ABSTRACT

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE-MAKING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN TANA RIVER DISTRICT, KENYA, 1900 TO PRESENT

By Fatuma Boru Guyo

Using the example of the Orma and the Pokomo women in the Tana River District, Kenya, this thesis explores the roles of women in peace-making and conflict resolution. Oral histories and semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen women from different backgrounds. The study identified six major themes. Each of these themes had impact not only on the women’s sense of identity, and of their roles in peace-making, but also revealed changes and continuity across generations. The study revealed that women were significant social actors generally and in particular in peace-making. Although their stories were consistent with the theories on war and peace, it challenges feminist critique by painting a picture of how they were able to create a place for themselves in their community through their role in peace-making, a role not necessarily defined through men. In conclusion, the study offers suggestions for further research in women’s roles in peace-making.
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE-MAKING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN TANA RIVER DISTRICT, KENYA, 1900 TO PRESENT

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Dedication

Dedicated to the Tana River Women for Peace (TRWP)
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Review of Literature

My interest in the history of peace and conflict resolution started some six years ago while I was pursuing my undergraduate degree in East Africa, Kenya, and also during my teaching experience in the Tana River District,1 Kenya. During my training as an undergraduate at Nairobi University, an interdisciplinary course, “Contested Terrains,” piqued my interest in the history of peace and conflict resolution. The course acquainted me with theories of conflicts revolving around natural resources and access to land and their impact on indigenous peoples. Though this marked my initial interest in peace and conflict studies, my experience in a girls’ high school was what ignited my interests most.

In 2006 to mid 2007, I taught history in a girls’ high school in Tana River District, Kenya. My students and I became friends and I learned so much about their stories, especially about the conflict between the Orma and the Pokomo peoples. The girls, particularly the Orma girls, part of a pastoralist tradition, explained how they had been absent for most of a school term because of conflict, especially during the conflict in 2001 between the Orma and the Pokomo. Coming to school from the interior of the district, and being girls, they were considered vulnerable during such a conflict and ended up staying out of school for months. This resulted in the continued marginalization of women and girls. This phenomenon made the history of peace and conflict resolution come alive for me, and in particular, the girls’ stories were my inspiration for my interest in peace and conflict resolution studies.

To give a brief overview of my research, I conducted oral history interview last summer with thirteen women from both the Orma and the Pokomo communities in Tana River District, Kenya. My main research questions included: what activities did women participate in that contributed to peacemaking and conflict resolution during the pre-colonial period? Have the roles women played in peacemaking and conflict resolution changed over time? In the post-colonial era, have women been given enough representation in decision-making during and after conflict? These questions are important in understanding the role African women have played in peacemaking and conflict resolution. The questions also highlight some of the areas in which women are still marginalized. I began this research in Tana River District, Galole Division,

1 Tana River District is a semi-arid area mainly occupied by Bantu, the Pokomo (agriculturalists), and the Orma pastoralist people.
where I have lived since 2005. The area has a history of ethnic conflict between the agriculturalist groups and the pastoralists, and sometimes between the pastoralists themselves.

In this thesis, I began my discussion with the introduction of the problem and reflect on the discourse theorizing the role of women in peacemaking and conflict resolution both in Africa and other parts of the world. Chapter Two looks at the methods and types of sources. Chapter Three describes the history of the study area and its peoples. Chapter Four is where the bulk of my research is, and it is the narrative of my oral history findings with case studies from the Orma and the Pokomo women. In Chapter Five, I give my conclusions and suggest areas of future research.

In Kenya, the understanding of women, war and peace has to begin with the understanding of Kenyan history. There are authors who have mentioned women and the Mau Mau war in Kenya, for instance, Greet Kershaw’s *Mau Mau from Below*. The author provides a classic understanding of the experiences of squatters (Kikuyu). She addresses the social and economic causes of the Mau Mau war and discusses women and their ideological ties to land. Kershaw, however, does not portray the importance of women in the Mau Mau rebellion. A nuanced work on women and the Mau Mau war is by Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters, and the Roots of Mau Mau*. Kanogo acknowledges that women played a role during the Mau Mau rebellion, but other than this, she gives no details of women’s specific actions. Although these works mention some aspects of Kenyan women’s history, still there is need for more studies focusing on women, for example, on the specific roles women played in peacemaking and conflict resolution over time.

Discourses on women, war and peace advance two schools of thoughts: essentialism and constructivism. Inger Skjelsbaek and Dan Smith’s *Gender, Peace and Conflict* argues that when dealing with areas of gender roles, the two opposing views provide a starting point. The field of war, peace-making and conflict resolution from a gendered perspective requires us to think of core individual and social identities irrespective of behavioral stereotypes and generalizations about people by nationality, social class, ethnicity or gender.

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3 Kershaw, 22-25.
Essentialism' in Gender, Peace and Conflict argues that essentialists base their argument on the notion that some objects possess static characteristics and that the behaviors and values of men and women are different by nature. Inger Skjelsbaek in Gendered Battlefields: A Gender Analysis of Peace and Conflicts argues that essentializing gender will mean that men are exclusively masculine and women are exclusively feminine. According to this thought, the relationship of women to war and peace can be looked at along gender lines. The perception that it is men who fight wars, and so it is men who should make peace, however, does not reflect the realities of war and peace, but rather reinforces gender stereotypes of women, as a weaker sex in need of a male’s protection. Women have been invisible for a long a time in matters of war and peace-making. They have been seen as victims or relegated to the role of mothers, sisters, and wives, or even the role of nurse. However, looking at peace building and conflict resolution from a critical gendered perspective, it is clear that women have been and are active participants in issues of peacemaking and conflict resolution. Apparently, geopolitical changes have altered wars and conflicts over time. Cynthia Enoe’s Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women’s Lives explains these changes from the point of view of men’s socialization in the military. She argues that men are persuaded to participate in conflict generally, as well as in the militarization of ethnic nationalism through the assertion that their manhood, that is the masculine ideal, can only be validated through military participation.

Thus, the notion of militarized men or rather, masculinity, is termed positive while the feminine is understood as negative. This is reflected in traditional theories regarding gender and conflicts. Gender roles are dichotomized: men, viewed as soldiers or warriors, exercised power over women not only during wars and during conflicts but also in other times. Women, seen as civilians, contrary to men, were to stay at home. This explains the reason why men feminize the enemy and commit rape against women symbolically, and too often literally. They use gender psychologically to symbolize domination in order to assume a masculine and dominant

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7 Ibid. , 49.
9 Mariam Cooke and Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, 1.
position during wars and conflicts. This denies women agency in matters of war, peacemaking and conflict resolution.

However, there have been men who perform duties that are socially constructed as belonging to females and vice versa. Thus, essentialism does not have room for change and relies on the idea that people remain essentially unchanged throughout their lives. The constructivists’ theorists use this fact. Inger Skjelsbaek, in “Is Femininity Inherently Peaceful?” in *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, sees the world and individuals as constantly transforming and not fixed. Skjelsbaek argues that individual characters are products of social construction. In other words, individuals are shaped by certain historical and cultural phenomena. Thus, the social constructivist’s view gives room for change in our evolving world making it possible for women to assume male roles socially and politically.

A specific example of this is discussed by L. M. Handrahan, in “Gendering Ethnicity in Kyrgyzstan: Forgotten Element in Promoting Peace and Democracy.” She confirms that during conflicts, despite their ethnic differences, women have been capable of bonding with others and relate well to each other. She writes, “Women are willing to cross ethnic boundaries and work together in situations of ethnic conflicts.” According to Handrahan, women have had more sense of their gender identity than their ethnic identity. They understand ethnicity differently from men whose understanding is more inclined to the concept of “citizenship” and political “representation.” Therefore, women are less attached to the concept of ethnicity than men. Perhaps, these two factors have made women better peacemakers.

In order to contextualize African women’s role in peacemaking, it is important to understand the history of peace movements. According to Marlene Targ in *Women for Peace*, the history of women’s involvement in war and peace as pioneered in the U.S and Europe can be traced back to 1915, to protests against the First World War by the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (ICWPP). The organization later changed its name to the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Women in Europe and the U.S. started working for peace in the early twentieth century, but scholarly consideration of

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16 Targ, 72.
women, war and peace took shape in the 1970s with the growth of women’s history, peace studies and women’s studies.\textsuperscript{17} Some of these works include Leila Rupp’s \textit{Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement}.\textsuperscript{18} Rupp discusses international women’s movements from their origins in the early twentieth century. Like Targ, she confirms that the WILPF was one of the radical, internationally recognized women’s organizations. About early women activists, Rupp argues that they referred to “themselves as ‘mother-hearts, guardians, nurses and preservers,’ ‘mothers of the human race,’ ‘carriers of life,’… [they] assumed that their gender united them behind the cause of peace.”\textsuperscript{19} However, her focus on only women in North America and Europe leaves women’s agency in the Third World unexplored. Myra Marx and Aili Mari did another important study on women’s movements, \textit{Global Feminism: Traditional Women’s Activism, Organizing and Human Rights}.\textsuperscript{20} Drawing from post-colonial and traditional feminist scholarship, the authors vividly analyze the connections between feminism and globalization, national women’s movements, transitional politics, as well as activism in the twenty-first century. The authors, for example, unlike Rupp’s \textit{Worlds of Women}, shed light on African women’s movements, particularly in the chapter by Melinda Adams, “Regional Women’s Activism: African Women’s Network and the African Union.”\textsuperscript{21} Another compelling addition to the growing literature on global feminism is Jacqui Alexander et. al., \textit{Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures}.\textsuperscript{22} This volume, together with \textit{Global Feminism}, deconstructs the notion of western feminist hegemony.

Although the growth of African women’s history is recent, the African women’s involvement in peacemaking is not a new idea. Contemporary ideas about women’s involvement in such roles, considered exclusively male- oriented, were challenged as long as 2,500 years ago by the ancient Egyptians. Isis, the Egyptian goddess of wisdom, is credited with teaching

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Anne Marie Pois, “Perspective on Twentieth Century Women’s International Activism: Peace, Feminism and Foreign Policy,” \textit{Journal of Women’s History} 11, no.3 (1999), 213.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Rupp, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{20}Myra Marx and Aili Mari, eds. \textit{Global Feminism: Traditional Women’s Activism, Organizing and Human Rights} (New York, New York University Press, 2006).
\item \textsuperscript{21} Melinda Adams, “Regional Women’s Activism: African Women’s Network and the African Union.” in \textit{Worlds of Women}.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade, eds. Feminist \textit{Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures} (New York: Routledge, 1997).
\end{itemize}
Egyptians how to communicate by developing a writing technique. This placed Egyptian women in positions of power and questioned traditional beliefs about women’s role in society. Drawing parallels to the position of women in ancient Egyptian society and modern day schools of thought, this example allows us to question female stereotypes.

In the twentieth century, the growth of this field of women’s history had a different context in Africa as compared to Europe and the United States. Mainstream African history grew in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The newly independent African states were pre-occupied with nationalistic historical writing and did not recognize the role of women as significant in historical inquiry despite their varied contributions throughout the continent. However, there were pioneer studies that restored African women to history, including Ester Boserup’s *Women’s Role in Economic Development*, and Iris Berger and Frances White’s *Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: Restoring Women to History*.

The growth of peace history in the mid-twentieth century has generated ample literature on African women. The existing literature provides examples of how women have been influential in peacemaking and conflict resolution, especially after the regaining of independence; for example, Codou Bop “Women in Conflicts, Their Gains and Their Losses,” in Meintjes et al., *The Aftermath: Women in Post Conflict Transformation*. The authors in this collection provide a classic understanding of women’s roles in post conflict reconstruction and their experiences in South Africa, Eritrea and Niger. Other studies address the role of women in settling disputes in the context of traditional African society. A good example of this is Rose Acholonu, “Igbo Women and the Tradition of Peace: The Dynamics of Change and Continuity,” in *Conflict Resolution and Peace Education in Africa* and in Ife Amadiume, in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Society*. Amadiume argues that based on age seniority, patrilineage daughters had great power especially in matters of peacemaking.

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23 Targ, 15.
The role of the Igbo women in peacemaking is also depicted well in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. He vividly elucidates how the Igbo polygamous marriage is central not only to the peace of the family, but to the Igbo community and beyond. The love for peace is demonstrated not only through Okonkwo, who paid a penalty for beating his wife during peace week but also through the role played by women at a family level. For example, the women in his novel played important roles as primary educators of children through story telling which socialized children into acquiring good social values.  

The same view is also discussed by Miriam Agatha’s *Role of Women in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Societies: A Selective Review*. In African tradition and culture, women are central to the upbringing of children and socialization of children into acquiring values such as responsibility, honesty and loyalty. Women also inculcate in their children the importance of humanity. This makes women be looked upon as peace builders by the society. George Ngwane also makes a thoughtful contribution to African women’s role in peacemaking and conflict resolution in his book: *Settling Disputes in Africa: Traditional Bases for Conflict Resolution*.

Other authors provide insight into the role of education in peacemaking; for example Ernest Uwaze’s *Conflict Resolution and Peace Education in Africa*. M.J. Mathey discusses the role played by elder women in “The Role Played by Women of the Central African Republic in the Prevention and Resolutions of Conflicts,” in UNESCO, *Women and Peace in Africa*. In traditional African society, women were valued for their efforts in conflict resolution. In particular, elderly woman were respected, recognized for their advisory roles behind the scenes, and on some occasions, for they would utilize their creativity and go to a greater length to solve conflict in their community. All of these scholars give women agency in one way or the other in peacemaking and conflict resolution. This thesis is an attempt to contribute to this existing literature. Specifically, it will explore the role African women played in peace-making and conflict resolution, using the example of the Orma and the Pokomo women.

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Literature on African women and the issue of war and peace explores various other themes. Some provide depictions of the types of war-time human rights violations committed against women; for example Meredith Turshen, in *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflicts in Africa.* Others lay a groundbreaking narrative on the relationship between women and war in the context of World War II, for example, Jaclyn Cock’s *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa.* Some are activism oriented and deal with the experiences of African women in socio-economic and political situations; for instance, W.O. Maloba *African Women in Revolution,* Chandra Talpade et. al., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism.*

Johan Galtung, in *Specific Contribution of Peace Research to the Study of Violence,* defined peace as not only the mere absence of war or conflict but also the absence of structural violence. Meredith Turshen, in *What Women Do in Wartime: Gender and Conflicts in Africa,* contextualizes this. She explains that conflicts and wars destroy the very patriarchal structures of society that for a long time have confined and degraded women. Turshen suggests that wars and conflicts bring a new beginning for women by giving them voice in the midst of turmoil that destroys morals, traditions, customs, and community. Experiences women go through during wars and conflicts have been positively converted by women into learning skills, and women have obtained social, economic, and political exposure and strength.

However, in war and conflict situations, the representation of women in decision-making is still problematic. A statement by the former United Nations Secretary-General, Koffi Annan, proves that at the decision-making level, women are still under represented. He described women’s roles in Africa:

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36 Johan Galtung, *Specific Contribution of Peace Research to the Study of Violence, Typologies, Violence and its cause,* (UNESCO PUBLICATION, 1980), 85-99. For the purpose of this study, peace is defined both in the context of human security as well in the political and social-economic context; peace-building is defined as specific infrastructure put in place to avert the causes of war and conflicts; peacemaking is defined as a process of resolving disputes that could lead to conflict situations; conflict resolution is defined simply as the process of ending a conflict and coming to an agreement by use of negotiations, arbitrations etc.
37 Turshen, 20.
“Women, knowing the price of conflict, often are better equipped than men to prevent or resolve it. They also have been “peace educators” over many generations, preserving social order when communities collapse under the pressure of conflict. He therefore regretted that women still are grossly underrepresented in decision-making, from conflict prevention to conflict resolution to post-conflict reconciliation.”38

In the Kenyan context, not only have women been absent from the histories of decision-making but also the existing work is insufficient both in scope and ethnographically. The voices of less privileged and illiterate women, in particular, have not been captured well, and call for historical inquiry. This thesis attempts to do so by using oral history interviews, supported by the work of historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists to explore a specific example of Kenyan women’s agency in peace-making and conflict resolution.

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CHAPTER TWO

Methods and Types of Sources

Oral Histories

This study was developed around the belief that lived experiences of individuals offer a valid approach in studying the histories of less voiced-groups. As an historian, oral history gives me a chance to engage with the past in order to learn more about the experiences of less voiced groups underrepresented in mainstream culture. For women in Tana River District in the twentieth century, this is especially true because of the many barriers and obstacles they face including poverty and illiteracy. Through the use of oral history, this study sought information about lived experiences of thirteen Orma and the Pokomo women in peacemaking and conflicts resolution in Galole’s Tana River District, Kenya. The data was collected over a three-month period during the summer of 2008. Because of time and limitation in resources, this oral history was carried out only in one of the divisions in Tana River, Galole division.

The choice of oral history as a method of data collection was necessitated, among other reasons, by the lack of historical sources on women in the communities under study. Historians use evidence to understand the past; oral history can provide a valuable source of evidence for it yields eye witness accounts and reminiscences about events, and the experiences of an interviewer. According to Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson in Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Development, oral histories, in general, have proved very effective in understanding how people cope with disasters like conflicts and wars. Also, oral history is relevant to understand experiences of women in male dominated fields, for example, peace and wars. This study assumed that this is especially true in looking at the traditional role of the Orma and the Pokomo women in peacemaking and conflict resolution. Oral history provides these women with a chance to evaluate their experiences in a deeply more personal way and serves as a means of empowering them. Furthermore, this gender approach is not only consistent with the purpose of the study, but was required to achieve its goals.

Description of the Participants

Semi-structured open-ended interviews were administered to a sample of thirteen respondents, picked from the Orma and the Pokomo women, the two major ethnic groups in Tana River District. All the participants were asked the same fifteen questions. The choice of open-ended questions was preferred in order to gain in-depth perspectives from the participants. The participants in this location are representative of many different groups, and thus give the variability needed to achieve the goals of this thesis including age, marital status, educational background, and occupation. Two of the participants had some post-secondary training in teaching; one was a retired primary school teacher and the other one is currently teaching at a local primary school. Some were small business entrepreneurs, two were village elders, some were full time housewives and mothers, and others were involved in a grassroots women’s peace organization in the district, Tana River Women for Peace (TWFP).

One-to-one interviews with the participants were conducted. The older women who lived through times of conflicts were particularly targeted for their in-depth knowledge of community history, values and practices. It was felt that such targeted sampling would be most effective at giving a picture of how women have lived with conflict. As mothers and even grandmothers they would also be able to recount the changes over time that they witnessed among their offspring. All responses were audio recorded and at the end of each interview, a ten to fifteen-minute summary of what interviewees said was reviewed with the respondents for further clarity or comments.

Upon my arrival in Kenya, I also first sought permission to carry out the research through Kenya’s Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology. Later, at the study area, I used a network approach to gain preliminary information about possible participants. I had lists of contact persons who introduced me to the most important of my participants, the elder women. In my first encounter with the women, I sought their consent to participate. Further explanations were given to individual respondents: what information was being sought and for what purpose. When approached, the elder women were always willing to participate in the interviews because many not only believed in the value of recording this information for future

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41 See Appendix 1.
42 Details are discussed in Chapter Four.
43 See Appendix 2.
generations, but also regarded this as a way of teaching the children about customs, *ada* for example, among the Orma community. After gaining the consent to participate, appointments were made with the informants who then decided when and where the interviews were to be conducted. All interviews were conducted at the locations chosen by the participants (mostly at a personal residence). This was an efficient method with which most informants were comfortable.

Participants were informed of the confidentiality of the study. With the exception of only one elderly woman, Habona Dara, I have chosen not to use the names by which the participants are known in their communities. Instead, common Orma and Pokomo names have been used. Also, their second names have been altered to protect their anonymity. However, the above practice was not agreed to by the participants on paper. The provision of consent forms seemed suspicious to them, as this study was carried out immediately after the recent clashes over elections in Kenya. Miami University also had exempted this thesis from review because it involved oral history interviews.

I conducted the research in both the Orma language, *afaan Orma* and the *Kiswahili* language spoken by both the Orma and the Pokomo community. A large percentage of people in Tana River District speak Kiswahili. Since I am fluent in both of these languages, I did not require interpreters. The respondents were questioned on their role in peacemaking and conflict resolution. When the questions asked required historical knowledge, the informants often followed with comments regarding what they knew of a particular question or events in their history. However, on such occasions, views of formally educated women among the participants were mostly sought to confirm some important information regarding the customs and history of these two communities.

One of the characteristics of topic based oral history, as argued by Thomas L. Charlton et.al. in *Handbook of Oral History*, is hypothesis. This thesis tested the following two major hypotheses:

1. Hypothesis one –despite socio-cultural factors, women played a role in peace-making and conflict resolution. Some of the questions asked to address this hypothesis included; first, all women were asked their understanding of the term “peace,” followed by the questions: Were you

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45 Charlton, Myers and Sharpless, 106.
ever involved in peace-making in your community? Do you educate your children about peace? If yes, what do you do to educate your children about peace and conflict resolution?

2. Hypothesis two – how roles changed over time. This hypothesis was tested by asking the following questions: During the colonial times, were women involved in peacemaking? If yes, explain how they carried out this role? Were there any changes in women’s peace-making and conflict resolutions roles in your community? If yes, explain the changes. Do women have a chance to participate in decision-making during peace-building in your community?

The interview time with an informant was for a maximum of two and a half hours. Almost all the interviews were conducted with one respondent at a time, but, on a few occasions more than half of the elder women joined in. This was encouraged in the interview process in order to tap the collective memory and compare it with collective evidence from the individual interviews. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed except in a few instances where the informant raised objections. In cases where the respondents declined, I made use of notes only, and after the interview, follow-up interviews were carried out if necessary.

The last part of my research time was spent observing and participating in some activities. I attended one of the group meetings for the Tana River Women for Peace and also observed how the Orma women conducted peace rituals and prayers. Observation, according to Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman, in Designing Qualitative Research, “entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors and artifacts in a social setting.” 46 An observation approach provides a degree of validity as it concentrates on what people really do as opposed to what they say they will do, especially as words and actions are not equivalent in real life. However, in the process of observing the participants’ actions, I also asked questions when necessary in order to confirm the interpretation and explanations for the events under observation.

The participants freely invited me to some of their activities. I attended one of the group meetings for the Tana River Women for Peace. This is a community-based organization that advocates for peace in the District. The meeting provided not only an opportunity to have a talk with women leaders in peace organizations, but also to collect vital information that helped test the hypothesis of how women’s roles in peace-making and conflict resolution changed over

time. In the case of the Orma women, observation proved most useful in the coffee peace rituals, *buna qallu*. Most women, during the observation seemed to be comfortable because I was an inside researcher as opposed to an outsider, and this made them particularly comfortable conducting their peace rituals.

**Printed Sources**

In Kenya, historical sources on women are generally hard to come by particularly for the Orma people and Tana River District in general. In the nineteenth century, travelers and explorers wrote accounts that were not specifically about women but only mentioned them. Most of these accounts were by men talking about male affairs. Other historical sources on Kenyan women were written by ethnographers. Alice Werner wrote about the Orma people and the Pokomo in 1913, 1914, and 1915. More recent work is by an anthropologist, Hilarie Kelly.

In 1921, Tana River District was placed under the Northern Frontier District (NFD). This area was not fully subdued by the British colonizers unlike other parts of Kenya, for example, central Kenya. Thus, NFD did not feature much in colonial written history. The colonial administrators, however, left some information, though scattered. Some of the sources consulted at the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi were official accounts; for example, Tana River District handing over reports that were instituted in 1919 to administer NFD. Handing over reports were reports left by an out-going colonial administrator for an in-coming administrator. Other colonial accounts included Tana River District annual reports, some notes on the nineteenth-century political history and peoples of Tana River District, and the letters written by the colonial administrators among themselves. These colonial documents proved useful in filling in details when the informants could not recall or remember, for example, specific dates when certain historical phenomena occurred. Archival research also gave important insights into

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47 More details of this ritual are discussed in Chapter Four.
50 Details on the history of Tana River District as part of NFD are discussed in Chapter Three.
the nature of resource use relationships between the Orma and the Pokomo community. The archival research highlighted that resources were the main cause of conflict over the years between the two groups.

Also, articles from the local newspaper, the Daily Nation were consulted and gave information on the colonial administration of Tana River District. Particularly, it gave information on the horrors of the 1959 colonial insurgencies in Hola. Other sources consulted were documents by Non-Governmental Organizations which provided general contemporary ideas about women and peace-making. Census reports were reviewed to update the population of the people in the study area and the social and economic development. To supplement these primary sources, I consulted information from various secondary sources including historical, linguistic and anthropological accounts.

**Data Analysis**

The use of oral histories is regarded as a valid and credible form of qualitative research; in analyzing the data collected, this thesis made use of the techniques of qualitative research to understand women’s role in peacemaking and conflict resolution. David Silverman, in *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*, argues that issues of validity and reliability are as important in qualitative-based studies as in quantitative ones. Qualitative analysis should be able to tell “convincing stories,” and the fact of objectivity prescribed within a frame of any particular study, in this case, in analyzing the role of women in peace-making and conflict resolution in Tana River District.

The transcriptions of the data were carried out in the field and upon my return to the United States. The transcribed data, and the notes from the field work were read several times and the common themes that the participants mentioned were identified. The themes were grouped as follows: peacemaking role in the family; role of traditional education and artistic expression; role of women’s traditional institutions; marriage between different cultures as a way of promoting peace; the Role of Women’s Organizations: Tana River Women for Peace

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(TRWP) and the use of coffee ritual as a symbol of peace. Criteria for the choice of these emerging themes were based on how many times they appeared in each of the thirteen interviews. Those that appeared ten times out of thirteen were held as common themes.

The analyzed data were reported in the form of narrative text with first hand quotations from the narrators. This method was preferred in order to reflect the goals of my research and to represent the views of the participants. Also, in this study, the reliability of data collected was held important. Prior to conducting the interviews, questions such as “How do I choose the people to interview?” “How do I prepare for the interview?” “What kind of questions do I ask?” were all reviewed and helped establish the accuracy of data collected. However, there occurred some limitations in the course of data collection. The oral history interviews took place over a period of three months. Data gathered could have been more detailed with a longer stay. Another limitation was the low literacy among the preferred age bracket of interviewees, who were not able to link events with a certain time frame. This limitation was remedied through archival research, and these limitations do not make this thesis less accurate but instead show the researcher’s concern for reliability. The experiences described here are not intended for generalization, but rather speak to discourses rarely studied from historical perspectives.

CHAPTER THREE
Description and History of the Study Area and Its Peoples

The research was conducted in Tana River District, Galole division in the coastal province of Kenya. The Tana River District comprises approximately 39,000 square kilometers of semi-arid bush land and flood plains. According to the 1999 census, the district has an estimated population of 180,901,\textsuperscript{55} and covers around an area of 38,446 square kilometers. The district derives its name from the longest river in Kenya, Tana River, known as "mto Tana" in the language of the local people. The river traverses the northern and eastern part of the district and drains into the Indian Ocean. Tana is derived from the Orma word which means "Red," due to the red sand deposit which makes the water appear reddish. The District borders Malindi to the south, Isiolo to the north, Mwingi and Kitui Districts to the west and Garissa and Ijara to the northeast. Today, Tana River District consists of five administrative divisions including Wenje, Galole, Bura, Madogo and Bangale. Recently, a new district called Tana Delta was created through a presidential decree. Garsen, which was previously under the Tana River District, has been placed under this new district together with Tarasa and Kipini, as administrative divisions.\textsuperscript{56}

Tana River District was first founded in 1897 by the British colonizers under the umbrella, Tanaland Province with the administrative headquarters at Kipini.\textsuperscript{57} In 1920, Tanaland province was abolished, Tana River District, together with Lamu were placed under the supervision of a Provincial Commissioner in Kisimayu, and in 1923, the district was combined with Lamu and became part of the Coast Province.\textsuperscript{58} It became a fully fledged District in 1927, and its headquarters were moved from Kipini to Hola in 1959.\textsuperscript{59}

The main vegetation types of the districts are bushes and shrubs, which are quite scanty in most parts. Few areas have the perennial grass cover most ideal for grazing. Rainfall is bimodal in the area, coming between March- May and October – December with average annual rainfall amounting to below 600 mm. The district was classified as arid and semi-arid by the

\textsuperscript{57} Kenya National Archives (KNA): Tana River District Annual Report (1960), 5.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
Kenya Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (KASAL), a development program sponsored jointly by the Kenyan government and the European Union.\(^{60}\)

Although marginalized, the district was one of the important historical sites in Kenya. It was where some of the Mau Mau fighters were imprisoned in 1959. Considered as one of the harshest places, Hola was used as a remote camp to punish some of the Mau Mau’s hard core fighters by forcing them to carry out hard labor. Kenya’s \textit{Daily Nation} reported one prisoner’s experience, “Each man was given a spade, a basin and a hoe, and then ordered to dig the soil. We had refused all along to perform this task…”\(^{61}\) As historian, Caroline Elkin in \textit{Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya}, asserts: when the detainees refused to work, they were beaten to death. Eleven of the detainees died and many of them were injured. The human abuse the British inflicted on the prisoners, as argued by Elkin, led to massive publicity after an inquiry’s findings were made public. The opposition members in the House of Commons called for a debate. This together with increased adverse publicity especially by foreign newspapers resulted in further investigations of human rights abuses in the Hola and other camps across Kenya. Consequently, the support by the United Kingdom for the white-ruled Kenya colony was reduced. The economic short fall gradually led to the moves towards Kenyan independence.\(^{62}\)

In terms of peace-building and conflict resolution, Tana River District is an interesting region to study because of the presence of the Orma and the Pokomo.\(^{63}\) Occasionally, conflicts have broken out between the two communities over land use, which one group uses it to harvest crops while the other uses it for grazing. Similar to other parts of Africa, the issue of land has been a major cause of ethnic conflict in Tana River District. These have deep historical roots dating to the late 1800s. During colonization, the Europeans used artificial borders and divided Africa into the current states. The colonization and imperial control of Africa resulted in the

\(^{60}\) Tana River District Development Plan, 2002-2008, 19.


\(^{63}\) See Appendix 3.
formation of new boundaries that forced ethnically diverse groups together in a way that created tension.

For example, after the Berlin Conference in 1885 that began the process of dividing the African continent between the major European powers, the French occupied much of West Africa. Other parts of West Africa, like Ghana, became a British territory. Belgium occupied a vast territory that became known as the Congo, while the British occupied part of East Africa. British East Africa, what is today called Kenya, became a protectorate in 1895. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the white British settlers began establishing themselves in the fertile highlands referred to as the white highland, and began growing cash crops like coffee and tea, commanding unjust political and economic power in the country. The highlands had traditionally been home to the Cushitic speakers who migrated from Ethiopia around 2000 B.C.E. Historically, ethnic conflicts in Tana River District between the Orma and the Pokomo date back to the nineteenth century. From the account of the English explorers of the Royal Geographical Society in the early 1890s, such as Ernest Gedge, the Pokomo and the Orma were frequently in conflict. During their migration to Kenya, the Orma migrated further south and into a more competitive environment. The Orma transhumance activities, especially during the dry seasons, encompassed the riverine floodplain that crossed into the Pokomo territory. Often this brought them into conflict with the agriculturalist Pokomo. Ernest observed that the Ormas raided the Pokomos for their agricultural produce. He noted that “Gallas” treated south Tana Pokomo in the same manner as the Swahilis, with the exception of enforcing their wishes with the spear instead of a gun.”

The Northern Frontier Districts (NFD), including areas such as Moyale, Isiolo, Garissa, Wajir and Marsabit were created in 1905. Definitely, the name “frontier,” suggests that NFD was annexed and was not part of the original protectorate. Several reasons explain why the

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65 Ibid., 10.
67 The word “Galla” means “immigrants.” It was a name commonly used in the historical literature to refer to Oromo but they rejected this name. See Alice Werner, *The Galla of East African Protectorate,* "Journal of African Society" 13, no.3 (1914), 121.
68 Ernest Gedge, “A Recent Exploration, under Captain F.G. Dundas, R.N., up the River Tana to Mount Kenia,” *Royal Geographical Society* 14, no. 8 (1892), 516.
69 See Appendix 4.
70 A “frontier” in geographical terms refers to a boundary that is not distinctly marked and vaguely separates two distinct territories.
British did not claim it before 1905, including an impenetrable culture of the Cushitic peoples, as well as the British view that the frontier area was economically unviable, suitable only for herding and grazing. However, in 1905 in order to check the expansion of Menelik II of Ethiopia, the British incorporated the frontier territory into their sphere of influence, and it became officially known as the Northern Frontier District.71

When NFD was merged with the Tana River District in 1921, the Cushitic pastoralist people, including the Orma were placed under emergency law.72 This was done in order to check the expansionistic nature of pastoralist peoples, as well as to prevent competition and conflicts over grazing and watering territories with neighbors from both Ethiopia and Somalia. The British administrators made the frontier a closed district in 1926, which dictated, under special District ordinance that special passes were required to enter or leave the frontier area. Section 18 of the Special District Ordinance stated that “no tribesman may leave the area preserved for his tribe to go into an area reserved for another tribe without a pass.”73 Although the geopolitical and sociopolitical isolation bonded all the nomadic populations of the frontier, the restrictions placed on their movements was a major blow to their pastoral economy since the movement either to Ethiopia or Somalia was an important drought-coping strategy.

In 1960, shortly before Somalia gained independence, the British government declared that all Somali areas should be unified in one region. Upon Kenya’s independence in 1963, people in the Northern Frontier District were asked by the British government, especially the Somali ethnic group, to decide whether to remain part of independent Kenya or secede to the Somali republic. The peoples of the NFD formed various political parties to either support or oppose the move including: the Northern People’s National League (NPNL) representing the Orma of Tana River District, and the Northern Province Peoples Progressive Party (NPPPP). These political parties gave voices to the NFD peoples who wished to secede from Kenya and join the Somali Republic.74 In the 1960s referendum, the majority of the Northern Frontier

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73 KNA: /PC/NFD/2/2/3, Tana River District handing over report (1947), 9.
District population voted for unification with Somalia, but the British government, despite having set up the referendum, rejected the results and kept the NFD within Kenya at independence. The disillusioned NFD inhabitants, particularly, the Somalis, resorted to violence in what came to be called *shifta* war.\(^{75}\)

**Brief History of the Orma**

The Orma people are Cushitic-speaking groups who form part of the larger Oromo nation. The Oromo form one of the largest ethno-linguistic groups in Africa and inhabit a vast area from Ethiopia to Tana River District in Kenya. The Oromo people became scattered by artificial boundaries created by European and Ethiopian colonialism in the late 1800s. Today, the Oromo people live in both Ethiopia and Kenya.\(^{76}\) Among others, the Kenyan Oromo comprise: the Orma and the Borana. The Oromo people share a similar dialect, and a similar socio, economic, religious and political cultures.\(^{77}\)

The Orma people separated from the other Oromo early; the historian, E.R. Turton argues that the Oromo speakers began migrating south from the northeastern highlands of Ethiopia around 1500, spreading gradually to the area north of Mt. Kenya and down the River Tana to the coast.\(^{78}\) The Orma ancestors lived with other pastoralists like Somalis, though their relationship with the Somali speakers was characterized by constant fights. By 1620, the historian, H. Lewis, believes that the Orma had already reached the coast of Kenya as far south as Malindi and the Juba River in Somalia. The traditions of several Coastal communities who trace their origin from a legendary “Shungwaya,”\(^{79}\) give accounts of the Orma as very powerful


\(^{76}\) See Appendix 5.

\(^{77}\) Kelly, *From Gada to Islam*, 20.

\(^{78}\) E.R. Turton, “Bantu, Galla and Somali Migrations in the Horn of Africa: A Reassessment of the Juba/Tana Area,” *Journal of African History* 16, no.4 (1975), 520. However, it is interesting to note that a recent discovery indicates the existence of the Oromo people in East Africa long before 1500. Archaeologists, B. M. Lynch and L.H. Robbins in “Cushitic and Nilotic Prehistory: New Archaeological Evidence from North-West Kenya,” *The Journal of African History* 20, no. 3 (1979), 319-328, dates the pillar in northern Kenya that the Oromo people used in their calendar system to 300 B.C., which indicates the earlier presence of the Oromo speakers in the area.

\(^{79}\) Oral traditions of the Bantu speakers point to this region as the original homeland of Bantu speakers. However, historians have also added that Shungwaya was a regional network of farmers, pastoralists and coastal people in the 1600s. See Thomas Spear, *Kenya’s Past: An Introduction to the Historical Method in Africa*, 54-57.
nomads who even overturned the powerful coastal city states, making them the most militarily superior people both in Eastern Kenya and Southern Somalia.\textsuperscript{80}

However, during the mid-nineteenth century, the Orma suffered external attacks that weakened their powers. The dispersal of the Borana Oromo migration into parts of northern Kenya drove the Orma away. At the same time the Ogaadeen Somali fought and defeated the Orma and moved those further southwards into their present homeland, Tana River. In the south, the Orma were attacked by Maasai raiders, in the west by Akamba raiders. The Orma also suffered attack by the soldiers of the Zanzibar Sultanate, who established a slave-based plantation economy around the coastal hinterland. Further dislocation of the Orma in the mid-nineteenth century was caused by small pox and rinderpest epidemics that greatly reduced human and animal populations. Rinderpest was introduced into Southern Somalia from India in the 1880s. By the late nineteenth century, these epidemics weakened the Orma, and the traditional system that once unified them, \textit{Gada}, began to decline. Several reasons accounted for this. The \textit{Gada} system spread with the migration and intermingling of the general Oromo ethnic group; however, following the formation of colonial boundaries, some Oromo groups became geographically isolated and the system distorted. The \textit{Gada} leaders also lost their political powers.\textsuperscript{81} This is best reflected by the Borana Oromo who fled from Ethiopia and settled in northern Kenya following the colonization of Oromo in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) by the Amharas in the 1900s. In the case of the Orma, by 1920, they had completely lost their hegemony and their traditional social organization system; \textit{Gada}, was eroded.

Although colonialism, conversion to Islam and the massive loss of populations both of humans and livestock weakened \textit{Gada},\textsuperscript{82} it is imperative to understand this Orma traditional institution before the coming of the Europeans. The pre-colonial social, religious, political and economic organization of the Orma people was based on an egalitarian system called the \textit{Gada} (generation grade). According to the anthropologist, Hilarie Kelly, \textit{Gada}, together with the moiety system, \textit{gosa}, and the generation set, \textit{harriya}, created a complex linkage that was essential in promoting peace, known as \textit{nagaa} in the local language.\textsuperscript{83} For the purpose of this thesis, only \textit{Gada} will be discussed because no Oromo history can be understood without

\textsuperscript{80} Turton, “Bantu, Galla and Somali Migrations in the Horn of Africa, 520.
\textsuperscript{83} Kelly, \textit{From Gada to Islam}, 40-41.
reference to the *Gada* system. According to the anthropologist, Asmarom Legesse in *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*, *Gada* originally started in the sixteenth century as an organization based on age-sets, but over the years, the organization acquired what he referred to as “a system of temporal differentiation of society having little done with age.”  

This makes *Gada* totally different from the age-set system because sons follow their fathers moving up one grade at a fixed interval regardless of their age. *Gada* is periodically defined and refers to the eight years in which a class stays in power, and it is a grade-based system where members are recruited based solely on genealogical generations. Although some scholars say that the *Gada* system functioned more as a social organization than a political one, *Gada* among the Oromo did exist as a political institution. Evidence for this can be found in the practices of the Borana, and also the Orma Oromo of Tana River. Kelly defined *Gada* “as the corporate, political identity of the Orma as a tribe vis-à-vis their neighbors…”

Oromo “tribes” differentiated themselves from one another and also from other communities through their participation and distinct practices of *Gada* system. They practiced *Gada* in such a way that it intersected and connected with other traditional institutions, for example age-sets, kinship, and linkage through co-operative labor. For example, in the case of co-operative labor, the pastoralist Oromo groups, in which the Orma are included, tied their *Gada* practices to the pastoral way of life. The effective operation of the *Gada* institution depended on the ability of the people to coordinate their movements. Jointly, these institutions functioned as the” check and balance” system that created a complex of networks linking individuals and that controlled conflicts by preventing the monopolization of power and authority by a single class.

*Gada* was also a system created to socialize men and distribute different skills and powers in the social and political set-up of the tribe at each stage of the *Gada* cycle. The members consisted of all males born within a specified eight-year period. The men passed through what was known as the *Gada* grade or *Luba*, based on the age difference of eight years. Each grade went through a cycle of eleven grades except for the fifth, which lasted thirteen

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87 Ibid., 67.
years, and the seventh grade which lasted three years. These included: grade I (Dabbale), which covered from birth to eight years. After this were grade II (Junior Game), grade III (Senior Game), grade IV (Qondale), and grade V (Luba). The others are grades VI, VIII, IX, X and XI.

Transition from one grade to the next was marked by ceremonies specific at that grade. For example, boys from age zero to eight were dressed and treated like girls. Their hair was kept long and decorated with cowrie shells. They were given utmost love and attention both by their parents and community at large because at this stage they were regarded as possessing special capabilities; they acted as intermediaries between humankind and God, Waq. However, the fact that boys at this age were treated like girls does not mean that the girls and women in general held low status. In fact, mothers to such children were highly regarded and were given utmost respect in their community.  

Within the Gada grades, different specialization of labor and hierarchies and rituals were recognized as one advances from one stage to the next. When members entered the Daballe grade, they were given proper males name and their hair was cut boy’s style and they started to assume responsibilities under their father’s guidance. For example in this stage, the boys were responsible for looking after the livestock within the vicinity of their homestead and helping their mothers in milking. It was at this stage that the boys formed symbolic association with livestock, and they were given a heifer that would multiply to become their own herd. By the time the members reached the third grade, that is senior Game, the boys were considered young adults and were entrusted with responsibilities, such as taking family herds into far river valleys for an extended period. It was at this stage that masculine values were taught and tested.

At grade IV, Qondale, the most significant activity was the institution of the Luba class. The members were selected based on both family and individual reputation. It was then that the members were required to undertake a prescribed war party, and after completion of this task, some members were admitted as senior councilors affiliated to the Gada membership. The grade V, Luba extended for thirteen years, and it was during this stage that members were entitled to marry, but there were some prerequisites to fatherhood; members were required to observe some rituals and ceremonies. For example, they observed a number of taboos and norms like praying under a special tree, singing at a shrine. Men carried extensive responsibilities

91 Kelly, “From Gada to Islam,” 77.
during this stage, such as safeguarding the community’s major resources against external aggression. This was done through military leaders known as Abba Dula who led in war and conflicts. By the end of the forty-year period, every man had experienced every major duty within the Gada system. By the time they reached grade VI, called Gada, the men assumed ritual and political leadership roles. They were regarded as highly experienced and held in high esteem within their community. And finally grades VII, VIII, IX, X and XI were generally stages of retirement, but still men at these stages were consulted for advice, both formal and informal. However, they retired from active participation in the Gada cycle. Instead, their sons and grandsons took over these responsibilities.

Women did not participate in the Gada system, nor did they have any organization based on age. This was similar to women in other regions, for example, in other parts of East Africa. However, within the Gada system, Oromo women’s status and their roles were categorized in three general stages namely: youth, adult life and old age. Women’s roles and powers were based on seniority. A similar view is held by the anthropologist, Ifi Amadiume, who argues that the bargaining power of women in the Nnobi region of Nigeria rested on age. Similar evidence is also revealed in the Oromo Borana. In a polygamous marriage, the first wife, which in this case is also the eldest, exercises more power and enjoys greater privileges as compared to a second or a third wife. For instance, she has more wealth measured in terms of head of cattle. Based on this, one can argue that in the pre-colonial period, African women’s roles were complementary to those of men, thus promoting gender equality. For example, in most Oromo groups, like the Borana, Gada leaders did not make their decisions alone but worked with several groups. One such group was women who brought into perspective their ritual specialization and control of their “domestic sphere,” based on age.

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92 Ibid., 78-87.
93 Ibid., 94.
95 This is discussed in Chapter Four, “Narrative of Finding,” as age was a very important factor in women’s roles in peacemaking and conflict resolution.
**Brief History of the Pokomo**

The Pokomo are Bantu speakers. The Pokomo migrated to their present home from a place called Shungwaya in southern Somalia, where they lived with the Taita, Segeju and other related coastal Bantus. However, the expansion of the Oromo Cushitic speakers in the sixteenth century pushed them further south. The Digo and the Segeju were the first to leave Shungwaya, followed by the Pokomo, Taita, Ribe-Kauma, Giriama, Chonyi and Jibana. They travelled together as far as the Tana River, where the Pokomo settled.98

The oral traditions of the Pokomo, and of other related coastal Bantus such as the Giriama, Digo and Taita, give evidence of this.99 As previously mentioned, the Pokomo were and are still agriculturalists. They cultivated close to the banks of the Tana River, relying on the periodic flooding of the river to grow maize, bananas and rice.100 During the pre-colonial period, the Pokomo unit of production was clan based. In Pokomo traditions and cultures, there were two clans: *Malachini* (Lower River Clan) and the *Watu wa Juu* (Upper River Clan). Each clan was further divided into a sub-tribe. For example, the sub-tribes among the upper River Clan included the *Milalulu, Zubaki*, among others. The Pokomo traditions, cultures and farming lands in particular, were organized around these clans. Because of the topography of the river, the Pokomo lived a semi-nomadic agricultural life because of the need to search for the suitable silts for their crops.101

Using these clans, before the European concept of boundary formation, the Pokomo people divided boundaries among themselves by drawing straight lines that defined each clan’s land. They believed that every clan had a right to access to lands near the river bank and on the flood plain. The divisions of the lands were supervised by a sub-lineage. Every two-kilometer, all lands along the river and the riverine were divided into parcels for each sub-tribes. It was a common practice particularly among the Lower River Clan, *Malachini*, where each segment of

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100 Norman Townsend, “Age Descent and Elders among the Pokomo,” *Africa* 47, no.4 (1977), 386-87.

clan-land corresponded to a sub-lineage consisting of about ten to twenty people whose ancestors had shared the same origin.\textsuperscript{102}

Pre-colonial Pokomo society was not based on the kinship system, but on age sets, which strongly defined powers held by elders as in most East African communities. Unlike the Lower River Clan who did not practice circumcision, among the Upper River Clan, initiation of boys was a common practice on which the age-sets system was based. They circumcised only the boys at puberty, and all males initiated together were placed under the same age-set system, known as \textit{Luva} in the Pokomo language. The new \textit{Luva} was formed every ten to twelve years. Young male initiates were secluded for a three-month period, or even more, and during this period, they were taught the customs and traditions of their society; for example, how to respect elders and choose a marriage partner. A man was not supposed to marry a daughter of a member of his own age-set. The Pokomo age-sets also formed the basis of co-operation in times of seasonal labor such as planting and harvesting, and working together for the good of all. Most significantly, during the nineteenth century, the Pokomo age-sets system served a military purpose to counter a series of attacks from the pastoralist Somalis.\textsuperscript{103} The Pokomo women did not have an elaborate organization based on age-sets. They belonged to their husband’s age-sets, and played background roles and influenced decisions taken by men through their husbands. Pokomo women extended their “domestic spheres” and performed rituals that they specialized in.\textsuperscript{104}

In 1890, the British and Germans signed a treaty known as the Heligoland-Zanzibar treaty,\textsuperscript{105} by which the Witu sultanate became a British protectorate, and most of the lands in the coastal region were placed under British administration. The British administrators converted all the waste lands to Crown Land. By 1895, when the British administrators declared Kenya a protectorate, most African communities began to experience massive land loss. In 1923, the British administrations, led by the Secretary of State for Colonies, set up what was known as The Kenya Land Commission that gave the British settlers the right to access these lands.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{102} Townsend, “Age, Descent and Elders among the Pokomo.” 389- 391.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 392.
\textsuperscript{104} KNA: DC/TRD/4/1, Tana River: Nineteenth-Century Political Records (1918-1919/20, 1921-1926), 11.
\textsuperscript{105} This treaty made Germany withdraw all her claims in Zanzibar, Uganda and on the Kenyan and Somali coast. Wituland and Zanzibar became British protectorates and colonial borders were defined. Germany, in exchange, was given the tiny North Sea island of Heligoland. For more details see A. Marshall Magphee, \textit{Kenya} (Washington: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1968), 36.
Most pre-colonial African society acquired land through lineage, for example in Kenya. When in the early 1900s the colonial government substituted indigenous clan ownership with individual land ownership, the Kikuyu, for instance, suffered a massive land loss, estimated at 60,000 acres under the British.107 The Pokomo land ownership was also compromised in this way during the colonial period. Much of the Witu Sultanate of the 1890 Treaty lay within the Pokomo territory, together with a place named Ras Shaka.

In 1926 and 1938, under the Ordinance of Native Lands Trust, boundaries were signed and sealed without prior Pokomo knowledge. Nine reserves were officially named as Pokomo territories and the peoples were forced to occupy those reserves.108 In 1942, when the Pokomo learned of their new land ownership status, through their committee established under the Native Land Trust Ordinance, they appealed their case to the Carter Land Commission. The minutes of the committee meeting read, “members asked for a declaration that all land as far as Ras Shaka be regarded as Native Land…”109 Only in 1954 did the colonial government’s Royal Commission on Land and Population meet to hear evidence of the Pokomo land claims, but the commission did not solve the Pokomo land problems. Their appeal was dismissed because, the Commission decreed, theirs was the claim of a small tribe, which should not monopolize an area designed for a potential economic development.110

109 Ibid., 63.
110 Ibid., 65.
CHAPTER FOUR

Narrative of Findings

Introduction

This chapter is about the content of the narratives of the women interviewed. My sample size is small: I interviewed 13 Pokomo and Orma women. Four of these were younger women, between the ages of 30 and 40. The older women were varied in age from their 50s up to 87. As previously mentioned, I used intracohort selection based upon a range of backgrounds in marital status, educational background, occupation. The three women in their early thirties, and the one in her forties were: Gamachana Buko, Riziki Komora, Hajibo Halkano and Gumato Rasa respectively. Gamachana, Riziki and Hajibo were selected because they all dropped out of school before completing all the grades. Halkano and Buko were selected through the recommendations of women grass-roots peace activists. The forty year-old, Gumato Rasa, currently a professional teacher, and Hamaro Bahola, a retired teacher, were selected because they represented minorities in their group. The others are women in their 60s, 70s with the oldest being in her 80s, Habona Dara. They were selected because of their rich knowledge of their communities’ customs and traditions. They were also selected because all the elder women were unschooled, and some are widowed. Apart from Habona Dara, I chose not to use the women’s real names in order to reinforce their anonymous and confidential participation. I have identified the women by age and whether she was Pokomo or Orma. Although most women were not comfortable talking about their families and marriages, the following is a brief introduction to the background of the thirteen women interviewed, beginning with the oldest, and ending with the youngest.

The Women: Orma

Habona Dara

Habona is an 87 year-old Orma woman, and she was the oldest of all the interviewees. She is a tall, slim and grey-haired woman but bends due to old age. She was dressed in Orma traditional attire, guntina.\(^\text{111}\) She moves around with the aid of a walking stick. Habona has ten children, six girls and four boys. Habona had no schooling in her life. All of her six daughters were unschooled and were married at a young age. One of her boys had secondary schooling and

\(^{111}\) This is colorful and patterned attire worn by Cushitic women. It is wrapped around the body with a knot tied over the shoulder.
works as a policeman. Habona’s husband died four years ago at age 84, and now she lives in a big family homestead with her eldest son. Within the homestead are four rugged huts with grass thatched roofs, and she occupies one of them with two of her granddaughters (her son’s daughters). She is taken care of by her eldest son who is a wage laborer.

**Hasaghale Panya**

Hasaghale is a 75-year old Orma woman. She was of medium height and had a dark complexion. Like Habona, she also dressed in a *guntina*. Hasaghale never attended school. Hasaghale is married and has one daughter. Hasaghale’s husband has some cattle which supplies them with milk for sale. He has a second wife with whom he has four other children, and they live in another village, but he comes occasionally to see her. Hasaghale practices traditional medicine from which she earns money to buy food and clothes. She lives in a grass-thatched mud house adjacent to her married daughter. The homestead in which they live belongs to her husband’s daughter.

**Alamitu Sora**

Alamitu is a 70 year-old Orma woman. She was slim and short. Although her face was wrinkled, she looked jolly. She had a brown complexion and jokingly confessed that she resembled her beautiful grandmother whom she was named after. Alamitu had no schooling and was married at age 14. She lives with her 80 year-old husband in a hut with a grass-thatched roof. She has seven children, two daughters and five sons, but only two sons are alive today. Alamitu and her husband are taken care of by their sons, one works as a wage laborer and the other is involved in the livestock trade.

**Hasora Abagudo**

She is a 70 year-old Orma speaking woman. She has light brown skin but one would not notice because of old age. She was dressed in red stripped typical Orma attire, *guntina*. Hasora tied a piece of cloth around her waist. In between her answers she gave a gradual smile, she said “I do this to reduce pain in my lower back...” She has had no schooling in her life. Hasora is married and had only one child, a girl, throughout her married life. Her 73 year-old husband is a peasant and has some goats and cattle. He married another wife at age 50. The second wife is in her 40s and bore him two sons. Hasora’s daughter did not go to school and is married with four children. One of her stepsons works as a wage laborer in Hola town, while the other one is unemployed. They have a big homestead with several grass thatched-huts in it. Hasora occupies
one of them and so does her co-wife. The rest of the huts were occupied by her stepsons and their families.

**Harufa Garo**

Harufa is a 60-year-old Orma woman. She is short, slim and had a dark brown complexion. Like the other Orma women, Harufa wore a brightly colored *guntina*. She had no schooling and sells fresh milk from her cows that she reared together with her husband. They have six children, two sons and four daughters. Both of her two sons went to school, but only one girl went to school. Her first born son is a policeman, while the other one works with local district administration as a clerk. The girl was married after her secondary schooling. Harufa lives with her husband on their own homestead; in it was a three-bedroom stone house, roofed with iron sheets. Harufa said the house was built through her sons’ help.

**Gumato Rasa**

Gumato is a cheerful 40-year-old Orma woman. She is tall, slim and has a chocolate complexion. She was lucky to get some schooling through her oldest brother who paid her fees. She currently teaches at a local primary school. She and her husband divorced after 17 years of marriage, and she lives with her two children, a son and a daughter. The son is in a college but the girl is still in high school. Gumato lives in a two-bedroom house not far away from the Hola town. She confessed that schooling was the best gift her family gave her, and despite facing a divorce three years ago, she said she is comfortable and can take care of her two children.

**Hajibo Halkano**

Hajibo is a 33-year-old Orma speaking woman. She was the third born in a family of five. Hajibo is short, plump with a dark complexion. She was dressed in long colorful *guntina*. Her hair was covered and she had a brightly colored patterned shawl that covered the upper part of her body. On her education, Hajibo confessed that there was much opposition from her paternal grandmother who made her drop out of school in Grade 10 [secondary level] and marry. She has five children, two sons and three daughters. They all go to school except her youngest daughter who was one-year old. Hajibo’s husband runs a small shop that sells foodstuffs. They live in a two-bedroom mud house. Hajibo is a member of the Tana River Women for Peace.
The Pokomo Women:

Hadhula Jillo

Hadhula is a 73-year-old Pokomo village elder. I chose Hadhula because she was a traditional village elder and used to practice as a traditional mid-wife. She was plump and average height but her face was wrinkled from old age. She tied a dark colored leso\(^{112}\) around her body and was seated on a chacha [mats made from reeds] when I first met her for the interview. Like her peers, she was unschooled and became a widow in her 60s. Her husband was a farmer, and together they had five children, three daughters and two boys. Only one of her children went to school, the last born son who schooled up to form four [Twelfth Grade] and now works as a game ranger. Hadhula stays with her eldest daughter whose husband cultivates some lands. Her ranger son also sends her money every month for use with her daughter’s family.

Mwanahamisi Dulu

Mwanahamisi is a 65-year old Pokomo woman. She was average height and medium build with a dark complexion. She was also dressed in leso. She has never attended any school. Mwanahamisi was chosen because, besides being in a polygamous marriage, she is the oldest women in Tana River Women for Peace. She was humorous throughout the interview process. She thought I was one of the agents assisting rural women, she would keep saying in Kiswahili “sisi twahitaji msaada [that they needed financial help].” I occasionally had to make her focus on the interview questions. Mwanahamisi had given birth only to daughters in her marriage, six of them, but only two are alive and married with children. Her peasant husband wanted sons and married a second wife in his 50s with whom he has three other children, two sons and one daughter. Mwanahamisi lives with her eldest daughter in a mud house thatched with marara [reeds]. Her son-law is a peasant.

Hadia Bakari

Hadia is a 64-year old Pokomo woman with no schooling. She is medium build, has a dark complexion. She dressed in a dark loose blouse, and like typical Pokomo women, the rest of her body, was a leso that was print-patterned. Her hair was not covered. Hadia lives with her retired policeman husband in a three-bedroom house they built. She has five children, two sons

and three daughters. Her first born son works in Nairobi as a policeman, the other one is unemployed. Her youngest daughter is a secondary school teacher, but her other daughters did not go to school; they were all married and have children.

**Hamaro Bahola**

Hamaro is a 50 year-old Pokomo woman. She was average build and has a light complexion. Her face was slightly freckled. She was missionary educated and was a primary school teacher until her retirement in 2007. Hamaro is married and has four children, three boys and one girl. Her husband is a local Catholic Church leader. She lives with her husband and her last born child. They built their own house, made of bricks with a corrugated iron sheet roof on a piece of land the husband bought. Her first born son is a teacher, another works for the post office in a nearby town, Lamu, and the other one is a policeman in Taita-Taveta. Her last born child and the only daughter is married and has one child.

**Riziki Komora**

Riziki is a 31-year old Pokomo woman. She was average build, tall and had a brown complexion. She wore a long, colorful *kitenge* dress [common African attire]. She was chosen because she represents those who have not had schooling in her age group because her parents did not have money to pay her school fees. Her husband is a policeman, and together they have two children, a 10 year-old son and a 7 year-old daughter. Both of her children go to school, and they all live in a two-bedroom mud house that had an iron sheet roof. Riziki is a member of Tana River Women for Peace.

**Gamachana Buko**

Gamachana is a 30-year old Pokomo woman. She had a smiley face. She was slim and tiny bodied, one would mistake her for an 18-year-old girl. She was dressed in a short skirt and green stripped blouse. She has three children, two daughters and one son. When I reported for the interview at her place, she was seated with her youngest child, the son on her lap. She told me he had malaria but she was willing to talk to me. Gamachana lives in the yard belonging to her husband’s in-laws with her children. Her husband does *vibarua* [casual labor] in Mombasa. Gamachana schooled up to primary level [Grade Eight] and then married because there was no money for her education. Gamachana is a member of Tana River Women for Peace.
The Methodology

I used purposive sampling to identify women to interview regarding their roles in peacemaking and conflict resolution. Much of the information on who to approach was first sought through people I knew personally who later directed me to my target groups, the elder women. I also knew of the existence of women peace organizations in the Tana River District where I interviewed some of the young women participants in women’s grassroots peace organizations. On some occasions, I requested the initial interviewees to help me identify other women who had relevant information.

Throughout the interview process with the participants, I kept in perspective the ideas of Katherine Anderson and Dana C. Jack, “Interview Techniques and Analysis,” in Sherna Berger and Daphne Patai, *Women’s Words: the Feminist Practice of Oral History*. They suggest both listening to ourselves and listening to the narrator. I began with personal questions like name, age. I then asked each woman about her understanding of the term “peace” and any incidences of conflict that she knew of in the history of the Orma and the Pokomo. This approach facilitated the exchange of information. I also brought to the attention of each of the participants that I was there to learn and listen respectfully, as is the tradition in many African societies, especially when listening to elders. My focus was, as Anderson and Jack suggest, “on interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint.” The interactive process that guided this study helped both the Orma and the Pokomo women share their experiences and what they had learned from their mothers and grandmothers concerning peacemaking in a positive way. The responses from the 13 women interviewed painted a picture of unique personal experiences. For each of them, peacemaking was a pursuit woven into their sense of community that was not possible without the women’s network, their sense of solidarity coupled with a sense of responsibility, and the ethic of care that they cultivated within their community in general.

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114 Anderson and Jack, “Interview Techniques and Analysis,” 23.
This chapter explores the gendered role of women, from the testimonials given by women themselves with minimal discussion and analysis. In this chapter, I am concerned with weaving the Orma and the Pokomo women’s own experiences into the larger historical framework. Their role is historical in the sense that they tell of lived experiences and the specific roles they played in minimizing conflict. Also, their combined narratives are historical in the sense that the women narrated changes they witnessed, spatially and chronologically not only in their roles in peacemaking and conflict resolution, but generally. The women interviewed recounted changes they witnessed, or learned from teaching by generations of mothers and grandmothers. Their stories revealed how the chronology of the history of pre-colonial Africa in general was identified with names of peoples, and events such as droughts, invasions and so forth. For example, for the Orma women interviewed, I tapped into their strong pastoral traditions. Their history revolved around changes in seasons. The name of one of the elderly women interviewed, Habona, attested to this:

I am called Habona. My parents gave me this name because they said I was born during one of the most devastating droughts in the Orma land.  

The word *bona*, without the pronoun, *Ha*, means drought. This is a common Orma name for women and meant that she was born during the drought season. Habona is much respected in her village because of her knowledge and experiences of traditional Orma ways.

Habona said her parents migrated from Ethiopia and settled in Tana River, Kenya. For centuries, there have been movements to the northern parts of Kenya of Cushitic peoples from both Ethiopia and Somali, predominantly pastoralists, who moved with changes in seasons in search of water and pasture for their herds. Habona herself was born in a small village called Matanya and later when she was married, she moved with her family to Hola. Habona was unschooled and did not know the exact date she was born, but it was very amazing how she situated her birth date in the context of Kenya’s colonial history. She was barely eight at the time when Kenya officially became a British crown colony that is around the 1920s, placing her birth date from 1910 to 1912. For women, such naming practices were but one way of history telling

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and of remembering all the events that happened during hard times. Older women said that these naming practices have disappeared. They linked this to changes in peoples’ livelihoods. Herding and farming, according to the women, no longer sustained families and communities as it did in the past generations. Instead, people, in particular the educated generations, have embraced the ways of outside worlds [money economy]. This affected how people related and in the process some customs disappeared. When I asked what brought such changes, most women’s responses were because of the influences from the modernized worlds. The participants also remembered history through events like colonial penetration. Among the Orma women, they referred to this period as *gхаaf nam adhi* [the white men’s era]. Similarly, *zama za wakoloni* [era of colonial rule] according to the Pokomo women interviewed, dates from the 1890s to the year when Kenya regained its independence in 1963. All the memories the women shared highlighted the value of peace in their lives and that of their communities, as well as some of the changes they witnessed.

Often, formal written histories of rural women in general and of their roles in particular have been defined in relation to men. Women have been featured basically as victims in most written colonial and postcolonial narratives. However, the interviews, oral traditions and songs presented in this thesis suggest that women played crucial roles in their communities. This narrative is an attempt to historicize forms of remembering identified with women’s role in peace-making and conflict resolution. This chapter combines the voices of the thirteen women interviewed. Organized in terms of the major emerging themes, from the questions passed to the women, it examines in detail each major theme of these oral history interviews.

**Peace in the Community and Family**

After personal questions such as name, marital status, education etc., each participant was asked one opening question. The question tested the women’s understanding of the term “peace.” This question provided a starting point from which women stressed the importance of peace in their communities, and particularly of their involvement in achieving and maintaining it. One of the elderly Orma women interviewed, Habona Dara, had much information to narrate. According to Habona, history telling ensured the continuity of past events and practices of her community. Much has changed; for example, in the olden days people used to see their grandchildren always but now, because of schooling, grandparents have little time with their grand daughters and sons.
Although she does not seem to dislike the idea of schooling, she is disappointed that some of the traditions that strengthen moral values are being lost.

When asked the meaning of the term “peace,” Habona regarded peace as an especially important aspect of any community’s well being. To her, peace is an absence of war, and encompasses living in a loving, harmonious environment with one another. It also means having endurance and patience in one’s family and community as a whole, and this ensures well being and tranquility. In her culture, the absences of such qualities were likened to conflicts.

In Orma history and culture, Habona explained that the word “peace,” known as nagaa, was an important element of Orma daily lives. She went on to explain that peace comes from good relations with family members, community and neighbors; and as a mother she taught her children the importance of greetings, and still does that now as a grandmother; she socialized her grandchildren and her neighbors’ children into the practice of such greetings. She further explained the meaning and the significances of greetings among the Orma as follows:

Every morning, I greet my people, neighbors… Daily greetings are the first sign of peace in my community and a greeting symbolizes Waq’s, God’s blessings… Orma start their day with morning greetings… “Bultiin nagaa?” And the person greeted responds “nagaa nagaa.” Failure to respond to such greetings is a sign of bad omen in my community; we see it as an absence of peace.116

The Orma local morning greetings, Bultiin nagaa? means, “did you spend your night peacefully?” The person greeted should respond, Nagaa, nagaa [peace, peace]. This is an indication of well-being and sets the tone for how the day will go. Similar meanings of peace resonated through all the interviews with other Orma and with the Pokomo older women. A 64 year-old Pokomo woman, Hadia Bakari offered a similar explanation when I asked her understanding of the term “peace.” She asserted that Pokomo women have been involved in peacemaking from time immemorial. Below is her explanation of the meaning of peace:

Me, I’m a peace loving personality… In the Pokomo history and cultures, peace means harmony, health and well being. Harmony provides farmers with good crops… enough food means peace in homes and families and the entire community.117

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116 Habona Dara, interview by Fatuma Boru, 22 May 2008.
117 Hadia Bakari, interview by Fatuma Boru, 30 May 2008.
Young women’s understanding of peace differed from that of the older women. Gumato Rasa, a 40 year-old professional teacher from the Orma community, said that peace means not only absence of war or conflict but equality in our community, and in particular, when the rights of women are safeguarded.\textsuperscript{118}

**The Role of Women’s Traditional Institutions**

The question on the women’s traditional institutions and their roles received a remarkable and well-detailed account from the Orma women interviewees, but it did not yield much from the Pokomo women participants. Both the older and the younger women recounted the changes and continuity they experienced or learned from their mothers and grandmothers in the colonial and post-colonial eras. The theme of the women’s traditional institutions tied in well with the role played by elderly women during pre-colonial times. For example, in the case of a misunderstanding between a husband and a wife, the elder women would go to visit the couple with the objective of facilitating reconciliation and bringing back harmony in the family. According to a Pokomo woman interviewed, Hadhula Jilllo, older women were typified as specialists in conflict resolution and were always consulted on the matters of conflict both in their families as well as in their communities. Both the Orma and the Pokomo women generally revealed that these roles were mostly advisory, as the decisions were taken by men, but women played an important background role and influenced policy through their husbands, brothers and sons to discourage hostilities.

The Orma elder women interviewees saw their traditional institutions as one of their strongest traditional legacies before the introduction of colonialism and conversion to Islam in the 1920s. One such institution was *Sqqee*. According to Hasora Abagudo, *Sqqee* played a significant role in the lives of the married women. When I asked the meaning of *Sqqee*, the interviewee referred to it as a special set of sticks given to women during marriage by their mother to signify the high status of women in the Orma culture. They have a symbolic function, socially and culturally, and women used this institution as a venue to articulate their interests. Hasora also added that the institution had no official leaders but that elderly women normally thought of as wise and with excellent oratory skills, presided over the practice of such

\textsuperscript{118} Rasa Gumato, interview by Fatuma Boru, 19 May 2008.
institutions. Since the Orma society based respect on age, adult women performed various ritual functions associated with the *Siqqe* institution.

When I asked if *Siqqe* had any function in settling disputes, the eldest interviewee, Habona said that women in the Orma culture do not participate in war, instead they use their *Siqqe* institution whenever a conflict breaks out to reconcile, *ararsa*, warring members of their families, clans and the community. She commented as follows:

In my Orma community, incidences of conflicts occurred mostly during the drought seasons. I remember how warriors used to raid the Pokomo farmers of their produce. We didn’t welcome these as women; we wanted always to live in peace with our neighbors. Although we were consulted as elders in our community before the outbreak of hostilities, our decisions were not final; our roles were mostly advisory as the decisions were taken by men. We don’t go to war; we stay home and pray for our husbands, sons, and brothers to come back home alive. We do this as a sign of peace… We dislike wars! 119

The young women’s comments both from the Orma and the Pokomo communities on the question of the role of traditional institutions, revealed that unlike the times of their grandmothers [pre-colonial period], today’s young women can express their views on anything regardless of age. On the matters of peacemaking, from what their mother told them, some of the young women revealed that in the pre-colonial period “older women monopolized everything.” When I asked how this changed over time, a 30-year-old Pokomo woman, Gamachana Buko, amid interruptions from her crying child, explained that:

In my generation I can say something to an older woman or man and they would listen to me but not during my grandmother’s period. In those days, young women were thought of as inexperienced and were not involved in something like settling disputes…With changes, I mean the modern education, young people have chances now and are involved in their communities’ development… And that is why I am involved in peace-building in my community. 120

Through the *Siqqe* institution, women learned, performed and nurtured relationships among themselves that encouraged an ethic of co-operation. Perhaps, the most telling evidence of the *Siqqe* institution’s significance that the women enacted and achieved was explained by a

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119 Habona Dara, interview by Fatuma Boru, 28 May 2008.
60-year-old Orma woman named Harufa Garo. Her explanation of *Siqqe* is typical in the way it privileged women’s will and power over that of men, especially after giving birth. Harufa asserted that:

According to the old ways, *Siqqe* was a form of women’s network; Women are neither in men’s Gada, [generation genealogy] nor in men’s Hariyya [age-sets]. Married women belong to their husband’s hariyya. But its *Siqqe* which gives women the rights to form sisterhood. During ceremonies, elderly women use their *Siqqe* to bless members of their communities…. *Siqqe* is held so that the person seeking blessings passes under it… Most significant, during the postpartum period, women are secluded for forty days as a way of cleansing the body and a way to give them a period of rest. In such circumstances, husbands are not allowed to meet sexually with their wives. Also, wife beating, characteristic of Orma men as a sign of love for their wives, is considered highly offensive during this seclusion… If a husband beats his wife during the postpartum period, the woman reports to the elderly women who will deal with the matter as per the community’s cultural norms. The women will protest against such a man, and all married women are supposed to join in such protests to show their solidarity for one another. Such a case is punishable through a fine imposed in the form of a goat, to be slaughtered for the victim. All the women joined in to perform this ritual as a way of cleansing the community of an evil spirit and reconciling the two parties.121

When I asked how the women offenders were punished, a 73-year-old woman, Alamitu Sora responded that in the case of a woman offender, she would be suspended from the routine women’s meetings and gatherings for an indefinite time as punishment because such offenders weaken the group’s solidarity.122

Some of the young women participants from the Orma communities commented that some of the practices like, women’s network and solidarity for one another, continued into the post-colonial period. Gumato Rasa asserted that “it was because of such practices that they were able to mobilize themselves to form a women’s grassroots organization to preach peace in their community.”123 However, from the collective memories of the Orma women interviewed, it was confirmed that the *Siqqe* institution has undergone much transformation; in particular the institution eroded under colonialism with the establishment of native courts as well as chiefs’ posts which gave most conciliatory and judicial responsibilities to men and left out women.

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121 Harufa Garo, interview by Fatuma Boru, 3 July 2008.
Archival research from the colonial report for the Tana River District reveals that in the 1950s, none of the chiefs appointed by the colonial administrators were women. All the names listed were of males.\(^{124}\) Thus, the British colonial system abolished these traditional systems of governance and directly or indirectly demobilized and subjugated both the power and authority of the Orma women, especially in their roles in peace-making.

When asked if they possessed any characteristics that made them especially suited to peacemaking and conflict resolution, the older Orma women interviewed collectively explained that a balance existed between the power of a man and woman in every aspect of their lives during the pre-colonial period. This is important, but for this to occur, they remarked that peace is a prerequisite as explained below:

We are a peace-loving community. As women, because of our life bearing capabilities, our traditions and culture regards us highly. Prayers in general and particularly peace prayers conducted through us [women] are always full of blessings. But, this tradition has faded in this new generation [twentieth century]; we know this defines us, it is our role, a gift bestowed to us by Waq, God, practiced by generations before us…\(^{125}\)

The young women, however, responded to this question with comments, especially linked to the reasons for their involvement in all women grassroots activities: that women are patient, good listeners and were more flexible. According to them, all these were qualities needed for grassroots activism.

Among the Pokomo women interviewed, traditional institutions did not feature much in their history. A 73-year-old, Hadhula Jillo, looked backward and forward across generations to give me a history of her community, historia za kale [ways of long ago]. According to Hadhula, pre-colonial Pokomo culture recognized the important roles women played generally in her community. She explained that:

Before the white’s man rule, women held as many positions of power and responsibilities as men. Things started to change when the mzungu [whites] came.

\(^{124}\) KNA: DC/TND/24/1/4, “From District Commissioner Tana River District,” to “the Manager Information Services, Nairobi,” (1951), 12.
\(^{125}\) Collective memories of four Orma women, Habona, Alamitu Sora, Hasaghale Panya and Guyato Buna, interview by Fatuma Boru, 15 July 2008.
They imposed their system and culture on us, Pokomo… We could not follow our traditions. Our roles as women to our families and communities were disrupted, and we were turned into helpless victims.\textsuperscript{126}

The sources from the Kenya National Archives only mention without providing any details that Pokomo women had an organization of their own called \textit{Vara}. The interviews, however, revealed that during the pre-colonial period, this organization, \textit{Vara}, was based on an age-sets system and served women’s collective interests. It was closely linked with their husbands’ age-set. The Pokomo participants collectively revealed the role women played through this organization to minimize conflict:

According to the traditions of our ancestors, elderly women settled disputes between husband and wife or wives, between women themselves. I remember my grandmother telling me how she trained young women in matters of peacemaking. She would be called upon especially when a girl was about to get married. Girls had to learn how to live with a husband and his family peacefully; girls had to learn how to settle disputes. I remember particularly, how my grandmother used to tell me, “you must learn how to reconcile warring people, it has first to start from your own families, here at home.” It is the same now for me, I teach my son’s children and our neighbor’s children on the importance of peace… \textit{Nashukuru} [I am grateful] to my now deceased grandmother… She taught me a very useful skill.\textsuperscript{127}

A 50-year-old retired teacher from the Pokomo community, Hamaro Bahola described how the area of domestic conflict has changed in the post-colonial period. She narrated her experiences of settling disputes in her own paternal family:

In this era [post-colonial period] things have changed, a woman can settle disputes regardless of age unlike the pre-colonial period. Myself, I do make peace in my family. I remember one incident in my family where my ability to settle disputes was most successful. When my father died at age 80, there was a dispute between my two brothers over land. My father died abruptly and he did not leave his will. My elder brother wanted to have all the plots left by my father in his name and this did not go well with my younger brother. I had to intervene as their sister, although at first it was not easy for me. My eldest brother in particular, was not ready to listen to me, “you are just a woman, what do you have to tell me?”

\textsuperscript{126} Hadhula Jillo, interview by Fatuma Boru, 9 June 2008.

\textsuperscript{127} Collective memories of Pokomo women: Hadhula Jilo and Mwanahamisi Dulla, interview by Fatuma Boru, 26 July 2008.
But I did not give up, I kept on talking to them; when finally one day, they agreed to meet in my house to settle the land dispute… I tell you, I was very happy. After the first meeting, we met for almost a week until my eldest brother finally decided to share the land equally with my younger brother…

When I asked Hamaro if the elder brother’s resistance to listening to her was because of her sex, the response was yes. Hamaro confided that this happened in her community when it came to crucial decision-making processes, but she never gives up. She said she fights back when necessary.

The Role of Traditional Education and Artistic Expression

Both the Orma and Pokomo women saw education and storytelling as one of the important strategies to promote peace and understanding in their community. This was conducted from childhood, and individuals underwent an endless process of socialization, with the mothers and grandmothers as a role model for girls, while the boys looked up to their fathers and grandfathers. Children were taught their community’s customs and traditions, for example, on morality, ethics and aesthetics as well as how to live with other children peacefully. Children’s education can be understood in relation to women’s greater contribution in socializing children into acquiring such values. Hasaghale Panya, a 75-year-old Orma woman described how traditional education was conducted in her community during the pre-colonial period. She commented that at various stages in life, the Orma conducted initiation ceremonies for both boys and girls, and it was during the seclusion period that both girls and boys were trained:

Girls at puberty are specifically trained in their duties and responsibilities by their mothers… But when the girls are about to be married, the responsibility is transferred to an elderly woman. This could be a grandmother, and if the grandmother is not alive, any well respected elderly woman in the village can take on this responsibility. Girls are taught how to conduct themselves in their matrimonial homes, and especially how to be a role model for stability and peace.

When asked how the traditional education on peace differed from what the children are now socialized into acquiring, a 31-year-old Pokomo interviewee, Riziki Komora, expressed her opinion:

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129 Hasaghale Panya, interview by Fatuma Boru, 18 May 2008.
[We] mothers are still pillars of our community. We bear responsibilities for bringing up children and teaching them all important aspects of life like peaceful co-existence with the neighbors’ children. I tell my children the disadvantages of violence, and children learn from observation, from what their parents practice. I teach my children basic things like sharing foods and play toys with other children. What is different from our grandmother’s or mother’s time is that children are taught by two different people, teachers and parents, and children tend to learn so fast. Modern schools also play important roles in our children’s peace education, children are now involved in advocating for peace through school activities like drama festivals; children also pass their messages of peace through songs performed at peace meetings and other activities associated with community peace-building.130

The question of artistic expression tied in with the theme on the education of children on peace issues. In traditional African societies, storytelling, songs and proverbs were used as education tools. Most women interviewed confirmed this. The songs, stories, and proverbs were used as a medium of communication between the adults and children. For example, the women in their interviews mentioned many stories that described greed and individual interests as major sources of conflict. These stories revolved around wild animals, like the hyena, known mostly for greediness. Many stories told to children were meant to inculcate values such as fairness, responsibility and even punishment for those who break community norms out of greed or self-interest. Such stories were also told to discourage conflict and hostilities as a 65-year-old Pokomo woman, Mwanahamisi Dulla recalled:

As young children I remember my mother and grandmother telling my siblings and me about long ago stories. We used to huddle together in front of the evening fire, listening carefully. Some of those stories were about animals like hyenas. We were told that hyenas were greedy, and those people who behaved like hyenas were frowned at in the community. If you are greedy you want everything to be yours, you are selfish and this is a bad vice that can create conflict, and we were warned not to be like hyena. Stories we were told as children emphasized values like honesty. Now it is the same stories I tell my grandchildren, although most of today’s children are no longer interested in the stories of long ago that we tell. Modern education has taken children’s time away and it is difficult to get a child to listen to you…131

130 Riziki Komora, interview by Fatuma Boru, 5 July 2008.
131 Mwanahamisi Dulla, interview by Fatuma Boru, 10 June 2008.
The Orma women interviewed also revealed that songs played important roles especially in women’s lives. Women used songs to pass messages to men folk. Guyato Buna, a 65 year-old Orma woman explained:

As women, we are normally not invited to men’s meetings. But whenever the signs of wars and conflict are noted, we have our way of signaling each other. Indirectly, we made our feelings known about the subject by singing songs that ridiculed and criticized unwise decisions taken by men.132

**Marriage between Different Cultures as a Way of Promoting Peace**

Most interviewees commented that women always related well to one another regardless of their ethnic background, and most of them do so even in the situation of conflict.

A 31-year-old Pokomo woman, Gamachana Buko, commented:

Modern times are not like the times of our ancestors who were used to marrying only from a certain culture, I mean, an ethnic group of their own. Nowadays different people marry from different cultures; we as Pokomo, today we marry from Orma, Luo, and many other ethnic groups. Although the most important factor in marriage is love, I view marriage as a link to break hostilities because it is through women that a strong kinship is established across different cultures.133

The young women, from both the Orma and the Pokomo commented that women from different ethnic groups related well, unlike men during conflict. A 70-year-old Orma woman, Hasora Abagudo, supported this sentiment and said:

During conflict, women can maintain good relationships with women from other ethnic groups. For example, during the late 1990s ethnic clashes between the Pokomo and the Orma, as men fought, women, at the background, continued to trade together. Pokomo sold bananas and grains to the Orma. From the Orma, we bought milk and meat.134

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132 Hajibo Halkano, interview by Fatuma Boru, 5 July 2008.
134 Hasora Abagudo, interview by Fatuma Boru, 17 June 2008.
The Role of Women’s Organizations: Tana River Women for Peace (TRWP)

Tana River Women for Peace (TRWP) is a grassroots organization formed to advocate for peace in the district. Grassroots leaders, according to J.P. Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, are those who use existing networks to incorporate new programs and projects to encourage peace and conflict resolution. In the case of the TRWP the chairlady wanted the women to speak for themselves and did not participate in the interviews. Instead, she helped me to identify some of the women to interview in her group. She also gave me a brief history of TRWP. The organization was formed in 2001 by women in Tana River District. The organization has forty members comprising all the ethnic groups in the district, and this membership is expected to grow. Since its inception, according to the chairlady, the organization managed to have one training session in the field of peace building and conflict resolution for its members through the Kenyan Government Arid Land Resource Management Program (ALRMP).

TRWP’s strength is in the women’s network, knowledge and experiences that each of the members bring to the group. This is not based on any specialized training but driven by the sheer will to resolve conflict in the district and the determination to create a peaceful environment for current and future generations. The major activity of the organization is door-to-door peace talk, from one village to another, and also to the neighboring districts especially during the early warning signs of conflict. This is carried out in conjunction with the major Kenyan Government sponsored peace organization in the district: Tana River Peace, Development, and Reconciliation Committee (TRPDC). The organization’s major challenge, according to the chairlady, was lack of finance which inhibited the women’s activities. She also added that some areas were difficult to access because of poor roads.

Because of time constraints, I interviewed only two of its members, one from the Pokomo and the other from the Orma community. Both the Orma and the Pokomo participants, especially the younger women with their comments drew my attention to the great potential of women in peacemaking and conflict resolution. They commented that peace-building is a voluntarily work because of their love for peace. They also added that women suffered most during conflict.

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136 TRPDC is an umbrella peace and development organization in Tana River District. For more details see [www.iss.co.za/pubs/monographs/no95/Chap6.pdf](http://www.iss.co.za/pubs/monographs/no95/Chap6.pdf).
situations, as has been the case with some countries in Africa, and that is why they advocated for peace and played a major role in negotiations for peace at the grassroots level. Like the older women, who revealed that during the colonial period, their roles in peacemaking were compromised, the younger women also lamented that they were not consulted in decision-making in the post-colonial era. A 33-year-old Orma woman, Hajibo Halkano commented:

I love peace and that is why I volunteered to be a member of Tana Women for Peace. However, most women are normally not engaged in the actual decision-making process. We participate only at the grassroots level, which, of course, is the most crucial phase. It would have been good if the government and community-based organizations involved us in the decision-making process during and after conflict. I personally feel that the current political culture tends to marginalize women when it comes to decision-making and the official negotiation of peace.137

When I asked the participants how they managed household chores and peace activities, all the young women responded that it was always challenging to balance the two. This was not the case with the older women and most commented “all our children are now grown-ups, we have less responsibilities.” Below is a comment from a young Pokomo woman, Riziki Komora:

I always plan my time. My day starts at 6 or even 5 A.M depending on the schedule for the day [She yawns]. I have to prepare breakfast, get the children ready for school. After that, I turn to cleaning utensils, clothes and everything that needs to be done for the day. [I] then prepare lunch. In our peace group we don’t meet regularly, once or twice per month. But if [we] have some special activities, we meet between 3PM and 5PM during the weekdays… Our once or twice per month meetings, [we] do it on the weekends when there is no school.138

When I asked the women how their husbands reacted to their peacemaking roles, most young women responded that their husbands supported them to participate in peace-building activities.

**The Use of Coffee Ritual as a Symbol of Peace**

The use of coffee ritual as a symbol of peace among the Orma women was emphasized by the women interviewed. Coffee, referred to as *buna* in the Oromo language,139 originated

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137 Hajibo Halkano, interview by Fatuma Boru, 23 July 2008.
from Ethiopia as early as the nineteenth century. More specifically, coffee is thought to have originated from the highland areas inhabited by the Oromo people. This is proved by the importance of coffee in various Oromo rituals, for example, in the *buna qala* ritual among Oromo women. Also P.T.W. Baxter “Oromo blessings and greetings,” in *The Creative Communion: African Folk Models of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life*, described coffee as central in the ritual life of women. He notes that “coffee beans, like cowries . . . stand for women; in heightened speech they are both used as metonyms for women.”

The interviews I conducted with the Orma women also proved the association of coffee with women. According to the oral traditions of the Orma as narrated by Hasora Abagudo, the use of coffee in peace prayers was a part of traditions and customs they imported from Ethiopia, and spread as they migrated. It is interesting to note how coffee is used as a symbol of peacemaking among the Orma Oromo. I must confess that I grew up watching my grandmother preparing coffee rituals for prayers, and the Orma women rekindled my childhood memories when they demonstrated to me how they prepared and used coffee rituals to pray for peace. The women prepared the coffee berries by roasting them in some cooking oil to which later some water and fresh milk were added. This mixture, called *torr* in the Orma local language, was sweetened by adding a little sugar. In other coffee rituals, the *torr* was drunk and the cooked coffee beans chewed by both men and women. However, coffee ritual prayers for peace were solely women’s ritual specializations. An elderly woman in the group recited some special prayers generally and specifically for peace. Special incense, called *lubadin* in the local language, was burned using a charcoal fire in a traditional earthen ware vessel called *idina*. Hassaghale, recited these prayers as: “*Elle Buna munagees, wor orma nagaa nutoch,*” meaning, “let the coffee ritual bring peace and make us a peaceful and blessed community.” These ceremonies with coffee and the accompanying prayers symbolized peacemaking practices among the Orma women, and were as important as their literal peacemaking interventions.

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141 Ibid., 239-240.
142 Hasora Abagudo, interview by Fatuma Boru, 28 July 2008.
143 Hassaghale Panya, interview by Fatuma Boru, 18 May 2008.
CHAPTER FIVE
Conclusions and Areas for Further Research

The oral interviews conducted with the Orma and the Pokomo women demonstrated that women in peace-making were not stereotypes. Men and women played a complementary role that signifies power possessed by both. Each woman had a strong sense of how peacemaking should be done, and of how it was done in her mother’s or grandmother’s days. The lived experiences of the 13 women interviewed offered insights into the roles women played to minimize conflicts, and thus the interviews supported my assumption that despite socio-cultural issues that affect gender relations in traditional African societies, women played a significant role in the peacemaking and conflict resolution processes. Their individual and collective experiences not only paint a picture of how they were active participants in peacemaking in their communities, but also how women’s roles in peacemaking and conflict resolution changed over time. The interviews also highlighted the many meanings of the concept of peace in East Africa.

Each of the women interviewed, narrated her roles in peacemaking and conflict resolution, and each of their stories highlighted changes they witnessed, and also some continuities. In the colonial period, the older women told of how their roles in peacemaking changed, women’s roles were not appreciated. The elder women, as indicated by the interviews, lost their powers in traditional peacemaking and conflict resolution during the colonial period. In the post-colonial era, the interviews with the young women also revealed changes. Gamachana Buko and Hamaro Bahola’s stories showed that young women witnessed a breakthrough in terms of their active participation in peacemaking unlike the pre-colonial period, where older women “dominated” peacemaking and conflict resolution roles and the rituals involved.

Also, change is reflected in the stories women narrated on the education of future peacemakers (children). In Hasaghale’s story, in the pre-colonial period, the education of children in the matters of peacemaking and conflict resolution was mainly informal, and verbal; children learned from the previous generation. Also, the education of children was a communal affair, not only done by parents, but also by grandparents and other elders in the village. It is also evident from her story that the roles that children learned were sex specific. For example, girls were socialized to become good mothers and wives. They were also expected to have abilities in
peace-making and conflict resolution. Children were also taught through story telling as evidenced in the story told by Mwanahamisi Dulla. In the colonial and post-colonial period, the education of children not only became formal and diversified, but also children learned from both the parents and the teachers, as shown in the interview with Riziki Komora.

All of the women I interviewed agreed on the education of children as an essential component of peacemaking. Mothers socialize children to acquire a culture of peace and to reject conflict and hostilities. The education of children was conducted both by the parents and the grandparents. In the pre-colonial period, the women’s traditional institutions, *Siqqe* and *Vara*, played a significant role in the evolution of the culture of peace. The women’s stories revealed the roles grandmothers and mothers played in socializing girls into acquiring family peace values and in encouraging social solidarity among women. This was the biggest and most positive single factor of continuity, women’s solidarity with one another. The interviews showed that in these women’s lives, there was a high level of interactions in terms of networking. Their stories speak to the nature of peace-building activities. Their collaborations, solidarity, connection with families and communities were all important factors in developing an environment of peace.

When speaking of their experiences, especially the older women did not describe themselves as being marginalized but saw themselves as social actors within their domain and specialized rituals.

When most African countries regained their independence in the twentieth century, the newly independent states inherited policies developed under the colonial system. What continued from the pre-colonial period into the colonial and the post-colonial period was that though active, women were invisible in the decision-making. We learn this from both the older and the younger women’s stories. The older women said they participated in discouraging conflicts in their communities through their “background roles,” but the final decisions rested with men. Similarly, in the post-colonial era, from the story of Hajibo Halkano, the lack of women’s representation in the formal decision-making is evident.

In the post-colonial era, women’s grassroots organizations have played important roles in building a culture of peace. From the interviews, the important roles such organizations played were exemplified by the Tana River Women for Peace (TRWP). The organization acted as a venue through which the women participated in and practiced peacemaking in their communities. It also gave the women the opportunity to express themselves when, as so often
happened, they had been left out of formal decision-making by the government and Non-Governmental Organizations. In many ways, women have also been excluded from accounts of decision-making during and after conflict through the interplay of gender roles and the image of men as portrayed in the traditional peace and war theories. Although the women in this study were marginalized, in the sense that they were excluded from formal decision-making, their stories told more of the women’s sense of belonging and community than of marginality.

Although traditional ideas about gender roles continued to pose challenges to women in general and, in particular in their peace-making roles, it did not deter the interviewees from their pursuit of peace-making. The story of Hamaro Bahola, who, despite her elder brother’s resentment, helped settle land disputes between the elder and the younger brother, is typical of the difficulties women faced because of their sex. Most importantly, her story reflects the ways in which women dealt with such problems. Another way in which gender roles may have proved challenging is described in the story told by Riziki Komora. She emphasized the order of her work that reflects the daily gendered roles of all women in her group. Although balancing their household chores and peace activities posed a challenge, some of the young participants said that their husbands did not oppose their participation in peace-building activities.

The most significant and interesting change as noted in the stories told by women is the meaning of “peace.” The international context of peace-building has undergone changes since the mid-1990s. This is so because of the changing nature of conflict as well as of the ways in which nations and international organizations continue to redefine the roles of those affected by conflicts, of women in particular.144 This was further exemplified by the United Nations adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000.145 It was the first legal document that recognized both women’s rights and their participation in peace negotiations. This has not only motivated women around the world, and in particular in areas prone to conflict, but has also changed the meaning of peace around the world. The stories told by the women interviewed reflected their own views of the meaning of peace. Their views varied by age. The older women defined peace in a more narrow way to mean the absence of conflict within their communities. The younger women defined peace in a broader way. For Gumato Rasa peace is

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www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf
not a mere absence of war or conflict, but also it means the equality of the sexes. This is in line with the argument advanced by the United Nations in *The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* which defined peace as including “not only the absence of war, violence and hostilities… but also the enjoyment of economic and social justice, equality and the entire range of human rights and fundamental freedoms within society.”

Finally, the experiences and roles women played in peacemaking, based on the interviews from the thirteen women, are not meant as generalizations, but rather as ideas that might be developed from their words for further studies. A full picture of the role of women in peacemaking and conflict resolution in Tana River District cannot be compiled from focusing only in one of its region, Galole Division. There are many divisions in the district. Tana River District is one of the oldest districts in Kenyan history. It is also one of the districts in Kenya where farmers and pastoralists co-exist, apart from its close proximity to the war-town Republic of Somalia. Considering these other divisions in Tana River District, in my future work, in addition to interviewing many more women, I would like to pose the following questions: How did peace-making practices in pastoralists’ communities compare with the agriculturalist communities or even with women in other parts of Africa? Does the historical association of Tana River District with the NFD affect how the contemporary peace-building efforts are handled? What impact does the close proximity of Tana River District to war-torn Somalia have on peace-building efforts in general, and in particular, on the role of women peacemakers? How can stories of contemporary African women in peace-making be incorporated into female pedagogy to explore how negotiations in gender related issues changed through time? What historical significance can we draw from one sex peace organizations in the context of African traditions? Answers to these questions will not only bring more understanding of the roles of African women, and Kenyan women in particular in peace-making, but the complexity and dynamics of women’ roles in peace-making and conflict resolution will be more appreciated.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Statistics:

Name:

Age:

Marital Status:

Occupation:

1. What do you understand by the word “peace”?
2. Do you remember any incidences of conflicts between the Orma and Pokomo? If yes, explain.
3. Were you ever involved in peacemaking in your family or community?
4. Are there any traditional women’s institutions in your community that are involved in peacemaking and conflict resolution? If the answer to the above question is yes, could you describe some of these institutions and how they function? Do these institutions still exist?
5. Do you have any symbols of peace in your community? If yes, could you describe them?
6. Do you educate your children about peace? If yes, explain some of the ways you use to educate children in your community?
7. Do you have any peace ritual/s performed specifically during peacemaking in your community? If yes, could you describe them?
8. During the colonial times, were women involved in peacemaking? If yes, explain how they carried out this role? Were there any changes? If yes, explain?
9. In the post-colonial era, do women get a chance to participate in decision making during peace building in your community?
10. Does modernization affect the role women play in peacemaking? If the answer to this question is yes, how?
11. As a peacemaker what are the specific activities that you perform which contribute to peace building?
12. How do women from two conflicting communities during ethnic conflicts relate?
13. In your own opinion, do marriages from different cultures minimize conflict? If yes, please explain?
14. Do you think gender bias incapacitates you as a peacemaker? If yes, what methods did you use to cope with this problem as a peacemaker?
15. Do you have any other thought about peacemaking and conflict resolution you would like to share with me?
APPENDIX 2: RESEARCH PERMIT

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT:
Prof./Dr./Mr./Mrs./Miss. FATUMA
....BOGU

of (Address) ....MIAMI UNIVERSITY
....USA

has been permitted to conduct research in
....TANA RIVER Location,
....COAST District,
....KENYA Province,

on the topic ....WOMEN AND PEACE-KEEPING
...INVESTIGATING RULE OF WOMEN IN
...PEACE-KEEPING
....30th AUG. 20__ OR

for a period ending ........., 20___
APPENDIX 3: OROMO NEIGHBOURS

Source: Courtesy of the Kenya National Archives (KNA).
APPENDIX 4: NFD BOUNDARIES

Adopted from Nene Mburu, 2005:20

Northern Frontier Districts(NFD) Boundaries- - - - -
APPENDIX 4: OROMOS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Source: Courtesy of the Kenya National Archive
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