

The Effects of Development on the Maasai  
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Laura E. Hauff  
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### Abstract

The Maasai are well known pastoralists from East Africa who have lived a long and proud past; however, their unique way of life is diminishing. This paper seeks to examine two factors that currently threaten traditional Maasai culture: the loss of herding land due to development strategies stemming from “the tragedy of the commons” and their cultural practices concerning women and girls, which are under attack from national governments and the international community. This review lays out traditional Maasai customs regarding land management and cattle herding and female circumcision and marriages, what factors threaten these practices and how Maasai culture has been affected by these changes, and finally some thoughts for the future.

## The Effects of Development on the Maasai

### A Personal Narrative

It was a cool June night and I had just gotten done with a long day at work. My body was sticky from sunscreen and sweat and I wanted nothing more than to get in my car and go home to take a shower. As I turned on University Street, I started speeding along on a path that I had taken so many times before. This time, however, for some reason I paid attention to all the sights and sounds of the street; the bright, flashing fluorescent lights that lined every block and the whizzing sound of passing cars. The typical busyness that characterizes many American cities in the evening. As I slowed to a red light, my mind wandered to memories of my time in Africa. There, nighttime is quiet, clear, and still. One hears only the quiet stirrings of animals that come out when the sun goes down and the steady rhythm of one's own breathing. I thought of the Maasai and their much simpler way of life, and I longed to be back there again. But with a quick change of the street light I snapped back to reality.

As my drive continued, however, I thought of the ways Maasai life is changing due to outside factors coming from Western cultures. Although the Maasai have proved to be resilient, they are not untouched by the ever-increasing reach of industrialization. I have a perfect photograph forever imprinted in my mind of a young Maasai man, traditional red garb draped over his limbs. In one hand he bears a spear that was used just hours before to hunt and kill a lion. Yet, at the same time, he is swaying to the beat pouring out of the headphones of a discman supplied by an American tourist. Although humorous, it made me think that maybe their culture will eventually become, no longer

theirs, but mine. And then another bit of diversity will have joined the distressingly ordinary status of my world.

I was fortunate to be able to sit and talk with some Maasai men one evening. Over the crackling campfire (and through a translator) they shared some of the recent changes they have experienced. They informed me that they send their “dumb” children to school and keep the wise ones at home to tend the cattle and learn traditional customs. Then those children come back from school and have ideas that challenge the traditional Maasai way of life. Now one can meet educated Maasai who have chosen not to continue piercing their ears and wearing the heavily beaded jewelry which characterize their people. These men were not angered by this choice, but rather, were concerned with what changes might be in the future. I wanted to know more about those concerns—what are the factors that threaten Maasai culture? How do these factors affect the cultural structure of the Maasai? What would have to be done to “save” the Maasai?

#### Maasai: People of Cattle

The impact of globalization is felt today by hundreds of indigenous communities world wide. Outsiders from a foreign land come into their territory ready to mine a field, cut down a forest, or prepare grasslands for a tourist park. From the Yanomami of the rainforest, to the Inuit of the freezing Arctic, indigenous people everywhere are threatened by the effects of development in the countries where they reside. One thing that most indigenous people have in common is their dependence on the land they occupy. Many times their whole social structure, livelihood, and cultural identity are entwined in varied ways with their environment. As their land and resources are taken away, more and more of their culture is lost as well. There is perhaps no clearer an

example of this than in the case of the Maasai, who in the past century have lost half the amount of land they once roamed.

The Maasai are one of the most celebrated tribes in Africa; many have heard or seen pictures of the tall and proud Maasai men who used to dominate the savanna. They are a semi-nomadic (they follow the seasonal changes with their herds) pastoralist group that has been living in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania for over 2500 years (McCabe, Perkin, & Schofield, 1992, p. 354). The current population of this Maa speaking tribe is estimated at 350,000 (Fratkin, 1997, p. 243). Maasai live communally and rely on their herds for subsistence. Pastoralists, such as the Maasai, can be described as, "...people who derive most of their income or sustenance from keeping domestic livestock in conditions where most of the feed that their livestock eats is natural forage rather than cultivated fodders and pastures" (Baxter, 1994, p. 4). In addition, they have always included some agricultural products into their diet, but recently they have engaged in small scale cultivation more frequently. Currently, 88% of Tanzanian Maasai and 46% of Kenyan Maasai cultivate (Homewood et al., 2001, p. 12548).

Typically three or four families (domestic groups) live together, in what is called a *boma*, and individual families change location every few years; they congregate in semi-permanent settlements during the dry season and disperse to temporary camps during the wet season (McCabe et al., 1992, p. 355; Talle, 1988, p. 156). A domestic group is comprised of a man, his wives, and dependent children. Each domestic group consists further of households composed of a mother and her children. A *boma* is a "circular cluster of dwellings enclosed by a fence" (Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 37; Ndagala, 1992, p. 53). Each herdowner has his own gate and all cattle reside in the

center of the *boma* at night. Members of a *boma* cooperate in daily tasks together, such as making watering and grazing decisions, building cattle enclosures, and providing security for the *boma* (Homewood and Rodgers, 1991, p. 37; Ndagala, 1992, p. 55; Talle, 1988, p. 157, 175).

A typical day begins when the women awake before dawn to tend to the fire. When the sun comes up, the women and younger girls take to milking the cattle as the cattle pass one by one through their respective gates. The women milk each cow and the cattle then meet on the other side of the *boma*. Elders give instructions as to the grazing scheme that the young boys who take the herds should follow. After the herds leave, women clean and repair the home, gather water and firewood, and take care of the children. The elder men discuss stock management and marriage settlements, while the warrior men travel with their group. The herds return in late afternoon and each cow passes through the gate and is milked again before it is put in the center for the night (Homewood and Rodgers, 1991, p. 38-40; Ndagala, 1992, p. 55; Talle, 1988, p. 180).

Cattle are undoubtedly the most important aspect of Maasai culture. They are involved in rituals and ceremonies, they maintain relationships within families and between different clans, and they produce food. In essence, they are the Maasai's livelihood. The Maasai are a patrilineal society in which clan memberships are inherited from the father (Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 45). A man's cattle belong to his clan; each clan has a distinctive mark that is cut into the ears of livestock (Ndagala, 1992, p. 24). "Kinship and marriage accord rights to the resources according to culturally established principles" (Ndagala, 1992, p. 25). Cattle are passed on from a mother to her sons, and so parents eagerly anticipate an heir to pass along their resources and keep the

family name. The composition of the herd is closely linked to production and reproduction potential. For example, the more females one has in a herd, the more long-term security a herdowner and his family have because they provide milk and future calves.

Although males control cattle holdings, one cannot overlook that women are involved in the process of cattle changing hands and have ownership over the resources (Ndagala, 1992, p. 167). It is through their mothers that males receive cattle. The husband hands over the set amount to the mother and she takes care of the small herd until her son reaches maturity. Women are central to livestock management; they milk the cattle, check for injury and infections, and take action if needed. Milk management is an area where women are given substantial decision making power (Ndagala, 1992, pp. 133-134; Talle, 1988, p. 211). “By being ‘owners’ and managers of houses, women control the main areas of productive and reproductive activities and this role constitutes the basis of their autonomy and gives them a strong identity as pastoralists” (Talle, 1988, p. 248).

Cattle are the structural backbone behind many important stages in life. For instance, they determine the age at which males marry. Men need to be independent and own a good size herd before they are able to establish their own domestic group. “A Maasai boy gradually accumulates animals held for him in his mother’s herd, whether allotted at the time of her marriage, born from allotted cows or acquired later as gifts from his father and other close relatives” (Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 48). Most men start out with about three cattle, usually given to them by their mothers. It is estimated that a family needs about 30-50 cattle to barely support itself (Hillman, 1994,

para. 6). Starting with only three cows, this accumulation takes about 24 years to achieve (Ndagala, 1992, p. 103). This is just about the time that men enter the *ilmorak* age grade (a new stage in their life) and are ready to marry. The age grading system is a unique social structure in which males move through stages of life with a group of peers (age-set). Their stage in life determines their political, economic, and social status in society.

Individual identity in Maasai society is related to membership in certain circles, where rights and obligations are formed. Residential circles are characterized by rights to resources and obligations within the *boma*. As the circle gets smaller, however, such as in individual households, the more rights it encloses and the more difficult it is to leave that circle. Membership in this group is voluntary since one can choose to leave or join *bomas* quite freely. Age circles consist of the age-sets within the more all-encompassing age-grade circle. Age-sets do not control resources, but they share rights and responsibilities and influence resources through livestock gifts and loans and sharing of products. Kinship circles are particularistic because membership is determined at birth. Ownership of certain resources such as wells and livestock are determined by clan. The closeness of this relationship determines cooperation and articulation of kinship rights. Although people may be separated in one circle, they are many times united in another. (Ndagala, 1992, pp. 148-151). In short, cattle are more than a source of food for the Maasai; they are instrumental in the bonds of personal relationships and necessary for the Maasai way of life. [For additional ethnographic background, please see *Appendix*.]

### The Tragedy of the Commons

Currently there is debate in Kenya, Tanzania, and the international community on how to utilize sections of East African land: should it be conserved for wildlife or used by

citizens in their various subsistence strategies? This debate has been intensified by Kenya and Tanzania's growth rates, which are both slightly above 2% ("Data," 2002). As the population increases, so does the competition for resources. This problem is further compounded by the fact that much land is already set aside with no opportunity for cultivation, grazing, or settlement. Tanzania, for example, sets aside 25% of its land that is under government protection for conservation and excludes human use. For the Maasai this is especially detrimental (Neumann, 1998, p. 4).

Due to the nomadic element of their existence, Maasai population estimates vary, but most sources suggest the population growth rate is around 2%, while one source gives an extremely high rate of 3.9% (Homewood et al., 2001, p. 12547). Naturally as their population increases they will need more cattle to support themselves, which means they will also need more land, not only for the increase in number of cattle, but also to move their herds to when the dry season approaches (Homewood et al., 2001, p. 12547). As the Maasai are pushed into smaller and smaller areas of land, their herds begin to decrease. Without enough land the cattle will die, and subsequently Maasai culture as well. For a Maasai (as illustrated above) without cattle is like an Inuit without snow: it is such a distinctive part of their culture, that the two cannot be separated. While land availability to the Maasai in the future is uncertain, a theme in ecology has emerged which predicts dire times ahead for the Maasai: the tragedy of the commons.

Garrett Hardin's article, "The Tragedy of the Commons" stresses the need to recognize that the earth and its natural resources are finite and, unless we want to greatly increase human misery, we need to find a way to limit population growth to zero. He believes that we mistakenly allow Adam Smith's "invisible hand" theory to guide our

policy on freedom in reproduction. “The rebuttal to the invisible hand in population control is to be found in a scenario... We may well call it “the tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968).

To visualize his thesis Hardin asks his readers to imagine a pasture available to everyone. It is thought each herdsman will keep as many cattle as possible on the commons. As a rational human, each person will seek to maximize his gain by questioning the utility to himself by adding an additional cow to his herd. There is a positive utility of one with the increase of one cow and the negative consequence is less than one to the individual since the pasture is open to all, the consequence is shared by all. Hardin claims (1968):

...the rational herdsman concludes that the only sensible course for him to pursue is to add another animal to his herd. And another; and another... But this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing a commons. Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit—in a world that is limited.

Hardin’s theory capitalized on past assertions of the problems in East Africa and also led many others to view the effect Maasai had on East African land in the same way. For example, Spencer (1998, p. 220) notes that the Royal Commission on East Africa raised the same criticisms in 1955 by recognizing the devastating effects of a “combination of communal range with unrestricted individual ownership, because therein neither the community nor the individual have regard to the effects of their actions on the land.” Even the United Nations Conference on Desertification (1977) stated that:

Under the pressures to which they are increasingly subject, pastoralists sometimes behave as if they regarded breeding stock, rather than the land and its vegetation, as their ultimate resource. This leads to an apparent disregard for the ecology of the plant communities on which the stock feed. Comparatively little attention may be paid to the performance of pastures under stress, to the requirements for successful germination or to the impact of selective grazing on the whole plant community. (Tolba, p. 23)

The tragedy of the commons had been pointed to as essentially fact for an explanation of the increase in land degradation so many times in the 1970s and 1980s that it began to be assumed with little questioning in either the public or scientific realms. Combined with the prolonged droughts in East Africa in the 1970s, many organizations and much literature focused on combating desertification caused by over herding practiced by pastoralists. “Few intellectual debates about the environment are marked with more ambiguity, scientific “self-righteousness”, and ideology than the debate about land degradation in dry regions or what is more commonly called “desertification” (Little, 1994, p. 213). Naturally most land rehabilitation and intervention policies based their plans and suggestions on this line of thinking (Fratkin, 1997, p. 240; Hogg, 1992, p. 132; Homewood & Rodgers, 1987, p. 112; Little, 1994, p. 213-216).

These plans followed the lead set by the British and the German which ruled over Tanzania and Kenya from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s. One colonial rule that hit the Maasai hardest was the implementation of artificial boundaries and “reserves” which forced Maasai to graze within set limits in order to provide land to colonist farmers and ranchers and to preserve land for game parks. This proved disastrous because the Maasai

could no longer graze near permanent water sources and ample grass, and they found it difficult to communicate with each other (Fratkin, 1997, p. 243; Ndagala, 1992, pp. 42-43). Unfortunately, “African governments and aid agencies have conspired to disregard the experience of failed policies in colonial times—it is argued that they were failures of colonialism—and yet they have followed a similar approach towards planning, perpetuating earlier assumptions and mistakes” (Spencer, 1997, p. 221).

Many solutions proposed called for overall privatization of land and commercialization of livestock, which many believed, would eliminate the problems caused by communal resources (Fratkin, 1997, p. 241, 251; Spencer, 1997, p. 220-223; Talbot, 1986, p. 449-450). Little (1994) found that:

Projects were hastily designed and implemented, with little clear understanding of the nature of the problem or agreement over what constituted desertification; many of them received strong political and financial support from multilateral (e.g., UN bodies and the World Bank) and bilateral foreign aid programs (e.g., US, French, and Nordic aid agencies). (p. 213)

It was thought that by setting up private or group ranches in both Kenya and Tanzania similar to Western individual commercial ranches, herd sizes would decrease and the supply for commercial meat would increase, bringing about an ecological transition among the Maasai and also bringing them closer in line with the national economy (Fratkin, 1997, p. 241, Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 207; Spencer, 1997, p. 220-221).

These programs not only failed to accomplish their objectives but, in many cases, further increased land degradation. Little (1994) explains:

The tenure reforms—such as private enclosure of communal lands—that are being implemented as a solution to the “commons” enigma actually facilitate the kinds of tenure ambiguities and environmental pressures that were originally associated with common property systems. The onslaught that is taking place in many dry regions stems partially from actions taken by individuals and governments to confront a perceived “tragedy of the commons. (p. 223)

These group ranches failed for numerous reasons, mainly because the policies did not take into account the complex ecological problem. The ranches were set up in the best grazing areas serving a limited amount of stock, taking prime range areas away from others and thus leading to further degradation elsewhere. When rains failed to come in the reserve areas, the Maasai had to leave the boundaries of the ranch and migrate to avoid the drought. In the same way, their kinship system did not allow them to refuse other Maasai who came to them while trying to avoid droughts elsewhere (Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 207-208; Spencer, 1997, p. 221).

#### The Tragedy of the “Tragedy of the Commons”

Is degradation of the land due to pastoralist logic leading to the destruction of Maasai culture? Is it really a “tragedy of the commons”? Perhaps in part, but recently social scientists have entered the debate and have suggested that policies stemming from this thinking are the real tragedy in that they have brought many more problems to the Maasai (discussed further in this paper). Scientists today propose that these intervention strategies ignored the full ecological condition of the area and never took into account traditional Maasai cultural practices.

Natural scientists today argue that these plans never fully accounted for the instability present in these arid areas which are frequently prone to drought. After consulting short term studies, plans were made to imitate Western style ranches which receive much more rainfall. The grasslands are unstable and thus livestock and population densities respond to the highly variable climate patterns. When the rains are strong, there is more pasture and an increase in population, but during times of drought grass, and subsequently population, decreases. Therefore, it is almost impossible to accurately measure the “carrying capacity” of this area and predict long term consequences of grazing on these grasslands. Furthermore, savanna grasslands are incredibly resilient to disturbance, which make some question whether there is even cause for concern (Fratkin, 1997, p. 242; Homewood & Rodgers, 1987, p. 113; Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 118; Talbot, 1986, p. 449). Most agree that “Isolated areas of change are due to several causes, and pastoralist impacts are by no means the sole or even the main agents of change” (Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 118).

A case study looking at long-term changes in the buffer zones of the Serengeti-Mara Ecosystem (SME) completed by Homewood and colleagues demonstrates that pastoralism is not destructive to the land and does not pose a threat to wildlife. The Serengeti-Mara ecosystem (the Serengeti is in Tanzania and the Mara is in Kenya) is a wildlife park that has total exclusion of human land use; only tourism is allowed. The decline in wildlife and land can only be seen on the Kenyan side and thus is due to government policies regarding land use. Homewood et al (2001) assert that:

...contrary to widely held views, rapid land-cover change and wildlife decline are restricted to the Kenyan part of the system. Correlation and causal analyses

demonstrate that major changes in land cover and wildebeest numbers are driven primarily by markets and national land tenure policies, rather than agropastoral population growth. (p. 12544)

This study reports that temporal climate trends, human population density and growth rates, uptake of small-holder agriculture, and livestock population trends do not differ between the two countries and therefore cannot account for the observed changes (Homewood et al., 2001, p. 12544). Rather, the differences seen between Kenya and Tanzania (in the buffer zones outside the park) with regard to wildlife and land deterioration are due to private (Kenya) versus state or communal (Tanzania) land tenure, agricultural policies and market conditions.

In Kenya, national development has favored intensive cultivation, commercial and private ranching, and export crop production, furthermore they also have a developed transport and market infrastructure. In contrast, Tanzania has advocated state or communal ownership such as villagization experiments and regional development programs and does not have a strong market or transport system (Bennett, 1988, pp. 40-41, Homewood et al., 2001, p. 12545). In Kenya, private land owners have the freedom to respond to market opportunities. Currently, cereal prices and imports are high which leads to an increase in large-scale cultivation (Homewood et al., 2001, p. 12547).

The effects of these two different approaches are what have lead to the decrease (in excess of 50% in the last twenty years) in wildlife on the Kenyan side, but not on the Tanzanian side. Homewood et al (2001) conclude:

Private land tenure makes possible and market conditions encourage commercial cultivation, which leads to major land-cover change and wildebeest decline in the

Kenyan SME. Conversely, state control of land, policies restricting mechanized cultivation, and market constraints reduce land-use options, land-cover change, and any associated impacts on wildlife in the Tanzanian SME. (p. 12548)

Although agriculture or ranching may be able to support more people in the short run, these approaches cannot anticipate and prepare for drought years. While many experts believe strongly that the Maasai are not solely, or maybe not at all, responsible for land degradation, some even argue that pastoralism is the *only effective* way to live in East Africa's semi-arid and arid environments due to the prevalence of droughts and the unpredictable environment. The Maasai strategy is viable in the long run because they are able to capitalize on good years and save up cattle for hard times ahead (Hillman, 1994, para. 8; Hogg, 1992, pp. 133-34).

In addition to the criticisms of intervention policies by natural scientists, social scientists blame the failure of these plans on the lack of knowledge of Maasai cultural traditions in two specific ways. First, traditional pastoralists actually do have systems in place that limit access to pasture. "Social scientists criticized Hardin's assumption that communally held resources meant no restriction on use" (Fratkin, 1997, p. 241). Second, was the failure to recognize the success of pastoralism as a subsistence strategy in the area compared to ranching and how difficult it would be to change the mindset on herding practices from those strategies used in pastoralism to the logic used in ranching. Talbot (1986) explains:

Livestock are a central part of the Maasai culture, not simply a product to be raised for sale. And the traditional pastoral practices, including the Maasai's propensity to increase livestock to the maximum limits of the rangeland, are

logical responses to the need to ensure survival in a difficult environment, especially under conditions of risk caused by the uncertain and variable rainfall.

(p. 449)

Many contest that a communal tenure system practiced by the Maasai do control grazing by regulating access to users and sanctioning abusers, have mechanisms in place to conserve resources at certain times of the year to guard against mismanagement, and are more effective than privately owned land strategies (Fratkin, 1997, p. 241; Little, 1994, p. 216). Although land and water resources are not privately “owned” by the Maasai, individuals or groups (especially educated or influential members of society) have “control” over land areas and especially over water points, which help to regulate use of the pastures (Fratkin, 1997, p. 243). Mobility is essential to pastoralism in order to combat the seasonal variation in dry regions. Anything that restricts these mobility rights, such as intervention through ranching or installation of water points, and removes resources from collective use, contributes to or creates land management problems (Fratkin, 1997, 251; Little, 1994, p. 223).

#### Social Change in Maasai Society

The previous discussion focused on whether or not the Maasai’s pastoralist strategy led to land degradation and could coexist with wildlife. Most recent studies and views suggest that it is not the Maasai that are the problem, but rather the intervention policies that have been established. Maasai’s access to land in the future is uncertain, but failed policies from the past have already affected Maasai culture. Although some Maasai (especially Kenyan Maasai) have increased their wealth, education, or cattle holdings, for the most part these policies have had a negative effect on traditional Maasai

life. Due to the reduction in territory because of population increases and conservation measures, the Maasai are experiencing an increase in wealth differentiation, sedentary living styles, and different economic opportunities. These effects are interrelated and contribute to the increase in inequality in Maasai society and the breakdown of Maasai cultural systems.

As mentioned earlier with regard to traditional systems which regulate access to pasture and water, the Maasai make a clear distinction between ownership and control. Control is defined by Ndagala as the “power to direct or determine the disposal, allocation, and utilization” of resources. At the level of individual homes, only the head of the household has this right, to determine, for example, whether an animal is slaughtered, sold, or given away (Talle, 1988, p. 177). However, all members of the household have ownership over the resources, which is defined as, the “rights of use in the respective resources” (Ndagala, 1992, p. 15). Although there is disagreement about whether or not Maasai culture is truly egalitarian, some people argue that historically there has been a relatively small gap between the rich and the poor because all have access and ownership to the resources and thus get what they need (Bennett, 1988, p. 37; Ndagala, 1992, pp. 15-18).

In the past Maasai have had poor tools, limited trade, and highly perishable goods, which limit the economic system and make it hard for the wealthy (those with the most cattle) to raise their standard of living (although the wealthy do enjoy more social influence and involvement in the society) (Ndagala, 1992, p. 21). In addition, knowledge too, has traditionally been unstratified. The types of cattle bred are common herds and knowledge of their care is common to anyone who takes care of them. There is no elitist

training, they all know the same types of things, and so education could not lead to inequality (Ndagala, 1992, p. 152).

Currently, however, there has been an increase in things not usually present in Maasai society, such as education, consumer goods, agriculture and sedentary living. Although Maasai have always engaged in a small amount of cultivation, due to the loss of land, they have been forced to rely less heavily on their livestock and increase their involvement in other economic opportunities (McCabe et al., 1992, p. 362). As Maasai enter the livestock market or increase their agricultural endeavors, an income disparity develops among herd owners (Bennett, 1988, p. 37, Hogg, 1992, p. 135). Many Maasai sell their cattle when they need money for grain; when livestock numbers decrease due to mortality and disease, the amount of animals needing to be sold increases. In the past, Maasai would help their age-mates or kin when times got tough by giving away their surplus, knowing that they would be helped in return. However, these relationships are becoming stressed because many families are losing land and livestock at the same time and no one has a place to turn (Hogg, 1992, p. 35, McCabe et al., 1992, p. 360). Furthermore, now that Maasai are aware of other economic opportunities, some are not only less able to give away their surplus, but are also less willing.

The Maasai are becoming more sedentary for three reasons; decreasing territory, installation of technological inputs, such as watering points, and government policies (Ndagala, 1992, p. 171). An increase in sedentarization has placed pressure on the land and made access to resources based on residential groupings more difficult. Settling also gives control of territory to individuals or individual domestic groups, so the amount of communal sharing is decreased. "...the demise of communal property systems and the

loss of pastoral land are causing rangeland degradation, pastoral impoverishment and dramatic changes in the pastoral way of life” (Charnley, 1996, p. 41). Closer proximity and exposure to others has also led to new consumption patterns among the Maasai. They now demand consumer goods and therefore, have to increase the sale of livestock. As a result, less surplus goes to the needy and thus, the gap between the rich and poor is newly visible and increasing (Ndagala, 1992, pp. 171-172).

The demand for consumer goods is also crippling the age-grade system. “The age-grade system is changing both as a response to the economic opportunities open to the young people and as a reflection of the emerging possibilities for old people to retain their grip on the resources” (Ndagala, 1992, p. 158). The privatization of personal goods, and also education, have made it easier for males to achieve wealth and status earlier than their age-set peers and have allowed elders to stay in control longer.

Education is rapidly affecting Maasai culture, and carries with it negative and positive consequences. In order to compete in an advancing world and protect their land, the Maasai must educate their youth. This, however, causes conflict in their culture. Those in school are eligible for leadership positions outside of their culture, but are no longer available for leadership positions within. Therefore, outside leaders, at times, are not respected by their elders, but local leaders do not have the necessary tools needed today to solve pastoralist problems (Ndagala, 1992, p. 120). As a result, no clear leaders of a particular age-set develop because they cannot easily flow between Maasai culture and the larger society in which they live. Perhaps the greatest disadvantage education brings to Maasai society is as knowledge becomes more specialized, unequal opportunities for advancements result. It allows youth to find another source for wealth

and, thus, they can get married earlier. This shortens the length of ilmurrhood and lowers the age of circumcision (Ndagala, 1992, p. 172).

On the other hand, educating members of their society has proved to be beneficial as well. They can now more easily talk with government officials, articulate their needs, and receive cooperation. Those who have achieved sufficient literacy have been beneficial to the tribe because they can assist tribal members in land deed negotiations and other government dealings (Phillips & Bhavnagri, 2002, para. 26).

These changes in Maasai culture, the increases in inequality, economic opportunities, and education, have come about, in part, from a decrease in land, which results in a decrease in cattle. These changes further stress the cultural practices which depend upon cattle and threaten the pastoralist identity, for, "...to be stockless deprives most pastoralists...of social and cultural identity. The basic relationships between people; those between parents and children, between spouses, between friends, between clansmen and, above all, between affines are mediated through livestock" (Baxter, 1994, p. 5)

#### Men and Women in Society

A second major point of vulnerability in Maasai culture is their cultural traditions concerning women. It begins with the age-grade system where men move through the stages with much fanfare and importance while women sit on the side. Talle (1988) describes the age-grade system as a "structural and ideological vehicle promoting male dominance and inequality between men and women" (p. 91). Maasai women seem to be exploited through the Maasai customs of clitoridectomy and forced marriages; practices which are increasingly under attack from national and international organizations.

A distinctive characteristic of Maasai culture is their age-grading system. All males and females are graded according to age and their age-grade determines what they can and cannot do. The age-grade system provides a framework for allocating tasks and resources and determines the timing of events, such as marriage (Ndagala, 1992, p. 102; Talle, 1988, p. 91). Females move through the age-grades and are circumcised individually, while males move through them and are circumcised with their age-sets (a more specific age grouping). Women have two age grades; *intoyie* or “uncircumcised girls” and *inkitok* or “women” (further subdivided into married women and old women beyond child bearing age) (Ndagala, 1992, p. 87; Talle, 1988, p. 94). Maasai culture dictates that girls marry shortly after they are biologically ready to have children. Girls marry as teenagers, within a year of their circumcision. In contrast, males wait several years after circumcision because they must increase the size of their herds and take responsibility for their roles in society before they marry. “The social maturity of males in Maasai society will continue to lag behind that of females and men will continue to marry late as long as the productive potential of the family herds continues to be the only source of subsistence, and as long as the possession of cattle continues to have a cultural value which is linked to adulthood” (Ndagala, 1992, p. 104).

For males, the age-grade system, in which they move from herdboys to warriors to elders, is especially important. Homewood and Rodgers (1991) explain:

It is a sequence that spans a man’s lifetime and that is of overwhelming importance in the changing roles it imposes, the powerful ceremonies through which it is expressed, and also in terms of the unfolding political, economic,

social, and ecological education and opportunities it opens up for the individual.

(p. 49)

Men have three age grades; *ilayiok* or “uncircumcised boys,” *ilmurran* or “circumcised young men” (more commonly referred to as *moran* in Swahili), and *ilpayiani* or “elders” (further divided into junior, senior, and ancient elders) (Ndagala, 1992, p. 87; Talle, 1988, p. 93).

Male age mates are ritually bound to each other for life. While a *moran*, males do everything with those in their age set and this leads to a lifetime of responsibility and commitment to each other. “The close and intimate relationship between age-equals...entails mutual understanding and sharing of property – food and animals – and to some extent of children’s labour and the sexual services of wives” (Talle, 1988, p. 99). The period of moranhood (the *ilmurran* stage) is the proudest time in Maasai culture (Ndagala, 1992, p. 88). After looking over herds since they were five years old, these young men now take on new roles. At around 12-16 years of age, they have a ceremony after which they are circumcised at home (all those circumcised at the same time, usually every fifteen years, make up one age-set). For the next several years, they will live together as “warriors”. Their main duties now are to protect people and livestock from raiders and marauding animals, water the livestock during drought conditions, look after livestock in distant grazing conditions, track down lost or stolen livestock, and complete other tasks determined by the elders. This period of life will end with the *eunoto* ceremony. (Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 50-51; Ndagala, 1992, p. 91; Talle, 1988, p. 98-102).

Nine years or so after circumcision, the *ilmurran* go through an *eunoto* ceremony, where their heads are shaved, and they become senior *ilmurran*. At this point, they claim the full rights and obligations of their age-grade and those in the age-grade they are replacing are expected to move out of that age-grade and make room for the new age-set. The previous group of *moran* then becomes elders (Ndagala, 1992, p. 91; Talle, 1988, p. 102). Elders are central to resolving conflicts within Maasai society. They are the “guardians of laws” and the “conscience of society” (Saitoti, 1980, p. 185). “The elders constitute an impartial body which runs Maasai governmental affairs, maintains justice, and deals with the important issues that enable a society to exist and flourish” (Saitoti, 1980, p. 186). Elder men trying to hold onto their positions while the younger men pressure them to give it up characterizes the age-grade system (Homewood & Rodgers, 1991, p. 52; Ndagala, 1992, p. 92). Although most senior age sets receive great respect, economic and political power is always slipping from them (Ndagala, 1992, p. 117).

A Maasai woman’s life is greatly involved with that of her husband’s and children’s lives. A woman marries within a year of her circumcision. Her father has the final say in the marriage, but her brothers and mother are influential as well. She cannot marry a member of her father’s age set or someone from her own or mother’s clan (Ndagala, 1992, p. 123). After marriage she first lives with a co-wife or her mother-in-law to get a feel for her husband and the others in the domestic group and the routines of the family. Shortly after, she builds her own home, which becomes her domain (Ndagala, 1992, p. 125; Talle, 1988, p. 130).

While male circumcision is an event surrounded by celebration, female circumcision is more somber. “The operation, which is said to remove the “dirt”...of

childhood and thus to transform the girl into an adult, is performed by an elderly woman of the local community” (Talle, 1988, p. 105). Females are clitoridectomized in early puberty at around 13-14 years old. The procedure entails losing their freedom and entering strict, married life; they can no longer enjoy the company of warriors, nor can they choose their own spouses. Their marriage is already arranged by the time of their clitoridectomy and, many times, to men much older than themselves (Saitoti, 1980, p. 77; Talle, 1988, p. 105).

Although women are allowed to cry out, they are many times treated roughly and need to be held down because of their refusal to go along with the procedure. The clitoridectomy, although quick, seems painful and devastatingly complete. With only a splash of cold water as an anesthetic, an elder female takes a curved blade or small triangular knife and removes the woman’s clitoris and labia minora (Saitoti, 1980, pp. 77-81; Talle, 1988, p. 105). One researcher had to avert her eyes during a procedure, dismayed at the girl’s cries to stop and the older women’s unconcern (Bentsen, 1989, pp. 215-216). The Maasai’s ritual does not seem to be one of the kinder ways to perform female circumcision and is often viewed in dismay by outside cultures. The opinions of Maasai women themselves on the practice are varied and will be discussed later.

There are two areas in which women do exhibit a great deal of autonomy: they have access to production for and reproduction of the community and they are dominant over their homes. “...in Maasai society, the exploitation of women is alleviated by the fact that women enjoy extensive rights to part of the family herd, i.e. to the means of production. Married Maasai women are in charge of and manage the house in which they and their children live” (Talle, 1988, p. 3). In Maasai society, many objects have male or

female “value” dependent upon which sex labored to construct the object. Traditionally, women make their own homes and thus are the owners of them. Maasai men cannot even enter a wife’s house without her permission, which shows their lack of control over this aspect of the culture (Ndagala, 1992, p. 126; Talle, 1988, p. 190).

### Contemporary Women in Maasai Society

Recent media clips have shown intense disgust by leaders and government officials from East Africa on the treatment of the Maasai girl-child. The Maasai-Mara Explorer Camp manager has been cited as stating that, “...boarding primary schools would be built to eradicate retrogressive practices such as moranism and early marriages among the Maasai” (“Hotels,” 2003). A District Commissioner in Kenya vowed to use the Children’s Act to make sure children’s rights are not violated as he stated that, “The Government had unearthed a racket in which old men in the area colluded with parents to withdraw and marry young girls...” (Jimbo, 2002). If these sentiments are shared by all, Maasai cultural traditions would disintegrate with Maasai children away at boarding schools, not learning Maasai culture. Practices such as female circumcision and early female marriages, which demonstrate Maasai male dominance, have caused a controversy in East Africa that question the Maasai way of life.

The Maasai are similar to many pastoralist groups in that they are a male dominated society. Talle (1988) explains how this system is kept in place:

The patrilineal clan organization and the male age-set system are important organizing principles which mediate control of means of production (livestock) and labour into the hands of married men, thus generating gender inequality in social relations of production and reproduction. Women are regarded as social

minors and their procreative resources are largely appropriated by men of elder status in the age-grade system through bridewealth transactions. (p. 2)

The Maasai are unique from other groups, however, in the significance that the age-grade system has in creating male supremacy. As discussed above, males move through the age-grades with elaborate rituals. “Women are associated with this system but are not a part of it; for this reason, women are, by definition, subordinate to men in all aspects of cultural subtlety” (Talle, 1988, p. 94).

One characteristic of Maasai culture which is often viewed in dismay by other cultures is the practice of female circumcision (otherwise referred to as female genital mutilation, or in the Maasai’s case, clitoridectomy), which is done to 89% of Maasai girls (“Law Should,” 2003). The procedure’s purpose is to transform girls into adults and in turn, transform women into child bearers who now have many sexual restrictions. “From now on she may only associate sexually with age-mates of her husband and those who do not belong to the same sub-clan as herself or who are closely related to her matrilaterally” (Talle, 1988, p. 111). There is said to be an increase in girls fleeing their homes to escape the practice and finding refuge in boarding schools. This action has increased pressure on the government to investigate areas where female circumcision is practiced and enforce laws that make the practice illegal (“Law Should,” 2003). Although the opinions of women on this subject are not widely reported, they do voice their opposition to forced early marriages.

Talle (1988, p. 166) reports that during her time spent with the Maasai, many women complained about their marriages to old men. She says, “One of them said to me, ‘You try and you try but nothing happens’, hinting at the failing potency and

impregnating power of her husband and regretting her choice of a better partner”. Typically a girl’s husband has already been decided by the time of her clitoridectomy. She is unlikely to know him personally, and should be respectful of her father and not interfere, but rather hope that he made the right choice (Talle, 1988, p. 126). Talle (1988) remembers that whenever she witnessed a Maasai wedding she always felt sadness for the bride because of the submissiveness and anxiety that was displayed. A young teenager faces a strange life with a strange man, she is forced to change residences, and will undergo social pressure to procreate (p. 124). “In many respects marriage is a major life crisis for Maasai women” (Talle, 1988, p. 120).

Although most Maasai women simply comply with these marriages, there are a growing number who, many times with the help of their mothers, flee from a marriage they do not want to be a part of. The case of one girl shows a father’s authority over his daughters and also the use of force used to make sure women marry who they have been “promised” to. Jemat was lucky enough to be sent to school at a young age and with her education, she decided she did not want to marry young, but rather become a teacher. One time, while home for a school break, she found that her father had promised her to Naikolu, a man she did not like. To escape this forced marriage, she ran away from home and went back to school. During the next school break, she returned home, and Naikolu and her father were waiting for her with the plan for Naikolu to take her with him. Jemat was cornered and for fear of being cursed or beaten, did not disobey her father’s plans; however, she cried nonstop for four days. “The other women in the homestead told her that crying would not help; they had all cried” (Talle, 1988, pp. 124-126).

Jemat's action of running away is commonly taken by Maasai women who try to oppose male authority. Their destination is usually all girl boarding schools, which are known to take in girls who have nowhere else to turn. "For six years Kajiado AIC, the boarding school 55 miles south of Nairobi in Masai country, has been housing scores of child brides who had escaped families" ("Kenya," 2001). The headmistress, Priscilla Nangurai, says she runs into fathers who come looking for their daughters, but turns them away. She does not like the idea that children are "removed" from their parents' home without consent, but she claims to have the support of police chiefs and education officials ("Kenya," 2001).

Presently there are laws in place which provide legal protection and assistance to Maasai women from the government. Two of the most notable are the Children's Act of 2001 in Kenya and the Marriage Law of 1971 in Tanzania. The Children's Act, among other things, legally criminalized the act of female circumcision and punished those who performed the procedure ("Law Should," 2003). The Marriage Law states that: "No marriage shall be contracted except with the consent, freely and voluntarily given, by each of the parties thereto" (Hodgson, 1996, p. 110). Although these laws are hard to enforce and face long standing cultural traditions, Hodgson gives a clear example of the Tanzanian state conflicting with Maasai patriarchal traditions, by citing a case in which one Maasai woman took her father to court rather than go along with her arranged marriage.

The case began in 1992 when Aloya accused her father, Aladala, of forcing her to marry against her will and threatened to kill herself with poison if he continued with his plan. The elders, in their attempt to keep control, threatened to curse Aloya if she

pursued the court case. As the case unraveled, claims were also made that Aloya was threatened with violence from Maasai males, if she did not marry the man her father chose. Throughout the case the court attempted to decipher whether or not traditional Maasai marriages violated the Marriage Act. The court ruled that anyone involved with a marriage in which permission was not given by one of the parties, will be sentenced to three years in prison. The court recognized that, although in Maasai culture it is the parents who decide the fate of their children, this directly conflicts with the Marriage Act, which will be upheld. Although Aladala's sentence was reduced (because he was a first time offender), he disowned his daughter and claimed that she belonged to the government (Hodgson, 1996).

The success of this girl's case shows that the status of Maasai women is changing and will continue to do so. This will eventually force some aspects of Maasai culture to change and adapt as well. Women will continue to seek alternatives to practices elder men use to control them and if fleeing their families continues to increase, the family structure will crumble. As long as governments continue to enforce laws like the Children's Act and Marriage Act of 1971, men who have their daughters circumcised or force them into early marriages may be punished. To avoid that situation, fathers may have to relinquish some control over their daughters and women may see an increase in autonomy.

### Summary

Since the time of colonialism, many have tried to intervene in Maasai society and most have failed. One of the largest reasons for this is the misunderstanding of the rationale of pastoralist practices. In the past, governments have tried to increase

sedentary living among the Maasai, integrate them nationally by controlling their movements, and make their pastoral production contribute to the national economy. They have tried to decrease herds and increase market sales, but because Maasai are so used to preparing for drought years, they continue to maintain large herds. Maasai have been appointed to government positions, but leadership and political mobilization has failed at the community level (Bennett, 1988, p. 36-39). In addition, because of previous disasters caused by contact with European intervention, the Maasai distrust many intervention plans (Bennett, 1988, p. 42).

Those who have worked closely with the Maasai have several suggestions for those who will work with the Maasai in the future, and the one thing they all stress is cooperation between the Maasai and decision makers. An actively involved community is the key to conservation. Management interventions need to work within the existing pastoralist framework and those involved need to have an accurate understanding of the social and economic conditions rather than relying on myths or stereotypes (Hogg, 1992, p. 134; McCabe et al., 1992, p. 363). Specific actions that would benefit the Maasai would be to recognize, and grant them, their legal rights to water, pasture, rights of ways for herds, and unhindered passage across international boundaries, a fair price for cattle sold, recognition of their knowledge, an environment with distributive mechanisms for veterinary drugs, grain, and education, and an end to the pressure to settle (Baxter, 1994, p. 7; Hogg, 1992, p. 135). If future strategies do not include Maasai social structure in their planning and the Maasai are not allowed to continue grazing as they are accustomed to, I believe there is strong evidence which suggests that their culture will continue to deteriorate. Already kinship systems have changed and the semi-nomadic aspect of their

lifestyle has become more sedentary. Without enough land their cattle will eventually die off and so will many remaining aspects of Maasai culture.

There will inevitably be changes in the Maasai customs that subordinate women. Maasai women are increasingly speaking out against practices that restrict their freedom and they are supported by human rights organizations world wide. Some Maasai women are beginning to choose their own marriage partners and refuse to be “cut”; actions which were previously unheard of. Although increasing the status of women would not cause a break down of Maasai culture, some components of their societal structure, such as the power of elder males, will need to be altered.

#### Future Thoughts

There is much speculation as to the future of the Maasai, but the idealistic part of me would like to see Maasai pastoralism continue. I am fascinated by this culture that is so unlike my own and I appreciate the uniqueness of a society that functions on cattle. It frustrates me to think that their culture and others around the world are being destroyed by interventions coming from Western societies like my own. On the other hand, all change has benefits as well. In the case of the Maasai, changes have brought about an increase in the status of women. They have begun, and will continue, to fight male dominant practices that constrain their freedoms and choices.

There are two ways in which I undoubtedly see parts of Maasai culture preserving. The first is with regard to land management practices, such as community based conservation. The Maasai would be great caretakers of tourist parks and reserves. Their knowledge of the land would give them excellent advantages as guides and land

managers. Perhaps they could even engage in cultural conservation as well, which is happening to some extent in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania. I also see Maasai identity preserving. They are such a proud and resilient people that I can hardly imagine the day when someone does not proclaim, "I am Maasai".

These issues are big problems in themselves and warrant future research. Questions I have after completing this project are: How, and to what extent, will Maasai be involved in future decisions concerning the land they currently live on? What is happening to the Maasai who have "given up" pastoralism and are making a living doing other work in East Africa's cities? Finally, in cases such as the Maasai, where cultural survival impinges on individual rights, how do we humans, determine the proper course of action in dealing with all types of cultures around the world?

## Appendix

### Ethnographic Background

#### The Home and Children

The home, constructed of mud and cow dung, is symbolic and has ritual importance in Maasai society. It is the place where all life is protected (Ndagala, 1992, p. 127). This perhaps is an extension of how highly valued children are in Maasai culture. Children are valued in Maasai culture for three reasons: as heirs to the family, as laborers, and to secure strong relationships to other domestic groups through marriage (Ndagala, 1992, pp. 128-129). Young boys are in charge of herding, and young girls help their mother in daily chores; without the help of children, most families would flounder. Finally, when two Maasai marry, their families become connected in a way that helps to assure economic and social security (Ndagala, 1992, p. 129).

#### Polygyny

Some argue that the presence of polygyny in Maasai culture and the absence of ilmurranhhood for women are proof that women are subordinate. Polygyny, however, is not used to lower a woman's status. Taking a new wife does not threaten existing rights in house resources. Cattle from one wife are not taken to give a new wife, rather the husband draws from his unallocated herd. The first wife may receive senior status in that she is acknowledged by the younger wives and called "mother", but all wives are treated equally by the husband. Further, polygyny is argued to even benefit women at times. They are able to help each other if one becomes sick or overwhelmed. And they have a large say in their husband's subsequent marriages (Ndagala, 1992, pp. 133-134).

## Religion and Conversion

Two aspects especially characterize Maasai religion: their belief in a monotheistic God and their harmony with nature. The Maasai believe in one god, *Engai*, who lives both on earth and in heaven and is the master of life and death (Saitoti, 1980, p. 26). *Engai* can also mean “sky” and the Maasai say that the sky and earth were once very close (Olsson, 1989, p. 241). The Maasai believe they acquired their cattle when these two entities split; *Engai* let down the cattle to them by using a rope made from tree (an element which also is significant in their culture for medicinal purposes). *Engai* is genderless, but has two aspects: the Black god who is good, kind, and generous, and the Red god who is punishing and vengeful. The Black god is seen in thunder and rain which brings grass and thus is good for their cattle. The Red god brings lightning, which strikes and kills (Saitoti, 1980, p. 26).

Maasai believe that *Engai* is the source of welfare and misfortune and is active in their daily life. They display their behavior and attitude toward God both orally and ritually (Olsson, 1989, p. 239). They pray as a community during major ceremonies and individually in daily life. Most prayers ask for children or cattle and are full of praise (Saitoti, 1980, p. 26). Although the Maasai believe in *Engai* in heaven, they do not believe in ancestor worship or life after death. Therefore, they believe that all spiritual faculties die with the body and, thus, do not bury their dead, but rather leave them out to decompose in nature. They also have no type of priesthood, sacred buildings, or religious artifacts (Olsson, 1989, pp. 238-240).

The Maasai were introduced to Christianity as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century when French Catholics and British Anglicans first came to East Africa (Saibull & Carr, 1981,

p. 108). Since then, ministers and priests from different Christian faiths have been vying for Maasai conversion. The result of the missionaries' efforts is an example of why women seem to be more religious than men. Dorothy Hodgson studied missionary efforts towards the Maasai and how they led to further gender differences. She looked at the Catholic missionaries of the Holy Ghost (CHG) who struggled from 1950-1993 to convert Maasai men, only to find to their dismay (these missionaries were influenced by the pre-Vatican II belief that leadership positions within the Church are held by men) an increase in female converts.

The missionaries first worked through the schools, then through homesteads, and finally in individual instruction classes, all of which had certain barriers against women, yet Maasai women overcame them (Hodgson, 1999, p. 758). Maasai women have been thought of (and have thought of themselves) as more religious and "morally superior" (Hodgson, 1999, p. 761). Hodgson attributes women's dominance in this realm to several reasons. First, this shift happened during a time when men became increasingly dominant in political and economic affairs. Religion was still considered to be a woman's domain, a place where women could assert themselves. Second, Catholic forms of worship, such as song and prayer, were already common among Maasai women, and Catholic stories of the Virgin Mary and Abraham and Sarah were an immediate attraction given the pressure on Maasai women to be fertile. Finally, becoming Catholic only strengthened the Maasai woman's view of herself as spiritually superior, in contrast to men's views in which being Christian and Maasai was a huge contradiction (Hodgson, 1999, p. 775).

## Health and Disease

All Maasai have medical knowledge in *olchani* (“herbal medicine”) which is used daily, however another type of medicine called *entasim* or “ritual medicine” is only known by specialists and used in rituals (Arhem, 1989, p. 76). *Entasim* medicine is always finely ground and can be used to protect people from misfortune, but also to produce harm through cursing. Maasai also put some belief in spirit possession, which can be commonly attributed to pains or diseases that do not disappear with traditional treatment (Hurskainen, 1989, p. 141-143).

The Maasai, “...regard disease as physical influence upon, or organic perturbation in the bodies of men and animals” (Olsson, 1989, p. 235). Medical treatment usually consists of herbal medicines or particular diets. Only in cases of serious illness or extreme emergency are experts consulted (Olsson, 1989, p. 235; Saitoti, 1980, p. 192). Maasai carry the notion of “right” and “wrong” foods and thus eating proper food maintains health and prevents sickness (Arhem, 1989, p. 77). Important substances are meat, blood, milk, and honey wine, but the most significant herbal medicines come from trees (Arhem, 1989, p. 76; Olsson, 1989, p. 237; Saitoti, 1980, p. 192). Pieces of bark, roots, or leaves (when used as medicine, called *olchani*) are taken without being processed and are sometimes added to foods. Certain trees are used for particular ailments (Arhem, 1989, p. 76). A recent study has even attributed the low incidence of heart disease among Maasai (which is unusual considering reliance on meat and milk) to cholesterol lowering chemicals (and vigorous activity of 12-18 miles walked daily) found in several bark extracts regularly added to Maasai foods (Sears, 1995; Saibull & Carr, 1981, p. 129).

Although the Maasai are fairly self-sufficient medically, they also rely on outside services and modern medicine. One organization that deals with Maasai injuries and illnesses is the “Flying Doctor Service”. This group began in 1957 and is composed of surgeons, anesthetists, and nurses who make regular visits to rural hospitals and are on standby for medical emergencies and evacuations. Based out of Nairobi, they perform mercy missions and surgery in the bush. They have a Mobile Ground Unit operating in Maasailand which is run by nurses and some Maasai, and when needed, patients are flown to nearby hospitals. Despite the best efforts of the medical staff, at times Maasai do not stay in hospitals, or continue treatment, which only worsens the problem. Some elders are also skeptical of these services and refuse treatment for themselves and their families (Saibull & Carr, 1981, pp. 128-129).

#### Conflict Resolution and Violence

Subjects dealt with at elders’ meetings range from goat theft to questions of inheritance to murder. The procedure begins when an individual has a problem and takes it to a well known and influential elder. If the elder thinks the problem requires a meeting, he will gather the other elders. They began the meeting with a blessing to “resolve the issue”, and then each party may present his/her case. Subsequently, each elder, one by one, stands and presents his view. There is no vote, due to their belief that this practice will lead to an obvious consensus. The chief of elders then summarizes the conclusions and states the fine that must be paid, if any (Saitoti, 1980, p. 187).

In Maasai society there are no jails, nor physical punishment. Most crimes have fixed fines, usually payable with livestock. For example, stealing a goat holds a fine of a 2 ½ year old calf or breaking a bone requires payment of a ewe. In the rare cases of

murder (Maasai do not often intentionally kill one another), the procedure is a little more complex. First, the guilty party hides until the victim's relatives no longer wish to take revenge. When the guilty party and the victim's family meet, the offender must give the family forty-nine cattle of their choosing as blood-money, which shows the close association between property rights and patrilineal clan organization (Saitoti, 1980, p. 187; Talle, 1988, p. 83). Murder, along with most other crimes, are rarely reported to the government because the Maasai do not believe that the government sees the "human elements" involved, but only pays attention to the legal aspect. The Maasai believe that since one person is already dead, why punish the society more by allowing another death (that of the offender's) (Saitoti, 1980, p. 188).

Finally, contrary to the outsider's belief that the *moran* are aggressive warriors who spend their days in warfare, the Maasai also have strict regulations on fighting. Individual Maasai must first use sticks and clubs, and only when those break are they allowed to use spears and swords. Even when using swords, they are not allowed to slash with the intent to kill, but only nick the enemy's skin so as to cause pain. However, when the Maasai fight non-Maasai, they do fight to kill in order to not be eliminated themselves (Saitoti, 1980, p. 187).

### Education

Although Maasai are increasingly being educated there is a problem with the lack of education most Maasai receive. Without education, many are unable to take advantage of other opportunities and help their tribe. Hillman (1994) writes:

It is estimated that only a few thousand Kenya Maasai have managed to find some livelihood outside the two Maasai districts, while impoverished herders, equipped

with little or no schooling, continuously go out from these districts into the towns of Kenya in search of wage employment. (para. 21)

This has compromised the Maasai peoples' health and their self-worth. In the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, 16-22% of children were found to be malnourished as were 12% of adult males and 15% of adult females (McCabe et al., 1992, p. 360).

Although it may be hard for others to imagine, since cattle mean everything in their society, to fail at herding also means to fail in life.

Education among Maasai is low due to conflicting ideas about education between the government and the Maasai. The Kenyan and Tanzanian government run systems of education that still follow conservative colonial education standards such as rote memorization, formulaic computations, and emphasis on British content and modern technology. In addition, children are expected to wear British-style uniforms, attend school year round, and speak in English (Phillips & Bhavnagri, 2002, para. 20). In contrast, the goals of Maasai education are to maintain a cohesive society, ensure survival of the migratory lifestyle, and learn the tasks related to the various roles within the community. Children are socialized with the values of collective ideology, tribal cohesion, respect for elders and conformity to tribal norms and rituals. They also learn about cattle tending, health care, and the defense of the clan. This is accomplished through direct observation and teaching, participation and apprenticeship, and their oral tradition (Phillips & Bhavnagri, 2002, para. 5, 9). Johnson Kinyago, a Maasai herder explains, "We pick out the brightest children, those with the most potential, and then send them off with the goats. It takes brains to identify each animal, find water, and ward off cattle rustlers. School is for those who are less quick" ("No swots," 2002).

In addition to having a school system that isolates citizens from their own traditional cultures, it is economically costly for the Maasai. In Kenya school is not free and in Tanzania only primary school is free (Phillips & Bhavnagri, 2002). Maasai herders rely heavily on their children's labor, so when children are in school, this also takes away from the family income. Furthermore, married women and boys going through moranhood do not go to school, so most Maasai who do attend do not get past the 8<sup>th</sup> grade (Phillips & Bhavnagri, 2002, para. 25). This situation is unfortunate because only about one in ten Maasai are literate. It puts them at a disadvantage in living in the technological and information age ("No swots," 2002).

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