

4 John Bodley, 1997

AFRICAN CATTLE PEOPLES: TRIBAL PASTORALISTS

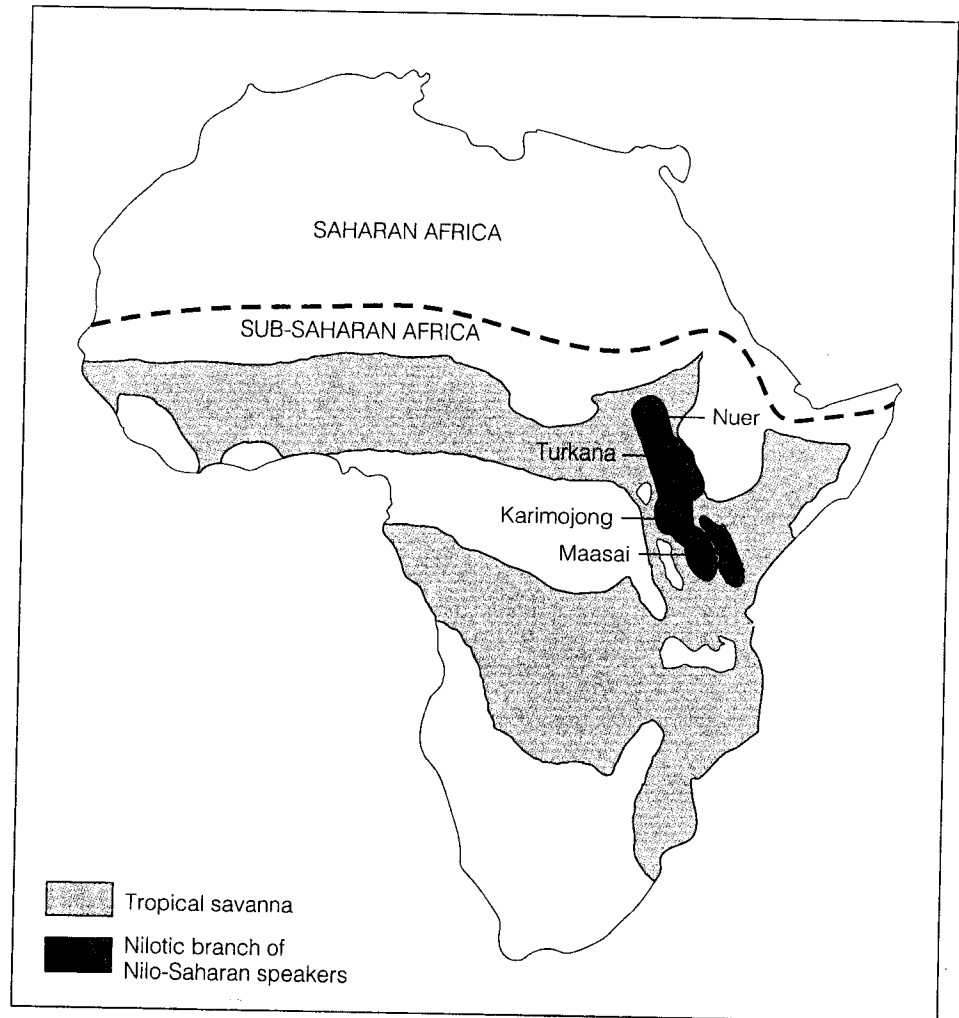
The Nuer, Karimojong, Maasai, and other Nilotic-speaking peoples in East Africa have fascinated casual European observers and anthropologists for more than a century. The pride and arrogant self-confidence of these peoples were so striking, and their warriors were so brave and numerous, that they commanded the immediate respect of the first European colonialists. The Maasai were viewed with special awe, because their warriors made a contest out of killing lions with spears and wore their manes as a badge of courage. It was even more impressive that these peoples could support themselves almost entirely from their cattle in an environment that Europeans considered virtually useless. Furthermore, cattle dominated all aspects of their culture, to a degree that outsiders thought irrationally obsessive. However, these East Africans, who may be respectfully called "cattle peoples," have maintained themselves up to the present day through many cycles of drought and epidemics, and they have retained much of their autonomy despite many government-imposed changes.

Since the end of the Ice Age, animals were domesticated in many parts of the world. This opened up new possibilities for people while creating many new problems. In the absence of animal domesti-

cates, the density of farming peoples was limited by the availability of fish and game, as was discussed in Chapter 3. Animals such as cattle are a valuable source of protein and can serve as a mobile food surplus and a reproducible source of wealth. Cattle can also be readily stolen and must be defended. They can make social equality more difficult to maintain, and they may be handled in ways that alter the relations between men and women and the structure of domestic groups.

Ethnographic material illustrates how African herders manage their animals for subsistence needs in an unpredictable environment. Cattle are so important in these Cattle Complex cultures that they provide ideal case material for illustrating functionalist interconnections and for making comparisons between the explanatory power of idealist, values interpretations of cultural patterns and materialist, cultural ecological interpretations. Cattle cultures are also useful for introducing such important anthropological concepts as segmentary lineage systems, bride-price, age-class warrior systems, animal sacrifice, and acephalous politics. In societies such as these, where status is so closely tied to ownership of animals and success in raiding, the potential for both social inequality and environ-

FIGURE 4.1
Map of savanna regions
of Africa showing
Nilotic-speaking East
African cattle cultures
discussed in the text.



mental deterioration through overgrazing is significant. A major issue we will explore is the extent to which poverty and desertification, which are certainly problems in contemporary East Africa, are intrinsic features of traditional pastoral cultures. We will present arguments on both sides of this issue. A related issue is the compatibility of pastoral nomadism with wildlife in Africa.

MAKING A LIVING WITH COWS

Cattle Herding and Tropical Grasslands

What special advantages do cattle offer peoples living in the East African savanna? How does

subsistence herding differ from commercial ranching?

East Africa is part of the tropical *savanna* ecosystem, but it is topographically a highly diverse region (Figure 4.1). Much of the area occupied by the Nilotic pastoralists in Kenya and Tanzania straddles the equator along a zone lying 3000–7000 feet (914–2134 meters [m]) in elevation and consisting of arid plains and wetter, grassy uplands. Today this region includes some of the most famous game

savanna An ecosystem dominated by grasses, often with scattered trees or shrubs, and maintained by frequent fires, sparse rainfall, and poor soils.



FIGURE 4.2 *The East African savanna ecosystem is a complex product of the interaction of human activity and natural conditions.*

parks in the world, such as the Amboseli and Serengeti national parks in Kenya and Tanzania, respectively. It is also home to many small-scale cultural groups involved in a wide range of subsistence economies.

The tropical savanna ecosystem is a grassland zone, which may have a few trees and shrubs, separating tropical rain forest zones from arid deserts (Figure 4.2). Fire and grazing play an important role in maintaining and extending savannas, but they result primarily from climate, soil, and topographic conditions, especially a pronounced wet and dry season. In striking contrast to the diversity and stability of tropical rain forests, savannas are dominated by very few species, and they exist in an unstable, dynamic equilibrium. Drought cycles or changes in grazing pressure caused by disease can rapidly change the inventory of plant species and shift the balance between trees and grasses. Biological productivity is high in relation to biomass, but plants are short-lived in comparison to rain forest

species. Nutrients are turned over, or cycled, much more rapidly in the savanna. There are proportionately more leaves and grass and less wood in the savanna, and the foliage is more palatable because it contains fewer resins and other chemical defenses. The advantage for consumer species is that there is more food available than in the forest. Extreme seasonal variations in rainfall create periodic pulses of primary production resulting in brief food surpluses that are best exploited by nomadic grazers (Bourliere and Hadley 1983).

Pastoralism in East Africa (see the box entitled, "The Origins of African Pastoralism"), like the savanna itself, exists along a rainfall continuum from wet to dry, showing greater dependence on animals and greater nomadism as rainfall declines. In areas where the average annual rainfall exceeds approximately 25 inches (650 millimeters [mm]) per year, people are likely to be village farmers, relying on grains such as millet, with livestock raising carried on as a minor subsistence activity. Where rainfall

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drops lower than 25 inches, pastoralism becomes increasingly attractive, nomadism increases, and people become more and more dependent on their animals, while farming becomes supplemental. In extreme cases, as with some Maasai groups, people may subsist virtually entirely on animal products, whereas some may exchange animal products for grains from their settled neighbors.

The great advantage of domestic livestock is that they convert otherwise inedible plant material into meat, blood, and milk for human consumption, in areas where farming would at best be a marginal activity. The use of domestic animals also permits dramatic increases in human population density over that supported in the same environment by foraging. East Africa is world famous for its game parks and can support up to 10,000 kilograms (kg) (22,076 lb) of wildlife biomass per square kilometer (km²) with some fifty species of large grazing mammals. The Hadza of Tanzania, who forage in this hunter's paradise, take only a small fraction of the game and maintain themselves at typically low population densities of just .4 persons per square kilometer. Their Maasai pastoral neighbors support 2 to 6 people per square kilometer. Pastoralism permits precise control over reproduction and harvesting of the animals and leads to large increases in food production per unit of land. However, successful pastoralism is a complex and delicately balanced system, which poses many difficult problems and requires major adjustments in the organization of society and labor.

East African cattle peoples, operating within small-scale cultures, manage their cattle and relate to their grassland ecosystem in radically different ways from the approach of market-oriented ranchers operating within the global culture. The first objective of subsistence pastoralists is to extract the maximum food value from their animals for direct consumption as efficiently as possible, while emphasizing self-reliance and long-term security (Dyson-Hudson and Dyson-Hudson 1969). African cattle may appear scrawny in comparison with the hefty beef cattle of North American rangelands and feedlots, but range-fed African cattle do not require an enormous subsidy of fossil fuel energy, and they are well adapted to survive seasonal drought and disease. American cattle are raised with the least human labor possible. They must gain weight

quickly to be sold for the maximum financial profit. They thrive on water pumped from deep wells, special food that is planted, processed, stored, and trucked to their feeding troughs and feedlots, and expensive antibiotics, growth hormones, and appetite stimulants (see Chapter 12). Furthermore, African beef does not go through a chain of processors, wholesalers, and retailers to be processed, packaged, advertised, stored, and marketed before being consumed. There are no remote shareholders that profit from African cattle but that do not participate in raising them. African cattle are ritually sacrificed, butchered, and eaten by the same people who care for them. (See the box entitled, "Cattle Carrying Capacity.")

The Cattle Complex: Obsession or Adaptation?

Why do African pastoralists focus so much of their culture on cattle? Is it an irrational cultural obsession or do they make rational use of their animals? Is herding a sustainable adaptation in this environment?

Historically, East African pastoralists have been seriously misunderstood by anthropologists, development planners, and conservationists. Many observers concluded that they irrationally overemphasized cattle in culturally determined ways that caused overgrazing and left them with poor-quality animals. American anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1926) was apparently the first to refer to the East African cattle area and to describe the **Cattle Complex** as an irrational cultural value on cattle for nonutilitarian purposes. According to Herskovits, Cattle Complex peoples used cattle more for social and ritual purposes than for subsistence. They were treated as wealth objects and sources of prestige. People rarely ate cattle; instead, they exchanged cattle at marriage, used them to settle disputes, and sacrificed them on ritual occasions. Besides these noneconomical uses, people seemed to have an

pastoralism A way of life based on raising livestock.

Cattle Complex A cultural system in which cattle are important in subsistence, social and political organization, and religion. Sometimes described as an irrational cultural emphasis on nonutilitarian values.

The Origins of African Pastoralism

African food-producing systems based on pastoralism and farming probably arose some 10,000 years ago. Developments in Africa roughly paralleled the Middle Eastern Neolithic; in both areas, developments were due to a combination of still poorly understood factors involving both resource constraints and new opportunities.

Domestication of animals involves a process of mutual changes in the behavior of both people and animals, which offers certain benefits to both. It should not be thought of as a remarkable discovery or invention. The question is, Why did people decide to raise animals, and which animals did they choose? Cattle, sheep, and goats are ideally suited for domestication for two reasons: First, as herd animals, they can be easily controlled. Second, because these ruminants have multichambered stomachs, they can digest cellulose that humans cannot, which converts to animal protein that humans can digest. Animal domestication may have been undertaken as a gradual process of increasing control over game animals to make up for the shortfall in animal protein that occurred with increased demands from population growth after the Ice Age.

As cultural control, animal domestication involves any systematic human intervention that makes the animals more available for human exploitation. The process can move from seasonal culling of wild herds to increase their growth rates, to corralling and maintaining herds year-round, to selective breeding (Hecker 1982). Such activities were probably underway with sheep, goats, and cattle in the Middle East by 9000 BP and quickly resulted in physical changes in the animals that could be recognized as domesticates. Archaeological evidence of domestication includes such things as reduction in size of the animal; specific changes in morphology, such as horn shape in goats; and an increase in the skeletal remains of young animals slaughtered as a result of selective culling (Stein 1986).

Pastoralism, as a full-time specialization in domestic animals, has probably been practiced in Africa as long as anywhere in the world (Figure 4.3). Sheep and goats were probably brought into North Africa from the Middle East, whereas wild cattle may have been locally domesticated by 7000 BP or earlier (Smith 1984). The Zebu, or hump-backed cattle, apparently reached Africa from India about 4000 BP. Because there are no wild ancestors of cattle, sheep, or goats known from sub-Saharan Africa, it is assumed that they were introduced to East Africa from elsewhere as domesticates.

The spread of pastoralism depended on environmental conditions. Over the past 10,000 years, small changes in rainfall have made the Sahara environment

fluctuate abruptly between conditions favoring or discouraging pastoralism. The first favorable period began about 7000 BP and presented an open niche for pastoralist expansion. After pastoralism became established as a basic way of life in the Sahara, people apparently carried it south into appropriate environments in sub-Saharan Africa as they became available. The primary barrier to the spread of pastoralism in sub-Saharan Africa was the tsetse fly, which transmits trypanosomiasis, a form of sleeping sickness often fatal to cattle. The tsetse fly flourishes in forested and brushy vegetation and effectively precludes cattle from large areas of Africa.

Pastoralism first became established in East Africa in the central Sudan by 5400 BP and then in the arid zone of northeast Kenya by 5200 BP, where it was presumably introduced by early Cushitic-speaking peoples from Ethiopia (Table 4.1). The higher savannas of East Africa were apparently not occupied by pastoralists, because of tsetse flies, until changes in climate and vegetation made conditions more favorable by 3300 BP. Shortly thereafter, by 2500 BP Nilotic-speaking ancestors of the modern Maasai and Turkana peoples arrived (Ambrose 1984). Therefore, African pastoralism is a very long established human adaptation and can reasonably be considered a basic component of the savanna ecosystem.

Anthropologists often group the "cattle peoples" of East Africa into a single culture area stretching from Sudan to South Africa, but they are a diverse group of cultures organized at different scales of social complexity, united only by their common interest in cattle. Speakers of three major language phyla may be included: Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Kordofanian, and Nilo-Saharan (Ruhlen 1987). Afro-Asiatic speakers include the Cushitic languages of Ethiopia, Somalia, and northeast Kenya, which are related to Semitic languages such as ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, and Arabic. As pastoralists, Cushitic peoples often occupy the drier regions of East Africa and may depend more on camels than cattle. Niger-Kordofanian languages include the Bantu speakers, who cover much of sub-Saharan Africa. Cattle are often important for Bantu peoples, but many are also village farmers. The Nilo-Saharan speakers occupy a wide area of north central Africa in the upper Nile region and in the Sahara. The most famous cattle cultures, such as the Nuer, Dinka, Karimojong, Turkana, and Maasai, all belong to the Nilotic branch of Nilo-Saharan. (Nilotic also refers to the very tall physical type of Nilotic speakers.) These peoples occupy the swampy plains along the White Nile in southern Sudan, the high savannas of the Rift Valley system, and the south and east of Lake Victoria to the Serengeti plains of Tanzania. The Nilotic peoples are the primary focus of this chapter.

FIGURE 4.3 *Hump-backed Zebu cattle may have been in Africa for 4000 years. Samburu Maasai warriors preparing to slaughter a Zebu ox at a wedding.*



TABLE 4.1 *Prehistory of East Africa*

1000–2000 BP	Expansion of Bantu-speaking, iron-using village farmers
Pastoral Neolithic in Kenya (2500–5200 BP)	
2500	Southern Nilotic speakers from southern Sudan enter highlands as mixed farmer/pastoralists with livestock, millet, and sorghum
3300	Modern climate and vegetation established Savanna pastoral Neolithic in highlands
4500	Domestic camel reaches Horn of Africa from southern Arabia
3000–5600	Climate drying after wet phase; tsetse bush in highlands inhibits pastoralists Scattered foragers in highlands
5200	Savanna pastoral Neolithic introduced in lowlands by Cushitic speakers bringing domestic livestock and ceramics
Saharan Pastoralism (4000–8000 BP)	
4000–5400	Domestic livestock and ceramics in central Sudan
7000–8000	Local domestication of cattle in Sahara Domestic sheep and goats reach North Africa from Near East
<i>Homo Sapiens</i> Foragers (40,000–200,000 BP)	
200,000	Middle Stone Age; core tools, flake points, scrapers

SOURCES: Ambrose (1984), Clark (1984), Phillipson (1985), Smith (1984), and Wendorf and Schild (1984).

exaggerated and personal attachment to their animals. When range-management professionals later found that pastoral cattle were underweight and less productive than their counterparts in the American West, it is not surprising that the pastoralists were accused of overgrazing and blamed for **desertification**, the process by which a savanna is converted to arid desert by overgrazing.

British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard conducted one of the first and most detailed studies of a cattle culture among the Nuer of Sudan between 1930 and 1936. This study (Evans-Pritchard 1940), which became a classic in ethnographic literature, showed the social, ritual, and emotional value of cattle but also demonstrated their utilitarian function.

Cattle Carrying Capacity

Comparative analysis of subsistence herders requires several types of data and concepts, which are outlined in Figures 4.4 and 4.5. Calculating the carrying capacity for herd animals and the number of people that could be supported by pastoralism is a deceptively simple theoretical problem. One need only know the amount of plant biomass that animals can consume in a given area each year on a sustained basis and the amount of human food that the herds can produce. Range-management specialists usually assume that 50 percent of the annual new plant growth (AGNPP) can safely be consumed by herbivores without degrading the grazing resources. Carrying capacity is rated in TLUs (tropical livestock units of 250 kg [552 lb] of biomass)/km²/year and varies according to the AGNPP, which in turn depends on rainfall. It is assumed that each TLU will consume approximately 3105 kilograms (6854 lb) of dry forage annually.

In practice, none of these figures can be precise, and the formula is not so easily applied. This explains why there is so much professional disagreement over whether pastoralists are managing their herds rationally and maintaining the quality of their pastures. The primary problem is that AGNPP, the most critical value, varies dramatically in time and space in the pastoral zones. Successful pastoralists must plan for long-term, minimum carrying-capacity values, taking into account the frequency of droughts. The actual productivity of human food will depend on the particular mix of animals in use and the specific pattern of herd management.

Evans-Pritchard called the Nuer "pre-eminently pastoral." He reported that they considered themselves herdsmen above all else and only grudgingly resorted to farming because they didn't have enough animals. They looked contemptuously at people without cattle, as he found on his arrival in Nuerland, when the Nuer refused to carry his baggage. He found that they had "the herdsman's outlook on the world" and considered cattle "their dearest possessions." Cattle were ornamented and named and their genealogies remembered. Boys received an "ox-name" at birth. Men were addressed using names that referred to their favorite oxen, and women were named after the cows they milked. They raided their neighbors for cows. They always talked about their animals:

I used sometimes to despair that I never discussed anything with the young men but livestock and girls, and even the subject of girls led inevitably to that of cattle. Start on what-

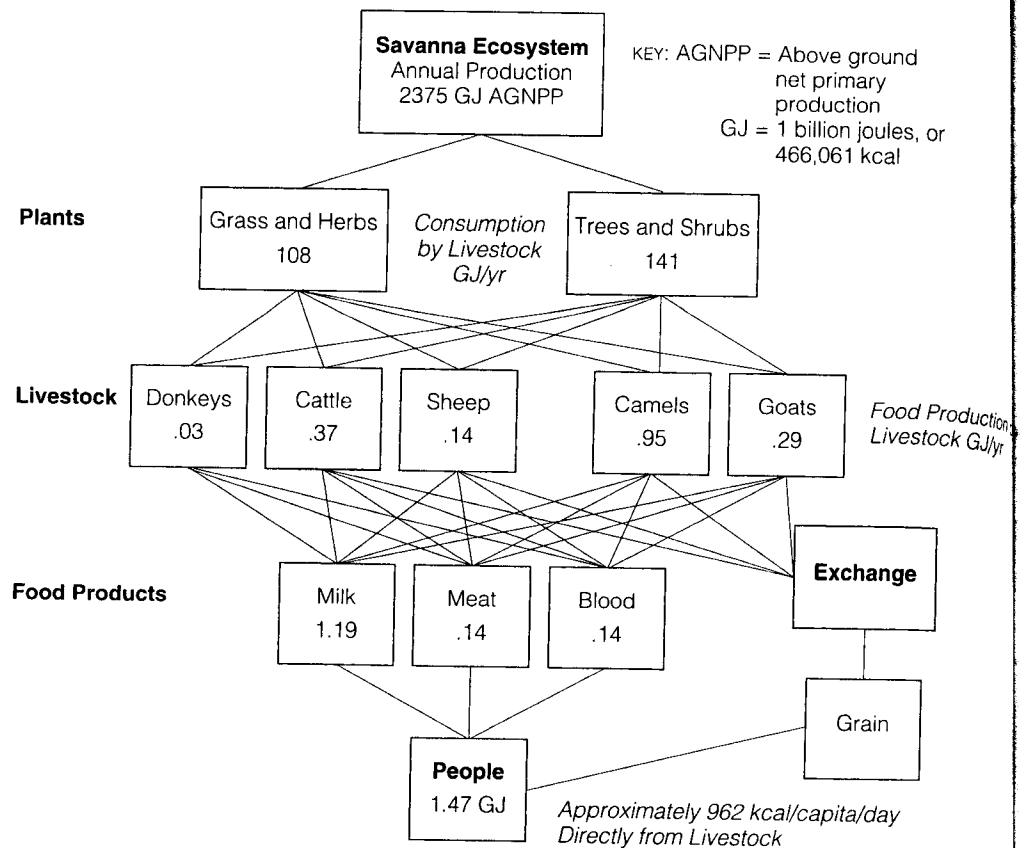
ever subject I would, and approach it from whatever angle, we would soon be speaking of cows and oxen, heifers and steers." (Evans-Pritchard 1940:18-19)

For Evans-Pritchard, this "pastoral mentality" took on the appearance of an "over-emphasis," a "hypertrophy of a single interest." As further indication of Nuer obsession with cattle, he pointed to the "linguistic profusion" of cattle terminology. He found ten terms for describing cows of one solid color and hundreds of possible permutations of terms based on combinations of white with various patterns and associations with natural objects. Further Nuer terminological distinctions are based on horn shape, ear cropping, and age and sex categories. In all, the Nuer had thousands of ways of de-

desertification The process by which a savanna is converted into arid desert by overgrazing and/or climate change.

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FIGURE 4.4
*Energy flow in a pastoral
 production system, the
 Turkana. (SOURCE:
 Coughenour et al. 1985.)*



scribing cattle and composed poetry and songs using their names. A. B. C. Ocholla-Ayayo (1979) has listed 125 terms applied by the Luo, Nilotic neighbors of the Nuer, to cattle internal and external anatomy, covering bones and internal organs in great detail (Figure 4.6).

Evans-Pritchard recognized that this extreme interest in cattle had a utilitarian basis. He noted that the Nuers' flat, clay-soiled, seasonally flooded environment was deficient in such basic raw materials as stone and wood and was a difficult area to grow crops, but it provided excellent pasturage. The Nuer therefore lavished seemingly extravagant care on their animals, such that the cattle enjoyed a "gentle, indolent, sluggish life" (1940:36). He described the virtually symbiotic relationship between the Nuer and their cattle, in which each depended on the other. The Nuer extract an impressive array of material resources from cattle. Milk is the primary product, and it may be consumed

fresh, sour, or processed as cheese. Blood is drawn from veins in the neck and will be boiled or allowed to coagulate and roasted in a block. An animal would ordinarily only be slaughtered for ritual purposes, but then it would be butchered and the parts immediately distributed. Dung is a critical fuel for cooking, and dung fires help drive off biting insects. Dung is also used as a construction plaster, as well as for medicinal and cosmetic purposes. Cattle urine is used in cheese making and tanning, whereas skin and bones have many uses in the manufacture of various artifacts such as containers and ornaments. Without cattle and their products, life would be very difficult in Nuerland.

The pastoralists are widely accused of irrationality because some people believe that they raise far more poor-quality animals than they need for mere subsistence in order to achieve the prestige and social value of large numbers of cattle. They are accused of overstocking their ranges and degrading

Basic Formulas:	
$CC = (AGNPP/5)/C$	
$P = CC/R$	
Carrying-Capacity Variables:	
Where CC =	Carrying capacity, the number of animals in TLU that can be supported/km ² /year on a sustained basis
$AGNPP$ =	Above-ground net primary productivity in kilograms of DM (dry plant matter)/km ² /year (new plant biomass produced each year)
DM =	19 MJ/kg, or 4500 kcal/kg
TLU =	Tropical livestock units, 250 kg of animal biomass
C =	kg of DM consumed/TLU/year
R =	TLU required for human subsistence/person/year
P =	Number of people supported/km ² /year

FIGURE 4.5 Environmental limits on African pastoralists.

their environments, thus contributing to desertification. This is sometimes seen as a classic *tragedy of the commons* situation (destruction of a communal resource to serve self-interests), because grazing lands are communal property and an individual herder would have no incentive to hold down the size of his herd. Planners often recommend that it would be better for pastoralists to raise beef for the market as private ranchers. Actually, little firm evidence supports the view that small-scale pastoralism is inherently prone to overstocking, whereas there is abundant evidence that outside development pressures do contribute to overgrazing (Homewood and Rodgers 1984). Small-scale subsistence pastoralists operating outside of the market economy are unlikely to find any conflict between individual self-interest and their social responsibility to maintain range quality (McCay and Acheson 1987).

Whether or not African pastoralists are self-conscious conservationists, their traditional subsistence practices include important limiting factors that reduce the likelihood of overgrazing. First, the subsistence needs of a household determine herd

size (Tables 4.2 and 4.3), and the labor supply and the declining feeding efficiencies that arise as herds grow set its upper limits. Second, in the absence of trucks, pumps, and deep wells, the frequency that animals must be watered and the distance they can travel between grazing areas and water severely limit grazing during the dry season.

African cattle under traditional nomadic pastoralism do appear to be of lower quality when compared with U.S. beef and dairy cattle (Table 4.4). African animals convert less of their forage into human food and produce less body weight because the frequent droughts cause animals to channel more of their energy into biological maintenance than into meat production. They must adjust their metabolisms to cycles of periodic thirst and starvation followed by recovery (Coughenour et al. 1985, Western and Finch 1986). Low production is thus a long-range adaptation to severe environmental constraints. U.S. cattle achieve their high biological efficiencies thanks to a significant fossil fuel energy subsidy, which is not counted in these calculations but which is required to produce and distribute tractors, farm chemicals, feed, and agricultural research.

Pastoral Subsistence: Meat, Blood, and Milk

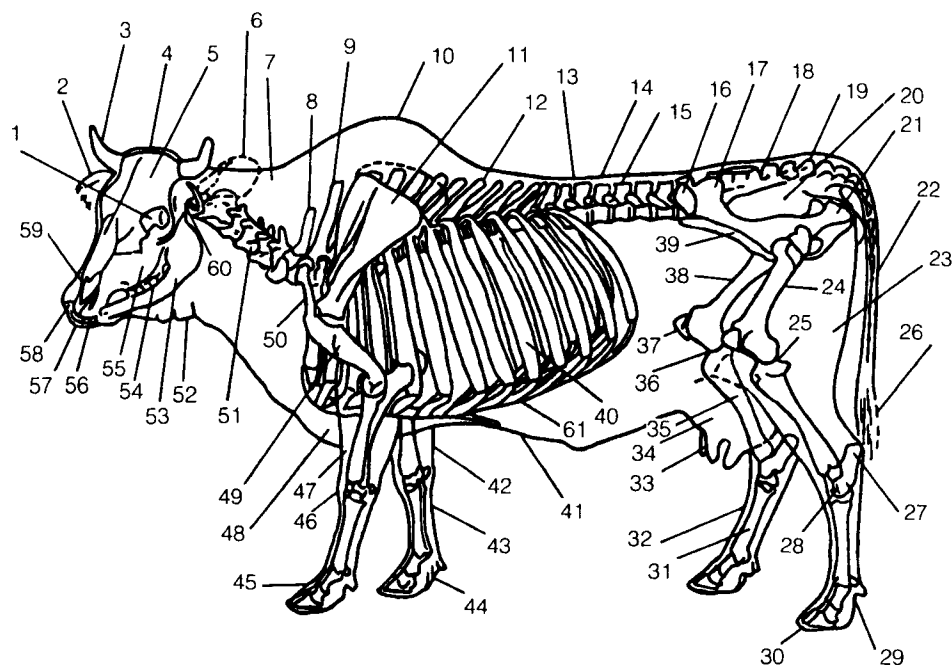
How are different animals used for food? How do people manage their animals for maximum food security?

To design a reliable food system based on domestic animals, a subsistence herder must solve several problems: which animals to use, what food products to produce, how many animals are needed, what age and sex categories to maintain in the herds, when to slaughter, when to time breeding, how to feed and water the herd, and how to protect the herd from disease and predators. Hunters let nature take care of most of these matters, but herders find that their lives must be constantly modified to take care of their animals.

Most East African pastoralists are considered, and consider themselves, to be cattle peoples be-

tragedy of the commons Destruction of a communally held resource, such as grazing lands, by unchecked individuals seeking their own self-interest.

FIGURE 4.6
Anatomical terms ap-
plied to cattle by the
Nilotic-speaking Luo
(Ocholla-Ayayo 1979).



- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Chokndorro | 22. Ip | 43. Ogwala |
| 2. It | 23. Ring em maoko | 44. Ofunjtielo or nguttielo |
| 3. Tunḡ | 24. Odiere machien | 45. Witielo |
| 4. Tatwich | 25. Fuond odire gi ogwala | 46. Chong |
| 5. Sihanga or patwich | 26. Orengo | 47. Bat korjachien |
| 6. It (omwot it) | 27. Fuond ogwala | 48. Agoko |
| 7. Ngut | 28. Nyapong tielo | 49. Chokbat mar oriere |
| 8. Chok ngutmachiek | 29. Odofony tielo | 50. Chokrangach (colar bone) |
| 9. Chok ngutmabor | 30. Okak tielo | 51. Choke ngudi |
| 10. Kuom | 31. Chok oluko | 52. Jund dhiang |
| 11. Opal | 32. Ogwala | 53. Choklem mapiny |
| 12. Ariedi lihumbli | 33. Thuno | 54. Nyiponge |
| 13. Giko nyakmeru | 34. Dagthuno | 55. Choklem mamalo |
| 14. Dierngech | 35. Chok em | 56. Lep |
| 15. Giko nyakmeru | 36. Fundodiene | 57. Leke mamon |
| 16. Wichok oguro | 37. Nyapong odiere | 58. Um |
| 17. Chokoguro | 38. Odiere | 59. Chok um |
| 18. Choktie ip | 39. Chokbam | 60. Tiend it |
| 19. Oguch dhiang | 40. Ngede | 61. Chokagoko |
| 20. Ringsarara | 41. Pinyich | |
| 21. Dhokisonga | 42. Bat korachich | |

cause of the dominant cultural role that cattle are assigned, but they actually depend on several functionally distinct domesticates, including cattle, camels, sheep, goats, and donkeys (see Figure 4.4). Cattle play major social, ritual, and subsistence roles while providing important material products. Camels become increasingly important as rainfall

declines or when pastures become overgrazed. The small stock (sheep and goats) may provide more of a household's meat requirements than cattle and can be a significant source of milk. Small stock also are useful to speed recovery after a serious drought because they reproduce more quickly than cattle (Table 4.5). Reliance on animal domesti-

TABLE 4.2 *Minimum Estimated Herd Size to Support One Household**

	Camels	Cattle	Sheep	Goats
kcal	28	64	116	205
Protein	11	28	64	74

SOURCE: Dahl and Hjort (1976).

*Reference household assumes six people, including husband and wife, boy age 18 years, girl age 15 years, and two small children, ages 3 and 8 years. Total daily nutritional needs of 318 g of protein and 13,800 kcal.

cates makes for a situation that is the reverse of the protein-limitation factor seen in Amazonia. East African pastoralists have an abundance of protein but have some difficulty producing adequate carbohydrates and calories except where they can grow grain or obtain it by exchange from neighboring farmers.

Complementarity between domesticates is a striking aspect of pastoral systems. Maintaining mixed herds of large and small grazers and browsers makes for more efficient utilization of available forage and, in a simple way, duplicates the complexity of the natural savanna ecosystem. As grazers, cattle and sheep feed primarily on grasses and herbaceous vegetation; as browsers, goats and camels rely on woody shrubs and trees. Utilization

TABLE 4.4 *Biological Efficiency of African Nomadic Subsistence Cattle in Comparison with U.S. Cattle**

	Ecological Efficiency	Production/Biomass
African nomadic	.9	.2
U.S. beef	5.5	.78-1.1
U.S. dairy	17.0	.8-2.6

SOURCE: Coughenour et al. (1985).

*Ecological efficiency = production/energy consumed by animal. U.S. dairy production refers only to milk.

of diverse domesticates also helps level out seasonal fluctuation in food production: Camels often produce milk year-round, cows produce only during the wet season, and sheep and goats produce most milk during the dry season.

The diverse animal products that people eat also have the advantage of complementarity, and they maximize sustainable subsistence yield. Rather than emphasizing meat, which is obviously a one-time use of an animal, milk production is the primary objective for herders. Milk maximizes biological efficiency because the calories in milk can be produced four times more efficiently in energy cost than the calories in meat. Blood and milk can be produced without harm to the animal and comple-

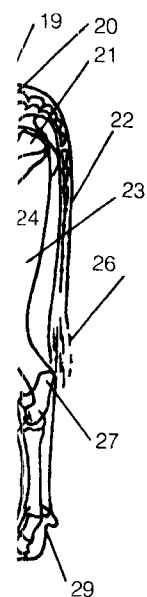
TABLE 4.3 *Average Reported Household Herd Size and Composition**

	Camels	Cattle	Sheep	Goats	Totals
Rendille					
TLU/household†	12	11	40	61	31
kcal (%)	19	16	11	15	61
Protein (%)	50	33	23	32	138
Karimojong					
TLU/household	—	33	—	—	16
kcal (%)	—	34	—	—	34
Protein (%)	—	—	—	—	—
Turkana					
TLU/household	—	—	—	—	30
kcal (%)	43	14	17	—	74
Protein (%)	—	—	—	—	—

SOURCES: Rendille (Field 1985); Karimojong (Little and Morren 1976); Turkana (Coughenour et al. 1985).

*All based on average family of 8 people, counted as 6.5 adult equivalents.

†TLU = tropical livestock unit.



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TABLE 4.5 *A Functional Comparison of East Africa Livestock**

	Camels	Cattle	Sheep	Goats
Vital Statistics				
Weight/kg	453	250	45	45
Feeding	Browser	Grazer	Grazer	Browser
Calves or kids/female/ year	.5 1.5	.7 3.4	1.5 18	2 33
Herd growth, %/year				
Subsistence Production/Animal				
Milk (kg/day)	4	2	.01	.03
Blood (liters [L]/year)	60	6	—	—
Carcass/(kg)	226	125	10–25	10–25
Production/Herd of 100 Animals/Year				
Milk				
kcal†	17,374	5497	2340	1847
Protein (kg)	918	245	131	91
Blood				
kcal†	163	108	—	—
Protein (kg)	38	27	—	—
Meat				
kcal†	664	4536	2017	608
Protein (kg)	142	278	50	65
Fal (camel hump)				
kcal†	527	—	—	—

SOURCE: Dahl and Hjort (1976).

*These figures are estimates; actual figures can vary widely. Annual production for herd reflects average age and sex distributions and natural mortality as well as intentional slaughtering. Milk production represents the human share after the needs of calves and kids are satisfied.

†In thousands.

ment each other in that blood is a major source of iron and can be drawn from animals that are not producing milk. This is especially important when cow milk production drops during the dry season. Cattle are not as efficient as goats at meat production, so cattle are rarely slaughtered except ritually, although they will be eaten when they die naturally.

Traditional herding is a labor-intensive activity. Individual herds may be subdivided to better reflect the abilities and requirements of animals according to condition. Herds are moved seasonally to take advantage of the best pasture, and in some areas, a regular altitudinal *transhumance* (moving herds for optimum grazing) may be practiced. Pastoralists manage their herds to maximize the number of female animals to keep milk yields and growth potential high. Given the natural mortality rates of cattle and their reproductive biology, a herd is unlikely to contain more than about 30 percent fertile cows, and only half of these will be producing milk.

The actual number of animals needed to satisfy household nutritional requirements can be theoretically estimated, based on calculations of the annual production of a standard herd; however, there are many variables, and published estimates range from thirty to ninety or more head of cattle per household. Different researchers may use different estimates of household size and daily per capita minimum caloric requirements. The widely accepted 2300 minimum daily kilocalorie (kcal) figure is probably too high because it is based on Euro-American standards. East African cattle herders are smaller people and should have correspondingly lower energy needs. Use of the high-calorie figure must inflate minimum herd requirements. Although the production of milk per animal under pastoral nomadism is lower than on European dairy farms, pastoral milk is more concentrated, and its nutritional value is 30 percent higher than that of European milk. Given the archaeological

record of pastoralism in East Africa and the incredible resilience of the system under the impact of colonial invasion and recent forces for change, it seems that traditional herders are operating quite rationally. Their herding strategies contribute to the long-range survival of their families in a very difficult environment.

DAILY LIFE IN EAST AFRICA

Nuer Society: Bride-Wealth, Lovers, and Ghosts

How do cattle provide a central focus of marriage, kinship, ritual, and politics in the daily life of cattle people? What role do cattle play in Nuer marriage? How does the distinction between biological and social paternity influence Nuer marriage arrangements and concepts of sexual morality in this patrilineal society?

Apart from their obvious utilitarian value, the Nuer told Evans-Pritchard that the "supreme value" of cattle came from their use as **bride-wealth**, which was the basic requirement for establishing a fully legitimate household (Evans-Pritchard 1951:96). (I avoid the use of the term *legal* to refer to marriage or household in this concept because legal implies formal law, supported by courts and jails that did not exist in Nuer society.) Nuer marriage involves rights over cattle and women and is an agreement between the families of the bride and groom. (See the box entitled, "How Do Nuer Men View Women?") It requires a lengthy series of negotiations, public and private ceremonies, and transactions, which are not complete until children are born to the couple. Because Nuer marriage is so complex and involves so many different rights, it is an ideal case from which to examine the meaning of marriage, family, and household as cross-cultural concepts.

The process of Nuer marriage is initiated by preliminary talks between the two families in order to specify the animals that can be transferred. The bride's family can demand cattle for six different categories of claimants by order or precedence: the bride's grandparents or their ghosts, the bride's parents, her uncles, her aunts, the spirits of her father and mother, and her brothers and half-brothers, as shown in Figure 4.7. Ideally, some forty head of cat-

tle can ultimately be transferred to the bride's father, and he is then obligated to distribute them to each of the claimants on his side of the family and to the bride's mother's family. In a typical distribution, twenty animals would go to the bride's immediate family, with her father getting the largest share, and ten animals would go to each set of uncles and aunts (Figure 4.8). Each category of claimant receives a specific number and type of animal. For example, the bride's full brother can receive three cows, two oxen, and a cow with its calf, seven animals in all. In the negotiations, animals are promised by name to specific people.

The preliminary negotiations are formalized in the betrothal ceremony, which is the first public marriage ritual. Betrothal is marked by the sacrifice and distribution of an ox by the bride's father to the groom's family. The first installment of bride-wealth cattle is also transferred to the bride's father. Several weeks later at the wedding ceremony, negotiations are finalized, and more cattle transferred, but the transfer and the marriage are not considered official until a later consummation ceremony with its series of rituals. After this, the groom's family can demand compensation in the event of his wife's infidelity, but the couple does not establish a joint homestead until after their first child is weaned. Until then, the wife remains in her parents' homestead, and her husband is a visitor who must maintain a ritual distance from his in-laws.

Once completed, the "ordinary" Nuer marriage creates a simple nuclear family household based on husband, wife, and child (Figure 4.9). Such a household is headed by a man, as husband, and draws its subsistence from his herd and from the wife's garden. The homestead contains a byre (a cattle barn) and its kraal (corral), cooking hearth, and a small sleeping house for the wife. In a polygynous marriage, each wife has her own house. Several such homesteads belonging to a group of brothers or a father and his sons might cluster

transhumance Seasonal movement of livestock herds to maintain optimum grazing conditions; often involves altitudinal shifts.

bride-wealth Goods, often livestock, that are transferred from the family of the groom to the family of the bride in order to legitimize the marriage and the children of the couple.

How Do Nuer Men View Women?

Anthropologist John Burton (1980) asked several Atuot (Nuer) men and women to respond to his question, "What are the relations of a wife and husband, and how do they come to quarrel?" He felt that their answers closely matched what he observed. Mayan Akuot, a father of six children, answered as follows:

In our land, it is for a woman to give birth to children. Women are not good or bad—they are in between. Their badness is that even if you are married with one hundred cows, she may still leave. Even if you cultivate much grain, she may still leave you. This is because some women have no heart. If it is a good woman she will bear many children. If there were no women, how would all the people be here? She is the one who created the land. There is the wife of the black people, of the animals, of the cows, of the fish—all of them have this land. If it were not for women, how would people be so many? Women are good—they make children and food and beer. The woman has the land. If a man stays in this land without a woman, he will not go ahead [that is, his progeny will never be realized]. (Burton 1980:717)

together around a common kraal as a composite homestead.

Many other domestic arrangements are possible (see Figure 4.9). For example, a woman, especially if she were infertile, might become a "husband" and have children by marrying another woman who then takes a male lover who becomes the biological father, or **genitor**, of the female husband's children. In this case, the female husband is the legitimate father, or **pater**, of the children, as well as the husband, and her family transfers cattle as bride-wealth to the family of her wife. In a "ghost marriage," someone marries in the name of a dead

sibling or other relative who has died without having completed a marriage and who thus has left no descendants. In all such cases, cattle are transferred to the bride's family, while the deceased, male or female, becomes the pater; the stand-in relative lives with the wife as "husband" and genitor but has no rights over the children. **Levirate** marriage, when a man marries his deceased brother's wife, resembles ghost marriage, except that the dead husband was already married and the bride-wealth had been transferred. The original, now dead, husband is still considered the husband, and the brother who stands in his place has less con-

FIGURE 4.7
Order of precedence of claimants on Nuer bride-wealth cattle: (1) grandparents or their ghosts; (2) father (F) and mother (M); (3) father's brother(s) (FB) and mother's brother(s) (MB); (4) father's sister(s) (FZ) and mother's sister(s) (MZ); (5) spirits of father (F) and mother (M); (6) brother(s) (B) and half-brother(s) (FS). (SOURCE: Evans-Pritchard 1951.)

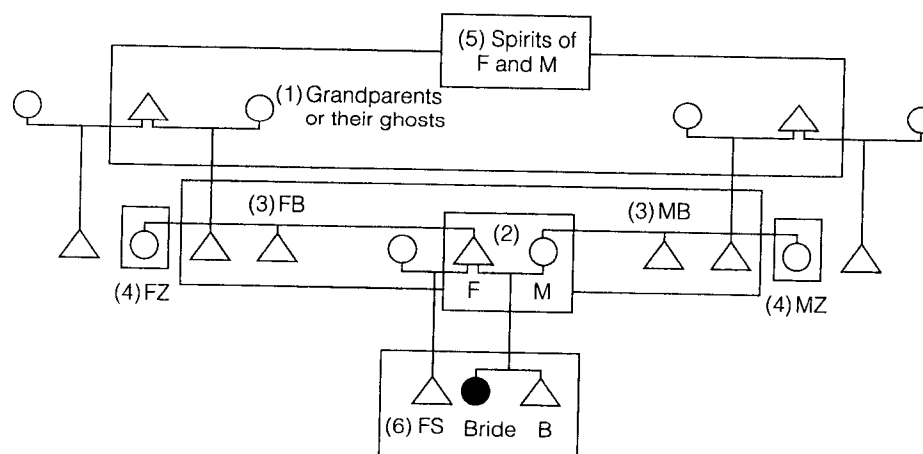
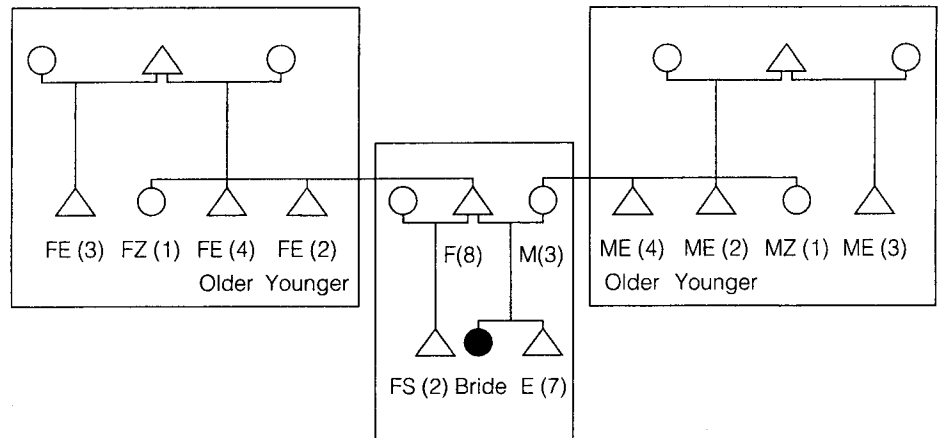


FIGURE 4.8
The distribution of Nuer bride-wealth cattle; the numbers in parentheses indicate the number of cattle received. (SOURCE: Evans-Pritchard 1951.)



control over his wife than the "husband" of a ghost marriage.

Women have considerable freedom in Nuer domestic arrangements, even though all marriages are officially arranged by the families involved. Instead of remarrying, widows sometimes live with lovers, who may father children by them. However, the original legitimate family, established by bride-wealth, remains intact, and her children will all belong to her original husband, who is always their pater. Evans-Pritchard (1951) called such arrangements "widow concubinage." In some cases, a woman may move in with a lover while she is still married. She will be a "married concubine," and again her children will all belong to her husband because of the bride-wealth.

For the Nuer, the concept of paternity, or "belonging to," is a far more important matter than biological parentage or the details of domestic arrangements. Paternity is established by bride-wealth cattle, thereby providing one with claims to cattle that may, in turn, be used for bride-wealth. Marriage also links one to a set of ancestor ghosts and spirits that must be ritually acknowledged. Maintaining such claims is more important than whether a "father" is living or dead, male or female, or with whom your mother cohabits.

The use of bride-wealth, such as cattle, to formalize marriage has so many ramifications throughout the culture that some anthropologists recognize societies based on bride-wealth and those based on *bride-service* as distinctive societal types (Collier 1988). These two marriage systems create

different culturally defined systems of domestic relations organizing the inequalities of age and sex in different ways. Young men in bride-service societies, such as in aboriginal Australia and Amazonia, do not incur long-term debt obligations when they marry and need only hunt or provide other services to their in-laws during the early stages in their marriage. In bride-wealth societies, the exchange of bride-wealth valuables between male heads of families sharply defines the social statuses of husband, wife, parent, and child. The social importance of bride-wealth cattle gives a man more of a vested interest in the marriages of his brothers and sisters than he might have in a bride-service society.

Bride-wealth has sometimes been called bride-price by anthropologists, who may even refer to wife markets, but these terms are better avoided because they imply purchase and incorrectly suggest that women are chattels in cattle societies. With the Nuer, this is certainly *not* the case because women have the final say over who they marry. It would be foolish for a father to force his daughter into a marriage against her wishes because bride-wealth cattle would have to be returned in the event

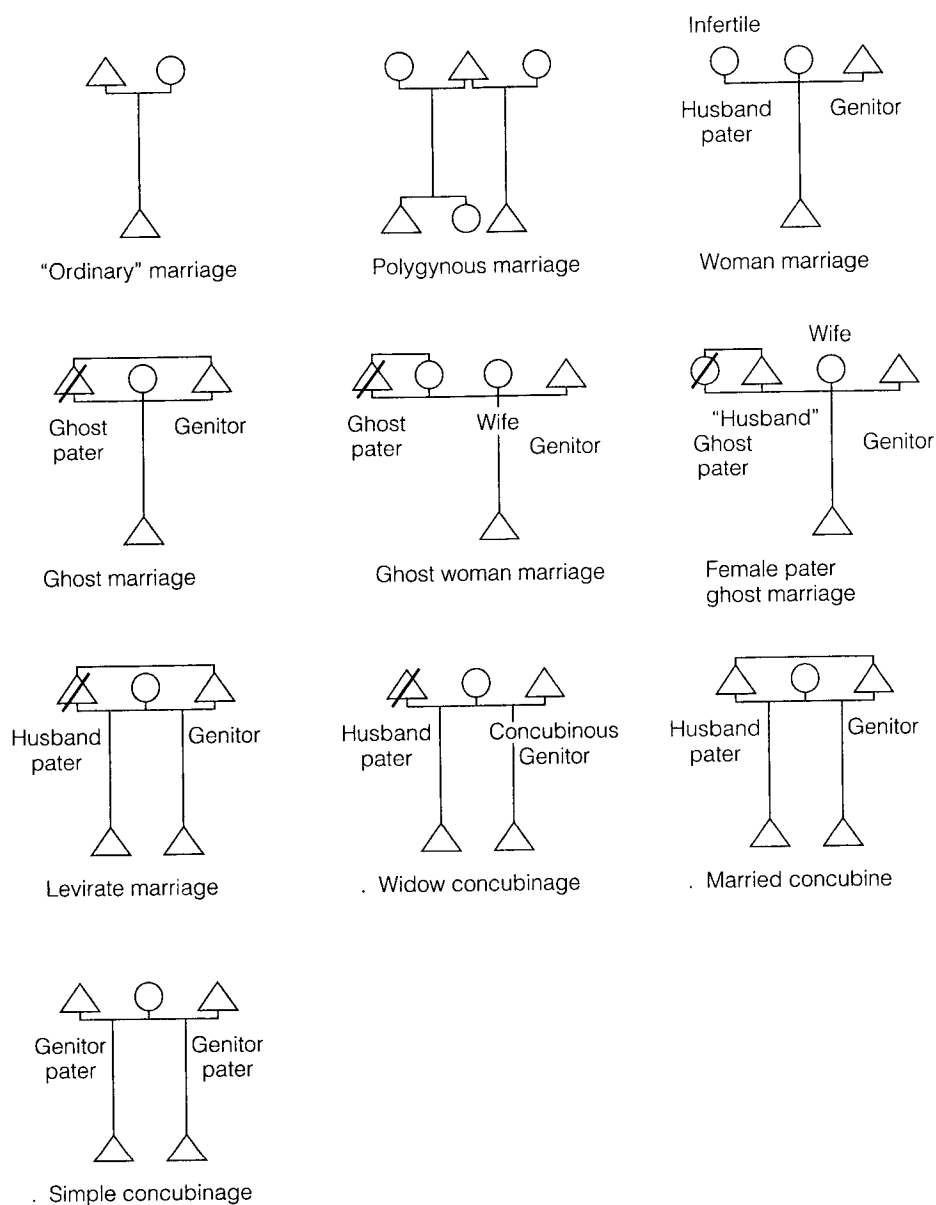
genitor The biological father of a child.

pater The culturally legitimate, or sociological, father of a child.

levirate A cultural pattern in which a woman marries a brother of her deceased husband.

bride-service The cultural expectation that a newly married husband will perform certain tasks for his in-laws.

FIGURE 4.9
Nuer forms of marriage.
 (SOURCE: Evans-Pritchard 1951.)



of a divorce before children were born to the marriage. There are, however, inequalities of age and sex built into the system. The marriage transaction gives a man, or a woman acting as a man, the right to establish paternity, to claim cattle as an indemnity for adultery, and to claim cattle when his wife's daughters marry. Men in this system sometimes explicitly equate women with cattle because, when

women are "given" in marriage, they bring cattle in exchange.

From a Marxist perspective, marriage in such systems is considered an instrument of political power that allows men to gain rights to exploit a woman's reproductive powers and the labor that it produces (Meillassoux 1981). This could be considered the case because, through marriage, a man

Cattle and Kinship Terminology

The importance of bride-wealth exchanges is also seen in the kinship terminologies of cattle peoples. The Nuer, and related northern Nilotic groups, are noted for using highly descriptive kinship systems (sometimes called Sudanese) that place each of ego's cousins in a distinctive category based on terms that are combinations of terms applied to primary relatives, as in the English expression "father's sister's daughter." This makes sense given the different positions these kin take with respect to bride-wealth cattle and because none of them are marriageable. It is important for people to distinguish between kin on mother's side and father's side and between distinct groups of kin related through males, because that is the primary line through which cattle and rights in cattle are inherited. Cattle, as moveable property with important social, ritual, and economic significance, make all the difference. The Iroquois kinship systems of Australian aborigines and Native Amazonians (see Chapters 2 and 3) need to make fewer distinctions and can merge kin on father's and mother's sides.

The Maasai kinship system represents another type commonly associated with groups that emphasize the rights of kin related through males and where complex property relations must also be distinguished. In this system, which is usually called Omaha, ego groups mother's agnates (kin related through males) into a single category regardless of generation (Figure 4.10). A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1941) originally interpreted this as the operation of the principle of the unity of the lineage group, inferring that males of mother's patrilineage were treated as a single group, which reflects the fact that ego did not actually belong to the group but was still connected to it in important ways. Such an interpretation is not a fully adequate explanation for why the Maasai have Omaha terminology, but it does make the system understandable.

gains the labor not only of his wife but also of his sons, who will work as herdsman, and his daughters, who will be gardeners and milkmaids along with their mothers, until they move to their husband's households. Furthermore, young men are also being dominated because it is the male elders who ultimately control the cattle that young men need to marry, just as in aboriginal Australia the old men controlled ritual knowledge and the initiation process that were the requirements for adulthood. There are explicit dependency relationships here between men and women and young and old. Equating this with the domination and exploitation that produces poverty in large-scale societies and

divides households by social class is misleading because households in small-scale societies have relatively equal access to strategic resources such as food and shelter. (See the box entitled, "Cattle and Kinship Terminology.")

Understanding Nuer Descent Groups

How did outsiders' views of Nuer descent groups differ from the Nuer interpretation of their social divisions?

Evans-Pritchard devised a remarkably ingenious model to describe the political organization of Nuer society. The Nuer, with a population of some

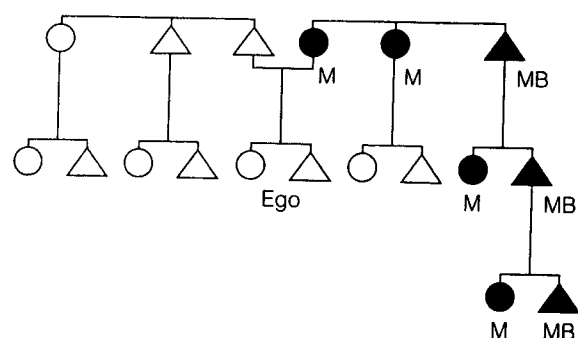


FIGURE 4.10 Omaha kinship terminology system, which emphasizes mother's patrilineage.

300,000 in the 1930s, were said to be organized by clans, lineages, and territorial groups into an *acephalous*, or headless, political system, which operated in the absence of formal political offices (Evans-Pritchard 1940). The clans and lineages were descent groups thought to be based on an "*agnatic* principle," which meant that they recruited members exclusively through males by means of patrilineal descent or *filiation*. In Evans-Pritchard's scheme, the highest descent-based unit was the clan, which was composed of maximal, major, minor, and minimal lineages at the lowest level. These units corresponded to the territorial units with the tribe at the top and primary, secondary, and tertiary tribal sections down to the village community at the lowest territorial level.

This system could be represented in a tidy diagram (Figure 4.11a), but the Nuer themselves may well understand it differently, as Michel Verdon (1982) suggests. The Nuer apparently have no term in their own language for clan or lineage; when Evans-Pritchard pressed them for lineage affiliations, he found that it was most difficult to make them understand what he wanted to know. He was able to obtain names for lineage segments, but these were merely the names of particular ancestors. When he asked the Nuer to draw their lineages, they came up with lines radiating from a center (Figure 4.11b), not the branching trees and pyramids that he preferred. He also observed that "lineages" did not in fact form discrete localized groups. That is, the members of a lineage often did not live in the same village, nor were they strictly patrilineal. He found that lineages often incorpo-

rated children filiated through women or through adoption.

Despite the inconsistencies, Evans-Pritchard (1940) declared that clans and lineages appeared on ritual occasions when people made sacrifices to their ancestors, when groups mobilized to settle disputes, or for raids and feuds. Such ephemeral descent groups acquired their own reality in the anthropological literature—especially in the work of British functionalists in Africa, where they became standard descriptive devices, and in major comparative studies. However, regardless of whether the Nuer linguistically identify clans and lineages, they do divide their society into nested levels of inclusiveness, based on their assumptions about relations to ancestors and territory. Perhaps most importantly, they do successfully organize large numbers of people without central political authority.

When it became obvious that the natives were not very concerned with the purity or even the existence of their descent groups, some argued that descent was simply "ideology." Sahlins (1965) observed that different ideological models of descent organization could be projected onto the same arrangement of people. A given group might, for example, consider themselves to be patrilineal, matrilineal, or even bilateral, without making any changes in individuals. Descent thus became a cultural fiction that people adopted for whatever purpose and then imposed on themselves.

As anthropological models, lineages and clans grew out of nineteenth-century evolutionary theories that viewed them as stages on the way to statehood, according to Adam Kuper (1982). A clan-based society was thought to represent an evolutionary advance over societies organized only by families, but because they were still based on kinship or the biology of descent, clan societies were considered to be more "primitive" than territorially organized states. Lineages and clans were thought to be equivalent to corporate legal entities that, like business corporations, existed in perpetuity apart from their individual members. However, in case after case, critical examination showed that clans and lineages did not form consistent, culturally recognized units. East African pastoralists do remember ancestors, and they marry outside of specific categories of kin; but, like Australian aborigines, they seem not to organize themselves into cor-

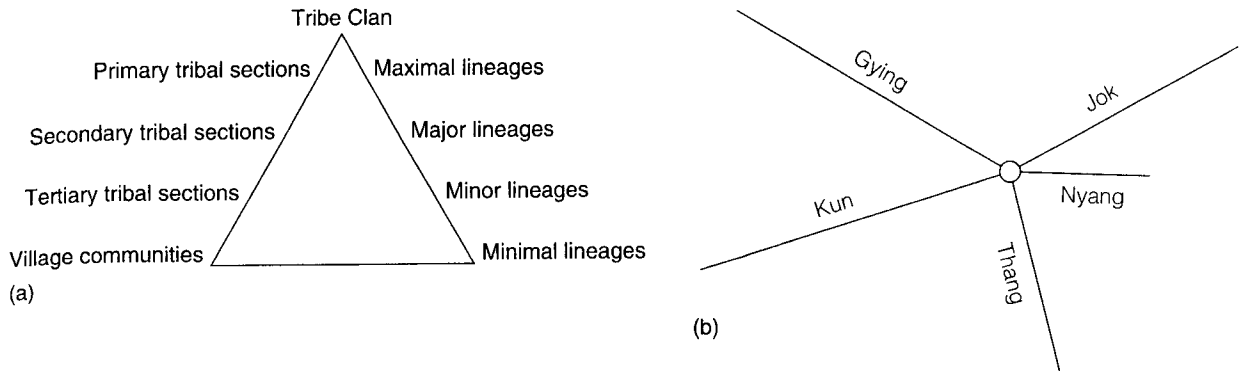


FIGURE 4.11 The segmentary lineage of Nuer society as devised by (a) Evans-Pritchard (1940) and (b) the Nuer themselves.

porate descent groups. Instead, their lives are organized around politically autonomous villages, households, and overlapping networks of kinship. The Nuer categories that Evans-Pritchard called *patrilineages* have also been described as interest groups concerned with claims in cattle (Verdon 1982). Ranked descent lines may be traced to elite persons in hierarchically organized societies; in such cases, "royal" or "noble" clans and lineages may be culturally significant, but such is not the case with the Nuer, or the other African pastoralists considered here.

Leopard-Skin Chiefs and Politics in Headless Societies

How do the Nuer organize themselves politically in the absence of centralized political authority? What were the roles of cattle, locality, and the leopard-skin chiefs?

Before his 1965 critique of descent theory, Marshall Sahlins (1961) suggested that the Nuer were a critical "type specimen" of the *segmentary lineage system* operating as a political mechanism for "predatory expansion" by tribal societies against other tribal societies contesting a common ecological niche. Thus, segmentary lineages made a sort of ordered anarchy possible in acephalous (headless) societies lacking a permanent ranking system, formal political offices, or government institutions. In his early reading of Nuer ethnography, Sahlins

ignored the repeated evidence that lineages were not culturally recognized and that local residential groups did not represent descent groups. He accepted Evans-Pritchard's contention that local villages were organized around lineages and lineage principles and argued that sociability increased with spatial and genealogical proximity. The lineage structure determined the severity of conflict and what groups would mobilize.

If the Nuer were not really organized around segmentary lineages, how did they handle conflict without resorting to political hierarchy? This is no small problem because we are talking about relatively large societies that make Australian and Amazonian societies seem insignificant in comparison. Government census figures for 1955–1956 list some 460,000 Nuer and 1.152 million Dinka, a closely related group (Southall 1976). Organizing this many people into a vast network of politically

acephalous A political system without central authority or permanent leaders.

agnatic Kin who are related through male links.

filiation A parent–child relationship link used as a basis for descent-group membership.

patrilineage A lineage based on descent traced through a line of men to a common male ancestor and sharing a joint estate.

segmentary lineage system A system in which complementary opposition and genealogical principles of unilineal descent are used by residential groups as a basis for political mobilization in the absence of centralized political leadership.



FIGURE 4.12 *The Nuer leopard-skin chiefs were mediators rather than political leaders.*

autonomous villages, each with no more than a few hundred people, must be recognized as a major achievement.

The key feature of the Nuer segmentary system was **complementary opposition**, or what Sahlins called the "massing effect," which means that political alliances form according to the affiliation of individual combatants. So, for example, if a conflict developed between two villages, members of other villages would not join in; but if someone stole a cow from another district, then neighboring villages might form a temporary alliance against the perceived common enemy. Similarly, all members of an ethnic group might move against a different ethnic group. All of this was very similar to the type of conflict described for Amazonian groups but on a larger scale.

Evans-Pritchard (1940) described a political system with increasing levels of violence as social

distance increased. Within a village, men might fight with clubs, but serious disputes would be settled quickly. Between villages men might fight with spears, and blood feuds were possible, but cattle could be accepted as compensation for homicide. Raiding for cattle routinely occurred between more distant groups of Nuer villages, which Evans-Pritchard designated as tribes but which were probably shifting alliances of adjacent villages. Women and children and granaries were spared in "intertribal" raiding, but they might not be spared in raids against non-Nuer groups such as the Dinka, who nevertheless developed from a common culture.

Conflicts seemed to arise primarily over cattle, either from cattle raiding or from disputes over unpaid bride-wealth transfers. Homicides could lead to feuds between kin groups, which could lead to further vengeance killings as in Amazonia, but among the Nuer there was a mechanism for mediation. Specific individuals, who Evans-Pritchard (1940) called **leopard-skin chiefs**, served as mediators and attempted to persuade the conflicting parties to settle the dispute by means of compensation in the form of cattle transfer (Figure 4.12). Leopard-skin chiefs were respected as ritual practitioners and as mediators, but they were not chiefs with political authority. In his mediator role, the chief was expected to threaten to curse a reluctant party with supernatural sanctions but, in fact, had no coercive power.

Although cattle are a major cause of conflict, they are also an incentive for reducing conflict. Intervillage feuding would disrupt bride-wealth transfers because wide extension of incest restrictions, which reduces confusion in bride-wealth transfers, means that villages are usually exogamous. This divides the loyalties of people who might be obligated to support one another in blood feuds as co-villagers, as close kin, or as claimants to bride-wealth cattle. It is thus virtually in everyone's self-interest to reduce feuding to an absolute minimum. By crosscutting village membership in this way, small-scale societies create what has been called the **peace in the feud** (Gluckman 1956). It appears both that cattle made possible increased population densities and that their cultural use provided an incentive and a mechanism for limiting the feud.

Viewed in its own terms, Nuer politics makes perfectly good sense for a small-scale society of autonomous villages maximizing equality and economic self-sufficiency. The advantage of the segmentary system was that it came into effect only when it was needed. It seems to have given the Nuer a decisive advantage in their raids for Dinka cattle and allowed them to steadily gain territory at the expense of the Dinka. Some observers have called Nuer expansion a "conquest" and "tribal imperialism" (Kelly 1985), but such terms are more applicable to war conducted by a central authority. It is important to distinguish between wars of conquest as state policy and raids and feuds between small-scale societies. Nuer expansion, a relatively gradual process over many decades, involved steady incorporation of the Dinka through intermarriage and adoption, with a relatively small loss of life, because the Dinka were consistently harassed by Nuer raiders. Because the Nuer and Dinka are such close cultural relatives, the issue of the Nuer conquest raises the question of ethnic identity in small-scale societies (see the box entitled, "Ethnic Identity: Who Are the Nuer? Who Are the Maasai?").

Nuer Spirits, Symbolism, and Sacrifice

How do the Nuer construct their collective religious beliefs around the concept of Spirit? In what respects is their religion egalitarian? What is the symbolic religious role of cattle?

The religious beliefs of African pastoralists such as the Nuer and Maasai are primarily expressed in life-cycle rituals or during other crisis events, such as drought and disease, and often feature the sacrifice of animals. The most basic distinctions in Nuer cosmology are made between Spirit and Creation, or between the immaterial and material worlds, which exist in complementary opposition (Beidelman 1966, 1971). When people show proper respect (*thek*) for these distinctions, their lives can normally be expected to go smoothly; misfortune occurs, however, when these categories intrude on each other, either in natural events or due to immoral human actions involving natural categories or human society. Failure to observe incest restrictions, for example, can bring illness. Confusion of categories causes **ritual pollution**, or contamination by "dirt," as "matter out of place" (Douglas

1966:35). Sacrifice and ritual can restore the previous order by mediating between the opposing principles of Spirit and Creation.

In Evans-Pritchard's (1953) analysis of the Nuer concept of Spirit (his translation for the Nuer word, *Kwoth*), he described a hierarchy of spirit manifestations ranked from high to low and with distinctions based on their location and social associations (Table 4.6). He felt that all of these different spirits were simply different "refractions" of a single unitary Spirit concept. The highest level is called God and is considered to be a pure spirit who is located in the sky and is associated with humanity in general. Genealogically, he may be referred to as father, but his involvement with human affairs is indirect. The air spirits occur at a lower level, in the atmosphere, and are represented by charismatic religious specialists known as prophets who are thought to communicate directly with these spirits. They may help warriors prepare themselves spiritually for cattle raiding and may be instrumental in organizing relatively large-scale military expeditions. Lower-level spirits may be manifest in animals and objects and are associated with kin groups and individuals. There are many ritual specialists including earth priests, cattle priests, and grass priests, to name a few, and a wide range of curers and diviners, all of whom maintain special relationships with these spirits. According to T. O. Beidelman's (1966, 1971) analysis, Nuer religious specialists demonstrate their association with Spirit by assuming the ambiguous characteristics of confused categories. Prophets have long hair and beards, wear clothing, and appear unkempt, when ordinary Nuer would be unclothed, clean-shaven, and neat. They accomplish their role as mediators

complementary opposition A situation in which people assume a group identity in political opposition to another group at the same level.

leopard-skin chief A respected Nuer religious practitioner who served as a conflict mediator. He was not a political leader and could use only ritual sanctions.

peace in the feud The divided loyalties of individuals in small-scale societies caused by overlapping networks of kinship and marriage that provide important incentives for ending feuds.

ritual pollution A dangerous spiritual condition caused by symbolically opposed categories becoming mixed or confused.

**Ethnic Identity:
Who Are the
Nuer? Who Are
the Maasai?**

The distribution map of Nilotic-speaking ethnic groups in the upper Nile does suggest that a rapid military conquest of the Dinka by the Nuer occurred along the "predatory expansion" lines suggested by Marshall Sahlins (1961) and Raymond Kelly (1985) (Figure 4.13), especially given the Nuer predilection for raiding Dinka cattle and their negative stereotype of the Dinka. Kelly even suggests that the Nuer motive for expansion was their higher bride-wealth rates. The conquest theory originated with the early British administrators and explorers who were themselves members of a conquest society, and it is hardly surprising that they were quick to see evidence of imperialism among peoples they were themselves conquering. Peter Newcomer (1972) challenged the conquest theory and initiated the debate over Nuer identity. Newcomer asserted that the Nuer were, in fact, originally a Dinka subgroup who were lucky enough to develop the segmentary system as a social mutation that gave them an advantage over other Dinka in competition for finite pastoral resources. In this view, the Nuer were simply Dinka who became more successful raiders.

Newcomer's argument, which was elaborated by Maurice Glickman (1972), is that the Nuer became more effective cattle raiders because herders from different Nuer villages were forced to interact amicably in dry-season cattle camps and found it easy to form intervillage raiding parties. In contrast, the Dinka occupied more favorable grazing lands, made less extensive seasonal moves, and consequently did not need to develop the elaborate social network that formed the basis of Nuer "segmentation." Thus, ecological factors related to cattle herding might account for the superior organizational ability of the Nuer (Glickman 1972).

This discussion still leaves unanswered the question of who the Nuer are. A careful reader of Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* might be surprised to learn that the Nuer do not call themselves "Nuer." They are "Nath" or "Naath." In a footnote, we find that "the word 'Nuer' is sanctioned by a century of usage" and is what the Naath are called by the Dinka and all other outsiders, we might add. The Dinka, in turn, call themselves "Jieng." In both cases, as so often occurs with ethnic self-appellations, the words *Naath* and *Jieng* mean "people" (Southall 1976). When both Nuer and Dinka speak of an individual person, they use the same term, *Raan*. Linguists refer to the "Nuer" and "Dinka" languages, but they are closely related, and both are divided into many dialects such that the differences between any two Dinka dialects might be greater than between two Nuer and Dinka dialects. Thus, even treating Nuer and Dinka as two distinct languages is somewhat of a "convenient fiction" to facilitate communication among linguists, missionaries, anthropologists, and government administrators (Southall 1976).

Calling the Nuer Naath only shifts the question to, Who are the Naath? The Nuer become as difficult to pin down as their phantom segmentary lineages. Because there is no permanent Nuer tribal entity, it follows that there is no Nuer "tribe." Indeed, anthropologist John Burton declares, "Such ethnic designation as 'Nuer' and 'Dinka' . . . are at best marginally indicative of observable interethnic relations and associations" (1981:157). The only consensus, apparently shared by the Nuer and the Dinka and their observers, is that the Nuer raid cattle from the Dinka.

The absence of fixed boundaries between Nuer and Dinka frustrated British administrators for years. The Nuer and Dinka freely intermarry, and cattle move between them as booty and as bride-wealth. Someone might grow up as a Dinka and be initiated as a Nuer. There are other rituals that convert adult Dinka into Nuer. Indeed, the two apparent ethnic categories share so many cultural traits that in mixed camps they may tell each other apart most easily by referring to physical difference in their cattle. In the final analysis, it seems that "true Nuer" are those who are the most successful herders in a given community. In this case, the Nuer and Dinka are not only people, but as Burton observes, "They are first of all pastoralists rather than antagonistic representatives of supposedly pure ethnic groups. . . . Ethnicity therefore moves on the hoof" (1981:160, 161).

John Galaty (1982) examined the problem of ethnic identity from the viewpoint of another Nilotic people, the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania. According to Maasai ethnosociology (how a society views its own cultural identity), the Maasai are speakers of the Maa language who belong to any of a number of named tribal sections of a single Maasai "nation," which has no formal political organization. The term *Maasai* literally means "I will not beg" and is a frequently used polite expression associated with the dominant Maasai values of bravery and arrogance. In their self-designation, Maasai also call attention to the beads that are featured in their dress and, most prominently, to their association with cattle. In their own eyes, the Maasai are "people of cattle." However, as the term *Maasai* is used, it has multiple meanings that shift depending on context. Galaty has represented this as a series of three nested triangles of three sets of contrasting identities, based on distance from a central Maasai identity (Figure 4.14). In the widest context (triangle A in the diagram), Maasai speakers see themselves as pastoralists distinguished from other people who emphasize hunting or farming for their subsistence. Non-Maasai-speaking pastoral peoples, such as the Somali, may be considered "Maasai" in deference to their herding and are treated with special respect. At a second level, encompassing all Maasai speakers, there are specific

categories based on dominant economy, such that Maasai who hunt are called *Torrobo*, those who farm are *Ilkurrman*, and "other Maasai" herders are *Iloikop*. Thus, at this level, common descent from mythical Maasai ancestors is invoked to verify one's Maasai identity even when herding is not practiced. Closest to the center, Maasai blacksmiths are *Ilkunono*, diviners are *Iloibonok*, and ordinary herders are called *Ilomet* by Maasai blacksmiths and diviners. Because the specific meaning of Maasai and the nine related social categories are so dependent on the context in which the terms are used, the confusion experienced by colonial-era Europeans when they attempted to elicit East African "tribal" names is understandable. They were looking for discrete, territorially based, politically organized "tribes," led by "chiefs" with whom they could sign treaties, and that they could "administer" as colonial dependencies. In reality, things were not that simple.

between Spirit and Creation because they partake of both categories and are thus in position to realign them. When anyone performs a ritual sacrifice, he, in effect, helps restore the cosmic order.

The preferred sacrificial animal is an ox (a bull, castrated at maturity), and every sacrifice is called an ox even when a sheep or goat is used. Because cattle are only slaughtered on ritual occasions and because herds are managed for maximum growth potential and milk production, it is reasonable on strictly utilitarian grounds that male animals would be sacrificed. However, Beidelman (1966) argues that oxen are chosen for sacrifice because of their close symbolic association with men and because oxen are male animals but sterile, thus in an ambiguous category making them ideal mediators between Spirit and Creation. Nuer cows are equated with women. Nuer women are allocated cows from bride-wealth, and women may be named after the cows that they milk. Men have ox names and a favorite ox, which is "initiated" with cuts on its horns that duplicate the deep incisions that are made on the foreheads of Nuer young men at their initiations. Young men marry after their initiation, but their oxen (technically bulls until that point) are then castrated. Beidelman stresses the parallels between marriage and restrained sexual morality for men and castration as moral domestication of the animal. Some men are called bulls, but, like real bulls, they are seen as aggressive and troublesome.

Even with the ethnographic reports of high gods, priests, and prophets for cattle pastoralists, these ideological systems are essentially egalitarian. There is no codified religious system and no fraternity of religious specialists. Spirit possession is available to anyone. Individuals retain a brief identity after death in relation to cattle and children, but there is no ancestor cult. Any man can perform sacrifices, and the political roles that prophets and leopard-skin chiefs play are strictly

FIGURE 4.13 *The Nuer and neighboring peoples.*

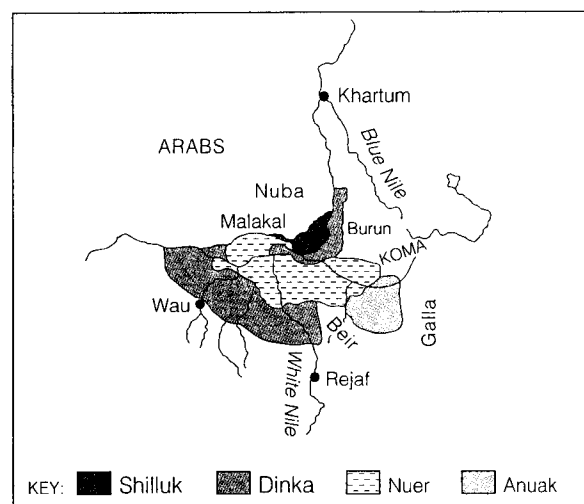
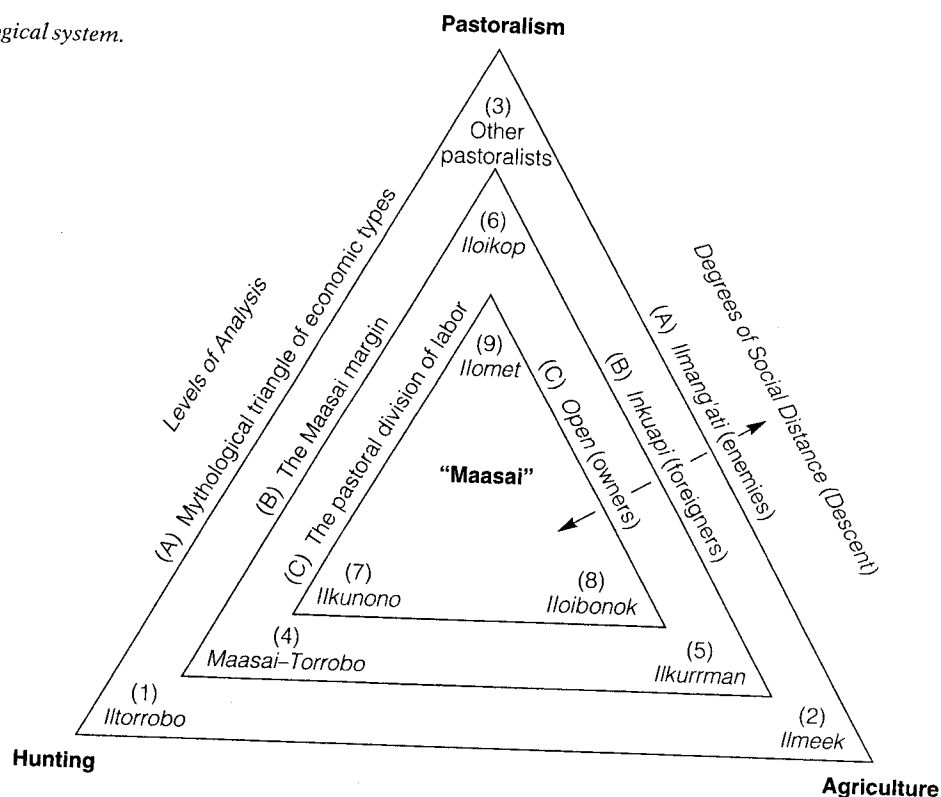


FIGURE 4.14
The Maasai ethnosociological system.



limited. These roles do not give them control over strategic resources or allow them to extract labor or tribute. At least one especially charismatic nineteenth-century Nuer prophet gained enough

influence to convince people to erect a dirt-mound pyramid shrine, but he was unable to convert it into permanent political power or an enduring ancestor cult.

TABLE 4.6 The Nuer Concept of Spirit (Kwoth)

Spirit Type	Location	Social Association	Manifestation	Genealogy	Rank
God	Sky	Humanity	Pure spirit	Father	Aristocratic
Air spirits	Air, clouds, breezes	Political movements, raiding	Prophets	Upper: God's children Lower: God's grandchildren	
Totemic spirits	Earth	Kinship groups	Animals	Children of God's daughters	Dinka-like
Nature, spirits, fetishes	Earth, underworld	Individuals	Things	Children of daughters of air spirit	Foreigners

SOURCE: Evans-Pritchard (1953).

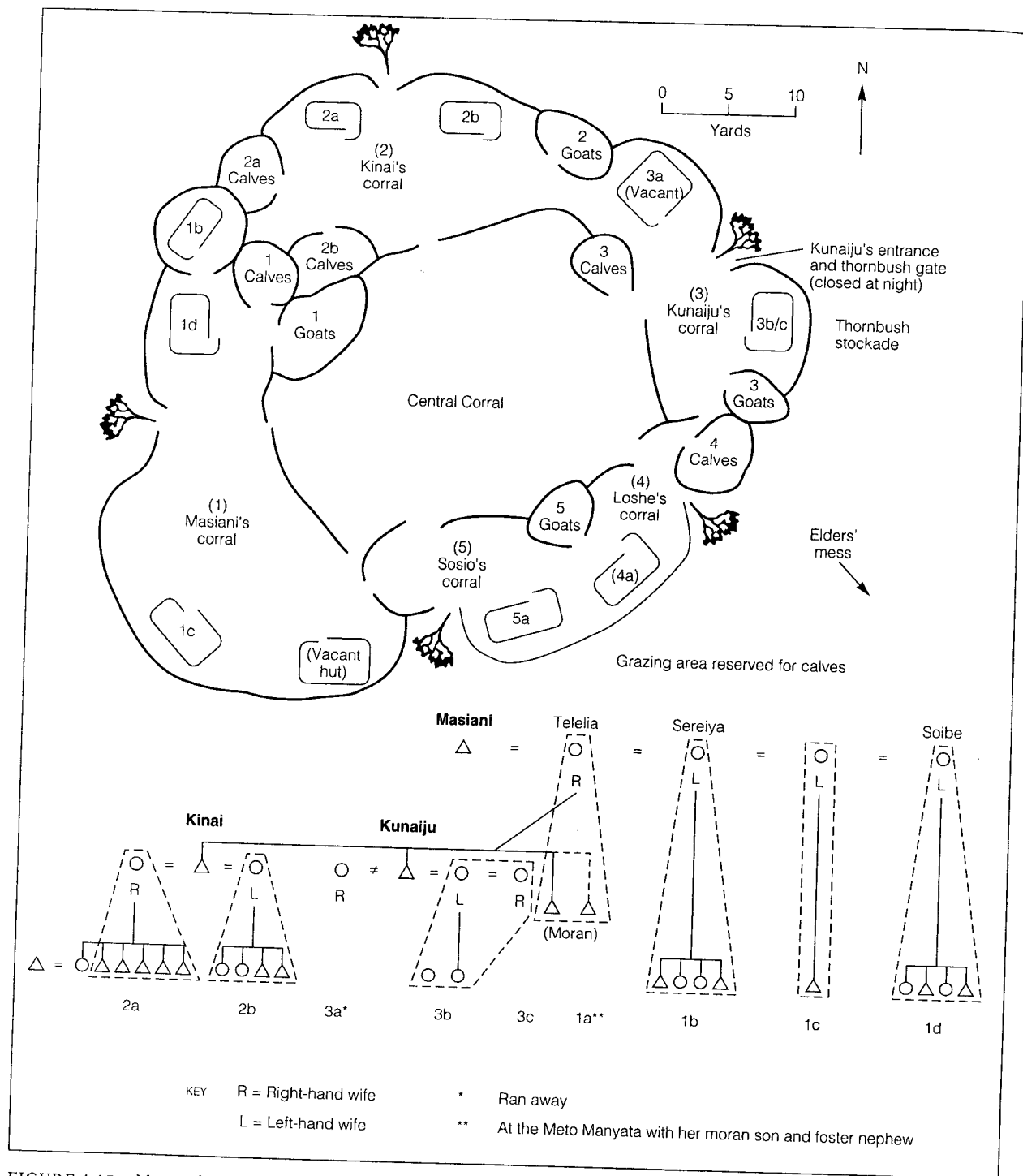


FIGURE 4.15 Maasai homestead. (SOURCE: Spencer 1988.)

The Maasai Age-Class System

How does age organize Maasai society? How do age classes contribute to social solidarity?

The Maasai pastoral system has remained viable even after years of colonial rule, cycles of drought and disease, persistent penetration by the market economy, and political control by the modern independent states of Kenya and Tanzania. African pastoralism has proven to have remarkable resilience, to not only the natural environment but also the wider political economy surrounding it. The Maasai demonstrate that a small-scale culture based on subsistence herding organized at a family level can maintain a high degree of social equality and autonomy while coexisting with larger-scale social systems. Anthropologist Paul Spencer (1988) argues that perhaps the principal reason for the success of Maasai pastoralism is not the pervasiveness of "cattle complex values" but the personal rewards offered by the *age-class system* common to many East African cattle peoples.

Maasai pastoralism, in its ideal form, represents the extreme in subsistence dependence on herding by African cattle peoples. As described by Spencer, the Maasai system depends on three critical social roles: the elders, who control normal herding activities; the wives, who do the milking and take care of the animals within the domestic compound; and the *moran*, unmarried warriors who until recently raided for cattle. The Maasai settlement pattern resembles the Nuer pattern described previously. Family herds are managed by the male heads of households, which are ideally polygynous. A man's married sons live in the same homestead compound (Figure 4.15), with their individual corrals grouped around a common corral. Control by the older men over the wives and children is a more overt cultural pattern with the Maasai than among the Nuer and is perhaps a reflection of the subsistence dominance of herding for the Maasai. Marriages are entirely arranged by a girl's father, who selects a future husband for her from among her suitors. It is also assumed that men will make the important decisions concerning the cattle, and they may beat wives who flout their authority.

As is frequently the case with polygynous societies, women marry at a very young age, whereas

men marry significantly later. This arrangement makes polygyny possible and makes it the prerogative of the older men, as in aboriginal Australia. With the Maasai surveyed by Spencer (1988), only 16 percent of the young men age 18–25 years were married, and none polygynously, whereas 60 percent of the men over 40 (ages 41–70 years) had more than one wife. Polygyny offers direct advantages to the herd manager because it increases his labor force and allows him to subdivide responsibility for his animals.

The age-class system with its associated ritual helps balance the social stresses created by polygyny and patriarchy. Life stages and generation levels are marked by a series of rituals that occur throughout an individual's lifetime (Table 4.7). Step by step, prepubescent children are named, their heads are shaved, their lower incisors are removed, and their ears are pierced and stretched. Each ceremony indicates increasing maturity. Removal of the lower incisors, for example, means that a young boy is old enough to herd livestock near the homestead, but he does not go far afield with the animals until he is old enough to tolerate large incisions in his ear lobes. A calf is ritually slaughtered at the first stage of adulthood, but this must occur after the father has been ritually inducted into his status as a full elder by having an ox ritually slaughtered and after the mother has ritually completed the process of her marriage. The spacing of these two ceremonies thus marks a generation. Ceremonies surrounding initiation make the initiation process a ritual rebirth, and the initiate symbolically becomes a dependent child. Initiation itself is marked by genital mutilation—clitoridectomy for girls and circumcision for boys. Shortly after the operation, girls are led to their new husband's homesteads as brides, and boys move through other ceremonies that ritually separate them from their status as children and prepare them for *moranhood*. Only males participate in the age-class system. Age groupings are sometimes described using a variety of terms, but in this discussion, which follows the definitions

age-class system A system in which individuals of similar age are placed in a named group and moved as a unit through the culturally defined stages of life. Specific rituals mark each change in age status.

TABLE 4.7 *Maasai Age Grades*

Grade	Age*	Feature
Senior elder	50+	Religious and ritual power, charisma of old age assumed
Great Ox Ceremony—Precedes Son's Initiation		
Junior elders	35–50	Incest avoidance of daughters of the age class, not expected to fight, have power to curse, sponsor new age class
Olngesher Ceremony—Moran Become Elders, Age Class United and Named		
Senior <i>moran</i>	20–35	Preparation of elderhood, may marry, meat and milk avoidances lifted
Eunoto Ceremony		
Junior <i>moran</i>	15–20	Wear red ochre, braid hair, dance with girls, have distinctive spears, perform ritual rebellion, form <i>manyata</i> warrior village, avoid meat and milk
Initiates	12–15	Age mates begin to associate distinctive regalia
Circumcision Ceremony		
Boyhood	10–12	Earlobes cut and stretched, work as herdboys
Childhood	0–10	Naming, lower incisors removed

SOURCE: Spencer (1965, 1988).

*Age intervals overlap because the actual age of specific individuals in a particular grade will vary widely.

employed by Bernardo Bernardi (1985), age class refers to the group of people who are promoted together through the same sequence of *age grades*, or culturally designated stages. The age class is here equivalent to the age set or age group of some authors. Males of roughly the same age move as a class sequentially through a series of subgrades from boyhood, to warriorhood (or the *moran* grade), to elderhood, and finally retirement. Age classes are named, and the members of each class carry a distinct style of hand-forged iron spear and form a fraternity (Larick 1986).

Each tribal section independently operates its own age-class system. A new class is formed roughly every 15 years under the sponsorship of the elders who are two classes ahead of them, or approximately 30 years their senior, and who will

serve as patrons of the new class. The recruitment period for each class is ritually closed by the elders in the class immediately senior to it. Each class is, in effect, forced up the age-grade ladder by the demands of the youths below who do not want to be the last to join a class that is about to advance. Late recruits experience a foreshortened time period in the favored warrior grade. The extended time during which a given age class can recruit means that there will be a relatively wide spread of ages within a given class; some Maasai set up junior and senior subsets within a single class, granting each different privileges and moving each subset through their own ritual stages of maturation. When the youngest subset of a class enters the grade of elderhood, the entire class assumes a single name.

The highlight of the entire age sequence is the *moran* grade, which young men enter after going through ceremonies that ritually separate them from their natal families. As *moran*, they become the warrior protectors of their communities; at the same time, however, these young men form their own egalitarian community of age mates united by special bonds of loyalty and shared experience. Freed from domestic routines and still unmarried, the novice *moran* are expected to dress in special finery, wear their hair in braids, dance and display, and carry on with young girls. Traditionally, they conducted raids to capture cattle and defended the local herds against raiders and lions. The most important privilege of the *moran* is the few years they spend in segregated warrior villages, known as *manyat* (singular, *manyata*), which are set up to defend individual districts. The *moran* flaunt their independence and live the communalistic ideals of *moran* brotherhood in their *manyat*. The supreme ideal of the *manyata* is represented by individual warriors known as "diehards" who pledge themselves to die in combat rather than retreat (Figure 4.16).

To establish the *manyata*, the *moran* conduct raids on their parental homes and carry off their mothers and small herds of cattle, sometimes against the protests of their fathers. As Spencer (1988) points out, this is clearly a ritual rebellion against the father's patriarchal control and has obvious Freudian overtones. The *manyat* villages of the *moran* are organized around egalitarian and communalistic principles in direct opposition to

FIGURE 4.16 *Maasai warriors.*

the age hierarchy and individualism of the domestic homestead.

The midpoint of *moranhood* is ritually marked by an extended ceremony known as *eunoto*, which begins 5 years into the grade and initiates a 10-year series of steps leading to elderhood. After this ceremony, a *moran* may be expected to marry. In the *eunoto*, the *manyat* villages are disbanded, and the combined age class is formally launched. This ceremony involves a spectacular display of massed warriors that even attracts fee-paying European tourists and film crews.

Although many ceremonial phases of the Maasai age-class system incorporate ritualized rebellions against parental authority, the excesses of the *moran* are held in check, and they are guided through the maturation process by their elder patrons, who maintain ultimate control by their power to curse their charges. It could certainly be argued that the age-class system constructively channels the otherwise potentially disruptive energies of the young men who grow up as subservient herdboys and must wait at least 10 years before they can marry. Spencer (1988) suggests that the age system diverts the stresses that are inherent in the family system away from the senior male household heads to elders in general. In some respects, the *manyata*

phase placed the *moran* in what Arnold van Gennep (1909) would call a *liminal phase*. It is a rite of transition in which the *moran* are ritually suspended in the space between being herdboys and elders.

The age-class system is functionally related to incest avoidance and marriage practices in a mutually reinforcing way. Spencer (1988) points out that Maasai incest restrictions are more elaborated toward daughters and mothers-in-law than for mothers and sisters. This is apparently because a system of age-class exogamy operates in which the men of one age class marry the daughters of the men in the class senior to them, rather than marrying the daughters of their own age mates. The age classes are thus linked by marriage alliances, such as might operate between exogamous clans. This reinforces the respect that must obtain between junior and senior classes if the age-class system is to survive as a whole because the junior class will find their fathers-in-law in the senior class. Age-

age grade A culturally defined stage of an age-class system such as childhood, adolescence, parenthood, and old age.

liminal phase An ambiguous phase of ritual transition in which one is on the threshold between two states.

Maasai Women

In the film *Maasai Women*, anthropologist Melissa Llewelyn-Davies, who speaks the Maasai language and has some 10 years' research experience with the Maasai, engages several Maasai women in a free-ranging discussion about their experiences as women. In their own words, these Maasai women define and accept as a given the gender roles of their culture. Women milk cows, bear children, and build their own houses. A woman "has nothing." They care for animals and have milking rights but no ownership rights over them. Men make the decisions about herds. Yet in this discussion with a sympathetic and knowledgeable nonnative woman, the Maasai women are quick to place their own cultural roles in a positive light. Clitoridectomy (female circumcision), which is strongly condemned by international feminists, is defended as something "we've always done." One woman explains, "It is something God began long ago. A girl wants to hurry up and be circumcised. It is a very good thing." When Llewelyn-Davies asks if the initiate is happy about the experience, she is told emphatically that she is "very happy" because the girl will then be thought of as a woman and will be able to marry soon.

Female circumcision may not be fully supported by all Maasai women, regardless of what they say about it. It may not even be a functionally irreplaceable part of their culture. In this case, women themselves perpetuate customs that may not be in their best interests.

In the film, the women tell Llewelyn-Davies that although they accept arranged marriages to old men, they are not always happy about it and may select young warriors as lovers even though their husbands would be angry if they found out. When Llewelyn-Davies raises the possibility of women being jealous over young co-wives in this polygynous society, a Maasai woman declares:

We're not jealous like you Europeans. . . . To us a co-wife is something very good because there is much work to do. When it rains, the village gets mucky and it's you who clears it out. It's you who looks after the cows. You do the milking, and your husband may have very many cows. That's a lot of work. You have to milk and smear the roof and see to the calves. . . . So when you give birth and it rains, who will smear the roof if you have no co-wife? No one. Who will clear the muck from the village? No one. So Maasai aren't jealous because of all this work.

However, the film also shows women greeting new co-wives with open, "ritualized" hostility.

It is a hard life, but there are rewards. After a girl's initiation, a group of women in the film sing,

Listen God to what suits women. It suits us to prepare charms for the initiates, to be busy with our children's circumcisions, to have celebrations, which are lavish in honey beer and milk and meat and butter. It suits us when our sons go out herding. It suits us to sit resting in the shade. It suits us when we suckle children. God, nursing mother, remember what suits us.

class exogamy also means that men will tend to marry much younger women, thereby creating the age differential that makes frequent polygyny possible.

The persistence of the Maasai as a society up to the present day is evidence of the importance of their age-class system. It is significant that while the population of Kenya as a whole has recently experienced extremely high population increases that threaten the economic viability of the entire country, settled farming groups are growing at twice the rate of the Maasai and other pastoralists (4 percent versus 2.2 percent or less). Isaac Sindiga (1987) suggests that the traditional Maasai practices of polygyny, postpartum taboos on sexual intercourse, and prolonged lactation, which are all linked to patriarchy and the age-class system, are significant child-spacing and fertility-dampening factors.

Although the position of Maasai women is usually described by both men and women as relatively inferior, Maasai women seem to accept this, or at least attempt to make the best of this situation (see the box entitled, "Maasai Women"). Within the age-class system, young men are also subject to the authority of the elders who control bride-wealth cattle and marriages. Women do not become elders, but they do clearly have a stake in their society and work to maintain the system, especially as they grow older. Senior wives may welcome polygyny because it lightens their domestic routine. Women themselves perform the clitoridectomy, and they accept it as a precondition of marriage. Divorce is an option, especially early in an unhappy marriage. After women have children, they gain more autonomy, and because they marry young, they usually outlive their husbands. Abused wives may appeal to the elders for help; men who commit serious offenses against women may be perceived as a threat to all women, and they may be assaulted, beaten, and their cattle slaughtered by a large group of enraged women acting in a publicly sanctioned role as enforcers of community morality. Women also conduct their own rituals of rebellion against patriarchal authority.

In some respects, the age-class system can be considered a highly egalitarian form of political organization used by stateless societies to regulate rights, privileges, and responsibilities between men who might otherwise find themselves in fre-

quent conflict (Bernardi 1985). The division of labor places women outside the public political arena as is often the case in small-scale societies. The underlying principle of male age classes is that every male enjoys the same potential to be a warrior, marry, raise a family, officiate at rituals, and so on, and these potentials are realized in orderly sequence by virtue of his membership in an age class where these rights are jointly shared. Conflicts do arise in the system, but they occur primarily over the timing of promotions. Political struggle takes place between groups and not individuals. Political power is thus widely distributed and strictly regulated. The system is not simply a gerontocracy with power concentrated at the top.

SUMMARY

East African cattle peoples have certainly developed a highly successful system that makes effective use of a difficult environment. Age hierarchy and apparent male dominance in many spheres exist alongside basic equality between households. Individual households maintain considerable self-sufficiency. To be poor in such a system is to have too few animals for subsistence and bride-wealth, but social support systems normally take care of both problems. There is little overt poverty in that cattle are widely loaned or shared between households according to need, regardless of their actual ownership. The effects of variation in herd composition are leveled out such that people are only likely to go hungry under the most severe drought conditions when people would be forced to draw on their small stock, but then everyone would go hungry. Sharing cattle between households also reduces the possibility that all of one's animals would be lost to raids or disease and makes the most efficient use of unpredictable and highly variable grazing and water resources. Raiding served to redistribute animals and allowed young men to build their herds rapidly. People who find themselves cattleless might opt out of the system by becoming foragers or sedentary farmers.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Describe the subsistence uses East African pastoralists make of their cattle.