



# Causes, Trends, Impacts and Resolutions of Baragoi Conflict- *Samburu County Kenya: An Analysis of how the conflict has impacted on gendered identities*

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## ABSTRACT

The post-cold war era continues to experience high levels of violence and instability. The focus on threats to individuals compels a shift in conflict analysis to integrate multiple perspectives. The protracted violent *Samburu* and *Turkana* conflict has been attributed to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, political incitement, competition over scarce and diminishing water and pastures, celebration of a culture of heroism that elevates the social status of raiders, the decline of the role community elders, marginalisation by successive governments and little presence of state security. Gender relations in Baragoi is extremely unequal, *Samburu* women face high levels of exclusion, violence and poverty. Women serve as proxy actors in the conflict. Culture and identity continues to play a crucial role in the dynamics of the conflict. The essentialist masculine assumptions of gender roles primarily confine women as victims, war widows, or heroic mothers, which gives little room for Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD). In this paper, the author examines how gendered identities have impacted on the causal factors, trends, impact and resolution of the conflict. To sum up the discussion the author proposes remedies to the conflict part of which includes political will to reinforce existing human rights laws and legislations as well as promotion of alternative sources of livelihood.

**Keywords:** Identities, inequality, culture, livelihoods

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“According to (Lenairoshi 2014:9) although, Kenya is considered a relatively peaceful country, a closer scrutiny reveals an unprecedented wave of internal and protracted cross border conflicts”. The Pastoral communities have been perpetrators and victims of conflict (Lamphear 1976). One such lethal conflict is evident in Baragoiin Samburu County. “Baragoi, has been described as the “epicenter of intertribal violence” (Mkutu 2005:31) and as a “new center of violence” (Mkutu 2005:314). It has also been described as the ‘Valley of Death’ (Standard 2012) due to its more recent association

with the November 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 massacre of 42 police officers after a botched police operation to recover raided livestock”. The principal aggressors of the conflict are *Ewaso Rongai* in Samburu North and *Kawa* from Turkana (Lenairoshi 2014: 14). Proxy actors include; the Pokot from Baringo County and *Rendille* from Isiolo County (Rosa: 2016:59). “Conflict

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has economic, social and psychological effects the magnitude of these effects may have a strong gender variation thus the reason for gender analysis of this crisis (Byrne 1996 cited in Obuyi 2020:14)". In pursuit to have a comprehensive analysis of the conflict the author analysis how the causes, trends and resolutions have impacted on the gendered identities.

### **Social, Economic, Political Cultural and Security Dynamics**

One important hypothesis concerning the causes of violent conflict focuses on the presence of major 'horizontal inequalities' and social exclusion, particularly when they coincide with identity or regional boundaries this may increase a society's predisposition towards violence (Brown *et al.* 2007:222). Further, (Berndt *et al.* 2013:6-7) notes that exclusion and marginalisation take place in the periphery of the state, where development and security provision do not represent a priority of the Central Government. This is reflected by Samburu County, deplorable social, economic and security indicators; (KNBS, 2019) points out to 71.4% poverty rate. The low socio-economic indicators are further aggravated by unprecedented low literacy levels depicted with only approximately 34% of population with ability to read and write (Samburu County CIDP:2018-2022:58).

*Conflicts in the North rift region of Kenya are thought to be part and parcel of a pastoral culture and livelihood. However, in recent years, emerging threats such as adverse climate change, failed state making processes, border insecurity; compounded with transnational crimes such as proliferation of arms, commercialisation of livestock raiding, predation of cultural practices and neglect for traditional conflict-solving mechanisms, has transcended the conflict to lethal security threats (CEWARN, 2005)."*

Contextualizing above trends ((KNBS: 2013:11) reveal variation in gendered poverty and social indicators; Samburu Gender Inequality Index score of Samburu County's Gini index is 0.318 points to the substantial marginalisation of women. Under increasing climate stress, women in communities'

dependent on mobile and sedentary livestock breeding in Samburu adopt more traditionally masculine roles, as men migrate further to find work (Ongoroet *al.* 2011:80). This further increases their vulnerability to insecurity.

The gendered social indicators leave much to be desired (Karanuet *al.* 2015:68) presents an alarming statistics on the low quality of formal education on women and girls. Culture plays a crucial role to the low literacy levels for girls; with female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced early marriages being the leading factors contributing to (90.43%) of school drop out for girls between ages of 9-14. "Fragility and conflict affect women, men, boys and girls different however, it is widely acknowledged that fragility most negatively affects the poorest and the most vulnerable groups in society, including women and children" (Kangaset *al.* 2014:1)".

*"Gender intersects with many other issues such as economics, resources, politics, ethno national identities and religious beliefs, among others, and therefore must be integrated in the analysis in conjunction with all these aspects (Jacinta 2013:14)". In line with this gender can be a motivating factor for taking up arms, both through gendered identities and norms surrounding violent masculinities, and as a reaction to existing gender inequalities that correspond to feminism (Ide et al. 2021:45). (Wright, 2014) points out that the subordinate camouflage feminine war tactics play a crucial role in the dynamics of conflict.*

### **Causal Factors-Identities**

"There is growing evidence around the ways that the beliefs and values behind unequal gender roles and power relations are instrumental in building support for and perpetuating conflict (Wright: 2014:2)". Women play very important and subtle roles whereas men play more explicit roles in cattle rustling activities (Versity 2021:40).

*"The deeply entrenched gender-based division of labour makes the Samburu women suffers further marginalization as they bear an inordinately heavier workload than their male counterparts. Besides nurturing children, women are responsible for*

*tending livestock, gathering wood, collecting water and constructing houses. These pastoralist women are considerably poorer than their male counterparts because they are commoditized and valued as source of bride price. Additionally, the increasing economization of food items such as milk, ghee, gum resins and beeswax which were entirely the women's domain has eroded their access to these items and resulted in more malnutrition for women and their children and eroded the little power women hitherto wielded (Ibrahim et al. 1996)". In the same vein, (Rosa: 2016:58) asserts that cultural practices such as payment of dowry using livestock has sustained raids amongst the pastoral communities in Samburu and neighbouring counties, Marriage agreements are purely base on livestock which creates demand for more livestock to sustain their culture.*

These views corroborate the assertions of (Guyo, 2017), that women from pastoralist communities, in their quest for prestige through marriage contribute to conditions that lead to conflict. Feminist theory examines forms of systemic inequalities that lead to the experiences of oppression for marginalised individuals. The theory critiques, the exploitative cultural norms one being "equating payment of bridal wealth" to creating subordinate marginalized identities for women as proxy contributors in cattle rustling and yet their benefits remain inexplicit (Versity 2021:23-24). The above trends depict that violence is a lived experience (Elwert et al 1999 cited in Ibrahim et al. 1996). The gender-based division of labour is considered a primary factor that creates different levels of exposure to risks (Rossi et al. 2008).

### **Trends—Identities**

According to (Spencer 2012) there are certain customs associated with warfare; this is evident on how women reproductive roles in the Samburu and Turkana conflict are manipulated which places them at the center of the conflict as perpetrator's. "Historically, women are considered as motherly, caring and gentle and men generally regarded as prone to aggression and belligerence (Moore, 2014)". Contrary, "(Chelang'a 2020; inVersity 2021) argues that, the pastoralist women play crucial

role of nurturing the next generation of warriors. Additionally, elimination of their spouses and sons during war forms part of the key drivers in escalation of conflict.

*The young initiated Samburu;" "warriors," ages 7–14 are expected to engage in hazardous long-distance cattle herding and protection of the community and its livestock, which can involve some theft or raiding of neighbors' livestock Marmone, 2017). As in other East African contexts (Saitoti, 1986 cited in Bilinda: 2020:2) raiding has historically been an important component of the construction of Imurran masculine identity. (Bilinda: 2020) argues that girls are key protagonists in these tales as sexy, well-ornamented lovers; specifically, they shape cattle raiding; through the songs they direct towards their Imurran boyfriends. Indeed, while Samburu women do not have formal age grades, they identify themselves according to the generation of Imurran with whom they danced, and thus the songs of Imurran and girls affirm their mutual importance to one another's identities. In this regard, the culture of praising masculinity heroism has been seen a trigger for escalation of the conflict (Arero, 2007).*

It can be pointed out that culture and identity continues to play a crucial role in the escalation of the conflict, women played a major role in smuggling of arms. The male police hardly did thorough checking on women, because it was considered a taboo to inspect what a woman was carrying under her clothes unless it was done by a policewoman. The number of policewomen was low, because the terrain in pastoralist areas did not favor the deployment of female police officers to patrol the region. Women capitalized on this to easily transport arms from the border points of war-torn regions. (Selassie, 1999) Arguably, weapons entering Kenya from neighboring war-torn countries are making raids increasingly dangerous.

Further, Onyango (2010) (in Okumu 2016) reveal that there is close relationship between pastoralists' men and women in instigating violence. Guns are owned by men among the Turkana but the custodians of the gun within the household are women. In some cases, the gun is given a lady's

name in this case referred to as 'Nasike', to portray the closeness between a man and his firearm.

"A central aspect of the military masculinity ideal is that it is masculine to engage in combat and take lethal risks. This is linked with gendered protection norms; confirming men as protectors of women and children (Karim *et al.* 2013: 465-466). Paradoxically, recognition of women's rights in war is rooted in traditional African society and perceived as a crucial inclusion both for conventional and non-conventional warfare. "(Pratt *et al.* 2011) further argues that women's value as agents of peace and their position as mothers have made it impossible to kill a woman even if she is armed during war. This is because women were the "male combatant's wives", and if a woman is falsely killed during battle, the land must be appeased". Regrettably, the dynamics have changed over time;

*Violence among pastoralists that targets women and children in Baragoi today, reveal changes in the interpretation of female identities. While past studies argued that women and children were protected from violence though norms based on the notion that 'women belonged to everyone' as they adopted the identities of their husbands regardless of their ethnicities at birth in patrilineal societies. Targeting of women conforms to a more primordialist interpretation of identities among the Turkana and Samburu. The stringent interpretation of identities of women can also be argued to have expanded forms of violence on women such as rape, killing of milking stock and vandalism of women group investments. Stringent interpretation of ethnic identities can further be argued to have led to the diminishing of inter-ethnic marriages among the Turkana and Samburu (Okumu 2016).*

### **Resolutions-Identities**

In the traditional war setting women regarded as male combatants' wives and not independent entity (Pratt *et al.* 2011). These findings point to the fact the norms and power structures that produce the gender division of labor can also regulate and constrain women's opportunities and agency to amplify their and their families' resilience in post conflict reconstruction (Ide *et al.* 2021:47). The

restriction of women to join council of elders is one of the setbacks.

(Ongoro *et al.* 2011:80) revealed that 177 households were sampled and out of which 61.58 per cent were male headed while 38.42 per cent were female headed. Women are not allowed to head households; they only do so on special circumstances for instance if they are widowed or divorced. This increases their vulnerability and lower their stake in mitigation efforts.

### **CONCLUSION**

In view of the multifaceted nature of conflicts, peace processes need to be viewed comprehensively in order to gain a greater understanding of how initiatives at different levels of society, and their linkages, can foster sustainable peace. Kenya has diverse laws that govern the rights of women and children. These laws are grounded on both local and international instruments that are aimed at protecting the rights of women and children as well as driving them to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms fully. The Constitution does not segregate rights as belonging to either men or women but conjoins all Constitutional rights and privileges as belonging to both genders that are of particular relevance include. For instance, Article 27 notes the right to equality and freedom from discrimination; (Meriwas *et al.* 2016:11). Despite the credible legislative structures in place, its enforcement which is unfortunately wanting will go a long way into remediating the situation.

Like in many other African settings, (CEWARN: 2005) appreciates the existence of traditional conflict-solving mechanisms among the Samburu community. However, the ongoing erosion of these favorable cultural practices continues to negatively impact on the security of the community. Efforts to revamp these noble cultural practices are of paramount importance if the security of Samburu is meant for improvement.

"A cohesive society works towards the well-being of all of its members, minimizing all forms of disparities and avoiding marginalization thus decreasing inter-group animosity and insecurities.

Moreover, a cohesive society strives to build networks of relationships, trust and identity between different groups; fighting discrimination, exclusion and excessive inequalities; and enabling upward social mobility' (OECD, 2011). Samburu is among communities that have suffered marginalization in a varied development indicator. It is important therefore to review effects of the marginalization with a view to address historical injustices which will continue to impact the community negatively if it remains unchecked.

Cattle raiding as a practice are motivated by both culture and livelihood (CEWARN, 2005). Recognising the harmful effects that goes along with the practice, it is time that sensitization and inclusion of alternative sources of live hoods for the communities' considered. This will call for concerted efforts from both state and non-state actors. However, (Peatrik, 2013: 218) notes that the gendered cultural practices and gendered agency can become not merely stereotypes but also larger-than-life distractions from politically motivated conflicts over land and resources.

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