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Colonial and post-colonial changes and impact on pastoral women's roles and status

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Abstract

The colonial experiences of pastoralist women have been largely ignored in the literature on Africa. The paper focuses on pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods to locate the impact of colonization on pastoral women's roles and social status using the example of Borana women of northern Kenya. In this study, it is demonstrated that while the pre-colonial women of the Borana did not enjoy full position of status relative to men, colonialism reinforced the differences between the roles of men and women, contributing further to the waning of Borana women's pre-colonial roles and status. The paper explores the process by which Borana society was brought into contact with the colonial economy and commercialization of their pastoralist activities. It sheds light on the impact of this integration on women's roles. The paper concludes with areas for further research on Borana women's roles in the post-colonial era.

Keywords: Colonization, Pastoralist, Women, Northern Kenya, Borana, Gender roles, Social policy

Introduction

Though the discourse of inequalities and marginalization of pastoralists is well-documented in literature on pastoral societies, case studies of pastoral women's experiences with colonization have received little attention. It was only recently that the previously ignored responses by pastoral societies to the changing socio-economic and political situations have begun to get some scholarly attention. At the same time, case studies regarding how women experienced changes did not - with exceptions - For example, Hilarie Kelly 1992, Gudrun Dahl 1987, Aud Talle 1987, and Jean Ensminger 1991 explore how roles, rights and gender relations have changed over time within pastoral production. Even so these studies have examined the status and roles of women as if they are a recent phenomenon when such roles have been part of a long tradition. Women played roles ranging from herding small stock to economic roles of processing the primary products of milk, meat and skins and exercised considerable power and influence over the distribution and exchange of these products (Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008).¹

However, this changed during the 1890s colonization of Africa. During the almost seven decades (1890-1963) of British rule in Kenya, the colonial government introduced socio-economic and political policies to facilitate the integration of Kenyan societies into the colonial economy. For pastoral societies in northern Kenya, British authorities challenged the legitimacy of pastoral institutions through state-imposed policies of compulsory destocking, grazing controls and restriction of movements. This process gradually led to the integration of pastoralists into the colonial economy. The study seeks to understand the process that brought the Borana into the colonial economy, the impact of the integration on the pastoral economy and, specifically, the impact on Borana women's roles and status. As will be shown later, in Borana society, we cannot speak of total equality of women and men, but the roles played by different genders were based on age, gender relationship and ones' social status. The Borana women, like other pastoral women, discharged their roles based on the principles outlined above. They also participated in women's-only traditional organization with women's roles and rights within the society. However, Borana women's lost status deteriorated during the 1890s colonization as was true

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with women in other societies. While it cannot be argued that colonization was the only factor in the loss of women's roles, I argue that it was the interplay of factors, among them, colonialism, in conjunction with the spread of Islam and Christianity, which added to the forces that reduced Borana women's roles, positions and status in their society. The history of Christianity in northern Kenya has been explored by Tablino 2004, but it is important to note that unlike other parts of the colony, in northern Kenya, Christianity did not establish a significant presence until the final decades of colonial rule. Although missionary presence dates back to the early twentieth century, Christianity started taking root in northern Kenya only in the 1950s and 1960s.² It is to be understood that Christianity reached Africa generally in the context of the European's moral duty to change the traditional religious practices and beliefs of Africans. While both men and women were affected, it fell largely on women who dominated religious and ritual practices as a venue to assert their roles. However, Borana women's status deteriorated following colonization beginning in the 1890s, as was true for other societies (Kuwee Kumsa 2004).³

First, the article reviews the current literature on pastoralist women's roles and Borana women in particular to illustrate some of the major works that have been done. The second goal is to examine the pre-colonial roles and status of pastoral women using the example of the Borana of northern Kenya. This contextualization is especially important as it does justice to the normally ignored experiences and roles of pastoralist women in their societies. The third goal is to provide a brief historical background of the Borana, and the fourth aim is to examine the impact of colonization on Borana women's roles. The process of colonization which subsequently led to commercialization of pastoralism and gradual integration of the Borana into the colonial economic system is crucial in understanding the impact on women's roles and Borana gender ideology. The paper concludes by situating pastoral women's roles within the post-colonial changes in Kenya and suggests areas for further research on Borana women's history.

Literature review

The experiences of pastoralist women have been largely ignored in the historical literature on Africa.⁴ This is striking when comparing works on pastoral women with those on women in non-pastoral societies. The former have been largely excluded from the body of historical literature (Hodgson 1999).⁵

One group of scholars offers an exception to this exclusion. Ethnographers and anthropologists took the lead in providing information on pastoral societies in general. For example, Elliot Fratkin and Kevin Smith elucidate the

changes in the socio-economic and political environment influencing pastoralists. They discuss sedentarization processes, population growth and government policies as factors responsible for the altered lives of the pastoralists and the changing responsibilities of women (Elliot Fratkin and Kevin Smith 1995 and 2013).⁶ An analysis of the changing roles of pastoral women is also offered by Layne Coppock, María Fernández-Giménez and Jeannie Harvey, who examine collective actions by the pastoralist women of northern Kenya. The authors argue that factors such as population growth and settlement in towns have influenced the formation of collective self-help groups (Solomon Desta et al. 2013 and 2016).⁷ Another study proposes that camel milk, capital and gender link women's changing roles with trading activities, specifically the milk trade (Anderson et al. 2010).⁸ While literature on women's ownership varies widely according to Naomi Kipuri and Belinda Straight, Bonnie Kettel argues that women have rights over livestock and their husbands do not have rights over the disposal of such herds. However, Richard Hogg and Richard Waller disagree with this view, while Peter Little notes that in some pastoral societies, women have access only to herds gifted to them by their brothers or the ones that they came exercise full control milk and milk products (Hogg 2000; Kipuri and Ridgewell 1978, Little 1987; Kettel 1986).⁹

Other relevant sources include a number of theses and dissertations.¹⁰ For example, Michele Nori details the changes and livelihoods impacting northeastern Somali society. This work looks at some of the roles that women play in the livestock trade, marketing and other local commercial activities including the hotel business and the selling of khaat, a plant stimulant consumed by most men in northern Kenya (Nori 2010).¹¹ Such works provide important information for understanding the experiences of pastoralist women by addressing gender issues and the contribution of women to pastoral production.

Studies on gender issues among the Borana were conducted by Gudrun Dahl who describes the socio-economic consequences of historical and contemporary forces on the Waso Borana and the impact on the various sector of Borana society. Her use of historical perspectives to understand the gendered aspects of power relations allows for a comprehensive analysis of external forces such as colonialism and statehood along with their contribution to the family and society.¹² Another work by Dahl details the deeper meanings associated with Borana women's roles in building huts and their responsibilities associated with milking and milking containers. The significance of these roles, according to the author, goes beyond their everyday use and symbolizes women's cultural powers and identity within Borana society (Dahl 1990).¹³ Studies examining the impact of the Shifta war on the Borana pastoral economy make a broad reference to women (Khalif and Oba 2013).¹⁴

There is a large body of literature on pastoralists that address various aspects of the society but very little on women. Some mention women in passing, and even so, they have not paid attention to traditional sources for glimpses into how gender ideologies changed in the colonial period and effects on women of the Borana. However, these studies are germane to gaining an understanding of broader issues of change in colonial and post-colonial periods. The study draws from these works, and the paper especially seeks to contribute to the colonial historical literature on pastoral women.

The place of women in Borana society

The pre-colonial history of the Borana has been discussed elsewhere, for example by Paul Baxter in 1954, so there is no need to repeat it here. It is important to note that the history of the Borana of northern Kenya is part of the general history and culture of Borana Oromo who are currently distributed in Ethiopia.¹⁵ The Borana are a pastoralist group found in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya and form part of the larger Oromo linguistic group originating in Ethiopia. European colonization and the reign of Menelik II of Ethiopia in the 1890s divided the Borana between British East Africa and the Abyssinian Empire. The Borana are custodians of an egalitarian culture, a uniquely democratic socio-political and economic institution known as *Gadaa*. The *Gada* system has been discussed in detail by Asmarom Legesse and Marco Bassi (Legesse 1973; 2006; Bassi 2005).¹⁶ *Gada* organized the Borana society in terms of generation and age. However, the *Gada* institution is different from the age-set system (*hariya*). Whereas a member of an age-set group is recruited based on age per se, the *Gada* system is based on a generational set and recruits all male children irrespective of age into a single named generation set (Goto 1972).¹⁷ The leader, *Aba Gada*, is democratically elected in a general assembly called *Gumi Gayo* every eight years.¹⁸ The assembly is responsible for formulating rules for the Borana community, which are then executed by the *Aba Gada* and the council members. The council members amend rules and regulations where needed. *Gada* also preserves traditional customs by socializing men to assume political, cultural and economic responsibilities and pass them on to each successive generation. It is only men who participate in warfare and political election of *Gada* classes and camp leaders as well as age sets.¹⁹

Despite its egalitarian principles, the *Gada* politico-military structures actively excluded women. However, women wielded power and control indirectly. They formed part of the decision-making process among several groups within the *Gada* system based their husbands' age-set.²⁰ The roles and relations between men and women were primarily organized according to

age and gender. This is well illustrated in the Borana polygamous household where senior wives enjoy more privileges than junior wives.²¹ The *Gada* egalitarian system collective accorded women status and a venue to perform their roles. These roles were discharged through an organization that ran parallel to *Gada* known as *Siiqqee*, which existed generally in all Oromo groups. Details on practices and functions of *Siiqqee* have been presented by Kumsa and Hussein Jaylain among Oromo women of Ethiopia, while Hilarie Kelly has written on the practices of the Orma Oromo women of Kenya under the name *gaas eyba* (Kumsa 1997; Kelly 1992; Jeylain 2004).²² This study provides only a general overview. The literal meaning of *Siiqqee* is a stick, a marriage stick that stands for the rights (*mirga*) given to women within *Gada* institution. The *Siiqqee* stick is a symbolic rallying point for collective action.²³ *Siiqqee* serves to function as 'a check and balance mechanism' to regulate men's power in the *Gada* organization. Citing Legesse, Kumsa writes that the two separate domains (*Gada* and *Siiqqee*) had a strong functional interdependence and one was not valued any less than the other,²⁴ meaning that roles played by men and women complemented one another and their importance was not based on power differences between the female domestic sphere and the male public sphere but rather on the balance between male and female expectations in Oromo society. This balance must be maintained since the absence of which is equated with disharmony, and in response women must stage what is called a *Siiqqee* rebellion to restore back social harmony within the society. Under extreme circumstances, women would resort to what Kumsa called *Godaansa Siiqqee* (*Siiqqee* trek) deserting their households for men to take care of all household responsibilities. For women to return to their homes, the offender causing the imbalance must pay fines or carry out certain rituals and taboos to rectify the breach of norm between the parties concerned. Further violations of women's social rights may lead to the suspension of the offender from roles in the *Gada* council (Kumsa 2004; 2014; Bartels 1983).²⁵

Moving from a general overview to more specific roles, Borana women wielded power and control in the domestic sphere where they had de facto control over vital resources. Apart from the primary duties of child rearing, cooking, collection of water and firewood and building of huts, they participated in activities related to livestock keeping and management. They cared for small animals at the homestead and were in charge of milking. These responsibilities fall under what is called women's domains of stationary resources. On the other hand, men built *kraals* and defended camps as well as natural resources such as water and

religious shrines under men's domain of mobile resources (Waaqayo 1991).²⁶

Although men exercised greater formal power and authority in the political realm, women influenced political decisions through backstage roles. For example, Mario Aguilar and Laurel Aguilar's study on Waso Borana has documented Borana women's involvement in political affairs of their society and elections of local political leaders. Though they played backstage roles, Borana women mediated among themselves in their women's group and in consultation with a senior woman for whom to vote as the leader of their community. Aguilar writes, 'women seem to be silent and even passive, nevertheless they have forwarded their ideas through a senior woman, sitting in the inner circle of the meeting.....Women organize themselves before the meeting, not to riot, but to look for the right person in order to keep the Peace of the Boorana [sic].'²⁷

Borana women also discharged their roles in various ways namely the use of jokes or plays referred to as *qoosaa-taapaa*. As one of the elements of oral literature, jokes, plays and/or any other verbal expressions are important tools for communicating gender ideologies (Lorber 1996).²⁸ The use of jokes or plays by women is traced within this gendered context of language use. According to Fugicha Waqo, the use of jokes or plays challenges prevailing power relations and the male-centred social order in Borana society. The jokes or plays were told during weddings and child-naming ceremonies; Waqo argues that 'women *qoosaa-taapaa* humorously assails male crudity. On this occasion, the women constitute themselves into a group that challenges the traditional social order which privileges the men, by recounting the follies of men in their daily experiences.' (2003)²⁹ I suggest that the Borana women's use of jokes espoused a discourse of power in which they were able to place themselves in an alternative gender hierarchy. It further tells us something about their power of language and their immense cultural knowledge underlying the discursive jokes or plays that they perform.

Apart from *qoosaa-taapaa*, Borana women use folk songs to indirectly express their feelings about men's injustices or to react to unwise decision taken by the men-folk. Songs serve different purposes and are performed in different historical, social, cultural and political contexts to praise or ridicule. This study focuses on the latter; the use of songs by women of the Borana to negotiate male-female power differential in everyday situations. For example, Waqo has shown how Borana women use jocular songs, not necessarily directed to a specified individual, but as a criticism of 'pervasive social realities within the Borana community.'³⁰ Then the use of songs is to pass judgement and expected values within

society and, specifically to the interest of this study, to express issues that permeates gender roles and relations. One of the songs that speaks to the roles and powers of women within Borana society is described below by Waqo:

Isa daaddu hikuu wa dhageete Sooddaan duuban
baate wa dhageete Sooddaa tun maan jeette wa
dhageete Aada bona jedhe wa dhageete Isa baare
haraabu wa dhageete Harbora rakate wa dhageete
Harbora incacabsani wa dhageete Baare incacabsani
wa dhageete Ark isa inkutani wa dhageete Isa moora
baasu wa dhageete Sareen shondu buute wa dhageete
phe (group burst into laughter and disintegrates for
some time).

Translation:

As he is untying a food container, did you hear? His mother in-law caught him, did you hear? She asked what was happening, did you hear? It is the norm of drought he said, did you hear? As he licked the container, did you hear? His bracelet got stuck, did you hear? The bracelet cannot be broken, did you hear? The container cannot be smashed, did you hear? His hand cannot be cut, did you hear? As he melts the fat, did you hear? Dog snatch his member, did you hear?³¹

This song, while telling us more about limited food resources and environmental vagaries of drought, a common theme in pastoral societies, ridicules men for trespassing into women's food control domain. Women leverage the taboo that prohibits men from handling food in a way that confers power to them. Control and distribution of food, for example milk as already indicated, reflects women's performance of power and assertion of their roles. Similarly, through control of food resources, Samburu women have been shown to negotiate power issues within their community and even with the elders who enjoy exalted status (Holtzman 2002).³²

Additionally, Legesse elaborates that women's use of folk and work (*Karile*) songs not only lightens the burden of their chores but they use such songs to pass their remarks or direct criticisms about men's ill-advised decisions that they overheard in men's assemblies.³³ It can be argued that women's use of songs plays more of a role than simply calling males to conformity. It is a way for women to further assert their roles. Studies elsewhere have shown, for example, how Sahelian women use songs to 'subvert that idea that women lack voice' (Sidikou and Hake, 2012).³⁴ Songs and other genres of literature recorded from oral sources can provide narrative construction and insights into gender relations. This

can go a long way in reconstructing African women's history within a specified cultural context. However, recent study has lamented on the lack of attention to such genres and especially the use of songs as a 'form of verbal art'.³⁵ With the exception of a few scholars, among them Fugicha (2003) and Hussein (2004), scholars of the Borana and Oromo in general are also guilty of neglecting oral sources such as songs in reconstructing past status of women. According to Hussein, even Legesse whose seminal work focused on Borana *Gada* and issues related to gender roles did not exhaustively look at oral traditions for clues on women's past influential roles.³⁶

In summary, whether through use of songs, women's group, jokes or plays, the Borana case study indicates various socio, economic and political roles women played in their society. These roles, while determined by age, class, religion and marital status, gave pastoral women status and power as was the case with other African women in pre-capitalist African societies (Swantz 1985).³⁷

At the margins of colonial enclave: The pastoralists of northern Kenya

The history of colonization of pastoral societies in the nineteenth century has been discussed in detail by Gufu Oba and others and cannot be replicated here in any detail, and I therefore will discuss what is deemed the most important to this study.³⁸ The Borana were the dominant force in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya from the sixteenth century up until the dawn of twentieth century. They co-opted the Gabra, Rendile and Ajuran neighbours and people with whom they shared common borders to form the *worr Liban* (people of Liban) alliances. At times, some of the groups were assimilated into different Borana clans and given access to shared grazing lands and water resources.³⁹ While considerable shifts in alliances, power and displacement among various groups shifted the alliances by the nineteenth century, the outbreak of bovine pleuropneumonia, rinderpest, smallpox and drought, weakened the Borana (Oba and Tikki 2013).⁴⁰ The ecological disasters coincided with the Abyssinian colonial expansion from the north and the British from the south (Schlee and Watson 2009).⁴¹ Abyssinian rule was imposed in 1897 when a garrison was established at Arero in Liban. The Abyssinian military dealt ruthlessly with the Borana resistance, ranging from beatings to confiscation of their cattle. Indirect rule was introduced, and the Borana *qalu* (religious leaders) and ritual experts were absorbed into the Abyssinian administration, mainly to help with the collection of taxes. Moreover, the Borana were forced to provide labour in transporting the rations of the Abyssinian soldiers over long distances and to build their houses at the garrisons (Bizuneh 2008).⁴² The Kenyan

colonial administrators' annual report is replete with incidences of harassment and looting of livestock as well as killings and kidnappings of Boranas by Abyssinian authorities.⁴³

Kenya became a British protectorate in 1895 and colony in 1920. However, border issues with the Abyssinian Empire, security issues and control of movements by pastoral groups took the best part of a decade. In 1903, the British colonial administration ordered its engineers, under the command of Archibald Butter and Captain Philip Maud, to survey the boundary between British East Africa and Ethiopia. The survey culminated in the creation of a 'Maud Line' that was recognized in 1907 as the de facto Kenyan-Ethiopian border and renamed the 'Red Line'.⁴⁵ The Northern Frontier District (NFD) was added to the British protectorate in 1910.⁴⁶ However, the 'Red Line' boundary agreement left many vital resources on the Ethiopian side of the border which complicated the situation further. The Ethiopians prevented the Borana from accessing water on their side of the boundary agreement (the 'Red Line'), and the Abyssinian incursions and raids on British subjects including the Borana continued (Oba and Tikki 2000).⁴⁷

In 1909, the Borana came to grapple with a new challenge. The new waves of Somali immigrants into Borana territories in the early twentieth century exacerbated the situation for the Borana. This development led to the contraction of Borana territories causing conflicts between the Borana and the Somali immigrants. The British had earlier created the 'Galla-Somali line,' to keep Somalis to the eastern side, while keeping the Borana and the rest to the west of Mount Marsabit.⁴⁸ However, their interaction was not only based on conflicts. It was during the course of the Somali westward movements that the Borana conversion to Islam in the colonial period occurred from 1920 to 1950. The Borana of Isiolo, who were far removed from the centre of *Gada*, converted to Islam leading to the transformations of many aspects of their *Gada* practices.⁴⁹ While the details on how and the process of Borana conversion are not within the subject of this study, it suffices to say that religious cultures are one of the forces in understanding factors that affect people's lifestyles (Aguilar 2009).⁵⁰ This weakened the *Gada* contributing to the disintegration of socio-political structure of *Gada*, and the socio and political powers and women enjoyed within the *Gada* system waned explained by Baxter 1954; Shongollo 1978; Hassen 1990.⁵¹ By extension, distorting led to the distortion of Borana social relations and gender ideology which affected traditional bases of the authority, status, and the material circumstances of women.

NFD was occupied by pastoralists and remained closed since partition. It was not considered an integral part of the British domain, and the major reason for the

occupation of northern Kenya was to keep away the Abyssinian Empire that was progressively advancing south into British East Africa.⁵² For the most part, it was designated a 'special area', and colonial policies controlled movements into and out of the district. By 1919, there were scattered small retail shops in Marsabit and Garba Tulla, operated by Arabs, Indians and Swahili merchants since the colonial government discouraged pastoralists from entering business including trade in livestock.⁵³ Before the Second World War, available employment opportunities were in government administration. However, as will be detailed later, these positions were only accessible to men. Although the colonial government extended its power into northern Kenya among pastoral societies, there was no intent to spread its socio-economic and educational development agendas to this region. Generally, pastoralist activities were considered as going against the prevailing social order (i.e. the colonial economy based on settled agricultural production), and colonial authorities did not see pastoralism as a productive form of land use (Manger 1996).⁵⁴

By 1926, the Outlying District Ordinance decreed the closure of the frontier to curtail movements in and out for security reasons.⁵⁵ Ten years later, the Special District Ordinance of 1934 demarcated tribal grazing areas for each ethnic group in the frontier. This brought to an end movement by pastoral groups that often spanned colonial national boundaries as the case with the Borana and others who often shift livestock from northern Kenya lowlands to the highlands of Ethiopia during droughts.⁵⁶ Restrictions imposed on livestock movements curtailed livestock production and the very basis of Borana identity. Livestock ownership is a symbol of not only wealth but also accompany their socio-cultural ceremonies of marriage, child naming and circumcision rituals (Hogg 1992).⁵⁷ It can be argued that the restrictions placed on livestock production undermined the Borana personal and collective identity based on livestock.

Even after World War II, when the development plan for the colony was drawn, the promise to provide grazing, water, livestock marketing and healthcare did not materialize generally in the NFD.⁵⁸ Like the rest of the colony, educational activities were carried out by missionaries but they were very limited. The Bible Church Missionary Society (BCMS) and the Africa Inland Mission (AIM) whose activities focused on missionary education and provision of health services converted Borana and Burji communities in Marsabit, and the Samburu of Wamba and Maralal. The children of the converts enrolled at an elementary schools established by the missionaries.⁵⁹

By the end of the colonial period, pastoral societies did not experience meaningful socio-economic changes unlike the rest of the colony concentrating most services only in the regions occupied by white settlers.⁶⁰ The policies of

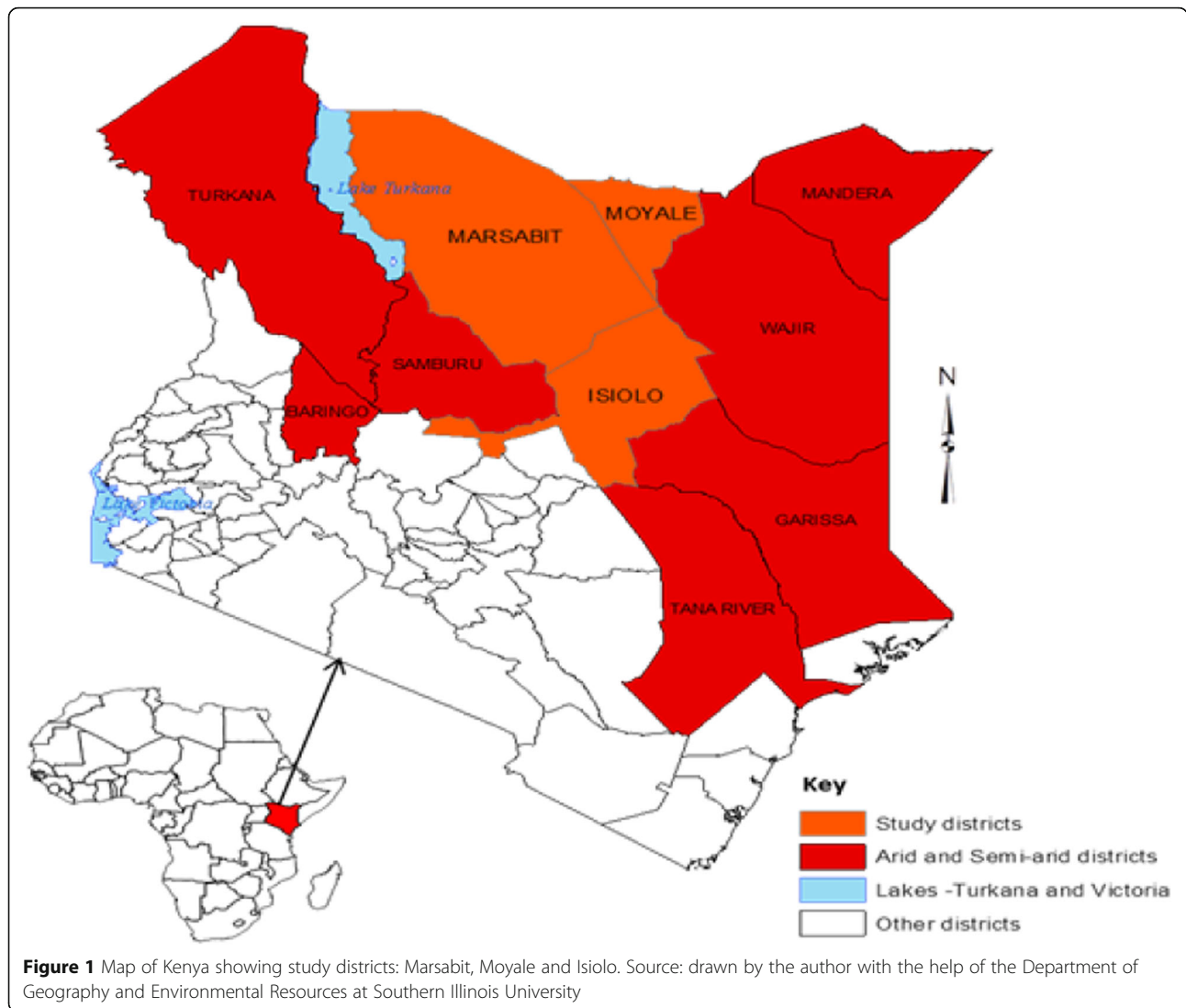
marginalization continued in the post-colonial Kenya government as will be examined in the section under post-colonial development. However, it is significant to note that the post-colonial government, like its predecessor, adopted policies intended to change their way of life as they continued to adjust to changes in population increase, loss of pastureland, and even civil wars.⁶¹

Study area

The study focused on the Borana of northern Kenya who are mainly found in the Moyale, Marsabit and Isiolo areas as shown in the map (Figure 1). The terms Northern Frontier District (NFD), northern Kenya and Arid and Semi-arid Lands (ASALs) have been used to refer to areas settled by pastoral societies in Kenya. In this study, the names NFD and northern Kenya are used interchangeably to refer to both geographical classifications and socio-economic and political constructs. The NFD is a political construct dating to the colonial period, and it is a product of policies that continued during the post-colonial period which are responsible for the region's continued inequality with the rest of Kenya. The northern regions were barely studied during the colonial period apart from popular visits by big game hunters and adventurers and explorers (Stroomeer 1995).⁶² A systematic study of the arid regions began only in the 1970s. Northern Kenya accounts for 80% of Kenya's total land area of 582,646 square kilometer.⁶³ Although sparsely populated, the region's ethnic composition is diverse. Apart from the Boranas there are also Somali, and Turkana who mainly reside in the town of Isiolo. In Marsabit district are mainly Borana, Samburu, Somali, Rendile, Gabra, and Burji ethnic groups. People of Indian and Arab ancestry who are involved in trading activities also reside in Marsabit. Most people including the Borana are pastoralists, and herding is practised by 80% of the population.⁶⁴

Methods

This study takes its approach from historical studies, development studies and gender theories to provide a framework with which to analyse Borana women's roles and status. While the major approach remained historical, to trace the history of the Borana and northern Kenya and to understand the process that introduced changes in Borana society and women's roles, the anthropological approach was useful in describing Borana socio-cultural, economic and political organizations. The research is based on analysis and synthesis of diverse sources. Primary sources consisted of the Kenya National Archives (KNA materials collected through two separate periods in 2013 and 2014). The study relied on using traditional sources such as colonial archival, previously unexplored travel memoirs, in an attempt at



teasing out ideas that speak to gender roles and relations in Borana society within the broader socio-economic and political forces of the past century. The materials also helped in understanding the colonial administration of the NFD, including social, economic and political policies developed to ‘administer’ northern Kenya. Secondary literatures consulted are books and articles in journals together with other published sources that address various aspects of the Borana society. These sources are germane to gaining an understanding of broader issues pertaining to discourse of socio-economic and political marginalization in post-colonial era.

Results and discussion

Impact of colonial changes on Borana women’s roles and status

Exploration of colonial impact on pastoral gender organization in northern Kenya provides an interesting

look at how gender and colonial ideologies were constructed. As mentioned before, with the exception of a few studies, pastoral societies have been overlooked in the studies on gender relations, reflecting the importance of analysing how gender and colonial ideologies were recreated and reinforced in areas considered marginal to the colonial enterprise such as northern Kenya. Detailing this process, this study traces changes in Borana gender ideology in the broader socio-economic and political changes wrought by colonization. This makes sense in relation to the argument that ‘gender relations in general are bound up with historical relations of economic and political dominance, particularly with the workings of imperialism and capitalism (Clever 2001).’⁶⁵ It is demonstrated that the enduring colonial social construction of gender projects a broader socio, economic and political analysis, and I now turn to the discussion of these through three major themes - establishment of

colonial native authority, commercialization of pastoralism and post-World War II social reforms.

Establishment of colonial native authority

The British colonies adopted the principles of indirect rule introduced officially in 1934. Indirect rule was a system in which the British ruled their colonies in Africa as elsewhere through the pre-existing local governance system. Although there was no full-scale application of the system, in the case of Africa, the policy was guided by the postulation that African and European cultures varied greatly and communities that had developed institutions were best ruled indirectly. In Kenya, the history and process of British colonial consolidation and rule has been discussed in detail by (Ogot and Ochieng 1989; Lonsdale and Berman 1979; Mungeam 1966).⁶⁶ However, it is important to note that British administration was based on the general British principals, where the colony was divided into provinces led by the provincial commissioner helped by the district commissioners. The district commissioners were aided by district officers and assistant district officers. Under the district officers were local administrators, composed of village headmen and the post of chiefs, the lowest hierarchies in the colonial administration. Many reasons abound in the literature for the establishment of indirect rule including saving the colony the costs of hiring British administrators. Indirect rule was also said to help preserve cultural practices with minimal interference (Vail and White 1989).⁶⁷ This is significant to my analysis. First, gender-related issues were part and parcel of these cultural practices. Going by this, the colonial administration system would have retained women in some of their pre-existing positions of power. However, colonial authorities misrepresented the meaning of public and domestic sphere to 'mean that men and women do not know about each other's sphere (Jaylain 2004).'⁶⁸ I suggest that this justified the integration of native men into the colonial local administration by default. Archival sources are explicit about the association of men with colonial titles of village elders, chiefs and headmen. For example, the Moyale District Annual Report of 1920 to 1921 provides a favourable description of a Borana headman named Yatanni Kune. He is described as 'an influential and most useful headman, who would be difficult to replace.' (Moyale District Annual Report 1920-1921) ⁶⁹ The phrase "difficult to replace" speaks to the depth of responsibility and invested on men by the colonial regime. The new system reinforced men's authority and status by introducing not only a new hierarchy of native administration, but also new a gender hierarchy. This observation is supported, for example, by Dorothy Hodgson in her study on the Maasai of Tanzania. She

notes that 'by extending the authority of men, especially elder men, over the newly emerging domain of "the political," indirect rule broadened and deepened their control over junior men and women. It gave certain men new rights and responsibilities as "representatives" of their communities, including the authority to collect taxes, enforce livestock decisions and codify customary laws.'⁷⁰

It has been further argued that the European colonial venture 'was a gendered enterprise' which thrived on labour forces provided by men. Central to this were ethos of militarism, masculinity and manhood.⁷¹ Colonizers reinforced these ideas in their recruitment of natives into the British forces based on gender and even cultural backgrounds. In this context, men from pastoral cultural background were thought to possess military skills, which made them desirable for recruitment into the colonial troops.⁷² The evidence from a colonial report indicates that six Borana men were trained as members of the tribal forces, commonly known as *dubas*, and were eventually employed as prison wardens.⁷³ The absence of Borana women from such accounts speaks loudly to the fact that colonial labour forces favoured males reinforcing the invisibility of Borana women and their lack of participation in military roles as espoused under the *Gada* system. On the other hand, men increased their privileges and dominance, an argument further made by Timothy Parsons that the recruitment of pastoralist men into British forces 'led to feelings of superiority among soldiers and resulted in demands for special treatment and privileges, many of which were granted by the army.'⁷⁴ Parsons alludes to the continuation of such privileges in the post-colonial period in which men benefited from ranch distribution policies. Commercialization and ranching policies divided pastoral land into group ranches distributing over 99% of ranches to men, leaving women out (Flintan 2007).⁷⁵ Pastoral women and men complemented each other; while women looked after livestock within the homestead, men managed satellite herds, and this permeated also into the equal access to natural resources sustaining pastoralism activities. However, with the replacement of collective ownership of lands with private property rights, pastoral women in general lost their access to natural resources, which by extension included lands allocated to ranching in which male members had privileged land access leaving out the females. While this process was not even for all pastoralist societies, it affected the Borana women as it happened with the Maasai and Samburu women. Research on policies enforcing land privatization has been shown to have negative effects on the social well-being of women. Although this has been the case in most countries with large pastoral populations, like Ethiopia, women have limited ability to access and own

land, which is a form of economic access to key markets as well as a form of social access to non-market institutions, such as household- and community-level governance systems (Flintan 2003).⁷⁶

Commercialization of pastoralism

Colonial policy of monetization and commoditization of a generally pastoralist economy has been shown to have an impact on gender relations. In the early years of British administration in the Northern Frontier District, the British established colonial posts along the trade routes used by pastoralists to impose taxes and control trading activities (Samatar 1989).⁷⁷ Although slow in developing, colonial revenues were derived from commodities - tea, sugar and tobacco - sold to pastoralists. Trade licences provided to retail shop operators both by local residents and Indian and Arab immigrants in northern Kenya were another source of revenue accrued by the government (Marsabit District Annual Report 1928).⁷⁸

The introduction of taxes gave greater impetus to the integration of pastoralists and the Borana into the colonial economy. In colonial Kenya, direct taxation of Africans began in 1901. Pastoral societies paid taxes in kind (Tignor 1976).⁷⁹ The Northern Frontier District Annual report of 1925 indicates that pastoralists, including the Borana, paid 30 head of cattle and 50 sheep annually. This system was, however, replaced in 1928 by a hut and poll tax in which each man aged 16 and over was required to pay a prescribed tax in cash annually. To meet this requirement, Borana had begun to trade livestock between the north and central Kenya by the 1930s (Colonial Report 1930).⁸⁰ However, the codification of males aged 16 and over is telling of the gender designation of men as heads of households who had ability to pay taxes and not women. It has often been argued that in the case of northern Kenya and pastoralists, the tax policies encouraged trade in livestock, introducing the cash economy in the north. Integration of men, though peripherally, into the colonial cash economy gradually replaced women's control over milk and other dairy products and gave men exclusive rights to dispossession of livestock (Sobania 1979; Hodgson 2001).⁸¹

The outbreak of the Italo-Abyssinian war of 1936 increased the supply for livestock from northern Kenya to feed the large troops stationed in NFD and Marsabit in particular. For example, Marsabit District was used as a military base to send patrols into the whole of the NFD and the dispatch of the Kenya African Rifles (KAR). By 1942, 250,000 sheep and goats were sold and 20,000 heads of cattle were disposed in the NFD. Although short-lived, the demand particularly brought the Borana under pressure to supply the meat needed by the soldiers (Marsabit

District Annual Report 1935 and 1941).⁸² However, the demand sparked by the short-lived war period and the need for cash to purchase commodities were not the only factors in explaining colonial policies that encouraged pastoralists to sell their livestock. Other concerns emerged, for example overstocking issues. The overstocking thesis was premised on the view that pastoralists including the Borana kept more livestock than their available grazing land leading to overgrazing and land degradation (Mackenzie 1947).⁸³ To effect this policy, in 1934, a special District Ordinance restricted all pastoralists in northern Kenya to demarcated 'tribal' grazing areas for each ethnic group and grazing guards were put in place to enforce grazing rules (Tana River district Report 1947).⁸⁴ Failure to stay within a designated grazing area was considered trespassing, warranting not only a court order but also seizure of livestock and a monetary fine. For instance, the Borana were restricted to graze their herds only on the northern side of Mount Marsabit, but when in 1936, some of the Borana in Marsabit were found herding their stock in a restricted area, 10% of the 500 sheep alleged to have trespassed were confiscated by the colonial authorities and their owners expelled from the area along with their remaining stock. Boru Abdo, their village elder, was summoned to court to explain and made to pay a monetary fine. Again the reference to men, with regard to the matter, as elderly played into colonial gender hierarchies, and as Hodgson puts it for the case of Maasai, 'men were expected to apply for permits, and men were directed to herd and keep livestock in quarantines.'⁸⁵ Similarly, in Borana society, attention given to men implies that they were the ones in charge of livestock, including where to graze and with responsibility for maintaining local control.

Land-related policies further lowered women's socio-economic status in Borana society and pastoralists in general. First and foremost, the colonial government perceived pastoralism as seasonal and traditional land tenure and practices associated with pastoralism were viewed as a barrier to commercialization of land. In essence, by 1940, demonstration plots were developed on the slopes of Mount Marsabit to plant maize. The local communities including the Borana were allocated farming plots but with various conditions including signing a legal contract with the District Commissioner, maintaining presences on the land. They could not transfer land, sell their agricultural products or erect any building without the written permission by the District Commissioner. Furthermore, the plots were considered Crown Land and not inheritable. This condition was particularly a blow for widows, including from the Borana community, who were vulnerable to eviction upon the death of their husbands (Marsabit District Annual Report 1946).⁸⁶ These laws reduced women's access to productive resources such as land.

In the period during and after the Second World War, gender inequality was further reinforced as the Borana were brought more into contact with the colonial economy. Broadly speaking, in response to increased pressures in the aftermath of the Great Depression, among the Borana, like other pastoral communities, the colonial government intensified earlier efforts to promote monetization and commoditization of their livestock and opportunities for retail trading for the Borana elite (Dahl 1979). Dahl writes:

The period during and after World War II, with its high demand for cattle, contributed much to giving Borana society an altered profile. Deliberate new attempts were made to back up the power of chiefs and headmen and fresh fields of activity also opened up, which made it possible for a stratum of Borana leaders to differentiate themselves more distinctly from the common herd owner.⁸⁷

Again this shows that the colonial economy did not create a niche for the Borana women but increased the powers of male figures over the women in the community. It is also interesting to note that apart from creating gender inequality, the colonial economy increased differentiation among the Borana communities where class became a basis for social inequality, impacting non-elite male members of the Borana society and, of course, placing women, who were perceived as stockless, at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Post-World War II social reforms and women

Even in the post-World War II period that ushered in socio-economic recovery in most colonies in Africa, including Kenya, there was notable exclusion of pastoral women's needs in general. The post-World War II social programmes stressed reforms in health, agriculture, education, trading apprenticeships and creation of women's organizations.⁸⁸ One of the major areas that post-World War II social reforms sought to address in the last decade of colonial rule was participation of African women in formal education.⁸⁹ It is important to stress that even post-World War II policies that explicitly sought to increase basic education thought to open opportunities for African women in general had little impact on pastoral women's access to education.⁹⁰ However, the author is aware of the complexity of socio-economic, cultural and religious factors that explains the absences of pastoral women's participation. That said, during the late colonial period in Kenya, as was true with the rest of the British colonies in Africa, education was a crucial stepping stone to all other types of socio-economic and political mobility. For example, among pastoral societies of northern Kenya, it was only men who had an

opportunity for basic education and even read the popular newspaper of the time, *Habari*. The colonial labour force was made open to men trainees who were recruited into native colonial military forces.⁹¹ Although pastoral societies' participation in formal education for men and women of pastoral cultural backgrounds was at best minimal relative to the rest of the Kenyan communities, the participation of pastoral women in education was even far more minimal. That said, pastoral women were deprived of the socio-economic opportunities available to pastoral men by virtue of the latter's relative educational attainment.

The deprived nature of the educational system among pastoral societies makes it difficult to gather total school enrolment and attendance figures in northern Kenya. Nevertheless, in 1948, the first intermediate government school was built in Wajir. The Bible Church Missionary Society established elementary schools in Marsabit, Wamba and Maralal and enrolled children of the Borana, Burji and Rendille converts.⁹² Only a few children got access to a modern education, for example those whose parents were shop owners, natives working for the colonial government, administrators, members of the local police (*dubas*) or ex-soldiers.⁹³

Even when, in 1952, the colonial government with the help of missionaries established self-help groups for African women, later named *Maendelo ya Wanawake organization*, (MYWO) development for women in 1954, pastoral women were generally excluded simply by default with most of the groups being established in the regions settled by sedentary communities and in urban areas. In NFD, Colonial Annual Report only mentions Marsabit District as the possible location to establish *Maendelo ya Wanawake* organization.⁹⁴ Even so, the implementation process in Marsabit was largely left to the discretion of the colonial District Commissioners. Detrimentially, the women's groups were not given priority in funding. Colonial archives reveal that 'only a small sum has been included for Marsabit in case the District Commissioner can introduce some community development there.'⁹⁵ While the colonial government emphasized the importance of the MYWO in non-pastoral areas, for pastoral women, British administrators never made social policy welfare a priority as evident in the limited funding offered by the colonial government.⁹⁶ Indeed, colonialism destroyed women's traditional organization, replacing it with a hierarchical system that undermined the traditional bases of women's authority generally in Africa.⁹⁷ Women's organizations in colonial Kenya illuminate important aspects of these shifting roles. Often, these played out in actions that fed the marginalization, especially that of the rural pastoralist women.

However, pastoral women in general have not been just helpless victims to changes around them, but active

agents. This is illustrated in a memoir by Daniel G. Van Wyk, a pioneer settler in Kenya who travelled in NFD in the 1950s.⁹⁸ Although it has been ignored by scholars, the autobiography sheds light on pastoralist women's roles in the late colonial period, crucial in reconstructing women's roles in colonial NFD. Offering a vital account of the interaction between the NFD pastoralists and the colonial administrators, the autobiography provides glimpses into the roles that pastoralist women played in colonial Kenya in defending their rights. The women participated in actions affecting public policy. Van Wyk describes in detail a demonstration by pastoralist women against the imposition of dress codes by the colonial administration. According to Van Wyk's account, the wives of colonial administrators demanded the compulsory law. They accused the indigenous women of wearing scant dressing styles intentionally to provoke attention in the township.⁹⁹ Enraged by the law, the women took to the street to demonstrate, demanding apologies and respect from the colonial authority. Van Wyk writes,

Scores of demonstrators came into view ... They were all women; there were not a single male amongst them. They had defied the dressing regulations and came ... bare breasted, bare footed, and with only a string of beads and a piece of cloth tied around the waist. As time went by I pieced together their shouted grievances and demands. It went something like this: no more Khaat (mi'rah in Arabic) for our men.¹⁰⁰

While the author does not clearly say the ethnicities of women, he does mention the Borana, Somali, Samburu, and Turkana pastoralists of northern Kenya. Regardless of which group or groups these women came from, the women's actions fit the theme of the informal ways pastoralist females came together to oppose unjust policies imposed upon them without their voice or vote.

They also wanted the colonial administration to ban the stimulant plant, khaat, noted in the quote above. The wives paid for their husbands' khaat purchases from the money they earned with basket weaving and jewelry making. At the same time, they paid taxes levied by the colonial government on the khaat trade. The women felt those resources would have been better used for their needs and that of their households and communities. In response, the women organized themselves to protest these injustices. They lobbied themselves by taking to the street and forging demonstration strategies. Their activist actions included songs and rude gestures such as putting their hands high on their heads and shouting.¹⁰¹ Van Wyk's accounting provides an invaluable description of these women's active agency during a time of government and gender-based strictures. The

governmental restrictions along with the pockets of women's resistance continued throughout the colonial period in northern Kenya and the Kenyan colony as a whole.

Van Wyk's account is significant because it illustrates the aspirations of pastoral women. In the literature on African studies and women in general, such information is often glossed over - or, in the case of pastoralist women, even totally ignored. Scholars have failed to appreciate the insights that this travel memoir provides about a group whose voices have been marginalized in historical literature. However, written from a white male perspective of the time, the work is not without biases. There are plenty incidences where the author's descriptions are lost to the exoticization of pastoral societies in general and the NFD environment.

Post-colonial development and women

As in other African nations during the twentieth century, Kenya joined the stream of independence movements and regained independence in 1963 and women's issues in general moved into the post-colonial phase of Kenyan history. Initially, the new government's actions towards policies affecting women paralleled those of colonial administrators, for example use of the network of women's groups for education and social development. However, at the national level, the newly independent Kenya government, with assistance of western countries, enacted 5- and 10-year development plans within which the government delineated the roles urban and rural populations would play. While development plans in the 1960s focused on large infrastructural development, the 1980s projects were small and focused on agricultural and health-related issues targeted at rural populations. These projects were carried out with the help of private and voluntary international and domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The reference to international and domestic NGOs is particularly important to my analysis of changes in Borana women's roles and pastoralists in general. This is so because activities of these organizations feed into policies and issues of women's socio-economic development including an emphasis on creating educational opportunities for women.

In 1964, the Kenya Education Commission ordered a study on educational needs of the country under the chairmanship of Simeon Ominde. The Ominde report laid the foundation for post-colonial educational policy by stressing the practical goals of education.¹⁰² The report recommended greater social inclusion, including decreasing the gender disparity. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the government embraced and endorsed the slogan *Harambee*, a Swahili word meaning 'let's pull together', and focused on the mobilization of local resources and local participation in development (Ngau

Peter 1987).¹⁰³ While the *Harambee* spirit was used as a national strategy for mobilizing self-help development projects, communities placed greater emphasis on creating educational opportunities for children. In 1961, the Borana of Isiolo raised \$1000 to build the first primary schools, Govern African School (GAS), in Isiolo district. The total enrolment was estimated at 253 (Isiolo District Annual Report 1961).¹⁰⁴ It is not clear how many of these students were female. In the earlier years following independence, there had been an expansion of and increased enrolment in primary and secondary schools, but a major gender gap existed in pastoralist areas. The rate of completion was generally low for both pastoralist girls and boys relative to other Kenyan communities, and it was worse for pastoral girls, for example, in 1979, only 1,927 girls completed grade 8 in the whole of northern Kenya compared to 3,149 boys (Kenya Ministry of Education Annual Report 1979).¹⁰⁵

Additionally, in Marsabit, local communities strove to build and maintain some *Harambee* schools for their children, as shown in Table 1. Although data on the number of students from pastoral backgrounds is not available, the table provides the number of secondary schools in the Marsabit District; the last four secondary schools are examples of *Harambee* schools. The local communities in the district shared the cost of school construction and maintenance by selling their cattle to make financial contributions. However, there was only one girls' school in the whole of Marsabit District after more than two decades of independence, the Moi Girls Secondary School. The presence of only one girls' school compared to the number of schools for boys means fewer girls enrolled, speaking to the problem of gender gap in education for pastoralists girls and young women. According to Anthony Somerset's 'Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity', the general increase in girls' primary school enrolment rate and the national girls' enrolment rate stood at 77% compared to 34% of girls from pastoral background in 1979 (Somerset 2007).¹⁰⁶ While the rise in cost of education, among other socio-cultural factors, can explain the educational gender gap for

pastoral females, the government did not, however, make efforts to encourage education of pastoralists in general and pastoral females in particular, compared to the rest of the Kenyan colony.

There were also policies that generally considered integration of pastoralists into the general post-colonial national economy. Famine relief programmes and irrigation schemes were introduced to present agriculture as an alternative way of making a living. The Kenyan government, supported by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and Christian Relief agencies, as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), initiated irrigation projects in the country's dry areas.¹⁰⁷ For instance, in 1969, the first government/donor-sponsored irrigation project in the Waso Borana territory was inaugurated at Kinna on the bank of the Ewaso River to enhance food production for families who had lost their livestock during the drought that followed the *Shifita* conflict. These irrigation schemes became sources of employment and investment for rich Borana who employed other pastoralists.¹⁰⁸ Subsequent schemes began in 1973, 1974 and 1976 (Hogg 1980).¹⁰⁹

However, the importance of mainstreaming gender in the development issues did not surface until the 1980s structural adjustment policies (SAPs) and the economic crisis in developing countries in general. To remedy these problems, the World Bank and International Monetary Funds established a bottom-up strategy in developing countries, stressing the importance of mainstreaming gender issues in development plans. The goal of the programme was to bring development agendas to the local level in order to empower women as well as to help community organizations access resources and participate in local decisions and processes relevant to them. According to the United Nations, these two aspects help empower women and contribute to economic growth and development (United Nations 1995).¹¹⁰

Until recently, the impact of these adjustment programmes on pastoral women has been neglected. While sedentary agricultural communities in Kenya suffered a slump in prices for their produce, as in other developing countries, practices for pastoralists exhibited both advantages and disadvantages (Monte and Katebalirwe 2000).¹¹¹ On the one hand, the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) created competition for land. Based on the underlying notion that pastoralism was not an efficient use of land, the post-colonial government adopted policies that emphasized privatization and commercialization. These new laws caused pastoralists to be evicted from their own lands as was the case with the Maasai communities in Kenya.¹¹² On a positive note, the commercialization of livestock resulted in better market prices. This allowed pastoral women from

Table 1 Number of secondary schools in Marsabit District, 1965 to 1989

| School | Year founded | Students |
|-----------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Marsabit Secondary School | 1965 | Boys |
| Moi Girls Secondary School | 1984 | Girls |
| Moyale Secondary School | 1974 | Boys |
| Sololo Secondary School | 1988 | Boys |
| Laismis Secondary School | 1989 | Boys |
| North Horr Secondary School | 1989 | Boys |

Source: compiled from Marsabit District Annual Report, 1989, 15

wealthy households to increasingly diversify their economic activities. The Orma pastoral women provide an apt example of this latter dynamic (Einsminger 1992).¹¹³ The Kenya National Development Plan of 1989 to 1993 envisaged long-term goal policy plans that stressed improvements in standard of living of people in Arid and Semi-arid Lands (ASALs) by integrating them into the wider Kenya economy. Among the Borana, settlement schemes intensified in the post-colonial era after the devastating *Shifita* conflict, not to mention the impact of major droughts in the 1970s and 1980s that eradicated 40% of Marsabit's livestock, thus impoverishing many pastoralists (Republic of Kenya, Development Polict for Arid and Semi-Arid Lands 1992).¹¹⁵ Consequently, the government's role as a national policy-maker and its subsequent decisions affecting pastoralists might be explained by the long-standing perception of pastoralism as an unviable economic pursuit especially 'at a time when *Shifita* insurgency subverted' the Kenyan government. This generated a feeling that pastoralists were an uncontrollable, anti-development group, a perception that informed government policies and had implications for the nature of development interventions adopted by the government (Whittacker 2012).¹¹⁶

The development policies initiated by the Kenyan government and international community envisioned women as agents of social change and invited them to assist in the implementation of development plans in the nation and in their societies (Edwards et al. 1996).¹¹⁷ These changes sped up in the 1990s with the emergence of democratic movements.¹¹⁸ The rights of minority communities, such as pastoralists, who had suffered historical marginalization, began to gain recognition in Kenyan politics in part because of international advocacy, which created an awareness of the issues facing pastoral communities. These organizations advocated for constitutional changes, meaningful policies and the inclusion of minority ethnic groups and women in Kenyan politics. Referring to efforts by these organizations, Elizabeth Kharono in her study done in 2011 argues that they 'made it possible for the poverty eradication strategies to include issues such as pastoralism which had previously been marginalized'.¹¹⁹ It was argued that the agendas of democratization, human rights, sustainable development and economic growth could only be achieved with the consideration of women's and gender issues at their core.¹²⁰ Women's collective actions became an important strategy in the fight against poverty. For example, Action Aid, one of the well-known NGOs working among pastoralists in northern Kenya, has promoted income-generating activities for Waso Borana women (Walsh 1992).¹²¹ Participation in NGO activities further encouraged women's interest in collective action and group formation. It is within this historical context

that the formation of women's groups, especially among the Borana of Isiolo following the devastating impact of the *Shifita* war from 1963-1967, began (Khalif 2010).

Khalif's seminal work discusses the response of the Isiolo Borana women through women's groups. The author has outlined the history of these pastoral women groups starting in 1982. The Kulamawe women's Group was the first one named after the administrative division where it was based. As the first organization, the numbers started out small: a membership of 24 women. A year later, the post-colonial government organized women's associations such as Korbesa and Kifunguo founded in 1987. The groups had 30 and 40 members, respectively. By 1990, 11 other groups had emerged. Individual women founded over 80% of these bodies. This speaks of the agency of Borana women in post-colonial era. Although Khalif's work focused only on the Borana of Isiolo, the work of Coppock and his co-authors published in 2013, focused on 16 women's groups distributed in northern Kenya. Both of these studies discussed the groups' origin, formation activities and the degree of sustainability. The two studies fill the gap in our knowledge of women's collective action among pastoral societies that has been obscured for long but leaves unanswered questions as outlined in the concluding remarks.

Conclusions

This study explores the role of pre-capitalist Borana women and how these roles changed with colonization, among other factors. The ideology of *Gada*, based on gender and age, regulated powers and relationships between men and women. It demonstrates that while the status of Borana women was not completely equal to that of men, the incorporation of the Borana into the colonial state bolstered the elements of pre-existing inequality. Specifically, creation of male native authority, commercialization and commodification of livestock, and the implementation of post-World War II social reforms blurs the social status women enjoyed before while enhancing male economic and political authority relative to that of women. Together, these processes shifted the female domestic and male public spheres as previously understood. This contributed to marginalization of Borana women because of their social position as pastoralists, colonized subjects, and females as was the case with other pastoral women. In the post-colonial era, pastoral societies have undergone further changes due to urbanization, an increase in population and the state-imposed policy of sedentarization that is attempting to integrate the pastoral economies into national and international markets. As indicated before, recent research among the Borana and pastoral women of northern Kenya done by the likes of Khalif, Coppock and others looked at women in the context of development policies, democratic movements, activities of non-

governmental organizations and civil societies. While the extent to which these movements have liberated women from oppressive structures is debatable, what is clear is that women in developing countries in general have been further brought under the forces of globalization and yet their struggles remain isolated and localized.¹²² This raises further questions: with the advent of democratic movements and policies of equalization, what does oppression mean for women and pastoral women in particular? This study further questions the significance of state and global-centred approaches of many studies that have been done in general on pastoral societies and especially women. My tentative take on this is that such approaches minimize the roles of women as historical actors. A future case study of Borana women of northern Kenya will address these questions by broadly situating their experiences in social, economic and political changes and, most importantly, in the Borana cultural context to reconstruct women's roles in post-colonial era. This will bring a better understanding of the agency of women such as the Borana who have been omitted from the historical record.

Endnotes

¹Naomi Kipuri and Andrew Ridgewell, *A Double Bind: The Exclusion of Pastoralist Women in the East and Horn of Africa* (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2008).

²For details, see Paul Tablino, *Christianity among the Nomads: The Catholic Church in Northern Kenya* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004).

³See Kuwee Kumsa, "Siqqee Institution of Oromo Women," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 4, Nos. 1 & 2 (1997), 113.

⁴This is not common only in regard to African women. For much of human history, women have not been recognized as significant in historical inquiry despite their many contributions.

⁵Dorothy L. Hodgson, "Pastoralism, Patriarchy and History: Changing Gender Relations among Maasai in Tanganyika, 1890–1940," *Journal of African History* 40 (1999): 41.

⁶Elliot Fratkin and Kevin Smith, "Women's Changing Economic Roles with Pastoral Sedentarization: Varying Strategies in Alternate Rendille Communities," *Human Ecology* 23, No. 4 (1995): 433–434; see also Elliot Fratkin and Kevin Smith, "Seeking Alternative Livelihoods in Pastoral Areas," in *Pastoralism and Development in Africa: Dynamic Change at the Margins*, ed. Andy Catley, Jeremy Lind, and Ian Scoones (London: Routledge).

⁷Layne Coppock, Solomon Desta Adan Wako, Ibrahim Aden, Getachew Gebru, Seyoum Tezerra, and Chachu Tadecha, "Women as Change Agents in the World's

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⁸David M. Anderson, Hannah Elliott, Hassan Hussein Kochore, and Emma Lochery, "Camel Milk, Capital, and Gender: The Changing Dynamics of Pastoralist Dairy Markets in Kenya," accessed 10 January, 2016, <https://www.soas.ac.uk/camelconference2011/file84333.pdf>.

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¹⁰Zeinab Kabale Khalif, "Pastoral Transformation: Shifta-War, Livelihood, and Gender Perspectives among the Waso Borana in Northern Kenya" (PhD Diss., Norwegian University of Life Sciences, 2010), 10.

¹¹Michele Nori, "Milking Drylands: Gender Networks, Pastoral Markets and Food Security in Stateless Somalia" (PhD Thesis, Wageningen University, 2010), 119–120.

¹²Gudrun Dahl, *Suffering Grass: Subsistence and Society of Waso Borana* (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1979), 278.

¹³Gudrun Dahl, "Mats and Milk Pots: the Domain of Borana Women," in *The Creative Communion: African Folk Models of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life*, edited by Anita Jacobson-Widding and Walter van Beek (Uppsala, Sweden: Acad. Upsaliensis, 1990), 134–135.

¹⁴Zeinab Khalif and Gufu Oba, "'Gaafa Dhaabaa' - The Period of Stop': Narrating Impacts of Shifta Insurgency on Pastoral Economy in Northern Kenya, c. 1963 to 2007," *Research, Policy and Practice* 3, no. 14 (2013); The Shifta conflict was a secessionist war fought by Somalis in Kenya in a bid to join "Greater" Somalia.

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¹⁶Legesse, *Gada; Bassi, Decisions in the Shade*.

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Competing interests

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

Declarations

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this manuscript and neither the article nor portions of it have been previously published elsewhere.

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