

## **Are Land Disputes Responsible for Terrorism in Kenya? Evidence from Mpeketoni Attacks**

Michael Nyongesa<sup>a</sup>

### **Abstract**

This article explores how land disputes have influenced domestic terrorism in Kenya. The author first examines the general trend of terrorism in Kenya and then compares the various causal factors for both domestic and external terrorism. This article establishes that historical land grievances have been politically and ethnically utilised by the politicians to fuel tension and radicalise the youths. The terror groups have utilised this fertile ground of ethnic tension to carry out the attacks. The article concludes that addressing domestic terrorism should incorporate strategies of addressing land grievances and economic inequalities.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, land disputes, marginalisation, Kenya, Mpeketoni

### **1. Introduction**

The recent terror attacks in Brussels and Paris exemplify increased global radical Islamist terrorism, and this indicates that no country is safe from terrorism. The Horn of Africa and eastern Africa have been scenes of conflicts and terror attacks in the recent past. Kenya, in particular, has experienced increased terror attacks since 2012. Al-Shabaab, which is Al-Qaeda's affiliate militant group in Somalia, has claimed responsibility for most of the attacks. The theoretical and political debates underpinning the 'causes' or 'conditions' for increased terrorism activities in Kenya have come up with several contrasting hypotheses which fall into two categories. One line of argument focuses on *external causes* which include: Kenya's proximity to unstable neighbours (Karari, 2014; Aronson, 2013), Kenya's close ties with Western countries (Adan, 2005; Rohwerder, 2015) and the presence of Kenya's troops in Somalia (Mellgard, 2015; GOK, 2014; Lind *et al.*, 2015). The second line of argument focuses on *domestic factors* which

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<sup>a</sup>London School of Economics Alumnus

include: youth unemployment (Sibena, 2015; Odhiambo, 2015), oppression and marginalisation of Kenyan Muslims (Karari, 2014; Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010) and finally economic and political grievances (Odhiambo, 2015; Botha, 2014). Each of the above factors cannot adequately explain every attack in Kenya as the phenomenon of terrorism is complex and the cause and reason vary from place to place (Whittaker, 2004). It would be misleading to analyse them from a general point of view as there are different reasons for attacks exhibited by al-Qaeda and ISIS in Syria and Iraq, Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Taliban in Afghanistan (Mohammed, 2015).

Kenya has a long history of land injustices and grievances and any domestic economic grievances are related to land (Boone, 2012; Kanyinga, 2009). Therefore, this paper is of the view that land grievances constitute the *fulcrum* of domestic terrorism in *some parts* of the country. Land is pursued indirectly and beneath other factors like ethnicity. Less research has been done to establish the interaction between land grievances and domestic terrorism in Kenya. *Land grievances* have only been mentioned to supplement other internal conditions facilitating radicalisation.

In that regard, the aim of this paper is to assess how land disputes and grievances have influenced terrorist activities in Kenya. This topic is relevant to development because a lot of resources are being allotted to fighting terrorism. Furthermore, this paper also contributes to the counter-terrorism policies domestically and at the global level. Coastal Kenya, and Mpeketoni in particular, was used as a case study because it has experienced the highest number of attacks in the country in most recent times (ACLED, 2015) and, at the same time, has 'extreme' cases of historical land injustices in Kenya. This paper exclusively utilised desk-based qualitative research as the primary methodology where a review and analysis of the relevant literature on terrorism and land in Kenya was done.

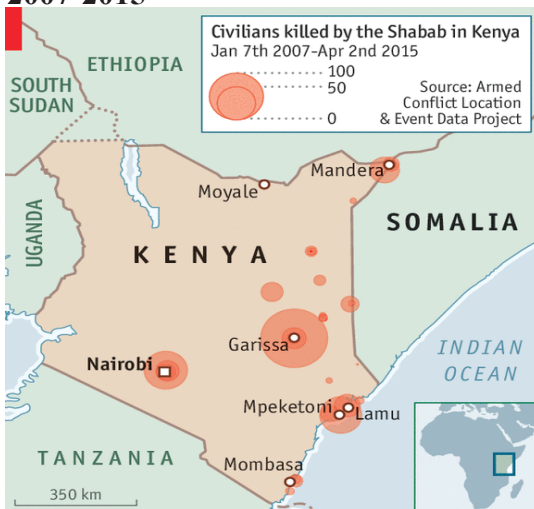
The central finding of this paper is that, while other factors predominate and provide a primary explanation for the increased terror attacks in other regions such as Nairobi and northern Kenya, in the case of Mpeketoni, land injustices and grievances have been exploited politically, fuelling hatred and tension between the natives and the outsiders. This hatred and tension has been utilised by the Al-Shabaab to infiltrate, recruit and radicalise Muslim youths who, in turn, carry out terror attacks targeting the outsiders who are non-Muslims in order to displace them from their areas. Al-Shabaab is utilising this fertile land of ethnic tension, frustration and religious dichotomy to win over financiers and sympathisers. This is really helping Al-Shabaab to infiltrate Kenya and advance their economic and political

motives. It is evident that if the Kenyan government continues to deny the real domestic socio-economic grievances on which extremists have relied to radicalise and recruit, Kenya risks presiding over the growth of a fully developed domestic Al-Shabaab insurgency (Mellgard, 2015). Therefore, anti-terrorism policies and strategies should start by addressing the domestic socio-economic inequalities (Menkhaus, 2015), build strong relationship with the Muslim communities and reform the security institutions to enable them to gather intelligence information and respond quickly.

## 2. Overview of Terrorism in Kenya

Terrorism in Kenya dates back to the colonial era when the British rulers labelled the freedom fighters named Mau-Mau terrorists and yet the group was a legitimate liberation movement (Mogire & Agade, 2011). From 1970 to 2014, Kenya experienced 440 terrorist attacks. They resulted in around 1,400 deaths and around 5,800 injuries (Pate & Miller, 2015). Most of these attacks occurred in the northern and coastal regions as well as Nairobi. The most fatal attack was in 1998 when al-Qaeda attacked the U.S. embassy in Nairobi where more than 200 people died and around 4,000 were injured (ibid.). From 2012 to 2015, the terrorist attacks significantly increased, with the Al-Shabaab claiming responsibility (Mellgard, 2015). The other notable attacks include the Mpeketoni (Coast) attack in 2014 where over 100 people died (Butime, 2014). Another major attack was on Westgate Mall (Nairobi) in September 2013 where 67 people died and, most recently, the Garissa University attack where 147 students were massacred.

**Figure 1: Kenyan Map Showing Patterns of Al-Shabaab Attacks from 2007-2015**



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### **3. Mpeketoni Terror Attacks as a Case Study**

Mpeketoni is situated in Coast Province and in Lamu County. It experienced a lot of terrorist attacks in 2014 as highlighted in Figure 2 below. Greater Mpeketoni is a fertile farming area located along the East African coastline that runs from Mombasa to the Kenya-Somalia border. It was created as a settlement scheme for the landless Kikuyus in 1968 by the Kenyatta government (Boone, 2012). The relocation of Kikuyus to Mpeketoni has been labelled as ‘rigged development’ and the Kikuyus are termed as ‘outsiders’ by the locals who are Swahilis and Muslims (IRIN, 2014). This relocation altered the ethnic and religious composition of Lamu and most of the Coast region (Butime, 2014). The influx of more Kikuyus, and members of other tribes who were Christians, resulted in the indigenes being the ethnic and religious minority, which has led to a lot of tension (ibid.). The locals believe that this relocation was a deliberate attempt to destroy their economic power, which adds to the narrative of marginalisation (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010). Lamu is the only county in Kenya where nearly 50 per cent of the population is non-indigenous (IRIN, 2014).

#### **Figure 2: Death Toll in Lamu as Result of Terror Attacks - June to July 2014**

**15 June:** 65 people killed in Mpeketoni and the environs

**17 June:** 15 killed in Poromoko and Witu

**23 June:** 5 killed in Taa village, Pandanguo area

**5 July:** 12 killed in villages in Hindi area

**5 July:** 9 killed at Gamba

**18 July:** 7 killed near Mpeketoni centre.

**Source:** IRIN news 23 July 2014

#### **3.1 Predicting and Predisposing Factors for Increased Terrorist Activities in Kenya**

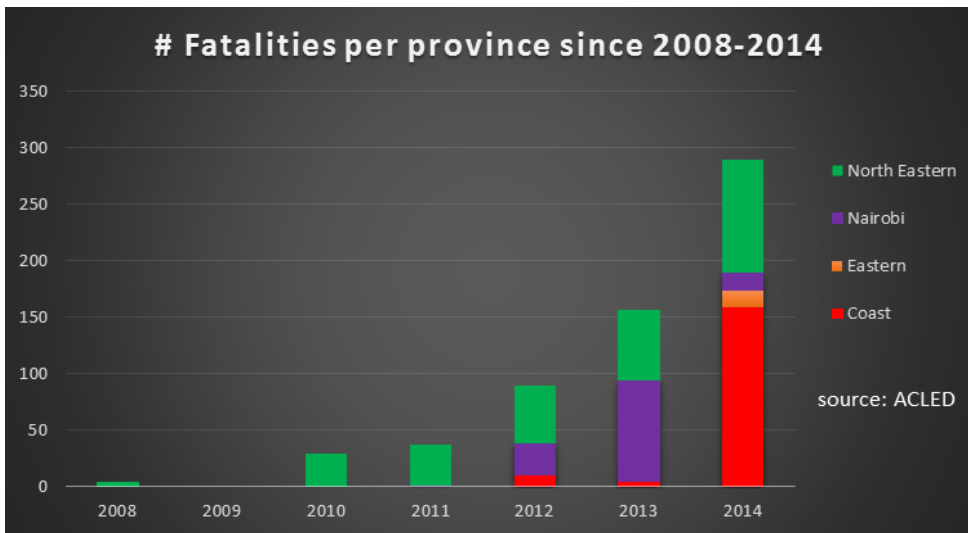
To understand and unravel the mystery of increased terrorist attacks in Kenya (Coast), the major contending, motivating and facilitating factors advanced by various scholars will be qualitatively and theoretically analysed and tested.

#### **3.2 The Presence Of Kenya’s Troops In Somalia**

In October 2011, the Kenyan government deployed Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) to Somalia under the AMISOM unit. This was after the Al-Shabaab had abducted some Kenyans, tourists and foreign aid workers (Odhiambo *et al.*, 2015; Mellgard, 2015). KDF’s invasion of Somalia re-amplified

the tenuous relationship between the Muslims and the Kenyan state (Rohwerder, 2015). It has been argued that this offensive invasion, referred to as Operation *Linda Nchi* (Swahili for ‘protect the country’), has been the primary reason for increased transnational terror attacks in Kenya since then (Rohwerder, 2015). The same argument can be reinforced by data from ACLED that indicates increased terrorist activities from 2012 up to 2014, as shown in Figure 3 below.

**Figure 3: Fatalities Per Province Since 2008-2014**



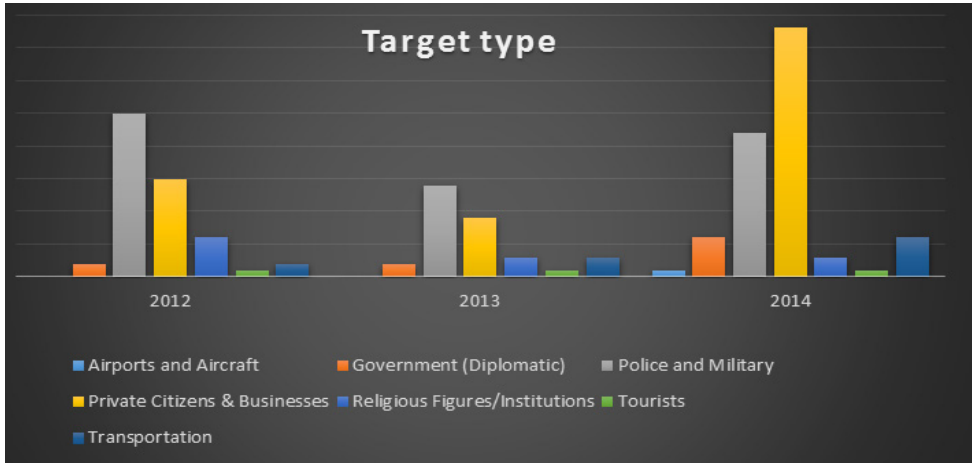
As shown by the bar graph above, the number of attacks has significantly increased since 2012, just after the incursion of Kenyan’s troops into Somalia. These increased attacks are perceived to be retaliations by the Al-Shabaab. Political debate in Kenya is muted on withdrawing troops from Somalia (Lind *et al.*, 2015) as a possible solution to increased terrorist activities. However, this hypothesis falls short on several grounds, as explained below.

*Geography of the attacks:* As Figure 3 above indicates, the attacks in 2012 and 2013 were primarily in north-eastern Kenya and Nairobi. The shift of the bulk of the attacks to coastal Kenya in 2014 needs a proper explanation. The possible reason is that the attackers could be looking for places that are fertile for conflicts because of simmering economic grievances and ethnic tensions (Butime, 2014) and Mpeketoni is one such place.

*Target type:* Most of the attacks in 2014 were in the coastal region (Figure 3) and on private citizens and their businesses (Figure 4 below). In 2012 and 2013, the attacks were primarily directed at the police and military,

which represented a clear message of retaliation because of the presence of Kenyan troops in Somalia. A shift in 2014 to primarily attacking the citizens and their businesses who are non-natives of Mpeketoni discredits this hypothetical factor.

**Figure 4: Trend in Targets from 2012-2014**



Furthermore, attacking the coastal region is perceived to have a link with its vibrant beach tourism industry that is at odds with the locally dominant Islamic religion and culture (Rohwerder, 2015). However, this link can be contested on the grounds that, even though Mpeketoni town itself is situated along the main coastal road leading to the Lamu tourist resorts, it does not host foreign tourists. The absence of tourist attractions there made it an unlikely target for the Al-Shabaab seeking to hurt the tourism industry and the fact that there were no foreign tourists among the victims reinforces this argument (Butime, 2014). Other countries have troops in Somalia and have nearly the same geographical proximity to Somalia as Kenya but they have not experienced as many attacks as Kenya. Ethiopia, Djibouti, Uganda and Tanzania have all experienced one attack each in 2014 compared to Kenya with over 60 attacks (ACLED, 2015). These statistics further nullify this assumption and call for consideration of other factors.

### **3.3 Unstable Neighbours and Porous Ungoverned Borders**

The long-running state collapse of Somalia and conflict spill-over act as ‘external stresses’ on peace and stability in Kenya (Lind *et al.*, 2015 p.4). When the Somali state collapsed in 1991, it created a lawless society where Islamic radical ideologies flourished (Aronson, 2013). Insecurity, lack of

governance and development vacuums in these areas have enabled armed groups, weapons and the jihadist ideology to gain ground and cause a threat to the Kenyan state (Gibbons, 2014). Most of the radical Islam comes from the Middle East and Somalia owing to porous insecure borders (Aronson, 2013). In 2003, President Bush reiterated that 'stabilising Somalia is essential in sustaining the war against terrorism' (Mogire & Agade, 2011). The geographical terrain, especially in north-eastern and partly coastal Kenya, is difficult to secure, hence remains 'ungoverned spaces', making it easy for Al-Shabaab to infiltrate Kenya (Kleinman & Bradbury, 2010; Anderson, 2014). The same argument is reinforced by Ombaka (2015:11), who dubbed these porous borders as an 'arc of insecurity'. In northern Kenya, the situation is worsened by the frequent conflicts between pastoralist communities due to cattle raiding and competition for pasture and water for their animals (Anderson, 2014). According to Mogire and Agade (2011), Somalia has played a big role in transiting weapons and Islamic fundamentalists who have coordinated most of the deadly attacks in Kenya.

The ungoverned spaces also hint at the failure or laxity in government and security surveillance which enables the terrorist groups to network, hide and flourish undetected (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010). This factor of insecure borders best explains most of the attacks in northern and coastal Kenya, especially in 1990-2010 (Aronson, 2013). The 1990s attacks were also hinged on Kenya's close ties with Israel and the West (Adan, 2005; Rohwerder, 2015). It can be argued that the geographical terrain and position of Mpeketoni provided the assailants with many routes of egress after the attack, which could be a possible reason for targeting it (Butime, 2014). Mpeketoni's location, being adjacent to the expansive Pandaguo forest to the north that extends into Boni wildlife forest that connects into Somalia and other routes heading to Witu and Lake Kenyatta, also favours hiding of the attackers. Given the fact that Al-Qaeda operatives involved in the deadly 1998 and 2002 attacks stayed in the same area also reinforces this argument (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010). However, the assumption that the Al-Shabaab chose Mpeketoni because of the ungoverned spaces and the escape routes is not convincing. It can be contested on the grounds that the high concentration of security forces in the area makes it unattractive. The location of the General Service Unit (GSU) and KDF bases in Hindi, Mokowe and Witu meant that the attackers risked heavy confrontation. In 1998 and 2002, security had not been reinforced in the area as it is currently (GOK, 2014). Therefore, if the driving force behind the attacks was this factor, then northern Kenya would have been the most appropriate because

of the many ungoverned spaces, but not Mpeketoni.

### **3.4 Marginalisation and Oppression of Muslims Facilitating Radicalisation**

There is a history of secessionism based on distinct ethno-political, regional identities and claims of socio-economic marginalisation of the two regions – northern and coastal Kenya (Dowd & Raleigh, 2013; Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010). Kenya's domestic policies, politics and practices in relation to uneven distribution of socio-economic development resources and the treatment of Muslims as 'second class citizens' have made them rebel against the state (Lind *et al.*, 2015; Botha, 2014; Aronson, 2013). Both regions have experienced political alienation and lag behind in development and infrastructure, i.e. education, health service provision, access to clean water, unemployment and poverty (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010). The issue of radicalisation in Kenya is principally influenced by marginalisation (IRIN, 2015; Karari, 2014). This implies that resentment against the state is strong and extremist groups have identified that particular gap, and have infiltrated the Kenyan communities by offering development where the state has failed. In keeping with Osama Bin Laden's statement about the U.S. – i.e. 'We speak for the poor and oppressed of the world' – oppression and poverty destroy the human spirit and erode reason (Moghaddam & Marsella, 2004). The same argument is reinforced by the deprivation theory which holds that marginalised groups harbour feelings of deprivation and frustration which underlie the groups' decision to engage in violent conflict (Martin, 2003). The state has also pursued aggressive counter-terrorism policies directed mainly at Somali and Muslim Swahilis among the coastal populations (Menkhaus, 2015). Unexplained assassinations, torture and mistreatment of suspected terrorists cause tension among the Muslim communities who perceive themselves as being targeted by the state (Botha, 2014; Karari, 2014). Muslim youth have joined Al-Shabaab (hence more radicalisation) in a counter-reaction to the government's imposed 'collective punishment' driven by the perception that all Somali and Kenyan Muslims are potential terrorists or sympathisers (Botha, 2014).

However, this factor (marginalisation) cannot adequately explain the attacks in the coastal region and particularly Mpeketoni. Compared to other areas of the country, Mpeketoni is far better than them in terms of development with vibrant economic activities and a developed infrastructure (GOK, 2014). Resentment is strong in Mombasa with vibrant Mombasa Republican Council calling for secession and therefore, it would have been a more appropriate target, just like in other years when there were



more numerous attacks in Mombasa than in Mpeketoni (ACLED, 2015). Moreover, the selective attacks against Christians and Kikuyus were also viewed as revenge for the counter-terrorism assassination of Muslim leaders by the government (Crisis Group, 2014). Attacking principally Kikuyus in the full knowledge that the president was a Kikuyu was a direct attack against the state. However, this assumption can be contested on the basis that other retaliatory attacks, especially after the assassinations, were directed at churches and police stations, not private citizens, as witnessed in Mpeketoni. Furthermore, the timing was totally inappropriate because most of the assassinations were in 2012 and 2013, well before mid-2014 when the Mpeketoni attacks occurred. Therefore, these demerits re-open the debate about historical land injustices and grievances in Mpeketoni as the fourth reason that facilitated the attacks.

## **4. The Land Factor**

### **4.1 Origin of the Land Question in Kenya**

The question of land tenure in Kenya remains unresolved and is often treated with sensitivity and fervent sentimentality (Kanyinga, 2009). The disputes concerning land revolve around the three fundamental land tenure issues, i.e. land administration, land ownership and land laws. The diverse interpretations and misunderstandings of land ownership and land use rights have resulted in land disputes in various parts of the country. These disputes have been mediated and moderated by other variables such as ethnicity, and have turned into land conflicts, leading to loss of lives, population displacement, property destruction, food crises and international humanitarian crises (ibid.). A trace of the evolution of land disputes reveals failure of land order which was occasioned by colonial rulers and the successive regimes of Kenyatta and Moi (Boone, 2012). The colonialists assumed proprietary powers over land. Furthermore, British land policy favoured the white settlers, leading to the suppression of indigenous land ownership rights and the dispossession of many indigenous communities of their land in the Rift Valley, Coast, Nyanza, Central and Western regions. These areas were termed as the 'white highlands' (ODI, 2008).

Land alienation was highly contested by the natives and was the motivation underpinning the Mau Mau rebellion movement that led to Kenya's independence in 1963 (Boone, 2012). The land grievances and dispossession were further aggravated by the Kenyatta government from 1963 to 1978. The Kenyatta government began a series of resettlement schemes to compensate the displaced populations. He distributed land,

among other resources, to the communities that were supporting him at the expense of communities that were opposed to his ideologies (Ajulu, 2002). Branch and Boone also note that after the exit of the colonial rulers, the natives were meant to buy back the land and most Kenyans could not afford this, so the elite who could afford benefited more. The resettlement schemes were biased towards the rich under the slogan ‘willing buyers, willing sellers’ (Nyong’o, 2005). The schemes were characterised by corruption, nepotism, patronage and ethnic politics (ibid.) hence favouring influential politicians and particular ethnic groups.

In particular, the Kikuyus were imported and settled in fertile areas of the Rift Valley and the Coast at the expense of the native communities in those areas such as the Kalenjin, Maasai, Mijikenda, Luo etc. The land grievances and tensions were further exacerbated by President Moi who succeeded Kenyatta in 1978. Moi portrayed the opposition who were Kikuyus as an exclusionary project to control land (ODI, 2008). To recover the stolen land, Moi evicted Kikuyus in some areas through stage-managed conflicts, as was seen in 1992 before and after the elections and again in 1997 (ibid.). Whereas the new 2010 constitution guarantees the right of land ownership anywhere, land disputes remain complex; they did not only form the basis for the war for Kenya’s independence but also constitute an impediment to Kenya’s peaceful coexistence and have profoundly undermined ethnic harmony (Nyadimo, 2005; GOK, 1999).

The issue of land conflicts can be resolved through the resettlement of communities, nullification of fake titles, and land (re)distribution but using a gradual approach (ODI, 2008). Furthermore, land reforms need to centre on the restructuring of power relations (Mamdani 1996). Therefore, in order to arrive at a long-lasting solution to land conflicts, the state needs to understand and address the root causes of injustices that were caused by the British from a historical perspective and rectify the problem (TJRC, 2013).

## **4.2 Land Politics and Elections**

Land politics is a game that creates winners and losers (Boone, 2012). The various Kenyan administrations have used their discretionary powers over land allocation as an instrument of (re)distributive politics, granting land access strategically to engineer political constituencies that would bolster them against their rivals (ibid.). Gerrymandering and incitement have also been instrumental in pushing out rival communities and containing those that support the political leaders. Control over resource allocation and access, especially to land, has become a means by which power and privilege are retained and expanded in the political system (ibid.). Therefore,

land disputes in Kenya are intertwined with how state power has been used to gain political advantage, lock in this advantage, and create winners and losers in the national political-economy at large (KNHRC, 2008; Boone, 2012; Ndungu, 2006).

The primary objective of land-related conflicts among Kenyan communities during the electioneering period is to influence voting patterns by eliminating some ethnic groups perceived to be a threat to the successful candidature of a powerful politician (Krätli & Swift, 1999). For example, boundary conflicts among the Samburu, Turkana, Pokot, Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luo and even the Ameru have been witnessed during electioneering periods in Kenya since the advent of multi-party politics in 1992 (Osamba, 2000). The epicentres of electioneering violence are northern Kenya, the Coast, the Rift Valley and Nairobi (Bradbury & Kleinman, 2010; KNHRC, 2008). For example, Baragoi sub-county in Samburu county has been experiencing a series of serious territorial and ethnic clashes between the Samburu and Turkana since 1994. The worst and latest incident was the Baragoi massacre that led to mass deaths and injuries in November 2012, very close to the 2013 general elections. It led to the displacement of many people in the area and the closure of schools and businesses. The population of the Turkana has increased over the years, leading to fears of the 'foreign' Turkana influencing the local voting patterns in what the Samburu politicians perceive as their exclusive territory (Muchai, 2003; Weiss, 2004). Land conflicts seem to increase in frequency and intensity before elections (Krätli & Swift, 1999). Another case was the Mpeketoni (Coast) clashes and tensions in 2012 close to the 2013 elections on which the Al-Shabaab capitalised in 2014, making the area a fertile zone for the attacks (see Figure 2) in which over 100 people died (Butime, 2014). Ethnic cleansing, land seizure and forced displacement characterised the attacks and their aim was to reduce autonomy and create ethnically homogenous areas.

Furthermore, the displacement crisis following the 2007 presidential election results was not an anomaly; it was part of a sequence of recurrent displacements that stemmed from unresolved and politically aggravated land grievances, in a context of population growth, poor governance and socio-economic insecurity (ODI, 2008). Land issues underpinned the conflict (Boone, 2012) just like 'greed' is hidden under the grievances in social conflicts (Keen, 2012).

### **4.3 Land Grievances as a Possible Explanation of the Attacks**

The coastal region has the highest number of squatters and landless and, at the same time, recorded the highest number of terrorist attacks in 2014

(Karari, 2014). The debate about and rhetoric of domestic terrorism are focused on socio-economic inequalities to which land grievances central (Mellgard, 2015). This implies that the Al-Shabaab has skilfully manipulated historical land injustices and socio-economic inequalities to radicalise and recruit members (Lind *et al.*, 2015). The number of Kenyans, both Muslims and Christians, in al-Shabaab continues to grow because of the domestic socio-economic grievances and inequalities (Botha, 2014; Mellgard, 2015).

As borne out by the sub-section on the geographical location and targeting of the attacks (also see Figures 3 and 4 above), the attacks have shifted to coastal rural and agricultural zones, particularly in Mpeketoni. The initial attacks in 2012/2013 were concentrated in urban areas like Nairobi, Garissa, Mandera, Moyale and Mombasa. They were also indiscriminate and Al-Shabaab claimed its attacks were in revenge for the presence of Kenya's troops in Somalia. The recent attacks in 2014 and 2015 primarily targeted rural areas, specific religions and communities (Mellgard, 2015). According to Mellgard, the shift from Kenya's urban, more developed regions to rural areas at the coast – which are less developed – is because conflict is more likely where there is inequality and economic battles, in this case with regard to *land*. More developed (urban) regions are more likely to experience riots and protests than drawn-out conflicts which are mostly common in rural (less developed) areas; hence Al-Shabaab's shifting its sights to those potential conflict zones (*ibid.*). The fact that Mpeketoni is a resettlement scheme with a history of land grievances, which characterises the Coast region at large, brings us to the central argument. According to Butime (2014), the central argument relating to most of the attacks at the coast in places like Mpeketoni stem from simmering social tensions embedded within land grievances, hence favouring radicalisation and domestic terrorism. Land conflicts in Mpeketoni have created a prospective conflict environment that has fitted in with the motivation underpinning the Al-Shabaab Islamist insurgency in Kenya (Butime, 2014:1). After the 2007/2008 post-election violence, the ethnic composition of the area was slightly altered with non-natives moving in. The natives have complained about the new influx of IDPs as a result of 2007/2008 post-election violence and they have opposed government's move to resettle more IDPs in the area (Otieno, 2014). Butime (2014) further argues that the major cause of these recurring attacks that principally target the non-natives has little to do with the presence of Kenyan troops in Somali but is intended to displace those who have unfairly acquired their land and to reassert their identity as the minority whose rights have been taken away by the 'outsiders'.

The rationale behind *target selection* (Kikuyus who are Christians and

non-natives) poses a challenge in explaining. However, it stems from the conflicting perspectives of domestic motivations and land grievances which relate to uneasy relations between the wider coastal region and the Kenyan government over unfair land resettlement (ICG, 2014). This argument points to the fact that the attacks were rooted in domestic land politics intended to displace the outsiders and control power and resources in the region (ibid.). Given the fact that ethnic Kikuyus and Christians were selectively attacked, it is plausible to deduce that the terrain of Mpeketoni's simmering social tensions had presented the attackers with a canvas on which to violently express their land grievances and ideals to the 'outsiders' (Butime, 2014). According to Odhiambo *et al.* (2015), the attackers were radicalised Muslim Kenyans in the coastal region who had links with Al-Shabaab from Somalia. The commonality of land grievances cutting across the wider coastal region of Kenya, coupled with the ethno-religious selectiveness in the targeting of victims, points to the possibility that the Mpeketoni attacks were primarily a product of internal land politics (ibid.). The large-scale land acquisition, development projects, and internal migration by other ethnic groups have also created tensions over land in the region (Sharamo, 2014: 8). Mega development projects by the government have caused conflict. For example, the discovery of oil in Lamu and the commissioning of the multi-billion dollar Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopian Transport (LAPSSET) corridor have led to a rise in the price of land and land grabbing by non-natives of the region because of their financial abilities (ICG, 2014). The project's impact on local livelihoods is a real cause for concern and in-migration is significantly high, fuelling land tension (IRIN, 2014). This horizontal inequality created in the region between the natives and the non-natives has resulted in feelings of frustration, fuelling instability in the coastal region of Kenya.

However much the state continues to publicly downplay the land factor and other economic grievances as causes of radicalisation, it is evident in their actions, especially in the coastal region, that they recognise the need to address the land problem. In late 2013 and early 2014, the government distributed 60,000 title deeds to squatters in the Coastal region (Blair, 2014; Nyassy, 2013) and in 2016, the government has begun distributing close to 5,000 title deeds (Gari, 2016). According to the *Daily Nation* (2014), the initial distribution in 2014 was biased and fuelled tensions, which possibly might have contributed to the Mpeketoni attacks. Therefore, it can be deduced that the major evidential cause of the attacks in Mpeketoni is related to ethnic cleansing, land seizure and forced displacement with the aim of reducing the autonomy and creating ethnically homogenous areas,

which is line with the argument that the belligerents aim to control space and land resources (De Waal, 2009).

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper suggests that, while other external explanations have merit, increased terrorist activities in Kenya have a strong link with domestic factors. Of the domestic economic grievances, land grievances are the most influential factor in the coastal region of Kenya and it is exacerbated by other factors, such as the politics of ethnicity, marginalisation and unemployment. According to the influential social conflict theories by Collier and Hoeffler (2004), these economic incentives attached to the struggle are tentatively viewed as proxies for ‘grievances’ (ownership of land and injustices by the state) and ‘greed’ (politicians influencing attacks). Land grievances have been exploited politically on the basis of ethnicity and religion, causing radicalisation. At the same time, Al-Shabaab has utilised these grievances to win over new partners, financiers and sympathisers and to launch the attacks in the interests of the financiers (politicians), e.g. by attacking specific communities to displace them either for political purposes or to settle land grudges. Furthermore, the counter-terrorism strategies adopted by the state have been discriminatory and oppressive, hence exacerbating radicalisation. The perceived ‘collective punishment’ of the Muslims and the assassination of the key suspects have done more harm than good and have induced new wars between the Muslims and Christians, thereby helping the Al-Shabaab to advance and foster extremism. Therefore, this paper proposes the following counter-terrorism policy measures.

The counter-terrorism policies and measures should incorporate addressing domestic inequalities and socio-economic marginalisation by following Kenya’s 2010 Constitution provisions on land reforms and resource distribution. In this way, more development resources will be distributed to the affected regions and the landless in the affected areas will be resettled to avert tensions over land.

The security agencies and the state need to improve their relationship with the Muslim community by refraining from hate speech and collective punishment of the Muslims and instead preach for national cohesion. This should involve dialogue with Muslim leaders, consultations with media editors who spread hate messages in the media, the inclusion of Muslims in national politics and parastatal appointments and facilitating Muslim-driven mosque and madrasa reforms (Rohwerder, 2015).

Lastly, the state needs to reform the security institutions and agencies. This involves equipping them to respond faster, enabling them to gather

intelligence information before the attacks occur, deploying many security officers in the volatile regions and prosecuting the security officers who violate the rights of Muslim communities in their counter-terrorism operations.

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