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# Understanding the Horn of Africa

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An online curriculum project of the Center for African Studies  
University of California, Berkeley

## *Which Route to Follow?*

by J. Michael Halderman

A short story and excerpt from his 1987 doctoral dissertation,  
*Development and Famine-Risk In Kenya Maasai Land*

Political Science

University of California, Berkeley

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Part of the online curriculum, “Pastoralism - Classic issues in contemporary times,”  
contributing to the *Environmental Pressures* module in the Understanding the Horn of  
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## Introduction

This reading is part of a larger curriculum on Pastoralism in the Horn of Africa (HOA). Other material in the curriculum piece includes:

- “Classic” Issues That Have Confronted Pastoralism in the Horn
  - Introduction
  - Key Points Covered in the Readings on “Classic” Issues
- The “Classic” Issues Continue to Confront Pastoralism in the 21st Century
- Student Activities & Questions to Answer Related to the “Classic” Issues
- The Emergence of New Issues Relating to Pastoralism in Recent Years
- The Potential of Pastoralism to Cope with Climate Change
- Student Activities & Questions to Answer Related to the New Issues and to Climate Change
- Relevant Websites and You Tube Videos
- Photos in the HOA Web Portal
- Relevant Maps in the HOA Web Portal
- Key References

All of this is available on the [HOA web portal](#).

## This Reading

This excerpt is one of four pieces written by J. Michael Halderman that introduce and describe through overviews and case studies the “**classic**” issues that confronted pastoralists and pastoralism in the Horn of Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the following readings. It is best to read them in the following order:

*“East African Pastoralists.”* In Cultural Survival Quarterly, volume 8, number 1 (Spring 1984: Special issue on pastoral societies in a changing world) pp. 39-45.

*“Problems of Pastoral Development in Eastern Africa.”* In Agricultural Administration, volume 18, number 4 (1985) pp. 199-216.

*“Which Route to Follow?”* In Development and Famine Risk in Kenya Maasai Land. Doctoral dissertation, department of political science, University of California, Berkeley (1987) pp. 39-59. (This chapter is a short story based on real events that is intended to provide the reader with a deeper and closer sense of the people and issues involved.)

*“The Future of Pastoralism in Turkana District, Kenya.”* Response to a request for information from students at Wageningen University in the Netherlands (June 2005) pp. 1-2.

These are available through the UnderstandingtheHorn.org site as well as through the Center for African Studies Horn of Africa Working Paper Series site:

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**DEVELOPMENT AND FAMINE-RISK IN KENYA MAASAI LAND**

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**John Michael Halderman**

**Doctoral Dissertation**

**Political Science**

**University of California**

**Berkeley**

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## CONTENTS

### DEVELOPMENT AND FAMINE-RISK

#### IN KENYA MAASAI LAND

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Acknowledgments   | i    |
| <b>PART I PROBLEMS, ANALYTIC APPROACH AND SETTING</b>                                       |      |
| Chapter 1 Examining the Relationship Between<br>Famine-Risk and Rural Development in Africa | 2    |
| Chapter 2 Which Route to Follow?  | 39   |
| <b>PART II MAASAI, OFFICIALS AND SETTLERS</b>   |      |
| Chapter 3 Maasai Dominance in the Pre-Colonial Period                                       | 61   |
| Chapter 4 The Brief Alliance Between British and Maasai                                     | 124  |
| Chapter 5 “White Man’s Country”   | 173  |
| Chapter 6 Maasai Moves and Treaties   | 226  |
| <b>PART III DECADES OF CHANGE</b>   |      |
| Chapter 7 “Conservative” Maasai   | 285  |
| Chapter 8 The Tumultuous Fifties and Sixties  | 345  |
| Chapter 9 Rural Development Policy for Maasai Land  | 404  |
| <b>PART IV ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS</b>   |      |
| Chapter 10 “The World Turned on Its Head”   | 487  |

## CHAPTER 2

### **WHICH ROUTE TO FOLLOW?**

This chapter sets the scene for the study that follows by giving the reader a sense of the peoples, attitudes and conditions to be encountered. The events of an interesting morning in late 1968 are described in a short story. The setting for the story is about 75 miles southeast of Nairobi, near the main highway and railway from the coast to the interior of Kenya. On that overcast day, I learned a great deal about the views of one Maasai regarding planned rural development. Letaare explained that he was a man at a "crossroads" because of government policy. Should he accept government proposals and follow what was described as the route of "progress," or should he stick to his traditional ways which he believed provided more security? His perception of the situation was strikingly different from that of government officials. Development policy for this pastoral area was based on the assumption that the traditional Maasai land and livestock management system did not increase their security but, instead, led to resource degradation and famine. The discussion with Letaare is deeply etched in my memory, and it may well have been the spark that ignited my interest in the topic of the present study.

Several of the key sets of actors discussed in subsequent chapters are introduced. The focus is on Maasai pastoralists. Much of the story takes place in a Maasai kraal camp on the pilot scheme (Poka) of the group ranch development program. Government officials are introduced indirectly through their development proposals and viewpoints. Three other sets of actors are also introduced: European settlers, who played a powerful role in molding Kenya's economic, political and social systems; landless Kikuyu, who also played a pivotal role in the colony's history, and who were considered very threatening during and

shortly after the transition to independence; and the nearby Kamba people, whose situation is not told in detail but who appear several times in the following study.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the first light of dawn I awoke. There would be no breakfast this morning because a lot of work needed to be done before the cattle went out to graze. After only a few minutes I left the little tin house set in a clump of trees that was then home. There was no electricity, and on a sunny day the house was unbearably hot inside from mid-morning until dusk. But there was running water and a simple shower system, a wood burning stove and a refrigerator that ran on kerosine. The furniture was government issue camping equipment and Land Rover seat cushions on wooden boxes. Except during the rainy season, I often cooked dinner outside on a charcoal stove. The evenings were pleasant inside the tin house, with hurricane lamps giving off a gentle light.

An old Land Rover was parked outside on a slight incline. After pushing it a few feet I jumped inside, put it in second gear and popped the clutch. The engine caught and I drove along the narrow track, soon passing the trees, shrubs, and flowers that concealed two adjacent grass-roofed huts. An Englishman lived alone, using one hut as a bedroom and the other as a dining room. He had come out to Kenya from England following the Second World War. After a few years working on ranches on the Laikipia plateau to the north, he had taken over this large ranch in Machakos district. Beyond his home, and around the western side of a rocky outcrop with two large water tanks on top, were the workers' quarters. Most of the laborers were landless Kikuyu. They had been recruited after returning to their home districts from detention camps during the Emergency of the 1950's, when the Mau Mau rebellion shattered forever the colonists' dream of a

"White Man's Country" in East Africa. Some of the European settlers stayed on after independence in 1963. While many of the settlers in crop producing areas quickly sold their land, often with considerable prodding, five years after independence most of the large cattle ranches were still in white hands.

Turning left onto the main drive I passed some of the finest Boran cattle in Africa. They were mostly grey or white, with prominent humps and dewlaps. In the early decades of this century, some Europeans had obtained indigenous Boran stock from pastoralists in the remote north of the country. This breed quickly became respected and popular among Kenya's commercial ranchers. The sturdy stock on this ranch clearly demonstrated the advantages of water development, dips to kill disease-bearing ticks, and selective breeding. Nearly every autumn the Englishman won prizes for his cattle at the annual Nairobi Show. The fenced paddocks also contained herds of eland and impala, as well as zebra and other game. Giraffe were shunted from paddock to paddock at certain intervals in a deliberate attempt to manage the growth of acacia trees. The road through the ranch ran due south. If it had been a clear day, I would have been looking directly at the snow-capped peak of Mount Kilimanjaro about seventy-five miles away on the Tanzania side of the border. Because I moved to this area during the short rains, in my first month I caught only a few glimpses of what must be one of the most impressive mountains in the world. Kilimanjaro is not part of a mountain range. It is an enormous, solitary mountain that rises vertically more than three miles above the surrounding African plain.

Within a few minutes I reached the highway. To the left, two hundred and thirty miles to the southeast, lay the ancient port city of Mombasa on the Indian Ocean. To the right, about seventy miles to the northwest, lay Kenya's modern capital of Nairobi. Nzai ranch, named after the Kamba word for zebra, was the eastern-most edge of what had been known formerly as the "White Highlands." In



1968, whites still owned most of the land along the highway to Nairobi. This thin wedge of settler-owned land, the Machakos ranches, divided the Maasai and Kamba peoples. Nzai, as well as many other farms and ranches in the "White Highlands," had once been Maasai territory. Beginning around 1900, European settlement brought new systems of land tenure and land use to this former British colony. After Maasai grazing and burning were prevented on Nzai, bush encroached onto what had been open grassland. In recent years some Kamba had been allowed onto Nzai to make charcoal according to a system whereby bush was cleared and trees preserved. The ranch owner benefitted by the removal of bush, and poor Kamba obtained a source of income. Many Kamba living in the overcrowded reserve complained that a European should not be allowed to own 10,000 acres in an independent Kenya while they had little or no land.

About seven years before there had been "war" between Maasai and Kamba. Workers on the ranch recalled that it had been unsafe to walk or ride bicycles along the highway to the nearby towns of Sultan Hamud or Emali. Living about one hundred and fifty miles from their home districts, the Kikuyu laborers and their families felt isolated on this remote ranch. Europeans claimed that Africans had been constantly at war before the arrival of Pax Britannica, and that white settlement had created buffer zones between hostile ethnic groups. Some settlers maintained that the recent fighting between Kamba and Maasai once again proved the wisdom and necessity of the policy of European settlement.

After driving three miles southeast along the highway I passed the busy little town of Emali. The number of trucks using the highway had increased rapidly in recent years, perhaps closely corresponding to the number of miles of additional pavement, and Emali had become a popular resting spot. The drivers favored a large restaurant that served both grilled and boiled meat, other food and beer. The use of the highway had changed dramatically in only fifteen years. In the

mid-1950's there were often only one or two trucks a week on the unpaved road, and the laborers on Nzai would stop work to stare at a passing vehicle. At that time, the railway paralleling the highway transported most of the goods between the coast and the interior. Once a motorcycle was seen heading for Mombasa, and the workers thought the rider must be crazy to tackle the vast stretches of waterless, game-filled plains and bush that lay between the ranch and the coast.

The increase in truck traffic was welcomed by some, but it made the highway dangerous to use because many truck drivers preferred traveling in the cool of the night. While this prevented engines from overheating, the trucks were often driven recklessly. The bars in Emali and other towns along the highway certainly did not improve the skills of many of the drivers. To make matters worse, truck headlights were frequently badly aimed, sometimes virtually blinding oncoming traffic.

But it was daybreak now, and there was virtually no traffic. Just beyond Emali I crossed an overpass that bridged the railroad tracks. When it was built, the overpass was seen by local people as a remarkable technological innovation. It was certainly a boon to those using this narrow ribbon of tarmac that linked the coast with Nairobi, other developed parts of the highlands and Uganda beyond. Many tourists were whisked along the highway in zebra-striped Volkswagen mini-buses on their way from Nairobi to Tsavo National Park, about seventy-five miles to the southeast, or to the beautiful beaches at the coast. As they raced by, they must have wondered what life was like for the many people who lived in the surrounding countryside.

By crossing the railroad tracks I entered Maasai land. At the end of the overpass, I turned sharply onto a dirt road that led to the Masai-Amboseli Game Reserve about sixty miles to the south. Because of the potholes and corrugations, few tourists travelled this road that also led to Oloitokitok, and to Moshi in

Tanzania. It had been raining intermittently for weeks, and the seasonal rivers and streams were full. At the first stream I stopped to gauge the depth and current. By cautiously choosing the crossing point, it was possible to ford many of the local creeks. I edged the Land Rover into the stream until the water level nearly reached the tops of the tires and then slowly continued across to the other side. The first commandment when driving in such conditions is to follow the Swahili proverb, "Haraka, haraka haina baraka" (Hurry, hurry has no blessing). Even though the old Land Rover would not start on its own in the morning, the engine never died while fording a stream.

\* \* \* \* \*

About two miles beyond the first stream I saw a Maasai man standing at a prearranged spot along the road. In addition to one "shuka" (calico cloth) wrapped around his body, he had another shuka wrapped around his head and shoulders to ward off the chill. In the early morning light, this solitary figure on the verdant plain was a memorable sight. I pulled off the road onto a cattle track and stopped next to him.

"Erro, sopa," he greeted me with a friendly smile.

I replied in Maasai, we shook hands and Letaare climbed into the passenger seat. He carefully placed his spear so that it would not interfere with my driving or our comfort. The spear was nearly six feet long, with a very short wooden shaft between two pieces of heavy steel.

"Are there many lion around this area now?" I asked in Swahili, glancing at his spear.

"When the rains come, the plains game follow. And when the game come, the lion follow. But, the spear," and he grasped the spear's shaft to emphasize his

point, "the spear is the Maasai rifle. This is all we need against lion. I hear that European on whose ranch you live has killed as many lion as a whole 'manyatta' full of warriors."

The Englishman had shot over seventy lion, and he had impressive lion and leopard skins on the floors of his huts and veranda. He and the Maasai agreed that predators had no right to kill cattle, that protection of livestock was a top priority.

The conversation with Letaare reminded me of the Englishman's description of what this part of Maasai land had been like in 1960-61. Animal carcasses had littered the dusty plains. The stench of decaying cattle, sheep and goats had burned through the nostrils to that part of the brain that stores vivid memories. I later heard many stories from Maasai of this difficult period. When asked, they recounted the hardships they had endured in efforts to keep their stock and families alive. Many had moved their herds outside the borders of Maasai land. One man, a warrior at the time, had been with a group who had moved to the Chyulu Range. As Letaare and I drove east along the cattle trail that morning, we could see the outlines of those hills in the distance. Although the Maasai herdsmen had found grazing for their cattle in the Chyulus, there was too little water and too much stock disease. But they knew of no better alternative. The cattle were forced to go without water for three consecutive days. Every fourth day the warriors and the other men rose well before dawn to start the cattle on the long trek to water, returning to the kraal near midnight.

Maasai lost perhaps half a million cattle in Kajiado District alone during the severe drought. No one knows for sure, but some estimate that more than three-quarter of the district's cattle died. International famine relief apparently prevented starvation among Maasai who, in normal times, were self-sufficient pastoralists. The United States and other countries sent food and supplies to

Kenya that were distributed in Maasai land and other areas. The drought ended abruptly in late 1961 when torrential rains pounded the denuded land. One effect was a flood that washed away the railway trestle over the usually dry river bed between Emali and Simba stations. The then unpaved highway between the coast and Nairobi became impassable in many places. The English rancher recalled vividly that he had been cut off from the outside world for six weeks. The British air force carried out a large-scale airlift, dropping maize in Maasai land and other parts of the colony.

Government officials involved in planning and implementing rural development policy for Maasai land explained that this traumatic period had been a critical turning point. While many members of most ethnic groups in Kenya had been vigorously attempting to "modernize," Maasai had become legendary for their "conservatism." According to officials and some educated Maasai, however, the hardships of the 1960's had transformed the views of many Maasai. The heavy loss of livestock and subsequent need to rely on outside assistance were said to have convinced these Maasai that they must replace their traditional land and livestock management practices with a more "progressive" approach. The group ranch development program was introduced to capitalize on this shift in attitude. Maasai were to abandon their traditional semi-nomadic pastoralism and allow the government to guide them along a development path that followed the lead of European commercial ranchers.

The Kaputiei Maasai were in the vanguard of these changes. At the northeast corner of Maasai land, this section occupied a relatively narrow stretch of territory over eighty miles in length. Their land bordered Nairobi National Park and the southern side of the railway from near the town of Athi River to the Kiboko River, not far from Hunters Lodge on the Nairobi-Mombasa highway. South and west of the Kaputiei were several other Maasai sections. In the mid-

1960's the Kaputiei agreed to divide their 800,000 acres of land into twenty group ranches. About two dozen of the "most progressive" Kaputiei obtained government approval for individual ranches.

The first group ranch, Poka, was established in 1964-65 when 36 Maasai men (six men later dropped out) agreed to settle in one area. Some government officers considered this a very important breakthrough, and they spent a great deal of time and energy working to get the new venture on its feet. They managed to slice through the bureaucratic labyrinth and to sidestep legal obstacles. Government loans were provided for water development and the construction of two cattle dips, and for some impoverished members to purchase excellent breeding stock to reconstruct their ravaged herds. Since there was no legislation allowing group ownership of land, it was impossible to use land as collateral for the loans. Officials explained that they had taken the unusual step of providing unsecured loans because they saw enormous potential in Poka as a pilot scheme for the development of the remainder of Maasai land and other semi-arid pastoral areas of Kenya.

Poka covered over 25,000 acres, mostly open grassland below the 4,000 foot contour. It formed a wide arc from 5679 foot Soysambu mountain in the west to near the railroad trestle that was destroyed in the 1961 flood in the east. Between Poka and Nzai lay six of the first individual ranches in Maasai land. These 2,000 acre units extended along the railway from Sultan Hamud to beyond Emali. The Range Management Division of the Ministry of Agriculture posted a Peace Corps Volunteer to work with the Maasai on Poka. When a government official asked if there was accommodation for a young American in the area, the Englishman offered the use of the vacant tin house on Nzai.

One of the government's objectives was to improve the indigenous cattle on Poka. This policy seemed to reflect the prior success of European ranchers in

similar endeavors. Several years before, the colonial government had imported some Sahiwal cattle from India and raised them at Naivasha in the Rift Valley for breeding purposes. Sahiwals were subsequently provided to Europeans and Africans in various districts in efforts to improve local breeds. Many officials considered Sahiwals excellent dual-purpose animals because of their ability to produce both milk and meat. Later I learned of the sharp controversy regarding the use of Sahiwals or improved Boran for upgrading efforts in semi-arid areas.

Loans of one thousand shillings were therefore made to most Poka members to enable them to purchase one Sahiwal bull each. The wealthiest herder received two Sahiwals. Soon after I was posted to Poka, twenty-five Sahiwal bulls were sent by rail to Emali where they were off-loaded and allocated to their new owners. One of my chief responsibilities at that time was to attempt to implement the new breeding policy. The major challenge quickly became keeping the Sahiwals alive in their new environment, but that is another, much longer story. The Englishman on Nzai had spent many years carefully developing and following his own method of improving indigenous stock. In contrast, in addition to maintaining the new bulls' health, my instructions were simply to reduce competition to the Sahiwals by castrating as many Maasai bulls and bull calves as possible. On that chilly morning in late 1968, Letaare was guiding me to his kraal to carry out that policy.

\* \* \* \* \*

We slowly followed the cattle trail for over a mile until we came to a fork.

"Which track should I take?" I asked.

"Shouldn't you take the highway instead of the track?"

"And how am I supposed to know the difference?"

Letaare's eyes twinkled as he talked. There was no perceptible difference, at least to me, between the two cattle trails leading away from the fork. He chuckled at his joke, as he often did about something he had said or was about to say. Letaare had a subtle, witty sense of humor, like that found among many Kenyans. He pointed to the left, and I turned the Land Rover in that direction.

After about five more minutes we arrived at his kraal. His family shared the kraal with those of three other men. I stopped the Land Rover, but he suggested that we drive to the other side of the kraal where he assured me there was an excellent parking spot. Each Maasai family and their livestock enter a kraal only through their own large gate, and I assumed that he wanted to park near that gate. He may have also wanted to enhance his status by demonstrating who had brought the new representative of the government to the village. The kraal was nearly fifty yards in diameter, surrounded by a fence made of thorn tree branches piled about four feet high. The low huts were inside the perimeter fence. Every evening all the livestock were herded into the kraal where they spent the night. Near the huts, each family had small pens for calves, sheep and goats. At night the cattle mingled in the large central area of the kraal.

Because it was early morning when we arrived, the livestock were still inside, or just outside, the kraal. There was a bustle of activity as the day began. Women and girls were milking, and several young children rushed up to us as we entered the village. The children deferentially bowed their heads, and Letaare and I greeted them by placing our hand gently on each lowered head. I watched one girl of about thirteen open a pen and allow a calf to scamper to its mother. After the calf suckled for a while, the girl moved the calf's head so that it would drink from another teat. The girl then milked from the first teat directly into a long, narrow calabash. The small brown calf suckled eagerly from its dam while the girl milked from the other side. Protected from predators, the cow was



producing milk to keep both the calf and people alive, continuing the age-old mutualistic system. This colorful scene captured the essence of Maasai pastoralism.

The girl wore a red shuka as a skirt, with a red and white checkered shuka shawled around her head and torso. Standing straight-legged, she bent over at the waist to rest her head against the cow's flank. Although milking steadily, she frequently peeked around the black cow's flank to catch a glimpse of the white stranger, the "olashumbai." On his way to inspect his stock, her father walked near a fairly large tree that was still standing inside the kraal. He carried an infant against his chest, in the crook of his left arm, and a walking stick in his right hand. Below his lower shuka was a badly scarred knee, and he walked with a distinct limp. I learned later that about twenty-five years before he had been hunting a lion with his warrior age-mates when the lion had charged, grabbed him by the leg and carried him over a hundred yards. The other warriors distracted the lion, and he escaped by quickly climbing a tree. I also learned later that the girl had attended boarding school for several years. Her father had recently concluded that she had received enough western education, insisting that she return to their kraal. He wanted her to lead a traditional life. She was to marry and live in Maasai land, not attend secondary school and wind up in Nairobi or some other strange place.

It was time to begin our work. The shortest of the men attached a rope made of eland hide to his long walking stick. He then moved very close to a yearling bull. As it walked away, he moved quickly with it, placing the stick in front of its right rear leg. As the bull stepped into the narrow noose, he dropped the stick and sharply pulled on the rope. Another man suddenly grabbed the rope. The two Maasai quickly threw the young bull onto its side and tied its legs together. The bull was then castrated with a burdizzo, a tool similar to a very

large pair of pliers. I placed the jaws of the burdizzo over the large duct above one testicle, then forced the two eighteen inch handles together. The process was repeated on the duct above the other testicle. The burdizzo crushes the sperm ducts and severs the arteries supplying blood to the testicles. The bull therefore loses its reproductive power, and the testicles atrophy. When the young bull was released it staggered to its feet, looked a bit dazed and then rushed away.

During my first weeks on Poka I spent several similar mornings neutering indigenous stock. The calves were relatively easy to deal with, but the bulls were spirited and very strong. The fun began when the rope was securely attached to a bull's hind foot. Two or three of us would quickly grab the short rope and try to slow down the rushing bull and throw him onto his side. Even a young bull could be a challenge, and big bulls would often break free. Many attempts were needed to castrate some bulls, while others were outright winners in these contests. The excitement of these "Maasai rodeos" in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro contrasted sharply with the usual early morning routine on the scheme.

\* \* \* \* \*

That morning at Letaare's kraal we castrated many bull calves and some young bulls. I pointed to a few mature bulls and said that my instructions were that they should get top priority. The men replied that we should begin with Letaare's bull since he had brought me to their kraal. After all, wasn't my government Land Rover parked outside his gate? Letaare deferred, pointing out that his bull was very powerful and that he knew it would put up quite a struggle. It made more sense to him to finish with the bull calves and the young bulls, then take a rest before tackling such a difficult task. His grey bull eyed us haughtily, and it seemed that Letaare had a valid point.

It wasn't long until Letaare announced that it was time for tea. The two of us walked to his shoulder high hut, and I followed him through the narrow, twisting entrance. Once inside, we sat on the edge of a low bed made of a framework of branches covered with cowhides. Letaare's wife sat on the opposite bed. As we talked, she used a poker to rearrange the wood in the small cooking fire bounded by three large stones implanted in the earthen floor between the two beds. An aluminum pot two-thirds full of water rested on a wire grill set on the stones.

I had become used to the semi-darkness and could now see the inside of the hut quite clearly. The young woman took a small packet of tea from the shelf above her, measured a specific amount in her hand and then dropped the tea leaves into the pot. When the water reached a full boil, she reached over to pick up a long, narrow brown calabash. She carefully poured the desired amount of fresh milk into the pot, replaced the leather cap and returned the guord to its place alongside several other calabashes. She then took a small paper bag from the shelf and poured a generous amount of sugar into the pot. After the mixture began to boil she lifted the aluminum pot from the grill and quickly poured the tea into two large, red metal cups. A metal strainer prevented the tea leaves from entering the cups. She then handed the cups to Letaare and me. The tea in the hut that morning bore little similarity to the iced tea I had drunk on hot summer days as a boy in America. Maasai tea was very hot, rich and filling.

Letaare and I slowly sipped our tea. In the manner of most Maasai in the area, he always addressed me by my first name. He did not preface it with "Bwana," and there was no hint of deference. Nor was there any hostility or resentment. Even though I came from the wealthiest, most technologically advanced country in the world and was a member of the race that had colonized his part of Africa, Letaare considered us equals. We talked that morning as two men of about the same age and same social standing would talk anywhere,

although what we discussed was certainly unusual and fascinating.

"Michael, are you a Kololiki or Mauani?"

He was trying to place me within the framework of the Maasai age-set system, the central political institution of his traditional society. Together with his age-mates, each male Maasai graduated through specific stages of political and social responsibility: junior warrior, senior warrior, junior elder, senior elder and retired elder. The colonial government had discouraged, sometimes strenuously, the warrior period of this system. Some Maasai, particularly those who had attended school, rejected or downplayed the age-set system. All of the Poka members, however, had passed through the traditional system. They had been initiated into adulthood while still in their teens and, after a brief transition phase following circumcision, had served for several years as warriors. During this period, which many looked back upon with fond nostalgia, they had lived in special warrior villages (known in East Africa by the Maasai term "manyatta").

Traditionally, every Maasai man belongs to either the "right hand" or the "left hand" of what later becomes a single age-set. The first groups of boys initiated form the right hand, while the groups circumcised several years later form the left hand. Letaare was a Kololiki, a member of the right hand of his then unnamed age-set. Half a dozen years before, he and his age-mates had graduated to senior warrior status when they passed through the "eunoto" ceremony. They had subsequently disbanded their manyattas and, in the intervening period, most of them had married. In 1968 the Mauani were living in manyattas as junior warriors, soon to take part in the eunoto ceremony and become senior warriors. It would be a number of years before the "olngesher" ceremony would be held to join the Kololiki and Mauani in a single age-set, marking their transition to junior elders. (Some descriptions of the Maasai age-set system portray the eunoto ceremony as marking the transition to junior elder

status, with the olngehser ceremony leading to senior elder status.)

Letaare wanted to know if I belonged to the right hand and was a senior warrior, a Kololiki, or if I belonged to the left hand and was a junior warrior, a Mauani. Since I was not Maasai, of course, I belonged to neither group. Although I had been in Maasai land only a few weeks, my previous experience in Kenya enabled me to answer his question. For two years I had worked on settlement schemes in the highlands west of the Rift Valley. The British government had assisted the independent Kenya government in buying out European farmers and settling Africans on individual plots of land on the schemes. When working as an assistant settlement officer in this program I lived with the Keiyo, or Elgeyo, a Kalenjin-speaking people related to the Nandi and Kipsigis. There are a number of cultural and linguistic similarities between the Maasai and Kalenjin. A key similarity is the form and traditional importance of the age-set system. I had learned that, because of my age, I could have been a member of two different Keiyo age-sets. If I had been Keiyo, my father would have decided whether I would have been among the youngest Sawe or the oldest Korongoro. The decision would have been based on a number of complicated factors primarily relating to family circumstances. Friendly members of each age-set pointed out that I could have been a member of their own group. It seemed appropriate, and never caused a problem, to hover between the two age-sets to fit the occasion.

An interesting parallel occurred when I subsequently worked among Maasai. Because of my age, I could have been among the youngest Kololiki or the oldest Mauani. As with Keiyo, friendly members of each Maasai group were ready to accept me as an "honorary" member, and we used the appropriate greetings. My answer seemed to satisfy Letaare: if I had been Maasai, my father would have decided whether I would be a Kololiki or Mauani. It was now my turn to ask a question.

"Letaare, where did you learn such good Swahili?"

"Isn't Swahili the language of the common man in Kenya?"

"It is, but there are many Maasai who do not speak Swahili, or who do not speak it very well."

"And there are Maasai who speak Swahili well but who pretend they cannot when outsiders ask them questions they do not intend to answer." Again he chuckled, thinking about this favorite Maasai ploy to ward off inquisitive outsiders.

Working on Poka I quickly learned that, by up-country Kenyan standards, about half the members spoke very good to excellent Swahili. All the other men and some women could communicate in Swahili, but they felt much more comfortable in their own language which some described as "sweeter" and more expressive than Swahili. None of the group ranch members knew more than a few words or phrases of English. Since I had not yet received an answer to my question, again I asked Letaare why he spoke Swahili better than most of the men in this area.

"I enjoy eating meat in the restaurants in Emali. The Kamba there do not speak Maasai, except for a few words. When there, I like talking with the truckers who drive the Mombasa highway. Should I expect Somali, Kikuyu and Indian truck drivers to speak Maasai?"

I learned later than when Letaare was a warrior he had been jailed for two years for stock theft. In prison he had mixed with men from various parts of the colony. When he returned to Maasai land he spoke excellent Swahili.

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Letaare's wife poured each of us a second cup of tea, and then he explained

that he was wrestling with a very difficult problem. In his colorful manner, he described his views on development policy for Maasai land. The explanation revealed that his perception of the issues differed sharply from those of government officials.

"Even though I still wear a shuka, I am not as traditional as the Maasai in the Reserve, especially the Kisongo" he said, pointing toward Amboseli. The Kisongo are a large Maasai section with a reputation for conservatism. It was interesting that he considered Poka different from "the Reserve."

"But, I am not as progressive as those trouser-wearing men around Samuli," he continued, referring to the members living on the western side of the group ranch.

"Remember when we reached the crossroads this morning on our way to the kraal?" I nodded yes. "Well, I am a man at a crossroads, but of a different kind. Going in one direction is a paved road, like the highway to Nairobi," he said, pointing toward Emali and then sweeping his arm to show that the highway continued to the northwest. "I have been on that highway all the way to Naivasha. I know that it is modern and paved, and that even when it rains for many days the trucks don't get stuck but keep on rolling."

"My problem is that the government tells us to follow the paved highway," he continued. "But, going in the other direction from the crossroads is a path leading into Maasai land," he explained, pointing in the direction of Kilimanjaro. "That path is the route of tradition, the Maasai way."

Letaare went on to explain why he felt like a man at a crossroads between the routes to progress and tradition. Government officials and some educated Maasai were telling him to adopt new and, what they described as, progressive ways. He listens to what they have to say, and he thinks there may be some merit to their arguments. But he is not sure that the progressive route will work. He

also knows that many Maasai think highly of their own way of life and continue to believe in it. He is willing to try the progressive approach, but he also wants to maintain some of his traditional ways. Rather than blindly accepting the development proposals, he wants to hedge his bets so that if the new methods do not work he can fall back on the old system. Now at the crossroads, he is carefully looking down each route, trying to decide which of the two is better, before he takes the next step and fully commits himself.

We finished our tea and left the hut. Once outside I quickly realized that all the cattle had left the kraal. I looked around until I saw two herdsboys driving the stock over a small hill about half a mile away.

"Letaare, why did the cattle leave the kraal before we were finished with our work?"

"Can cattle wait for us to drink tea and have a long conversation?"

"But why didn't we castrate your large bull before we had tea?"

"The tea was almost ready."

"But I drove a long way this morning, and I have a job to do. You knew that I wanted to neuter your bull and the other bulls. You suggested taking a break for tea because it would be such a difficult job."

"Do you remember what I said about being a man at a crossroads?"

"Yes, I will probably remember it forever. It was a very interesting way to describe how you feel about development. If I were you, I would probably feel the same way. Why?"

"Now you can understand that today I am a man who has already taken one step down the highway of progress with one foot, but also one step down the path of tradition with the other foot. The Sahiwal bull is my step toward progress. He is bigger than Maasai bulls, and the government tells us that his offspring will also be bigger and that they will produce more milk than our cows. But the Maasai bull



is my foot along the other route, the path of tradition. He may be smaller than the Sahiwal, but he is much tougher. I know that my bull produces good calves. And I know that his offspring do well in our hot, dry country. The seed of Maasai bulls has produced good offspring since the first Maasai age-set. Since before Maasai climbed the Kerio escarpment."

"The Sahiwal bull is a stranger here," Letaare continued. "I've already seen how tired he is after the long walk to water on a hot day. Suppose he gets sick and dies? I know that Ikokia's Sahiwal bull is already sick. I do not want to lose the seed that my Maasai bull can produce until I am sure that the Sahiwal bull will do well here on Poka. So, I will carefully watch both bulls to see how they do. Then I will decide whether to follow the highway of progress or the path of tradition."

After listening to his explanation, I realized that Letaare had deliberately planned to serve me tea as a non-confrontational way to prevent castrating his favorite bull. At that moment, I vividly recalled a photograph of my father, then sixteen, beaming with pride as he stood next to his prize-winning bull at a Midwestern county fair. I could imagine his outrage if someone had suggested neutering that bull. Letaare's position represented far more than sentimental attachment to an animal or to a way of life. He had raised some very valid points regarding the policy of promoting Sahiwal bulls in semi-arid parts of Maasai land and, more importantly, regarding broader issues of rural development among pastoralists in eastern Africa.

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The following chapters attempt to explain the origins and evolution of the policies and practices that produced the "route of progress." The study also

attempts to explain the reactions of Maasai to the tremendous changes introduced by colonialism, and the continued existence of the "route of tradition." That Letaare was faced with such a clear choice between the two routes is evidence of the continued attraction of the traditional Maasai system. But the context within which Maasai lived and operated began to change with the arrival of British officials in the interior of East Africa near the end of the past century. The next chapter discusses the pre-colonial situation of Maasai. We then turn to an examination of the enormous changes that followed, and to their effects on the perspectives of those involved in the development of Kenya Maasai land.