Maasai pastoralism has been characterized historically by highly developed herd and rangeland management techniques and social and cultural institutions at the intra- and inter-community levels that have provided security against shocks such as drought, crop failure and epidemic disease. Key to pastoral production was that herd management and milk production were the domain of the individual domestic units—the household or the homestead—while rights to pasture and water resources were communal so as to guarantee access to both dry and wet season grazing. It is this combination of individual and communal resources and inter- and intra-community relations that enabled pastoralism to thrive for millennia. It will be argued that the failure of colonial and neocolonial ‘development’ policies to recognize these key features of Maasai pastoralism has been at the root of both the crisis of land degradation and the undermining of Maasai and East African food security.

1. Introduction

Maasai pastoralism has been characterized historically by highly developed herd and rangeland management techniques and social and cultural institutions at the intra- and inter-community levels that have provided security against shocks such as drought, crop failure and epidemic disease. Key to pastoral production was that herd management and milk production were the domain of the individual domestic units—the household or the homestead—while rights to pasture and water resources were communal so as to guarantee access to both dry and wet season grazing and sufficient salt licks. It is this combination of individual and communal resources and inter- and intra-community relations that enabled pastoralism to thrive for millennia. It will be argued that the failure of colonial and post-colonial development policies to recognize these key features.

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of Maasai pastoralism has been at the root of both the crisis of land degradation and the undermining of Maasai and East African food security.

Individual appropriation of communal resources, like that practiced traditionally by the Maasai, has been the object of the notorious ‘tragedy of the commons’ view of resource degradation (Hardin, 1968). Policies based on precisely this flawed view have greatly contributed to decreased food security and environmental degradation in the region. The paper is therefore also a contribution to the growing literature disputing the tragedy of the commons thesis and, on another level, calling for a critical re-examination of the purpose of ‘development’ itself.

2. Maasai Pastoralism: Historical Overview

In order to provide their herds with a constant supply of pasture, water and minerals, the Maasai practice a method of resource utilization called transhumance. This consists of cyclical movements of the herds, but differs from nomadic pastoralism in that a relatively fixed homestead is maintained in the permanent water area. Each homestead is made up of several independent polygamous family units and, although there may be cooperation in the watering and pasturing of livestock, each unit possesses its own herd and has the ‘potential of autonomous movement’ (Galaty, 1980, p. 159) during the seasonal moves.

At the beginning of the rainy season, the herd is moved away from the cooler, wet, high regions, down into the dry rangelands. Here the herd feeds off the newly sprouted short grass that has shot up as a result of the long-awaited rain. These areas become depleted quickly and the herds must be moved around. As soon as the rainy season ends the range dries up and the herd is moved back into the dry season pasture near the homestead. Jacobs (1975, p. 417) cites several other Maasai ‘management techniques’ used in conserving and improving pasture, such as:

... regular use of donkeys to carry water, both to expand the grazing area and to permit camps to stay away from their dry-season reserves as long as possible; moderate burning of grasslands during good rainfall years either to rid it of ticks and other livestock disease carriers or to promote growth of more nutritious grass species; careful management of sheep and goats to avoid damage to grass at critical growth periods and to extend grasslands by regular browsing of bush encroachment; and regular social rebuke of families or camps which fail to adhere to good management principles.

While the homestead may be treated as the productive unit in terms of the general herd management, the basic unit in terms of milk production is the household, that is, the married woman and her children (Rigby, 1985, pp. 147–148). Division of labor is regulated by age and gender. Within each gender, distribution of social responsibilities is determined by age-set organization. Once initiated, every Maasai male and female passes through an institutionalized series of age grades, each with corresponding rights and responsibilities. Pre-initiated, very young boys and sometimes girls tend the yearlings close to the homestead (Parkipuny, 1979, p. 139). Young boys about 10 years of age begin
to go on the seasonal migrations of the main herd (Rigby, 1985, p. 156). The harsher herding activities (associated with dry season migrations, weak or sick livestock and cattle dipping) are done by young men (*ilmurran*), who are also responsible for long-distance communication and protection of the family and herd from wild animals and cattle raiders (Galaty, 1981, p. 69). Male adults and elders supervise the herding, make decisions concerning herd management and settle disputes. Retired elders are the keepers of history and the oral tradition, and supervise ritual matters.

Women do all the milking, and clean, sterilize, smoke, flavor and store the milk (Rigby, 1985, p. 148). In addition, women control the distribution and consumption of milk and the distribution and (non-ritual) consumption of other products, such as hides, blood and meat (Beideman, 1961, p. 61; Galaty, 1981, p. 69). Women also build and ‘own’ the house, over which they have authority. Perhaps most importantly, women determine the allocation of the inheritance of the herd among their children (Rigby, 1985, p. 150).

Despite the historically proven effectiveness of Maasai pastoralism in providing food security and preserving and even enhancing the ecological base of its reproduction, it has nevertheless been dismissed by those who claim that it does not provide security against ‘natural shocks’ such as drought and epidemic disease (see, for example, Halderman, 1983). This view overlooks or undervalues the complex intra-community relations that bind together the domestic units through a plurality of relationships of reciprocity. Such ‘institutionalized sharing’ consists of rights and obligations of cooperative relations mediated by the age-set system through its creation of a set of prohibitions and injunctions concerning hospitality and consumption.

A herd that is concentrated in one area is more susceptible to the vagaries of nature, and therefore livestock giving provides security by spreading the herd out and collecting obligations from others to reciprocate (Galaty, 1981, p. 72). For those with larger herds, giving is an economic necessity due to shortages of labor and also to avoid overgrazing (Hedlund, 1979, pp. 20–21). Stock partnerships, reciprocal gift giving, bride-wealth prestations and other relations of exchange thus function as a *de facto* Maasai system of security against natural shocks such as localized drought and disease.

Most of the colonial and Western literature on the peoples of East Africa depicts the population as divided into various ‘tribes’, and puts forth a picture of these separate groups as if they were absolute enemies in a constant state of war. In fact, however, interdependence between various groups in the region is what permitted the development of specialization in the three basic modes of subsistence production—pastoralism, agriculture and hunting–gathering—to occur. This mutual interdependence historically has insured the food security of all the peoples of the area against crop failure, cattle disease and localized drought, etc. Trade, intermarriage, martial alliance and other relations between the various peoples are well documented as being central to the survival of all in the region (see Lawren, 1968; Muriuki, 1968). This phenomenon (and its reverse) is no recent development; archeological evidence shows that this has been occurring in the region since 1000 BC (Robertshaw & Collett, 1983a, p. 296; 1983b, p. 74).
3. Political Economy of Late Colonial Capitalism

One of the policies vigorously pursued by the British toward the end of the colonial period was the privatization of land. While much land alienation for white settlement had taken place, particularly affecting the Maasai, the African ‘reserves’ up to that time still remained under traditional systems of land tenure. In 1954 Kenya adopted the Swynnerton Plan, which advocated ending the prohibition of, and instead promoted, both individual land tenure and export cash-crop production for Africans. The plan explicitly encouraged the creation of African landed and landless classes in the agricultural reserves: ‘former Government policy will be reversed and able, energetic or rich Africans will be able to acquire more land and bad or poor farmers less, creating a landless class. This is a normal step in the evolution of a country’ (from The Swynnerton Plan, quoted in Mohiddin, 1981, p. 26). It was believed that those alienated from their land would be absorbed into anticipated industry and capitalist farms, but the majority found no such employment (Gutto, 1981, p. 53). The landless agricultural population was thus compelled to encroach on already overcrowded Maasai and other pastoral grazing lands.

As for the pastoral populations, although the Swynnerton Plan proposed the long-term development of ‘marketable’ livestock, it explicitly recognized and encouraged the maintenance of self-sufficiency in subsistence food production in those regions as part of the overall national plan (Migot-Adholla & Little, 1981, pp. 146–147). Subsistence production could support the families of wage laborers, justifying wages below subsistence. Thus, one part of ‘African reconstruction’ would entail intentional perpetuation (with modification) of some of the traditional (pre-capitalist) forms of productive activity.

In Tanganyika, earlier in the century, the German colonizers had reduced Maasai pastures from 40,000 to 6000 square kilometers by forced evacuation from the Ngorongoro Crater, the Serengeti Plains and other areas, and placement in a ‘reserve’ which bordered Kenyan ‘Maasailand’, and thus made room for German cattle and ostrich ranches, and other individual German settlements (Kjekshus, 1977, pp. 74–75). After the First World War, when the British took over Tanganyika from the Germans, they opted for ‘indirect rule’ rather than establishing another settler colony. Thus, Tanganyika had never had a settler regime as Kenya did, and cash-crop production by Africans had never been outlawed. As a result, although traditional land tenure persisted, some socioeconomic differentiation had occurred in the rural areas with the rise of a peasant cash economy and kulaks (Mohiddin, 1981, p. 46).

Because Tanganyika was not formally a British colony, but rather an international mandate, the British were not able to enact a Tanganyikan Swynnerton Plan. Under the pretext of fighting the tsetse fly, however, a policy of ‘closer settlements’ was adopted. This consisted of a ‘population concentration’ campaign intended to promote the destruction of communal property (Kjekshus, 1977, pp. 178–179). It failed, however, to achieve any significant tsetse eradication or land privatization.
4. Colonial ‘Development’ Schemes

Colonial development policy toward the Maasai between the end of the Second World War and political independence vacillated between schemes aimed at commercialized livestock production and other schemes directed toward the transition to agriculture. In the early years, the colonial government yielded to settler opposition to indigenous competition; thus, schemes were directed primarily toward the maintenance of subsistence pastoralism or the transition to subsistence agriculture. The former revolved primarily around insect and disease control and eradication through intensified veterinary services and the construction of dips and the development of water resources through the construction of dams, boreholes and wells, while the latter was fueled by the persistence of the view of pastoralism as ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’. Following the adoption of the Swynnerton Plan, emphasis shifted toward the commercialization of livestock through demonstration ranches, rotational grazing block schemes, road construction and marketing programs.

A report by the colonial Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Water Resources (MAAHWR) (1962) represents a good overview of the problems with which colonial development policy was fraught. The range and scope of policymakers’ misconceptions concerning traditional Maasai social and productive organization are alarming. The statement (MAAHWR, 1962, p. 71) that it is ‘important to re-establish the principle of rotational grazing … which began to be introduced only about 1957’ indicates an inexcusable ignorance of the transhumant system of pastoral resource utilization. One District Veterinary Officer remarked that, as a result, ‘grazing patterns were imposed that were quite unsuitable to Masailand [sic] conditions’ (Fallon, 1963, p. 3).

Entire schemes were launched based on such incorrect views. The School Grazing Demonstration scheme inaugurated for the purpose of providing ‘instruction in animal husbandry and grass management’ (MAAHWR, 1962, p. 77) entirely disregarded the immense knowledge of pasture resource and livestock management accumulated by the Maasai over centuries, for, as Goldschmidt (1981a, p. 52) has observed, ‘The record of pastoral peoples in Africa has shown that under aboriginal conditions they have been astute in their management, imaginative in their organization and adaptive to changing circumstances in their procedures’. Equally ludicrous was the dam construction scheme ‘designed to find useful employment for the warrior [sic] age-grades’ (MAAHWR, 1962, p. 77). The traditional role of the ilmurran (so-called ‘warrior’) extended far beyond martial matters, and this has become more so as Maasai social reproduction is increasingly threatened by the negative effects of ‘development’ (Rigby, 1985, pp. 159–161; 1992, pp. 79–82). Another ‘employment’ scheme to clear oleleshwa bush was designed just for those Maasai ‘detained for Mau-Mau proclivities’ (MAAHWR, 1962, p. 80), i.e. involved in the nationalist political movement resisting the continuation of colonialism. Both the ‘education’ and ‘employment’ schemes actually contributed to the deterioration of the Maasai ability to survive by appropriating much-needed labor power and manipulating the traditional division of labor.

The root of the problems increasingly besetting Maasai pastoralism was
(and is) land alienation resulting directly from various development projects (Jacobs, 1979, p. 48). Whether stemming from increasing encroachment of cultivators left landless as a result of the Swynnerton Plan, the creation of national parks and conservation areas or the pushing of pastoralists into tsetse-infested areas to make room for individual, private or company ranches or farms, land alienation inevitably meant range deterioration.

Colonial policy disregarded the land issue and cited the problem as ‘overstocking’, which they tied to pastoral ‘conservatism’ and ‘irrationality’ (i.e. the ‘cattle complex’) and the persistence of communal land tenure. Thus, mandatory destocking was proposed as the remedy for overgrazing, to be enforced by legislation and, if necessary, ‘tribal police’ (MAAHWR, 1962, p. 286). ‘Overstocked’, however, has always referred to the carrying capacity of the land and never to the minimal stock requirements for human subsistence (Livingstone, 1985, p. 45). Thus, the livestock–land ratio may be too high at the same time as the livestock–human population ratio is too low—clearly a deadly contradiction. In addition, carrying capacity is not fixed, but determined by the quality of the rangeland. Deterioration of pasture lands resulting from development schemes lowers the ‘ideal’ livestock–land ratio. Although failing to recognize the crucial effect of land alienation and arguing in a different context, the Range Management Advisor to the United States Agency for International Development Mission to Kenya and Tanganyika at the end of the colonial period wrote:

In relation to the potential of the land the present problem is not due to overstocking so much as to lack of range management. In fact, if properly managed, the range resources would undoubtedly carry more livestock than at present. … Compulsory destocking rules … are not an effective method of management. (Fallon, 1963, pp. 1–7)

It is not only the squeezing of the Maasai into smaller areas, but also the fact that the alienated land overwhelmingly tended (and tends) to be that of the dry season grazing areas, essential in the transhumant resource system, which has further marginalized Maasai resources. The attempts to cure this problem through borehole and well construction to supply permanent water resources has caused tremendous deterioration of Maasai pastures. The cyclical movements of the herds, which traditional transhumance entailed, not only provided constant supplies of water, but (among other things) also guaranteed the replenishment of pasture. By installing artificial water resources in the wet season areas, the pasture there, already depleted from crowded conditions, becomes more so as it is transformed into a year-round grazing area (Hedlund, 1979, p. 29). The immediate vicinity of the water supply becomes bare from the constant trampling of the herds, and the distance between the watering point and the nearest pasture becomes larger and larger (Parkipuny, 1979, p. 138).

When drought hit Maasailand in 1960–61, the real ‘underdeveloping’ effects of the policies described above became apparent. The colonial government would not accept that there could be famine in Maasailand until it was already too late (Rigby, 1969, p. 46). Many Maasai (and Maasai cattle) died, and many others were left destitute. The official government position was to point to
starvation of both human beings and livestock as proof that the Maasai’s ‘traditional method of living is essentially lacking in the means to meet major disasters’ (MAAHWR, 1962, p. 71).

This government view disregarded the way in which community relations among the Maasai, and inter-community relations between the Maasai and hunting-gathering and agricultural peoples, historically, had served to protect against vulnerability to localized drought and epidemic disease, as well as crop failure. The government misunderstanding also extended to the historically proven resilience of Maasai pastoralism, and the real reason for increased insecurity of Maasai pastoralism: land alienation combined with ‘a misguided program of water development’ (Fallon, 1963, p. 7). Inability to perceive the nature of the problems results in attributing the problems to false causes: for example, one ‘expert’ view that the failure of colonial development schemes was the fault of the nationalist movement, ‘because the colonial regime could not enforce its policies as independence approached’ (Herz, 1970, appendix 1).

Of course, the usual cries of ‘overstocking’ and ‘overgrazing’ rang out. It is clear, however, from the views of some of the more objective of the ‘experts’, that ‘the severity of the impact of the drought on the Masai and their livestock was a clear result of the development-induced range deterioration’ (Talbot, 1972, p. 708). This is not to say that drought had no effect on pastoralists prior to colonial development schemes, but that:

> when the range is in good condition the impact of drought will be much less severe … The effect upon the Masai was broadly proportional to the condition of their rangelands; this condition, in turn, varied inversely with the amount of development they had suffered. (Talbot, 1972, p. 706)

As Hedlund (1979, p. 29) has concluded, the overcrowding and soil erosion resulting from the colonial policies caused a deterioration not only of pasture and water resources, but also of livestock quality itself, by creating:

> a higher degree of sensitivity to environmental and ecological changes. This was clearly demonstrated during the 1960–61 drought. It was shown that areas into which intensive development efforts had been directed suffered considerably higher livestock casualties than other comparatively undeveloped areas.

Yet official reaction was for the most part to accept no responsibility, and to blame the Maasai or, at least, the weather. More than one ‘expert’ response to the widespread livestock casualties (300 000 head of cattle in Kajiado District alone, 60–80% of all cattle in Ilkaputiei section) stressed the ‘bright side’: ‘the drought accomplished what administration was unable to do—it destocked the range’ (Fallon, 1962, pp. 25–26; see also Hennings in MAAHWR, 1962, p. 286). A minority cited the experts as at least partially responsible (Fallon, 1963, pp. 6–7; Talbot, 1972, p. 709).

One other note of tragic irony must be mentioned.¹ The (Kenya Colony) Department of Veterinary Service (DVS) reports with exuberance on its typically capital-intensive development project for that year: the completion of the building of the Maasai Field Abattoir: ‘It has an improved layout and allows a

¹ 1961.
great saving in labour and more hygienic handling of meat and meat products; a complete division was made between edible and inedible products, and excellent facilities were provided for meat powder production’. Then comes the clincher: ‘Unfortunately, mortality among Masai cattle had been so high during the drought ... that after two months of operation no stock were available for processing. ... However, huge amounts of bones were offered for sale’ (DVS, 1961, p. 104; emphasis added). It was not enough that colonial development policy turned pastoralists into bone sellers; the government reported that plans for 1962 included a grant of £4500 for enlarging the abattoir (MAAHWR, 1962, p. 79).

It is apparent that on the eve of the political independence of Tanzania and Kenya, Maasai productive and reproductive capacity was being increasingly undermined through various development policies. Deterioration of rangeland marginalized the productivity of the individual homesteads, and the insurance provided by relations at the community and inter-community levels was steadily shrinking, the former as a result of increasing ‘education’, ‘employment training’ and other disruptions of traditional social organization, and the latter from growing competition between cultivators and pastoralists as the resources of both dwindled.

The most striking feature of development schemes in the post-colonial period is their acceptance of many of the policies of the colonial administration. They can to a great extent be viewed as continuations of those policies set in motion prior to political independence. The primary reason is that, while the government planners had shown little better understanding of pastoralism than their predecessors, these schemes were still primarily being directed under the influence of the demands of external interests, through various forms of aid and internationally sponsored development schemes.

5. Political Independence: Policy and Planning

The British succeeded in assuring that the African leaders who took over following Kenyan independence were going to protect their interests and continue the policies which they had begun toward the end of the colonial period. These policies focused on the protection of private property and free enterprise and the encouragement of foreign investment, and were written into the new constitution (Mohiddin, 1981, pp. 35–41). An agreement was reached on the white highlands, the best land which had been expropriated from the African people (mostly Maasai) without compensation and legally reserved for European settlement, in which select Africans would be ‘permitted’ to buy some of the land there with money lent to them by the British (Gutto, 1981, pp. 54–55). The new African leaders, including Kenyatta, who once had been adamant about the return of these lands, had no objections. Independence was to be no more than a gradual Africanization of the colonial administration (Ake, 1981, pp. 187–191).

Given these realities, it is astounding that KANU, the ruling party in Kenya from independence, won the first election on a platform committed to creating ‘a democratic African socialist Kenya’ (KANU manifesto, quoted in Mohiddin,
A debate then ensued about what was meant by ‘African socialism’, and the official position was expressed by the government of Kenya when it issued Sessional Paper No. 10, entitled ‘African socialism and its application to planning in Kenya’, in 1965. The paper rejects both ‘Marxian-socialism and laissez-faire capitalism’ as ‘failures’ (paragraph 21) and suggests a mixed economy in which private property is well protected but the state guards against its misuse. While rejecting foreign domination and giving a good deal of authority to the state, it provided some tax concessions to foreign investors. Those government officials espousing Marxian views and criticizing state or monopoly capitalism were soon after squeezed out and the debate was officially ended.

In Tanganyika the British were unable to introduce private land tenure as they had in Kenya, due primarily to the strong opposition from the Tanganyikan African National Union (TANU) and its leader, Julius Nyerere. TANU also spoke of African socialism, but the key difference was that soon after independence, the new government passed legislation which outlawed ‘absolute’ private property in land (Kahama et al., 1986, p. 31). Otherwise, the early years of Tanganyikan independence saw policies similar to those in Kenya: tax concessions for foreign investors; some improvement in infrastructure; and dependence on cash crops (Mushi, 1981, p. 206). As in Kenya, debate ensued concerning the definition of African socialism, and the government responded, but very differently. In 1967, Nyerere published the Arusha Declaration, which outlined Tanzania’s plan for socialism. More importantly, the Declaration was immediately followed by nationalization of banks, insurance companies, most of the sisal estates, grain milling, and the Tanzanian assets of seven multinational corporations. In the following years much of the wholesale and import–export trades plus buildings worth more than 100,000 shillings were also nationalized. (Coulson, 1979, p. 2)

In addition, the Declaration took a firm ideological stand against development based on foreign investment and aid.

Both the Kenyan Paper and the Tanzanian Declaration stressed rural development as the key to socioeconomic growth and a better life for most of the people. Yet neither mentions the potential contributions of the pastoral peoples. In a policy booklet published by Tanzania in 1968, entitled Socialism and Rural Development, Animal Husbandry Areas are briefly considered as a ‘special problem’ (Nyerere, 1968, p. 140). There Nyerere proposes a gradual transition from individual to communal herds as part of a rural socialist transformation. In Kenya’s Paper, ‘National farms’ are proposed for ‘providing quality livestock’, while a great deal of emphasis is placed on the value of tourism, with no reference to the peoples who inhabit those areas (paragraph 101).

In both Kenya and Tanzania, the new African leaders seemed to have little better understanding of pastoralism than their predecessors. Pastoralists are considered ‘primitive’ and their way of life an embarrassment to ‘progressive’ and ‘civilized’ Africans. Statements that ‘laziness’ and ‘backwardness’, as well as the ‘improper’ or ‘inefficient’ use of land, will not be tolerated are implicit if not explicit warnings to pastoral peoples.
At the same time, the development of a livestock industry began to be recognized as desirable. In 1967, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) issued the East African Livestock Survey, in which expansion of beef and dairy production was recommended as a high priority for both domestic consumption and export. The fundamental problem was the failure of either international or national reports to satisfactorily link the development of the livestock industry and pastoral peoples (Rigby, 1969, p. 48). The FAO survey recommended Western-style, capital-intensive ranching as the path to commercial livestock development.

6. Ranching Schemes in Kenya

It is clear that, in Kenya, the policies which were initiated by the colonial administration near the end of its rule would be continued following independence. The foremost intention of the new government was to bring about incorporation of the rural areas, both agricultural and pastoral, into the overall capitalist transformation of the nation. This consisted of the continuation of the massive campaign toward the destruction of communal property in land, the creation of hospitable conditions for foreign investment and the emergence of a class of ‘free’ wage laborers.

In the Maasai reserve, created by the treaties with the British early in the century, the reproduction of the individually owned herd continued to rely upon the individual appropriation of communal pastures, water and minerals. Following independence, the continued encroachment of displaced cultivators and the opening of tourist parks, the Maasai, ‘well-knowing that treaties in Western jurisprudence, then and now, are reserved to sovereign states only’, became increasingly concerned about the security of their grazing lands (Gutto, 1981, p. 50).

Although top priority was being given to the agricultural areas, the government was also intent on the privatization of land in the pastoral regions and the development of commercial livestock ranches. As with many of the other cases in which they adopted certain features of the alien social order, the Maasai capitulated to the authorities’ demand for the creation of a limited number of individual ranches as a means of preserving their traditional social organization by gaining titles to some pastures.

In the Ilkapatiei Maasai section, 56 000 of their total of 806 000 acres were separated for the creation of 28 individual ranches (Goldschmidt, 1981b, p. 111). The individual ranches were intentionally demarcated at the geographical fringes of the Ilkapatiei section, surrounding the traditional sector, as a buffer against further encroachment, secured by the land title (Hedlund, 1979, p. 31). As was the case in the agricultural regions, those selected to receive the individual lots were chosen from among the missionary-educated and other veterans of government service (Galaty, 1980, p. 161).

The government perceived the individual ranchers as representatives of the Maasai. Many were appointed to government posts and they were generally shown favoritism by authorities at all levels. At the same time, relations between them and the rest of the Maasai became increasingly unequal. Galaty (1981, p.
82; cf. Hedlund, 1979, p. 32) identifies these changes as attributable to the ability of the individual ranchers to ‘straddle sectors [and thus] exercise great influence and prestige in each’.

The individual ranchers were intended to develop commercially, increasing livestock sales for both anticipated domestic consumption and potential export (Galaty, 1980, p. 161), thus drawing the rural sector into the emerging capitalist economy. Loans from government and international agencies, which hinged on private ownership, were granted, the titles serving as collateral (Hedlund, 1979, p. 32). At the same time as the individual ranchers benefited from their new position *vis-à-vis* the international and national economic and political systems, their relationship with the traditional sector became increasingly exploitative. The individual ranchers continued to invoke traditional Maasai grazing rights when they needed access to the remaining communal pastures for their herds. They were unable to reciprocate, however, due to the spatial limitations of their individual ranches and government restrictions concerning livestock movements across boundaries (Galaty, 1981, pp. 82–83). In addition, the individual ranchers took advantage of the need of the Maasai to market their livestock to pay taxes by buying cattle from them at cheap prices, which they then resold for extraordinary profits (Hedlund, 1979, p. 32).

Many other problems with individual ranching were soon apparent. Some of the individual ranchers sold their land to more sophisticated Kikuyu and other Africans and foreign agribusinesses because they did not realize the value of the land (Galaty, 1980, pp. 159–160). Many of the ranches did not contain adequate dry season pastures, and restrictions on spatial movements caused the deterioration of grazing lands (Migot-Adholla & Little, 1981, p. 147). Authorities questioned the validity of some of the titles (Hedlund, 1979, p. 32), and further individualization, given the size of the plots required for each ranch, was deemed impossible.

The individual ranches heightened the erosion of traditional social relations: the privileged Maasai ranchers were disengaged from the relations of reciprocity on which the homesteads depended in defending against localized drought and disease. Inequalities in the distribution of the means of production resulted and deterioration of the range was magnified. Perhaps most significantly, land was coming to define social relations in a way that pasture never had (Campbell, 1993).

The impossibility of drawing the Maasai into capitalist productive relations through total individualization of land led the government, following foreign advice, to search for an alternative method. In a section of the government’s *Report of the Mission on Land Consolidation and Registration* (1966), entitled ‘Circumstances where registration is inappropriate’, it is suggested that those areas not yet privatized as individual ranches should be divided into and registered as group ranches. There is nothing in the report that distinguishes it from similar colonial papers; it is clearly a continuation of the Swynnerton Plan: ‘Kenya’s leaders are convinced that the incentives and opportunities of private property offer a crucial requirement for economic progress’ (Davis, 1970, p. 24).

In an overview of the Maasai, the report states that ‘over-grazing and consequent deterioration of the land are natural features of the traditional system
of land use’, and posits that the Maasai’s ‘first principle’ is to ‘progressively give up their nomadic way of life and to settle down to a static existence’ (paragraph 102). The deterioration of the rangelands is believed by the government policymakers to be a result of communal land tenure (‘tragedy of the commons’). The report states that World Bank representatives have ‘convinced’ the government that registration of the land comprising the group ranches is ‘a prerequisite to the loan of money for development purposes’ (paragraph 106), and that the groups ‘will be expected to pledge their land titles’ (paragraph 451) to receive these loans through the intermediary of the Agricultural Finance Corporation.

The 1968 Land Act provided the juridical base for this form of group ownership (Gutto, 1981, p. 46). The Maasai, fearing that their unregistered land would be sold to outsiders or turned into more individual ranches, capitulated to the adjudication as a means of gaining some type of security over their pasturelands. The group ranch would have fixed boundaries, but the unit size would be more viable than the individual ranches (Migot-Adholla & Little, 1981, p. 148). Members would be incorporated as ‘some crude form of stockholders or shareholders’ (Gutto, 1981, p. 47) in the ownership, and this was thought to guard against both government expropriation and private sale of the land (Galaty, 1980, p. 163). The pastures within each ranch would be communally held, but herds would remain the property of the individuals, so that the organization of the group ranch was thought to diverge least from traditional Maasai social and productive organization (Livingstone, 1985, p. 45).

It was soon apparent that the group ranch was fraught with major problems. Many of the ranches simply were not ecologically viable units providing both dry and wet season pastures (Migot-Adholla & Little, 1981, p. 148). In Ilkaputiei, after a short time, only six of 14 group ranches that had been formed were found to be viable, and then only under the best climatic conditions (Hedlund, 1979, p. 33). Restrictions on herd movements between ranches, considered by the government and international development agencies as vital to economic transformation, further damaged the limited resources. These restrictions were enforced even though it was recognized that ‘European ranches in the same area move cattle from ranch to ranch to take advantage of local variability in rainfall and forage production’ (Davis, 1970, p. 26).

Asymmetrical relations of exchange that existed between individual ranchers and the traditional pastoralists now emerged between the individual ranches and the group ranches, furthering inequalities. In addition, inequalities developed within the groups themselves, stemming primarily from the establishment of a market system of allocating grazing rights between members within each ranch:

If grazing rights are not allocated to the stockmen who can make the most profit with them, then neither the ranches’ profits, the lending agency’s security, nor the growth of the national economy will be best served. ... By allowing the grazing quotas to go to the highest bidder (after some initial allocation is agreed upon) the [market] system assures that those who can make the most money out of cattle will control the grazing and this in turn will assure the ranch of greater aggregate profit than any other allocation. (Davis, 1970, pp. 27–28)

An alternative method of allocation, based upon redistribution of cattle rather
than grazing quotas, was quickly dismissed as ‘inefficient’. The inequalities fostered by such policies are further entrenched by the juridico-political reality that ‘registered representatives’, who are invariably from the elite, are the ‘trustees for the group’ and have ‘effective legal and administrative control over the land’ (Gutto, 1981, p. 47). More and more members lose their herds, sell their grazing rights to wealthier members and become wage laborers on the ranch, if not forced off entirely (Gutto, 1981, p. 49; Hedlund, 1979, p. 33).

Kenya’s development policy in the post-colonial period has been a direct continuation of the policies that began to be formulated and enacted during colonial rule. Privatization of land tenure, whether in the form of individual ranches or the market allocation of pasture in ‘corporate’ group ranches, has eroded traditional systems of resource utilization developed over millennia in response to the specific conditions of arid and semi-arid climate. In addition, the tendency toward stratification and unequal distribution of livestock, which is ‘an inbuilt part of the logic of the development’ (Hedlund, 1979, p. 33) of these ranching schemes, has resulted in the deterioration of the community relations that protected the individual homesteads against their vulnerability to localized drought and disease.

7. Ranching Schemes in Tanzania

As in Kenya, in the early years of political independence in Tanzania government policy toward the Maasai consisted primarily of a continuation of schemes formulated in the colonial period. The key difference was that in Tanzania land was nationalized; hence there was no campaign to promote private land tenure in the form of individual ranches. Without the massive displacement of agricultural populations as a result of land adjudication such as occurred in Kenya, there was less cultivator encroachment on Maasai pastures. However, land pressures on the Tanzanian Maasai resulted from other factors, such as tourist development, state ranching and agricultural projects, and foreign agribusinesses. Tanzania’s approach was similar to Kenya’s in other ways as well: foreign aid agencies played an influential role in designing development schemes; agricultural regions were given priority in rural planning; and pastoralists were looked upon as primitive peoples who should settle down and adopt agriculture.

Two years after independence, USAID published its proposals for the development of Tanzania’s rangelands. In the Range Management Advisor’s view, deterioration of Maasai pastures was the result of the ‘tragedy of the commons’, the combination of individual herds and communal ownership of the grazing lands. The prescription offered was that the rangelands ‘must therefore be adjudicated … the land allocated accordingly and tenure established that will encourage proper land use and development, and further stimulate economic and social progress’ (Fallon, 1963, p. 9). The path of development suggested is along lines similar to Kenya’s, in the form of the ranching association. Like the group ranch, the ranching association is a corporate body, but members earn rights to occupancy and use rather than ‘legal ownership’ of the land (Parkpuny, 1979, p. 141). It is suggested, however, that within each association, an association-operated ranch should be established ‘to demonstrate the profits and beef pro-
duction attainable when proper husbandry and grazing practices are followed. The remainder of the Association area should be used by the family group or individuals in accordance with approved management plans’ (Fallon, 1963, p. 12). This type of organization is strikingly similar to the Kenyan plan for the individual ranches to surround the ‘traditional’ areas.

The report is clear that the goal for the Maasai should be the transition from ‘subsistence cattle raising to commercial cattle production’ (Fallon, 1963, p. 15). To support this transition, the report recommends that ‘the desire and need for money to buy consumer goods should be stimulated among the Masai [and] the use of banking facilities … must be strongly encouraged’ (Fallon, 1963, p. 14). The statement that ‘some day undoubtedly, the Masai rangelands will be supplying high quality fresh meat to European and other world markets’ (Fallon, 1963, p. 14; emphasis added) confidently emphasizes the future contributions of Maasai resources, while remaining obscure about the role of the Maasai themselves. It does, however, promise that, should the Maasai survive the transformation, their production will be geared toward exports.

In 1964, Tanzania passed the Range Development and Management Act, which created the legal basis for the formation of the ranching associations. Due to the priority given the agricultural regions, however, only two of the 20 associations planned ever actually got off the ground (Goldschmidt, 1981b, p. 112). These pilot associations, at Komolonik and Tamali, were unsuccessful. Dips and a water pipeline to the dry areas were constructed, but the programs ran out of funding and the pasture around the watering points became depleted from the convergence there of the herds (Parkipuny, 1979, p. 141).

In 1967, following the publication of both the FAO’s East African Livestock Survey and Tanzanian President Nyerere’s Arusha Declaration, government involvement in livestock development increased. Few resources, however, were directed to pastoral peoples. Of US$30 million obtained for livestock programs from the International Development Association, 73% was used for the development of large-scale, state-controlled beef ranches (Arhem, 1985, pp. 25–27).

In 1970, USAID commenced the 10-year Maasai Range Development and Management Project. Range development specialists were brought in from the USA, and US$1.7 million was loaned to the Tanzanian government for capital equipment. The production target was a 100% increase over 10 years (Dumont, 1983, p. 144). The project entailed constructing cattle dips to fight disease and watering points to prevent overgrazing, improving herds, increasing marketing facilities and training select Tanzanians in conservation and range management (Parkipuny, 1979, pp. 141–153). Many promises were made to the Maasai in order to entice them to take part, and soon many had hopes of great improvements in their resources. To show how much was expected by the Maasai, the next age set to be initiated took the name ‘range’ (Parkipuny, 1979, p. 145).

The project has since become a well known example of a failed development effort. Once again the ‘experts’ failed to learn from past mistakes, as pastures around the dips and watering points became depleted (Dumont, 1983, p. 144). The ‘improved’ breeds proved to be unsuited for the northern Tanzanian climate; they tired easily, required more food and water than the indigenous
breeds and were more susceptible to East Coast fever (Parkipuny, 1979, p. 150). ‘Experts’ stayed in fancy hotels far away in Arusha, raced around in jeeps and were often nowhere to be found when needed. One who did take up residence locally was dismissed for ‘being too biased toward Tanzania and the Masai’ (Dumont, 1983, p. 146). Equipment was often delayed in arriving and minor repairs were done by outsiders, thus passing no knowledge on to the Maasai (Parkipuny, 1979, p. 152). The program failed to ‘go beyond the technocratic aspect’ (Dumont, 1983, pp. 144–145), disregarding a coherent understanding of traditional Maasai social and productive organization. It has been labeled an ‘investment project in Maasailand rather than a [true] development project’ (Arhem, 1985, p. 39) intended to improve the quality of life of the Maasai themselves. Sharp differences in goals persisted between both the USAID ‘experts’ and the Tanzanian officials, and between both of them and the Maasai. The ultimate result was ‘increasing subsistence stress’ (Arhem, 1985, p. 36).

The Maasai had been originally excluded from the ‘villagization’ process, as pastoral peoples were viewed as a ‘special problem’ case (Nyerere, 1968, p. 140). After the failures of the ranching associations, it was decided that a new project of ‘ranching villages’ should be undertaken. In most cases the operations were named after the region, but for the Maasai it was called Operation Imparnati, or Operation Permanent Habitations (Ndagala, 1982, p. 29). Homesteads would be erected in a large circle of 3–4 kilometers’ radius (Dumont, 1983, p. 147). Intervals between homesteads would be about half a kilometer. Various village services, such as water supply, dip, school, vet and dispensary, etc., would be located in the middle (Parkipuny, 1979, p. 154). The primary economic activity was to be livestock and dairy production, but some agriculture was also to be encouraged (Ndagala, 1982, p. 33; Parkipuny, 1979, p. 154).

Resettlement was achieved much more easily than it had been among the agricultural population, due to the pastoralist familiarity with mobility (Ndagala, 1982, p. 30). Coercion was used, however, if pastoralists resisted moving, and there were two reported cases of homesteads being burned (Arhem, 1985, p. 42). A major reason for both pastoral and cultivator resistance, though, was the interdependent nature of their relationship to one another. This interdependence has been key to the security of both groups, and the failure of government officials to consider the possible consequences of arbitrary relocation resulted in a disruption of the delicate balance at the inter-community level.

The new homesteads, because of their more permanent nature, were built by men, modifying somewhat the traditional division of labor, in which women were responsible for building the kraals (Ndagala, 1982, p. 30). It has also been noted, however, that the production, distribution and consumption of milk, which traditionally were controlled by women, are being increasingly overtaken by men as milk becomes commoditized and the role of money becomes more important (Ndagala, 1982, p. 37). The need for cash created by the ‘modern’ village conditions also erodes the community relations by undermining traditional reciprocity, and unequal distribution of livestock becomes more entrenched.

The permanent ranching villages, planned without consulting the Maasai, have resulted in range deterioration. The scale and layout, intended to improve
the provision of social services and marketing facilities, have concentrated livestock while hindering adequate transhumant pasture rotation (Parkipuny, 1979, p. 155).

8. Cultivation, Sedentarization and Land

The dominant policy position with regard to the Maasai since the earliest European contact in the 19th century has been that they should settle down and become cultivators. The fact that the view of an evolutionary progression of hunter to pastoralist to farmer, so popular in that century, has been widely dismissed on empirical and theoretical grounds has not made this position any rarer: it pervades most contemporary development policy. The reasons may differ (though not always), but the insistence that pastoralism has no place in the modern world is an prevalent today as it ever was. More recent trends in development policy in both Kenya and Tanzania clearly bear this out.

In Kenya, the failures of ranching schemes (of which cultivation and sedentarization were an explicit part) led to the ASAL (arid-semi-arid land) program. This scheme, ironically heralded as ‘an important break with past policy’ aims at ‘integrating dry-land farming programs’ with livestock production ( Migot-Adholla & Little, 1981, p. 150). This is to be accomplished through loans for irrigation, soil research and the introduction of ‘drought-resistant crops’ ( Bennett, 1988, p. 38). Those behind the ASAL scheme readily admit that the ‘implicit assumption’ which underlies the program is that pastoralism ‘will not be an option in the future’ (Migot-Adholla & Little, 1981, p. 151). Likewise, agriculture continues to play an increasingly central role in the Tanzanian government’s ongoing settlement of pastoralists in ‘herders’ villages’. Jacobs (1979, p. 48) asserts that the major reason for the government’s insistence that the Maasai must become mixed farmers is ‘so that their livestock can be made more marketable, for the sake of the national economy, and displaced individual Maasai more available for wage labor’.

The adoption of cultivation by the Maasai, whether made compulsory directly by government order or indirectly through development policy, has not and will not result in development, but just the opposite. There are several reasons why this is so, most of which may be reduced to climatic/ecological factors.

The areas inhabited by the Maasai, in both Kenya and Tanzania, ‘because of rainfall, soil and topographic limitations’ are best suited for ‘the production of natural forage for conversion into livestock products’ (Fallon, 1963, p. 2). Through the transhumant resource utilization system, pastoralists ‘can turn indigestible cellulose into protein-rich meat and milk’ (Wolf, 1986, p. 62). This is therefore the most efficient use of resources in Africa’s 778 million hectares of rangeland (Wolf, 1986, p. 63).

Those favoring agriculture argue that while much of the area of Maasailand is not favorable to agriculture, many areas are. It is true that there are areas interspersed throughout the Maasai pasturelands that are highly suitable for cultivation. These are the traditional dry season grazing areas that, not surprisingly, have been those most encroached upon by outsiders or earmarked for
development. Even though these areas could be productively exploited through agriculture, it would not be economical or efficient to do so, because these areas make it possible to utilize the arid wet season areas alongside them when they are combined in the pastoral transhumance mode of resource use. Use of these areas for cultivation thus ‘denies the dry-season water and grazing to a much larger area, rendering it unproductive’ (Talbot, 1970, p. 709). This is often countered by the position that the dryer lowlands can be improved and made productive through irrigation and various modern technical advances. It often takes years of crop failure and degradation of the environment for the experts to face the facts: ‘The idea that modern techniques, machinery and money are all that are needed to transform desert or dry steppe into a garden of Eden dies hard’ (Rigby, 1969, p. 45).

It has been asserted that the failure of agricultural schemes among the Maasai is due to Maasai inability or unwillingness to practice cultivation. This, however, is clearly disputed by the facts. The Maasai may not want to take up agriculture, but it is not from inability or ‘irrational’ social values. Historically, the Maasai have reverted to agriculture for brief periods when epidemic disease has resulted in heavy stock losses. When the herds have been built up once again, they have returned to full-time pastoralism. There have even been cases where the Maasai have been too successful as farmers:

in 1968, wheat schemes undertaken by Maasai in the Narok District of Kenya not only produced surpluses to the extent that Government could not dispose of the grain profitably and lost large sums in subsidies, but Maasai were then prevented for the next two years from replanting and urged to return to full-time herding. (Jacobs, 1975, p. 419)

Perhaps the most important economic reason for promoting and safeguarding the continuation of pastoralism is the higher productivity of pastoral labor as opposed to agricultural labor in these areas (Hedlund, 1979, p. 18). The reason for this is primarily linked to climatic/environmental conditions (Rigby, 1985, pp. 169–170). Studies have shown that transhumant pastoralism in semi-arid African regions provides between 2 and 10.5 times as much protein per hectare as agriculture (Wolf, 1986, p. 68). The Maasai ‘are fully aware that labor returns are much higher on pastoral than on agricultural activities (Rigby, 1985, p. 170)’, but often are not able to resist adopting cultivation, due to government compulsion. In other cases, deterioration of herds and rangeland due to various development schemes and land alienation compels the Maasai to supplement their diet by engaging in crop production. This further reduces available pastureland and a vicious cycle of land loss and degradation follows. If the crops fail, which is likely in such a climate, livestock will have to be sold to provide subsistence, multiplying the negative effects. In addition, the planting period and the dry season migration of the herd coincide, further marginalizing any benefits (Migot-Adholla & Little, 1981, p. 153). It is clear that the practice of agriculture by the Maasai or encroaching cultivators and agribusinesses results directly in alienation of precious dry season grazing, lower returns on labor and range deterioration. Schemes that have these results contribute much to the people’s impoverishment.
9. Tourism and Wildlife

No discussion of the effects of development schemes among the Maasai would be complete without looking at the implications of tourism and wildlife in Kenya and Tanzania. In the 1950s, vast tracts of Maasai pastures began to be alienated for national parks and conservation areas. National parks by law exclude any type of human habitation. The Amboseli National Park and Maasai Mara Reserve in Kenya, and the Serengeti, Manyara, Tarangire, Arusha and Kilimanjaro National Parks in Tanzania, are all traditional Maasai pastures that they are now prohibited from utilizing.

Conservation areas allow only a restricted, highly controlled human presence. Selective burning of unpalatable grasses, a traditional practice of pasture management, has been outlawed, the results being an expansion of unpalatable grasses and a reduction of grazing area (Arhem, 1985, p. 52). In addition, the cultivators have been removed from these areas, and the interdependent relations between the two groups have been disrupted.

That the Maasai are constantly accused of threatening the wildlife is painfully ironic. It is no accident that the Maasai inhabited these regions: the practice of pastoralism is largely what determined the ecological base for the tremendous variety of animal species to thrive there (Jacobs, 1975, pp. 410–411). More recent evidence supports the argument that the continued survival of these areas depends on the activities of pastoralists (Horgan, 1989, p. 42). It is never considered by the development specialists or national governments that the Maasai are ultimately responsible for the industry that brought Kenya itself US$417 million in revenue in 1989 (Europa, 1993, p. 1661).

The impact on the Maasai of this land alienation has been severe. Like all alienation of water, pasture and minerals, the encroachment of national parks has concentrated herds onto smaller, more marginal areas, resulting in range deterioration and threatening herd reproduction. In Kenya, the situation has deteriorated to the point where some Maasai survive only through the humiliation of becoming a ‘tourist attraction’ (Dumont, 1983, p. 149).

10. Conclusion

In both Kenya and Tanzania, various development schemes caused considerable alienation of Maasai pastures, primarily their vital dry season grazing areas. This pasture alienation, particularly when combined with mismanagement in water development, led to the deterioration of both range and livestock quality. The result was a significant reduction in the independent reproductive capacity of the homestead, the basic unit of real production and resource appropriation.

Tribalization from colonial policy, policies favoring the agricultural population and land pressures on the peasantry, causing cultivator encroachment on Maasai pastures, all increased the tensions between pastoralist and cultivator. These inter-community relations had been historically essential to both groups as security against localized drought and disease.

A vicious cycle occurred as decreasing self-sufficiency in subsistence production forced further sales of livestock to obtain money to buy agricultural
products formerly obtained through barter with cultivators. Commoditization of livestock and integration into wider markets began threatening the exchange of livestock as part of stock partnerships, reciprocal gift giving and bride-wealth prestations, etc., always essential in guaranteeing both the security of the domestic units and the redistribution of cattle. Thus, the community relations began to erode, a process furthered by modernization ideology.

In Kenya, privatization of land, either through the adjudication of individual ranches or the ‘market’ allocation of grazing rights in group ranches, led to the concentration of access to pastures in the hands of a few and began to create a stockless, pastureless class who, with the breakdown of the traditionally guaranteed access to gifts, had no recourse but to become wage laborers.

Individual ranchers and successful group ranchers with large herds and either private rangeland or purchased grazing rights attain a new and powerful role in the community. Stockless, landless pastoralists, on the other hand, are compelled to sell their labor power. This is not to say that a fully fledged transformation to capitalism has taken place. Many individual and group ranchers continue to practice reciprocal relations in some form, maintaining the traditional community relations. Some families, for instance, intentionally split themselves up between different group ranches in order to provide for security. Not all displaced pastoralists became wage laborers; some Maasai have become peasantized mixed farmers, and many continue the ancient strategy of making enough money outside pastoralism to allow them to rebuild a herd, although land pressures have decreased this possibility.

At the same time, the capitalism that has emerged is a ‘periphery within a periphery’, with little extended accumulation or generalized commodity production and much subservience to the national and international centers. Capital-intensive ranching has burdened many with debts and technological lock-in, while failing to solve problems of range deterioration, and encroachment by tourism and agribusinesses.

The crucial difference for the Tanzanian Maasai has been the persistence, by government decree, of communal land tenure. Commoditization and ‘villagization’ have caused problems at the community and inter-community levels similar to those in Kenya, but continued access to pastures has so far assured survival. The encroachment of tourists, agribusinesses and forced sedentarization/cultivation threaten breakdown, but the resilience of community relations and the adaptation to changing situations have permitted pastoralism to continue.

The key difference between the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania has thus been the issue of land privatization. It is clear, however, that, in both nations, development policies and schemes have played a major role in environmental degradation and the marginalization of a historically productive mode of subsistence to the point of threatening survival. The reasons for the failures of these schemes are the gross misunderstanding of pastoralism on the part of the policy makers, and the way in which national and international priorities are consistently placed above those of the people.

The ‘tragedy of the commons’ view continues to inform Western and Western-influenced policy making, not only with regard to development, but also in environmental policy and the transition in the former Soviet and Eastern bloc
nations. In fact, it may even be said that the consensus on the benefits of privatization among economists and policy makers is stronger than ever. It is imperative that this view is critically re-examined and, furthermore, that there is a renewal of critical reflection on the purpose of development.

References


