profile roles are suited for specific kinds of women for instance women who are western educated and or possess leadership qualities. These roles are not ordinary kind of roles any woman can perform. Typically, these roles delineate women from their families and communities as they are occupied with peace related conferences, seminars or workshops often conducted outside their own communities. In my view, this approach is narrow and shallow as it only gets a few women actively involved in peace processes. It undermines the capacity of ordinary women thus negatively impacting on how their potential can be exploited to positively influence contemporary conflict resolution.

In South Sudan for instance, ACCORD works at national, regional and grassroots levels to promote peace, reconciliation and peace-building initiatives. Basing its activities on UN resolution 1325, ACCORD strives to promote women’s participation and leadership in peace processes through negotiation and mediation during conflict resolution. Further ACCORD affirms women’s involvement in humanitarian and post conflict reconstruction, and the promotion of peace and security. A key concern here is the manner in which women’s role in peace and conflict resolution is artificialized to the extent of promoting

discontinuity between motherhood and womanhood. They are invited to play these high profile roles as women and not necessarily as mothers; Loketio in my view brings to light how this problem can be rectified.

Conflict-prevention efforts among the Nilotic Lwo are embedded in socio-cultural beliefs, customs and practises that are utilised in establishing and addressing potential conflict re-occurrences. More or less like peace-making and peace-keeping, it prevents the resumption of conflicts in a post-conflict situation (refer to Pokot-Marakwet told earlier in page 2). In motherhood and indigenous conflict resolution among the Nilotic Lwo, informal processes are used to control, lessen and determine conflict resolution using various symbolic items. Just like in other African cultures the Nilotic Lwo cultures, according to Efo regard motherhood ‘.....as a woman’s highest calling...’ This is in contrast to the conventional conflict-prevention interventions, where child-upbringing is not invested in and yet it is a central factor in conflict prevention.

### **Motherhood, Loketio and Nilotic Lwo indigenous Peace-building.**

Motherhood, through the utilisation of Loketio is the most natural way of peace-building before disagreements occur within and between communities. Take for example the case of South Sudan where communities are wrapped up in generational violence as indicated by Lederach (2005) peace values can be planted through motherhood. These values may look insignificant in childhood but in adulthood as illustrated in interviewees’ stories, they help determine someone’s understanding and reaction towards potentially violent situation. These values can be informally or naturally planted in children by mothers during day to day interactions and activities, during which a natural bond between mothers and children is created.

These mother-child moments are disreputable peace-building foundations that must be utilised diligently. In my view, the unprecedented scale of violence by militias against children and women during civil wars in Africa and South Sudan in particular can be linked to insufficient involvement of mothers with their children. This can lead to behavioural problems attributed to civil war crimes; not excluding the contribution of other factors such as proliferation of weapons. Adding to this, Lombardi a journalist, novelist and mother argues that hostile, destructive and aggressive behaviour in adulthood can be traced to

limited mother-child interaction during childhood (Lombardi, 2012). Rifkind & Picco (2014) in their book explain how a combination of psychological theories and other realities help promote the worst kind of violence in war situations. They argue institutions do not kill people but individuals and that empathy can be more instrumental in conflict resolution compared to weapons. In the same manner in the Masai, Pokot and cultures, mothers rely on the use of Loketio first of all to create a bond; communication and relationship with their children which can help prevent delinquency in boys when they are older. This early mother-child interaction helps create a mutual responsive orientation but also helps develop a child's conduct, cognition and moral emotion. This kind of informal education a mother gives is woven in conversations and helps influence children's decisions when it comes to violence against others; an aspect demonstrated throughout interviewee stories.

At a family level and to ensure one-ness, a mother wears Loketio at all times in order to maintain unity and peace. In motherhood, it is used to maintain discipline and instil societal values; including peace values in children for example it is believed that when a mother removes this belt after a brawl with his child, he will die (see Kilo's narrative page 3). It is to be worn at all times in order to maintain harmony and avoid trivial disagreements, in essence peace-building. For those children whose mothers are dead cowrie shells from their own mother's Loketio are given to them to keep for their own protection and peaceful living. Significantly, customary belief demonstrated in the use of Loketio can influence child-upbringing, maintain acceptable behaviour as well as build individuals' capabilities that can be instrumental in times of conflict resolution.

Further among the Nilotic Lwo, peace-building consists of values that are imparted in children from childhood aimed at preventing violent behaviour and creating sustainable peace within and between individuals. In these communities, peace-building fall within pre-conflict interventions, not post conflict as commonly seen in the international conflict resolution interventions. For instance rather than peace-building efforts being aimed at changing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours to ensure co-existence, it should cultivate, target and reinforce positive aspects of cultural beliefs, attitudes and behaviours (Loketio is worn daily). Throughout childhood, imparted cultural values among the Nilotic Lwo address the root causes or potential causes of violence or conflicts. They help create a societal expectation in that each individual has a duty and responsibility towards peace; and maintain socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political equilibrium within families and between communities.

However the problem here is that traditional peace-building relies on individuals' respect for symbolic items such as Loketio and assumes limited external influence on members which in most cases is not true. For example an interview with Omar reveals that bandits who caused atrocities in Durfur during the civil war originated from neighbouring Chad. They recruited from local Muslim communities. These well brought-up Muslim children turned against their own families, communities and neighbours. Despite this shortfall, this kind of pre-conflict peace-building in motherhood offers an advantage in that it maintains harmony and does not require multi-level actors as seen in the conventional post-conflict processes; and as indicated by Lederach (2005) and Galtung (1990; 1996). It

is a direct approach that focuses on human nature, before conflicts start, but also whose attributes overlap conflict-prevention and peace-making as will be seen throughout this section.

### **Motherhood, Loketio and Nilotic Lwo indigenous peace-making**

‘There are traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution that transcend ethnic conflicts and inter-ethnic conflicts. Tana River delta (farmers-pastoralists conflict) is one such example successful of peace-making.’ (Charlie, interviewed, 11/10/2012).

Charlie, in his account above highlights how Tana River delta conflicts were resolved through traditional mechanisms. For instance indigenous peace-making among the Nilotic Lwo endeavours to forge relationships through intermarriages and sociable rituals. Traditionally, mothers are known to encourage inter-marriage between communities in conflict. In wedding preparations, they weave intertwining designs that symbolise the ‘joining’ of husband and wife but also of the two communities into the bridal gifts; a view supported in Juspina’s account:

‘In our culture, a woman’s marital home becomes her personal long term achievement and it is in her interest to make it a peaceful living environment or community, she has to try to make it work amidst all circumstances. It is we the mothers who instil the spirit of togetherness, we keep communities interacting amidst fierce fights’ (Juspina, interviewed 21/02/2013).

In my argument, inter-marriage thus becomes a practical form of conflict transformation that focuses on establishing an equitable power relationship big enough to prevent future conflicts. Further, inter-marriages in Nilotic Lwo indigenous peace-making enables full reconciliation and new mutual understanding between disputing parties in that in-laws become relatives and it is a taboo for relatives to fight each other. Inter-marriages can still be exploited to positively influence connections in contemporary conflict resolution.

Further discussions with Efo (see following narrative) on the Nilotic Lwo concept of motherhood reveals that the Nilotic Lwo word *dako* or *daho* or *da’ko* or ‘dak’, which loosely translates as ‘woman’, ‘migrate’, ‘moving something away’, affirms the cultural

psychological preparation and belief in women as peace actors. Narrating how his mother spent several months without ‘crossing over’ to her mum’s denotes her acceptance into her new marital community, peaceful marriage or rather peaceful living in this context (see following narrative). And as indicated in Juspina’s views earlier, it is a woman’s responsibility to make it work, implying that a woman would not willingly want to let herself down by failure to ‘fit’ into her new community. Based on these views, we can infer that in both experiences of arranged marriage and motherhood, a woman must possess peace-making qualities in order to make it work at personal, family, community and inter-community levels.

‘... She is the peace maker, in all circumstances. Young girls are brought up with values that make them feel they are part of that next society, not to look back. For example my mother, their home was just a cross the road but my mum never visited her mother. I suppose it is a concept of belonging to her marriage home, fitting in or having a voice in her new community. When a woman is absent, a lot of problems, family is not at peace. The Lwo word for woman *dako* or *dabo* means ‘traveler’, ‘to move’. In their birth families, they are considered temporary family members. Girls are constantly reminded of how they should grow into good marriageable women or refrain from any undesirable behaviors such as quarreling, meanness and disrespect before they marry. And divorce can lead to tensions, raids, enmity (Efo, interviewed 29/04/2014).

As indicated in Efo’s story above, what even made the role of young unmarried girls distinctive in the Nilotic Lwo traditional society is that they are believed to have no family *dak* ‘traveler’ in that they are destined to live and fulfill their lives in someone else’, their husband’s as they are not practically considered to belong to her birth family or ethnic group. This means that girls have to be taught and are expected to embrace some qualities or virtues such as compassion, discretion, patience, gentleness, modesty and self control. Nilotic Lwo societies place very high expectations on girls and the above qualities are considered inherent in womanhood, only needing reinforcement by mothers through upbringing to enable them fulfill their future roles as wives and mothers as well as peace makers. From childhood therefore, her duties and responsibilities in marriage become her passion and her up-bringing prepares her for this ultimate goal, motherhood and its related

cultural roles. Sadly today, most if not all the current conflict resolution processes have not tapped into this cultural foundation up on which long-term peace-making strategies can be based.

Although arranged marriages can be controversial in the modern context of human rights often stigmatised as forced marriages, interviewee stories show that in the past recent years, these marriages are not forced as the girl's consent has to be sought. Sellie, an interviewee specifies that where a girl chosen by her clan women for compensation is below marriageable age, she is adopted by the enemy community and married off at the right customary age. My field notes further reveal that, in other West African cultures such as the Igbo of Nigeria, women used a stratagem to bring inter-ethnic hostilities to an end in certain situations of armed conflict; the prettiest girl of marriageable age was chosen to be given to one of the heroes of the opposing clan to make peace. And among the Burundians, a young unmarried woman was offered to the family of the victim purposely to make peace. This practice, often initiated by mothers, stabilizes hostile situations immediately and steadily led to further conflict resolution processes where necessary.

Contrary to the contemporary peace-making in major conflicts often conducted under the auspices of an international organisation, Nilotic Lwo traditional societies make use of rituals that cleanse the disputants of any bitter past and ushers them to a peaceful co-existence. Some of these ceremonies are performed in the final stages of arranged marriages. These ceremonies, often facilitated by women of childbearing age, involve ritualistic slaughtering of animals and 'blood pact' rituals that help put final end to inter-ethnic conflict. Inter-ethnic marriages for the purposes of peace-making create a link between the girls' parents and the parents of her husband. Further, it establishes a more secure alliance between the disputing communities. In my view, finding a basis up on which to re-establish relationships and ritualistic slaughtering of a cow which skin is utilised in the making of Loketio and other symbolic items that are incorporated into indigenous peace processes is a unique concept that can be beneficial to peace-making and to the wider conflict resolution discipline in the contemporary world.

Mothers' involvement in arranging for inter-ethnic marriages and rituals is in no way different from their involvement In Loketio tradition. These indigenous practices,

pioneered by mothers ensure communities are duty-bound to peace-making. As indicated in Juspina's account, these practices affirm the spirit of togetherness or *Ujama* or *Ubuntu*, a concept that runs through African cultures. It has got the 'unspoken' independence and interdependence in that each individual woman or mother is dependent on the other and on cooperation of the rest of the community. Uniquely, these traditions have got potential to resolve and transform conflicts instantly. As demonstrated in the Pokot-Marakwet inter-ethnic conflict, items like Loketio stop violence and promote justice. This in my view is a cultural gift that motherhood, Loketio and other Nilotic Lwo symbolic items offer to the world.

Motherhood is thus an established traditional structure through which social inequalities that often lead to real-life crisis can be resolved. Further, much as it is every community members' duty and responsibility to maintain peace amongst Nilotic Lwo communities, traditional motherhood role in my view offers mothers the tenacity to keep both families and communities at peace, making motherhood a peace institution in its own right. Additionally based on field notes, bad behaviour is associated with poor up-bringing and often blamed on a mother in Nilotic Lwo traditional societies. Further, by a mother threatening to remove her Loketio or curse her child due to bad behaviour, she controls and lessens potential conflict sources and behaviours. This versatile item not only represents status and possession but helps to shape personality traits. We can thus infer that motherhood and the use of Loketio represents creativity and continuity in peace-making.

### **Conclusion**

In this regard, we can infer that motherhood as an institution, through utilisation of items such as Loketio, can be exploited to positively influence connections in social and political inequalities in contemporary conflict resolution. As demonstrated in interviewee accounts, ordinary mothers possess significant knowledge and experiences of peace and conflict resolution. Mothers are peace educators, transmitters of positive cultural values and peace actors. Significantly, traditional motherhood peace actor role is less expensive and universal. It is important to point out that motherhood role in Nilotic Lwo indigenous conflict resolution extends further to other generally more formal women's roles which

include arbitration, adjudication, negotiation and mediation. Above all, traditional items such as Loketio offer reliable source of moral principles, cultural norms and philosophical heritage that can be beneficial in the modern day conflict resolution efforts.

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