

**TURKANA-DASSENACH CONFLICT: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES
MASTER'S DEGREE THESIS BY PATRICK RICHARD DEVINE.
INSTITUTE OF PEACE STUDIES AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,
HEKIMA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE – A CONSTITUENT COLLEGE OF
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA.**

**SUPERVISORS: PROF. WANAKAYI K. OMOKA, PHD, AND DR. ROBERT
MUDIDA
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PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

To contribute to understanding of the dynamics of Turkana-Dassenach conflict today in terms of historical and contemporary causes, factors and their consequences.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

To Identify and delineate the causes of Turkana-Dassenach conflict and their consequences.

THEORY

Human Needs Theory by John Burton (1997).

This theory posits that we believe that the human participants in conflict situations are compulsively struggling in their respective institution arrangements at all social levels to satisfy primordial and universal needs - needs as security, identity, recognition and development. They strive increasingly to gain the control of their environment that is necessary to ensure the satisfaction of these needs.

Design, data, and analysis

One-off cross-sectional sample survey (n=300 respondents divided equally between Turkana and Dassenach), and cross-tabulation mode of analysis.

Causes and Findings

First research question: To what extent does scarcity of natural resources contribute to the Turkana-Dassenach conflict occurrences?

Scarcity of natural resources (usually water and pasture) contributes to the conflict to a large extent. In one of the cross classification pertaining to this question 70% (n=210) of the respondents said that scarcity does so. The causes are vagaries of climate/weather, that is, prolonged drought and, at times, downpour resulting in destructive floods. These vagaries cannot be controlled by humankind's actions. Their aftermath typically witnesses occurrences of intercommunal conflict, the purpose of which is to recoup loses of livestock stemming from vagaries and the like.

Second research question: Does contested ownership of territory lead to conflict?

- The answer as per cross classification of relevant variables was positive. A territorial area with natural resources does cause competition between members of these ethnic communities which, in turn, leads to violent conflict between them, as the case may be. Some territorial areas (for example, high land) are valued more than others because they have better quality pasture. This causes competition for control over them. Often times the competition leads to conflict on account of the resources therein, precisely because the ethnic community in control tries to prevent the neighbouring ethnic other (Turkana/Dassenach) from using the resource.

Third research question: To what extent are Turkana-Dassenach conflict situations attributable to state weakness?

- This has to do with the fact of insignificant and ineffective state presence or visibility particularly in the conflict zone. In other words, provision – or lack thereof – of very few security personnel to patrol the interface’s hot spots and its environs, between Turkanas and Dassenachs, as well as the absence of other human security structures required to meet the welfare needs of the local people. A government’s exercise of authority within its territorial boundaries should be monopolistic. This monopoly should include the exercise of legitimate violence. When authority is not effective, legitimacy is watered down and, consequently, non-governmental actors resort to illegitimate violence to achieve their ends. This state of affairs obtains in the Turkana-Dassenach conflict environment. Poor state security was found to be a major contributor to the conflict. Virtual lack of government authority in the conflict environment was demonstrated by the data of this research to be implicated in the existence and nature of this perennial conflict. The lack of significant authority in the face of extremely limited and insufficient institutional welfare provision is invariably at the centre of Turkana-Dassenach conflict in terms of its causation.

Fourth research question: How does cultural variation account for incidents of ethnic conflict?

- The finding was cultural in two senses, viz, the tendency by Turkana to essentialize Dassenachs and vice versa, meaning the Turkana/Dassenach have certain attributes which make them to be what they are and not like anyone else. Essentializing the ethnic other (Turkana/Dassenach) is a recipe for interethnic conflict. There is hardly any doubt on that score. The other sense was culture as something which uses people rather than something which people use. Moranism and its behavioural expression in the form of aggression (raiding) against the ethnic other bespeaks culture using people. On the one hand these communities hugely depend on pastoralism for livelihood, and on the other hand the conflict between them is inextricably linked as an effect with pastoralism. This state of affairs implies to a large extent that diversification of livelihood away from pastoralism will lead to a considerable decrease of occurrences of inter-communal attack and counter-attacks.

Fifth research question: Are pursuits of political and economic interests implicated in Turkana-Dassenach conflict?

- The findings indicated that the pursuits are implicated in the conflict. The dynamics of the interests at national level have led to Turkana and Dassenach receiving increasingly unequal shares of the rewards of national development praxis because it is negatively skewed in their direction. Specially, by and large they live on the margins of the national society in that they are denied access to important positions and symbols of economic and political power within the society. They experience deprivation of resources (such as financial capital) and social network links to the centre of state power and legitimacy where policy decisions that affect them are made. Their localized inter-communal violent conflict occurrences are significantly due to this state of affairs.

Sixth research question: Does proliferation of small arms fuel conflict?

- A lot has been said and written in connection with small arms - how easy it is to access them, how to disarm these communities (Turkanas more than Dassenach), how their preference and use of them in most, if not all, inter-communal aggression (attacks/raids/revenge/stealing) lends credence to the notion of government failure to end the occurrence of localized inter communal violence, and the like. Respondents denied that small arms fuel inter-ethnic conflict (that is, they do not acquire small arms to fight the neighbouring ethnic other). They stated categorically and in no uncertain terms that they have to possess firearms for dual reasons, viz, human security - to secure their lives against attack by the ethnic other; and to protect their livestock from getting raided/stolen by the ethnic other. Pastoralism necessarily entails possession of firearms on account of these two reasons. Surrendering the small arms to the government authorities has failed because it is at once involuntary and acquiescence under conditions of unequal power. Since pastoralism entails possession of small arms, about the only workable – and successfully so - strategy of disarming is for the government to initiate social development projects and human security institutions that diversify livelihood away from pastoralism, thereby leading to atrophy of possession of firearms - rendering possession of them needless.

Seventh research question: Is there a partisan component in the role of non-governmental organizations working among the Turkana and Dassenach?

- Based on the data of this study non-governmental organizations are by and large non-partisan. Being partisan means engaging in advocacy activities in the interest of these ethnic communities by faulting the powers that be or the establishment and, at times, doing things that run counter to government's policy practices. The work of non-governmental organisations in these communities complements what the government does. Indeed, in some areas, locals know and they can mention what these non-state actors (for example, the church) has done for them, but not what the government has done for them. Besides, results of data analysis also indicated that non-governmental organisations do not take sides in the localised inter-ethnic conflict, that is, they do not side with one against the other. The Catholic Church - by far the major non-state actor in terms of nurturing peaceful coexistence between Turkana and Dassenach – does not discriminate between them. Thus, for example, its school at Todonyang (in Turkana land) in Kenya is attended by Turkanas as well as Dassenach from the Ethiopian side of the Kenya-Ethiopia border. According to the data of this study - generated through questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, group interviews (that is, focused group discussion) - no non-governmental organisation, be it faith-based or not, working in the northwestern Kenya-southwestern Ethiopia region on conflict/peace affairs was ordered to stop its work and leave the region. Non-governmental organisations do not need the government (except providing human security for them) to work in this region; but government needs them to work in the region because they do some of what the government would have to do or should do if they were not there. If there is a sense in which some aspects of their conflict/peace work smacks of partisanship or advocacy, it is tolerated because it neither harms conflict transformation/peacebuilding efforts nor undermines the legitimacy of states authority.

Note: The above is a summary of the findings of the research. Rev. Patrick. R. Devine holds an MA in Peace Studies and International Relations, and a PhD in Political Science and Public Administration. He is the founder and International Chairman of the Shalom Centre for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (SCCRR). For more information, see <https://shalomconflictcenter.org/>