



# Women in Pastoral Societies in Africa

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## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction .....   | 2  |
| Pastoralism in Africa .....  | 3  |
| Gender Social Conflict as Theoretical Frame for Analysis .....             | 7  |
| Social Contributions of Women in African Pastoral Societies .....          | 7  |
| Contracting Marriage .....   | 8  |
| Pregnancy and Postpartum Activities .....                                  | 9  |
| Pastoral Female Childhood, Adolescents, and Adulthood .....                | 10 |
| Economic Contributions of Women in African Pastoral Societies .....        | 11 |
| Cultural and Health Constraints Confronting Pastoral Women in Africa ..... | 13 |
| Conclusion .....   | 15 |
| References .....   | 17 |

## Abstract

Existing literature on African pastoralism only marginally reported issues on women in pastoral societies, particularly their socioeconomic roles and contributions to livestock production and development within pastoral environments/societies until the 1970s. In contrast, men's activities and roles are often reported by scholars as if women are idle in pastoral societies. The root of this somewhat relegation of female activities is not peculiar to studies on pastoral groups; it is common in most patriarchal societies. Even in scholarship, pastoral women were only passively mentioned in anthropological literature prior to the 1970s. Women in pastoral societies have culturally assigned roles that are influenced by so many factors – social, cultural, and economic, among others. It is therefore pertinent to highlight the significant gender-specific and non-gender-specific socioeconomic contributions of pastoral women, as well as the cultural and health constraints confronting women in pastoralists' environments. Women are economically

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involved in direct livestock production like cattle herding and indirect complementary livestock activities like milking, processing, and sale of dairy products (cheese, butter, and milk), crop farming, petty trading, skin/leather works, extracting rangeland products like firewood, and charcoal, among others. Pastoral women are also socially proficient in household management, co-decision-making with husbands, food preparation, birthing and child nutrition (breastfeeding), and leadership in pastoral women associations. In spite of these significant contributions to the development of pastoral societies, they are still culturally subordinated and not allowed participation in some spheres in relation to men. The chapter concludes that there is need to articulate how social justice initiatives could be applied using the gender social conflict analytical frame to bridge the gaps between the dominant group/gender (pastoral men) and the marginal group/gender (pastoral women) and bring about social change.

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**Keywords**

Pastoral women · Socioeconomic roles · Healthcare · African pastoralism · Gender roles · Conflict

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**Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of women in pastoral societies highlighting a few socioeconomic roles, cultural and health constraints, and contributions to livestock production in the general development of pastoral societies in Africa. The attribution of pastoralism as a system and practice to men has been a long conversation among scholars (see Hodgson (1999) and Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson (1980)). This attribution to men stems from what Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson (1980, p. 16) called “the fascination among anthropologists in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s which gave rise to ‘romantic stereotypes’ where nomadic pastoralists were conceived as ‘fierce “men”, brave, independent, freely moving with herds.” This was further influenced by the growth of British structural-functionalism as well as the western conception of “pride, hauteur, a strong sense of individual worth, and a strong sense of nobility as seen in the pastoral economy conceived of as male virtues; the role of women was therefore grossly neglected”(Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1980). The structural-functional approach understands human behavior as part of the system that helps keep society organized and functioning. From this perspective, gender is a means of organizing society into distinct roles that complement each other. Some anthropologists have argued that hunter-gatherer societies originated the ideas that men are providers and women take care of the home (Marshall 1973). It assumed that men are physically stronger and did not have the demand of child-bearing which makes it easier for them to take up aggressive autonomous roles like hunting and warfare. These roles became institutionalized within the traditional patriarchal structures, even when in contemporary times, physical strength is no longer too important for roles and jobs. In the words of Bruggeman (Bruggeman 1994, p. ii), “examples exist throughout Africa where women are actively involved

in previously precluded masculine roles like animal herding/husbandry, especially when it comes to milking, cow and calf health and control over livestock products.” And according to Waters-bayer (1985), the significance of women’s contribution to the pastoral economy of nomadic and seminomadic groups like the Fulani was passively described by early scholars of pastoralism in Africa, namely, Hopen (1958), Stenning (1959), and Dupire (1962). These scholars were however accused of applying a synchronic model in analyzing pastoral relations (Hodgson 1999). The synchronic model tends to lump all roles, activities, and contributions of different genders and age groups into one.

Some changes to this trend began to be noticed from the 1970s when more women began to participate in the studies of pastoral groups. Other factors influencing this change included the increased rejection of British structural-functionalism, interests in both emic (insiders’) and etic (outsiders’) perspectives from ethnographic fieldwork, focus on individual behavior relative to social/group behaviors, concentration on social change, development, shift in theoretical orientations about pastoral groups, and lots more (Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1980). Recent studies from the twenty-first century have shown that herding activities and pastoral management, in general, are executed not just by men alone but by other members of the group cutting across the gender and age divide (see Maanda Ngoitiko (2008), Nduma et al. (2001), Schloeder et al. (2017) and Sellen (2000)). This chapter, therefore, posits that women (not just men alone), boys, girls, and some of the aged are also involved in pastoralism depending on the immediate circumstantial realities which may be social, cultural, and economic and environmental factors. For instance, so many factors like the absence of a male heir within a pastoral household, shortages in labor, and absence of wage-labor capital necessitate the involvement of women in herding activities, livestock husbandry, or pastoralism in Africa (Roth and Fratkin 2005). This chapter is set to discuss the socioeconomic contributions of women in pastoral societies of Africa and the cultural and health constraints limiting women in African pastoral societies. It invokes gender conflict, identity, and role conflict perspectives and attempts to incorporate a gender social conflict perspective on gender in relation to understanding women in pastoral societies in Africa.

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## Pastoralism in Africa

Pastoralism can be looked at as both a *system* and a *practice* of livestock rearing and production. African pastoralism is a *system* of livestock rearing involving people who are primarily dependent on livestock, who are moving and living in marginal environments with marked seasonality, and who choose the movement of livestock all year round to pastures rather than bringing fodder to herds. On the other hand, pastoralism is also a *practice* of moving animals from one environment to another in search of pasture and water. There seems to be no agreement among scholars as to the actual number of pastoralists on the African continent. For instance, Roth and Fratkin (2005) report that Africa hosts about half the world’s pastoral groups, and about 240 million are agropastoralists, while Fabusoro and Oyegbami (2009) and

Fabusoro et al. (2010) reported that the continent hosts about 20–30 million as pure pastoralists, out of which about 10 million are found in Nigeria. Similarly, the number of pastoralists in other regions and countries varies depending on the time, location, and source of the population data used by diverse scholars. Thus, arguably these 30 million pastoralists who are largely polygamous Islamic populations (de Bruijn 1994; Onyima 2016) are not only men; they also include women (who may be more in number than the men). For instance, ethnographic fieldwork reports from scholars across the continent reveal that there seem to be more women and girls in pastoral households than men among African pastoralists due to the practice of polygamy in line with Islamic inclinations (see Onyima (2016)).

Pastoralists in Africa are currently found in diverse environments (arid, semiarid, humid, swampy, forest, Savannah) but more reside in semiarid pastoral environments (Pedersen and Benjaminsen 2008). The pastoral environments/space where these pastoralists are found in Africa influence the nature and type of pastoralism practiced as well as their socioeconomic activities and relationships with others. The pastoral environment can be defined as one which is occupied by livestock nomads/herders, their animals, and households mostly located at fringe spaces, which often expose its occupants to social, environmental, and health risks (Onyima 2016). It is important to point out that the African continent is a region of the world with marked seasonality, and this influences the types of pastoralism practiced and type of animal/livestock reared within a particular region or environment.

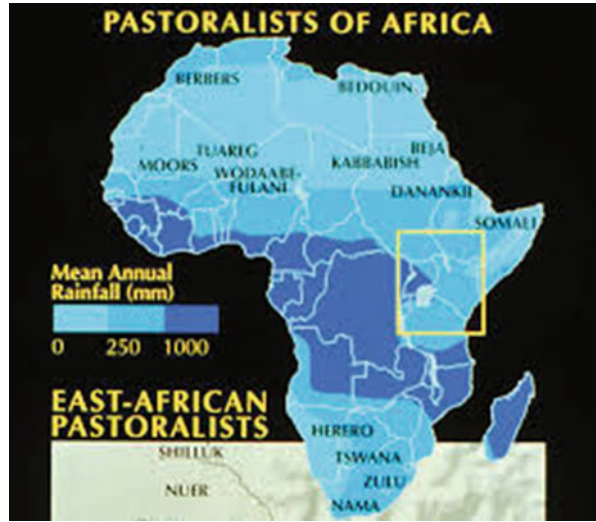
In Africa, pastoralism can be categorized firstly based on the nature of pastoral activities/economy and secondly based on the migratory pattern practiced. Hence, based on the nature of pastoral activities observed within the African continent, there are about three types of pastoralism, namely, (i) pure pastoralism, (ii) semi-pastoralism (agropastoralism (also classified as the traditional pastoralism in the literature)), and (iii) modern pastoralism (sedentary pastoralism or enclosed system or ranching). On the other hand, based on the migratory or nomadic patterns, there are about three types, namely, (a) pure nomadism, (b) semi-nomadism, and (c) transhumance nomadism. Nomadism talks about patterns of movements and migrations, while pure pastoralism is the economic practice of rearing only livestock. Pure pastoralists are often conceived as people who do not cultivate or eat crop foods, but this has been argued as historically nonexistent, hence the need to focus on the processes of pastoralism rather than on the ideal types (Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1980). Semi-pastoralism entails a system that allows for a combination of livestock husbandry with crop farming or trading. This is a more flexible system which is not as rigid as the pure pastoralism. Modern pastoralism encourages some form of sedentarization or total sedentism such as ranching which allows feeding the animals with hay not pastures. One advantage of modern pastoralism like ranching is that it reduces the contacts, clashes, and conflicts between nomads and sedentary groups like farmers. Literature abound on the pastoralists-farmer conflicts as well as the causes of these conflicts (Abbass 2012; Benjaminsen and Ba 2009; Blench 2001; Olaniyan 2013; Olaniyi 2015; Onyima and Iwuoha 2015; Schilling et al. 2012; Williams et al. 1999). African pastoralists are mostly nomadic, though majority are gradually adopting sedentism (see Ekpo et al. (2009), Roth and Fratkin (2005),

Fratkin et al. (2006), Freier et al. (2014), Nathan et al. (1996), and Nduma et al. (2001)). Sedentarization has generated a lot of conversations among scholars especially on its socioeconomic influences on African pastoralists, particularly probes on whether it is good for pastoralists or not (see Fratkin et al. 2006). Nomadism is the hallmark of African pastoralism, although there are a few exceptions depending on the region. For instance, ranching is prominent within the Southern African region, while other regions like the Eastern, Western, Northern, and Central Africa feature more of seminomadic groups like the *Fulani* or the somewhat pure pastoralists such as the *Bororo*. Pastoralists in Africa rear all sorts of ruminant animals like reindeer, horses, camels, sheep, goats, buffaloes, cattle, etc. Migration is thus a key feature of pastoralism because livestock must be fed regularly throughout the year, and since Africa is a region with marked seasonality, pastoralists have to move their animals due to alternating temperature or climatic conditions involving rainy and dry seasons. Nomadism as migration or movements is not limited to livestock husbandry alone; it entails extensive migration across diverse environments, borders, etc. Sometimes, these migrations could be short-term shifts (test migrations) or permanent shifts (Bassett and Turner 2007). In Africa, there are many reasons for migration, namely, familial (marriage, birth, and death ceremonies), religious (pilgrimage), political (military, refugee resettlement), and economic (labor migration, trade, livestock nomadism) (Oyadoke and Brieger 2004). Pastoralists also move in a bid to avoid impending animal disease epidemics, reduce competition, or avoid tax payment to the authorities (Blench and Dendo 1994, 2003; Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1980). Livestock nomadism is a “system based on extensive movements of herds and flocks in search of forage, led by human family units with no permanent home base”(Allen et al. 2011). I argue that it should, however, be rightly seen as livestock rearing with or without a permanent home base since it has been established that there are seminomadic pastoral societies and even sedentary pastoralists in Africa. So many scholars like Ekpo et al. (2009) and Roth and Fratkin (2005) report sedentarization among African livestock nomads.

Various pastoral communities exist across the countries and regions of Africa. In the Sahel region, we have the Fula people of Sahelian West Africa and Toubou of Niger and Chad. In the horn of Africa, we have the Afar, Bedouin of West Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, Beja of North Africa and the Horn of Africa, Berbers of North Africa, the Nuer of Sudan, Oromos of the Horn of Africa, Rendille of the Horn of Africa, Saho of the Horn of Africa, Somalis of the Horn of Africa, Tigre of the Horn of Africa, and Tuareg of the North-Central Sahara. In sub-Saharan Africa, we have the Karimojong of Uganda, Maasai of Kenya East Africa, Pokot of East Africa, Samburu of East Africa, Turkana of East Africa, and the Zulu people of South Africa, among many others (Fig. 1).

It is pertinent to state categorically that the abovementioned pastoral societies are not occupied by male pastoralists alone but also by pastoral women and children. They are not also passive/dormant beings; they are actively involved in various stages of pastoralism as a cultural and economic practice. Though these societies project more of male-centered gender roles than that of women, women still feature prominently in same, similar, or complementary roles in significant areas of the daily

**Fig. 1** Pastoralists of Africa  
(Source: Sabala (2013)  
Conflict, Environmental  
Security and Governance,  
among Pastoralists in Kenya:  
A Case Study of the Turkana  
Community)



pastoral community life. African pastoral societies are highly gender-differentiated societies (Onyima 2016). In these societies, there is a high consciousness of the existing differences of being a male or female which shapes/influences interhuman relations in a particular society. For instance, in my 1-year ethnographic fieldwork in selected pastoralists' communities in Southwestern Nigeria, there were separate male and female spaces for relaxation, gossips, chattering and male and female huts/stools. Nomadic women were not allowed to talk to visitors/strangers (researcher) until consent/permission has been obtained from the males. Women keep quiet or call off interviews/focus group discussion (FGD) once a male pastoralist enters the sessions. In my case, the women began to leave one after the other with one or more excuses, until I noticed the presence of a male (the leader of the bush settlement), and I pleaded that he grant them the permission to continue in the discussion (this was different from the official permission I had already gotten from him to study the group). With this type of gender differentiation in pastoral society, one cannot rule out the issues of gender conflicts and role conflicts in pastoral communities, and these conceptual frames are employed in this chapter in understanding women in African pastoral societies. Issues on gender inequality are highlighted in this discourse about pastoral women because they are found within patriarchal structures that give supremacy to the male gender. Writings of this nature on women across diverse societies often evoke concepts like gender identity, gender dynamics, gender expressions and meanings attached to it (ideas about masculinity and femininity), gender-based violence and girl-child marriage or early marriage, gender complexities, and how some structures empower a particular gender (male) over the other (females) across societies. This will not be an exception but must avoid the narrow scholarship of seeing gender as women studies alone, and issues pertaining to masculinity among African male pastoralists would be mentioned in comparative instances to buttress points.

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## **Gender Social Conflict as Theoretical Frame for Analysis**

Gender social conflict theory has been employed in this chapter as the analytical frame for this discourse on pastoral women in Africa. It is associated with scholars like Harriet Martineau who was the first female sociologist in England born in 1802, and she was one of the females who started the conversation on gender. She focused most of her works on marriage and female occupations and roles. This theory argues that gender is a structural system that distributes power and privilege to some (in this case to men) and disadvantage to others (women) (Giles and Hyndman 2004; Hodgson 1999; Kofman et al. 2000; Reay et al. 2005). In specifics, that structural system is patriarchy – a formal social organization where men have more power and dominate another gender(s) (women). This structure is seen more in institutional practices where women are restricted or disadvantaged socially and economically. Women are seen as incapable of doing certain things like being in leadership positions or what is perceived as “hard work.” This is seen in less official ways and local settings where rationality is extolled as a desirable way of thinking especially in leaders, while irrationality attributed to women means letting emotions affect decisions, and it is seen as a weakness and as such is not worthy to be in leadership positions. These presumptions make people see men as more naturally fit for leadership positions, perform certain tasks and roles (thereby turning blind eye to societies where women perform the same tasks and roles). Gender conflict theories are of various versions and draw from the feminist movements which have different waves. Thus, feminism is evoked in gender theories because it strives for a society where women have equal rights to men. In pastoral communities, the pastoral woman does not have equal rights and access to resources and privileges like their male counterparts. Female pastoralists occupy a low income/economic status, inability to access power, not qualified for leadership, prestige, and unequal access to resources, restrictions from speaking because of one’s gender and age, among so many other inequalities. The gender conflict analytical approach tends to highlight these differential statuses between both genders in order to ameliorate its effects on the marginalized gender and bridge the gap.

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## **Social Contributions of Women in African Pastoral Societies**

Socially, right from childhood up to the time of marriage, pastoral women contribute to the usual female-centered domestic household management and chores like cooking, washing, and sweeping and still veer into some traditional male gender-specific roles. As married women, they engage in co-decision-making with husbands, and crop farming, and leadership in pastoral women associations. They also perform their physiological and biological female gender-specific roles like birthing and child nutrition (breastfeeding), among others. Some studies focusing on the socially oriented gender roles highlighted above have been reviewed.



## Contracting Marriage

In the study conducted by Schneider (1973), among the Pakot (also called Pokot or Pokoot) of East Africa, in contracting a marriage, “when a man desires a wife, he must convey to her father a previously agreed-upon number of cattle and goats; these animals (cows, goats, and steers) are an essential part of any complete bridewealth” (Schneider 1973, p. 165). Apart from animals, the irrigable land is part of the marriage contract, and this does not imply that Pokot women are slaves exchanged for animals. It was also reported in the above study that cattle feature prominently in the marriage of a woman being the most important item of bridewealth. He argued that the exchange of animals or lands for women among pastoralists are just rituals of marriage as a rite of passage, but critical feminists may not accept this explanation without critiquing it. Though romantic love has little place in the notions of Pokot men, rather the improvement of economic position has a large place (Schneider 1973). If this is the actual cultural marriage practice, then it may be argued that pastoral women in Pokot society are covertly seen as articles for exchange, if not why will the Pokot men practice the culture of using women to improve their economic positions, social status like the culture of relocating to her husband’s family, and changing her surname? The bride is referred to as a “cow,” and the contract is compared with *tilia* (a trade of a cow for a steer) (Schneider 1973, p. 165). Many may argue it a symbolic way of contracting marriage, but this may not sit well in the minds of a critical feminist who wants equity and equality for all women and men all over the world. However, scholars like Bollig (2000) and Bollig and Österle (2008) have argued that some of these practices are changing and that the rituals are not important in Pokot economic exchange. The affines (in most pastoral societies) distribute the bridewealth, and some calves are returned to the herd of the bride and groom. It is important to highlight however that the bride is protected from extreme exploitation by sanctions; prominent among all is relinquishing claims to bridewealth and a fine to the husband if his wife dies under any circumstance before her prime (Schneider 1973). This shows the existence of some form of socially and culturally institutionalized structures influencing pastoral women’s lives, though some of these structures show efforts to limit or totally eliminate domestic violence as there are checks on the excesses of men against women in pastoral societies. With the current increase in divorce and instability in marital unions of the twenty-first century (Stevenson and Wolfers 2007), these issues (divorce, separation, and instability) have limited expressions and are somewhat abhorred by pastoral women. Though cases of divorce are not unheard of in pastoral societies as found in Ibarapa Oyo State Nigeria (see Onyima 2016), they are rare. “The bride wealth has other functions, such as stabilizing the marriage but it is more important from the economic point of view” (Schneider 1973, p. 165). Beyond this, the pastoral woman is covertly used as a kind of capital (in the prism of scholars, not the native pastoralists) in that she performs most of the basic productive labors in a household, while the men perform in the external sphere (though women are also performing outside the home). She not only must plant, tend, and harvest the crops (though receiving help from her husband with the very heavy work) but make shoes, weave baskets, milk



the cows, and even herd them when not busy with other things (see Schneider (1973) and Hodgson (1999)). Traditionally, there are structures that allow pastoral women property rights. All these empower pastoral women socially and economically too, but a recent study by Flintan (2010) has reported a weakening of the traditional customary institutions that protect women's property rights as shown below: the study by Flintan (2010) was among the Boran people in Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia which established how the traditional pastoral customary institutions accord pastoral women some property rights and provided a certain degree of protection for these women, but this protection is gradually eroding as a result of restricted mobility leading to the weakening of these customary institutions. The study suggested appropriate and effective government protection for pastoral women's property rights as they do not yet exist.

### **Pregnancy and Postpartum Activities**

Pregnancy and childbirth symbolizes a time of danger for pastoral women on many levels. Pregnancy is concealed for so long during the first trimester because of the fear of wizardry and sorcery, and when it becomes obvious, the woman goes to her natal home where she is less likely to be harmed (Hampshire 2004). In the review by Hampshire on the Fulani generally found in Francophone and Anglophone Africa, there is the physical danger of death or serious incapacity; lifetime risks to maternal health; the risk of black magic, witchcraft, and jealousy during pregnancy; and fear of serious misfortunes: miscarriage, death in childbirth, and deformity of the child (Hampshire 2004). There is also the fear of shame, an expectation to live up to the ideal of stoicism in the face of pain and danger, pastoral women were expected not to show a sign of weakness during pain like that experienced during childbirth (Hampshire 2004; Onyima 2016). The birth of a child attracts ecstasy and celebration because the first child is essential in cementing a marriage and giving the parents their new status in life from being married persons to parents (Dupire 1973; Hampshire 2004). Birth transforms couples to parents, but in most African patriarchal societies like that of the pastoralists, the sex or gender of the child matters and determines the degree of celebrations given by the man to celebrate the woman who has just delivered a baby. It also determines the degree of acceptance given to a woman in her husband's household because a woman who gave birth to a baby girl or continues to birth girls and not male children may be sent away to her parent, or another woman may be married to cohabit or replace her by the man. This implies that pastoral women stand the risk of experiencing divorce, separation, or polygamy because of their reproductive or fertility capacity in birthing the male gender in particular – which is medically established to not be a woman's fault. One thing that has attracted little or no attention of scholars is the psychological pressure and health impact mounted on women seeking to birth a particular gender. All these are all manifestations of masculine superiority over the female gender in a pastoral society.

There is also differential treatment given to male children over the female. A male child may be mocked or spanked for behaving like a girl or showing a sign of

weakness which is often attributed to women. According to Dupire (1973, p. 297), among pastoralists, “sex or gender differentiation appears very early in ways which babies are nurtured. A girl is washed in warm water for the first four months but this treatment lasts only for three months for boys. Amulets worn by babies differ according to sex and gender. Those worn for boys are for virility and by girls for fertility.” The culture of body morphology reshaping or modification is practiced, which is attached to the nose, limbs, etc., though, according to Dupire (1973, p. 297), very little attempts are made during the early age of life to discipline the babies. The child is nursed by the mother or surrogate. Children are treated with love, gentleness, affection, and patience by the men, women, and elderly – lessons of social behavior are inculcated through reciprocity – “an eye for an eye.” However, all these social expectations are impacted in children mostly by women. If a child beats a sibling, the mother gives back a gentle slap, but if a child is having tantrums, by becoming difficult or spoiled, he/she will be excluded outside the circle of women and children. Pastoral women also bear children who are socially and economically valuable, the girls in housework and as future sources of bridewealth and the boys as helpers in the management of the herd (Schneider 1973, p.170).

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### **Pastoral Female Childhood, Adolescents, and Adulthood**

Socialization and social expectations continue from childhood to adulthood, and this is done mainly by women. According to Dupire (1973, p. 297), “girls are allowed to play with brothers at the early age of childhood but when boys play with herds, she stays behind to play with dolls made of gourds.” There are a whole lot of conversations going on in the use of girl and boy toys in reinforcing the gaps between femininity and masculinity (Killen et al. 2001; Blakemore and Centers 2005). Once the girl begins to stand, she is put in the circle of women dancers and older women who clap and admire her as she dances. By 3 or 4 years old, she begins to admire herself and have her hair done by older girls. At this age her earlobes are pierced, six holes in the right and seven in the left with rings put in them (Dupire 1973, p. 298). The pastoral female from childhood goes through pains of genital circumcision and piercing for ornaments and beautification (without a second look at the disadvantages), so that she could be admired by men for marriage and supposedly prevent her from promiscuity (Ali 2012; Berg and Denison 2012; Berg and Underland 2013; Ouldzeidoune et al. 2013; Pashaei et al. 2012; Van der Kwaak 1992). The stages in the upbringing of a girl unlike the boy continue smoothly without a break until she is a married girl (woman) at 14 or 15 (Dupire 1973). She is monitored constantly and cautioned on how to sit, eat, and speak like a female/woman from childhood to adulthood, unlike her male counterparts. So childhood ends early for pastoral females (girls/women) as they are given out for marriage earlier than pastoral men, and this cultural practice of early marriage for females allows boys/men to enjoy the period of adolescence more than their female counterparts (Hampshire 2004). Early marriage or girl-child marriage is common among pastoral societies, and this is not without some health, psychological, and social consequences (Nguyen and Wodon

2015; Nour 2006; Raj 2010). Before going into marriage, girls are socialized into developing “social sense” and exposure to domestic responsibilities, food preparations, and looking after small ruminants (Hampshire 2004). Gradually, her play activities metamorphose into the tasks. At age 6 or 7, she begins fetching water from wells on foot, and sometimes she expected to trek distant kilometers in search of water at risk of being bitten by reptiles or raped. Recently though, some studies reports of some social services and facilities like pipe bore water being provided for pastoralists’ settlements and communities in Africa as shown in the picture below (Onyima 2016; Kandagor 2005).

Under the supervision of her mother, she pounds, grinds, weaves, fans and mats, decorates and mends calabashes, and sews. She also learns to carry her brother on her back and look after the home in her mother’s absence. In contrast, the male child is relieved of this multiplicity of tasks and left to do only a few chores outside the home like accompanying the father to herd animals. From age 4 or 5, daughters are taught socio-moral codes like sexual plays between brothers and sisters are forbidden (Dupire 1973). Among the Oromo in East Africa just like in other pastoral groups, for instance, a girl-child is betrothed a day after birth and never allowed to look at her betrothed fiancé or visit him, and older people must be respected. It is the role of the mother to ensure she is mentally and socially educated (Dupire 1973, p. 299). This study further reported that in this childhood life cycle, little girls learn two things: to be a daughter and a sister in a family. The relationship with the father is less affectionate but she learns to obey him. This to some extent reinforces the power structure that extols males’ superiority especially in the psyche of women in the pastoral society. Women constantly also remind the girl-child that she is a mere “girl” and should not express aspirations that may show they want to usurp that of the male (Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008). The choice for a spouse is done by the father and mother and she has no opinion. The father gives his daughter a heifer before she moves to her husband’s house, and the father practices avoidance and maintains a joking relationship with her and the in-laws but extends generosity to his grandchildren. The mothers maintain the position of a counsellor during her marriage. The daughter may give one of her female children to the old mother as house help, and once the girls get married, a woman relies more on her sons, and this is why mother prefers more sons than a daughter (Dupire 1973, p. 300). The relationship between a brother and sister is shaped by kinship and seniority (age), leading to mutual help, a shared affection which influences modalities for sharing agnatic rights of inheritance, and women get the least desirable (Schneider 1973). These gender disparities in roles reinforce the structure of patriarchy in African pastoral societies.

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## **Economic Contributions of Women in African Pastoral Societies**

Economically, pastoral women are involved in direct livestock production like cattle herding and indirect complementary livestock activities like milking, processing, and petty trading in the sale of dairy products (cheese, butter, and milk), skin/leather works, and extracting rangeland products like firewood and charcoal, among others.

For instance, Waters-bayer (1985) observed that early scholars of pastoralism in Africa, namely, Hopen (1958), Stenning (1959), and Dupire (1962), reported their studies on women involvement in extracting and selling of livestock products like milk, which is either consumed at home or exchanged for grain and is being the pastoralist's main source of subsistence. The women were responsible for milking, processing, and marketing milk, as well as for obtaining grain for family consumption within the West African pastoral societies. This is the case in many if not all other pastoralist societies in Southern, Central, Northern, and Eastern Africa (Waters-bayer 1985; Ngoitiko 2008; Mitchell 1999; Nduma et al. 2001). In the study conducted by Schneider (1973, p. 159) among the Pokot of East Africa (also known as the Suk of West District (West Central Kenya), "sex or gender taboo is present in handling cattle and its products, as women are forbidden to have much to do with them and there are special customs and taboos relating to their milk." The management and control of the family herd are mainly in the hands of the head of the family (man), even though his wife and sons may have some rights to certain animals (Schneider 1973, p. 165). The control of major sources of livelihood by men impacts negatively on economic power and income status and capacity of pastoral women. Though the wife and son have some rights (usufruct) and have much to say about how animals are used, there are cases where women manage the herds after the death of the husband. There seems to be no strict rule on livestock management responsibilities as stocks sent out to graze in draft are either guarded by men, women, or children (Schneider 1973) depending on the distance of the herds from the home-stead/settlement. The Pokot practice the "half-circle" ritual (also known as *kerket/sapana* – a religious ritual marked by divination, slaughtering of steers, and prayer ceremony by elders where the initiated men sitting in order of age-set positions form an open-ended half-circle facing the highest mountain in the land and circumcised younger men are initiated into adulthood). Put differently it is the age-set system of the pastoral Pokot (Peristiany 1951a,b). During this ritual, the women attend but must sit by themselves away from the half-circle and are given only the head of the slain beast. From this report, it seems that there is no clear-cut total prohibition against women having anything to do with cattle, as is true in some East Africa cultures (Schneider 1973:165), but the extent of the freedom is limited.

It is important to highlight that there are remarkable changes in the life of pastoralists in Africa; one prominent one that has been reported extensively by scholars is the adoption of sedentism, and this to some extent influences pastoralists' negatively and positively especially pastoral women in unique ways. For instance, a study conducted by Fratkin and Smith (1995) suggests that the adoption of the pastoral sedentarization in Africa presents new economic opportunities to Rendille women in Northern Kenya through the sale of dairy products, agricultural produce, and labor. Detailed findings of their study show that these pastoral women who belong to a number of different nomadic, settled agropastoral, and town communities engage in a variety of economic pursuits. For instance, Butz (2013) reports that economic marginalization, population growth, drought, and absence of other marketable resources are leading the Maasai pastoral women of the Engikareti in Northern Tanzania into charcoal production, thereby resulting to changing land

management and deforestation. Fratkin and Smith (1995)'s study show improved household budgets and that urban centers attract wealthier Rendille married women selling milk and poorer women engaged in wage-labor and petty commodity trade. Their study further comparatively shows that women living in towns work as strenuously as those in pastoral communities, while men in towns work less than those in pastoral communities and less than women in both communities. This data of pastoral women suggest that increases in women's income may have a beneficial effect on the nutrition and well-being of their children. The above shows that sedentarization is bringing a positive impact on the pastoral women in Northern Kenya. Contrary to the above, Flintan (2010) in the study among the Boran people in Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia shows that sedentarization is negatively impacting on the pastoral women's property right as a result of radical change in terms of both restricted mobility and access to vital resources as it is weakening traditional pastoral institutions which originally afforded women property rights.

One reason why the pastoral women's economic fortunes are small may be tied to what was reported by that, and it is also a striking fact that Pokot women do not place as high a valuation upon cattle as men do. One woman in the reviewed study said she did not think cattle were beautiful at all, but that grain was beautiful. Related to this are the facts that in ritual feasts (*Sapana and Kerket*), women get less meat than men (though they get meat in other ways) and are thought of as being without responsibility for their acts and so protected by the supernatural. Men are responsible for female destinies and must appeal to the supernatural through rituals on their behalf (Hampshire 2002, 2004). Pastoral women have little actual control over stock, though in theory may normally own cattle and control their disposition to some extent. However, it is possible for women to exercise considerable control over land and crops and sometimes to grow private crops to dispose of as they see fit. Women are completely in charge of the family granary, from which men are excluded, and they ration the grain to the rest of the family. Among the Sotho of South Africa, it is noted that women did not value cattle highly because they were allowed to have little to do with them. So this is not necessarily true that pastoral women don't like cattle at all, but they have over time imbibed the culture in their psyche that handling cattle is the sphere of male pastoralists. However, the literature is saying this is gradually changing as more women are getting into actual grazing and herding of animals especially when they are widowed or there are no sons and/or all their children are females.

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## **Cultural and Health Constraints Confronting Pastoral Women in Africa**

Women in pastoral societies in Africa suffer a lot of cultural, social, economic, and health constraints. Pastoral women are unskilled (at least in a modern sense but not in a traditional sense as they have acquired skills in milking, cooking, weaving, etc.), mostly nonliterate, and constrained by lots of cultural beliefs and rituals with religious intonations, which prevent them from venturing into huge economic

enterprises and seeking other higher aspirations like leadership positions. Studies conducted across several pastoral societies in Africa justify the above assertions, for instance, Conant (1965) has shown how some subsistence techniques of herding among the Pokot of West Central Kenya shape other aspects of the people's culture. In a study by Bruggeman (1994), exploring the role of women in livestock management in the agropastoral group of the Dodoth people in Karamoja, Northeast Uganda, reports that in accessing public resources like immunization and vaccines, for instance, women are allowed to access these health services, but it must be through the men, and if they must go in search of health care themselves, then they must inform their husbands/men (Bruggeman 1994). A pertinent question at this point is what happens to these pastoral women during emergency health-care needs where the husbands are not immediately reachable maybe because he has gone to graze his herds? This shows the extent that the limiting structure of patriarchy still holds sway within these African pastoral regions, and it impacts on women health-care access. A study conducted by Adebayo et al. (2008) on the effects of sedentarization on social services available to pastoral Fulani in Ogun State Nigeria found that sedentarization contributed to livelihood diversification into crop farming and petty trading (since they needed to stay longer at nomadic bush settlement) but has not improved the access to the social services, which is mostly needed by pastoral women and children. The study recommended that pastoral Fulani(s) be provided with adequate extension services and social facilities, such as education, water supply, electricity, adequate transportation, and farm credit. On the contrary, in a Kenyan study by Seno and Tome (2017), pastoralism which is the mainstay of the Loitokitok District of Southern Kenyan society (involving both men and women) is threatened by sedentarization, environmental degradation, changing weather patterns, and labor constraints as vulnerable members such as women and children embrace education. In essence, male pastoralists are more likely to send their female children to nomadic schools provided near or within pastoralists bush settlements than sending their male children because they need sons for grazing animals (Dyer 2001, 2006; Umar and Tahir 2000). This to some extent is an advantage to the few pastoral women who are allowed by their fathers to embrace modern education. When it comes to leadership issues among women in societies in Africa, Kipuri and Ridgewell (2008) write of a "double bind" that excludes pastoral women from national leadership in the Horn of Africa and East Africa. Specifically, the authors stressed that generally, pastoralists remain socially and economically marginalized and have little or no representation in local and national government. Kipuri and Ridgewell (2008) reported that only a few pastoral women have succeeded in campaigning for an open parliamentary seat in East and Horn of Africa. In Ethiopia, which has the largest pastoralist population, there are a number of notable pastoralist women, but they tend to be confined to junior positions particularly in the parliamentary institutions (Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008). So it can be deduced that pastoral women are marginalized both within the pastoral societies and in the larger political leadership sphere.

On the other hand, the most challenging health limitations confronting pastoral women in Africa are experienced due to unequal access to health care, pregnancy,

and reproductive health problems especially as it relates to obstetric health-care needs (Brieger et al. 2001; Hampshire and Hampshire 2002; Hampshire 2004). The degree of antenatal and postnatal visits to clinics is low, and this stems from some beliefs about socially constructed feminine characteristics among pastoral women such as “beliefs that only lazy women allow other persons to help during child delivery” (unassisted birth is prevalent among pastoral societies in Africa), and this belief and many other factors often lead to high rates of maternal mortality among pastoralists women (El Shiekh et al. 2015; Hampshire and Hampshire 2002; Hampshire 2004; Onyima 2016). Pastoral women endure harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation (Kipuri and Ridgewell 2008; Watson 2010). This posture of stoicism is the most fatal and must be discouraged among pastoralists in Africa. Issues of gender inequality abound where a pregnant or sick woman may need to get consent of her husband before seeking health care mostly due to poverty/low income, distance of a particular nomadic bush settlement to a health-care facility, and transportation issues because nomadic settlements are always in marginal spaces far away from the hospitals located in towns. Preference for traditional health care (herbs), allegiance to faith-based health care (reliance on Quranic drinks given by Islamic clerics), and others are limitations to pastoral women’s health (Onyima 2016). Gender-based differences in sufferers of different diseases like onchocerciasis (Brieger et al. 1997a,b), fever, and malaria are prevalent (Brieger 2011; Elmardi et al. 2009; Gundiri et al. 2007); Guinea-worm disease does a lot of harm on pregnant pastoral women (Berko 2008; Brieger et al. 1997a,b; Faso et al. 2014; Ramakrishna and Brieger 2006; Watts et al. 1989). Self-treatment of malaria prevails (Ruebush et al. 1995) as they manage malaria on the move (Akogun et al. 2012). Tuberculosis is also ravaging pastoralist societies, and women and children are affected and face delays in treatment as there are gender barriers in accessing tuberculosis care especially in East African pastoralist societies (Gele et al. 2009; John et al. 2015; Krishnan et al. 2014; Muhammad et al. 2014). Willingness to approach modern health-care clinics for HIV testing and counselling is low among pregnant pastoral women (Adeneye et al. 2007). What makes all these issues much worse is that there are little or no access to health care in pastoralists’ societies in Africa (Sheik-mohamed and Velema 1999; Onyima 2016), and vulnerable members like women suffer more, and hence there is a rise in advocacy for the provision of health care for pastoralists (Omar 1992).

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## Conclusion

The chapter concludes that there is a need for a broad inclusive policy that captures all women including pastoral women by taking cognizance of their peculiar environment, culture, status, and class in relation to other African women. In sum, we have so far explained that existing literature on African pastoralism largely ignored or marginally reported issues on women in pastoral societies particularly their socioeconomic roles and contributions to livestock production and development within pastoral environments/societies until the 1970s. In contrast, men’s activities



and roles are often reported by scholars as if women do not exist or are idle in pastoral societies. Being a patriarchal society, the root of this somewhat relegation of female activities is not peculiar to studies on pastoral groups; it is common in most patriarchal societies because of the contended crude philosophy that “women should only be seen and not heard stemming from a controversial ideology that African women are men’s properties or sub-human bought through bridewealth.” We have also highlighted that a common cultural expression is that in social or public gatherings, women rarely speak when the men are there particularly on sighting a visitor (an ethnographer or researcher) to the pastoral settlement; public speaking and decisions are often done by the men (Onyima 2016). Be that as it may, many pastoral women in the absence of a man welcome and entertain a visitor, are articulate, and speak freely when in a group of fellow women and can continue to respond to an ethnographer/visitor until a man surfaces (Onyima 2016). Pastoral women withdraw to their huts or stop speaking immediately when a man comes to the scene of interviews. This information is important for researchers who may want to study a pastoral group in Africa. This may be another reason why pastoral women’s views and activities on their health, social, and economic lives are marginally reported. Aside from this fact, even in scholarship the reality, however, was that pastoral women were passively mentioned in anthropological literature prior to 1970s. The African continent arguably boasts of about 30 million pastoralists (men and women inclusive) who are largely polygamous Islamic populations. Fieldwork observations and reports from scholars across the continent arguably reveal that there seem to be more women and girls in pastoral households than men among African pastoralists due to the practice of polygamy in line with Islamic inclinations. Women issues are gender issues associated with socially constructed roles perpetuated within patriarchal structures and have evoked a gender-conflict analytical frame. It is therefore pertinent to highlight the significant gender-specific and non-gender-specific socioeconomic contributions of pastoral women as well as the cultural and health constraints confronting women in pastoralists’ environments. Women are economically involved in direct livestock production like cattle herding and indirect complementary livestock activities like milking, processing, and sale of dairy products (cheese, butter, and milk), crop farming, petty trading, skin/leather works, and extracting rangeland products like firewood and charcoal, among others. Pastoral women are also socially proficient in household management, co-decision-making with husbands, food preparation, birthing and child nutrition (breastfeeding), and leadership in pastoral women associations. In spite of these significant contributions to the development of pastoral societies, they are still culturally subordinated and not allowed in some spheres in relations to men. The chapter concludes that there is need to articulate how social justice initiatives could be applied using gender social conflict perspectives to bridge the gaps between dominant groups/gender (pastoral men) and marginal group/gender (pastoral women) and bring about social change. It is important to note that a few women (less than ten in number) in the East African countries of Kenya and Ethiopia have been able to overcome some of these challenges and have risen to higher leadership positions in their countries, and as such pastoral women are not totally incapacitated, but much still needs to be done (Kipuri

and Ridgewell 2008). The aim, therefore, is to recognize the roles of pastoral women, integrate them into larger women enclave, empower them through education, and expunge the existing cultural and health constraints to enable them to contribute more to the pastoral economy and the general society.

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