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“Beautiful Beasts” and Brave Warriors: The Longevity of a Maasai Stereotype

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LOTTE HUGHES



IN 1932, THE MAASAI PEOPLE of colonial Kenya (formerly British East Africa) submitted a memorandum to the Kenya Land Commission (KLC) about massive land losses they had suffered at the hands of the British in the 1900s.¹ Through their “chiefs, headmen, and elders,” they began by describing their ethnic group. Instead of using their own words, however, they chose to repeat a description of the Maasai made by “eminent Britishers.”

This Nilotic-Hamitic tribe of pastoral nomads in former days overran East Central Africa. They owed their supremacy to their military organization under which the warrior companies or *sirts* lived apart and formed a republic of young men governed solely by ideas of military glory . . . They are a pagan tribe impervious to the efforts of any missionary society. Their bravery is proverbial. The customary diet is meat, milk and blood: any form of agricultural labour is beneath their dignity. The Masai are conservative pagans and so far have shown but little response to administrative effort. (*Kenya Land Commission Evidence and Memoranda* 1934, 1221)

They wished, they said, to “place on record glimpses of our status prior to the British advent as well as the characteristic [*sic*] and our origin as analysed” by supposedly eminent persons. They recited this largely derogatory account, proudly declaring, “We have deserved the special attention of almost all authors who have written books on East and Central Africa,” and they gave a list of books that the KLC could consult for further information. This began with *Through Masai Land* by Scottish explorer Joseph Thomson, who is credited with being the first European to cross “Kenyan” Maasailand in the 1880s (Thomson 1885).² I shall return to this celebrated travelogue shortly.

More than seventy years later, some Maasai are still describing themselves in remarkably similar terms. (Of course there are many exceptions, and ethnic identity is contested within the community itself, but I wish to discuss what may be termed the more unreconstructed accounts.)³ In self-essentializing fashion, they emphasize social conservatism, imperviousness to modernity and development, men's activities and manhood, the centrality of warriors (*il-murran*) in Maasai society, military prowess, and the supposedly warlike nature of the community, even though there are no more wars to go to and cattle raiding is banned. In certain texts and orally, people and their practices are frozen in time. The Maasai are "the great warrior people who roam the endless plains" (Olol-Dapash 1997).⁴ Pastoralism remains central; there is little or no mention of nonpastoral livelihoods, which ignores the fact that the Maasai economy diversified in the second half of the twentieth century and many people have become urbanized or move to and fro between urban and rural areas. Instead, it is claimed that "[they] still live much as they did thousands of years ago, herding cattle, sheep and goats" (Saitoti 1981, dust-jacket blurb)⁵ or that "the Maasai are probably the most purely pastoral peoples of Africa" (Kantai 1971, viii). A classic description of a noble warrior standing on one leg opens the book *Herd & Spear*, coauthored by a former Tanzanian Maasai park conservator (Saibull and Carr 1981). In the first chapter, "Who Are the Maasai?" there is barely any mention of women (other than mythical ones) or nonwarriors; it is as if they don't exist. Throughout, the emphasis is on male roles. The majority of photographs, even in a chapter on women, celebrate warriors. Elsewhere, only Maasai women such as Naomi Kipury have tended to write about women.

To give a more recent example, Kenyan Maasai activist Johnson Ole Kaunga focused largely on young men and warriors in an article on the challenges facing urban-based Maasai in Tanzania. While making important points about the effects of land losses, the marginalization of indigenous peoples in national-development processes, and the cultural exploitation of "warriors" in tourism and hairdressing enterprises, it was ahistorical and factually inaccurate in some fundamental respects (Kaunga 2002). He wrote that the "vast majority of men are employed as security guards—a task that is appreciated by most, including the Maasai themselves, as it is a reflection of the role of the traditional Maasai warrior: warlike and fierce." He noted that non-Maasai fear this community because their warriors are reputed to be "strong [men] who can kill a lion." But is it helpful to invoke this stereotype? The majority of male youths (certainly in Kenya, though the picture may be different for Tanzania) no longer

choose to be warriors but go to school instead; therefore it is erroneous to make warriorhood and lion killing, as acts of bravura, sound pivotal in Maasai society today. The work that young men do in urban centers is anathema to them, suggested Ole Kaunga, partly because these “once warriors” are fit only for pastoral life. These jobs are also undoubtedly badly paid, insecure, and demeaning. One could add that the loss of young men to urban centers as well as school has also resulted in a rural labor crisis; male elders are having to do the lion’s share of herding, dealing with external livestock raiding, and organizing other defensive measures, all of which were traditionally tasks undertaken by younger men.

However, although the pastoral idyll remains a cultural ideal for Maasai, it is no longer the only reality. The author says he does not know when Maasai first began drifting to towns, but this is evident from the literature on urbanization in East Africa. Maasai were becoming urbanized from the 1890s; there is nothing new about the phenomenon. In fact, one could argue that Maasai adaptability to change, and their ability to enter and exploit new markets, is something to be celebrated rather than abhorred. If Luise White is correct, the earliest “urban pioneers” were African prostitutes, who included Maasai women—not because they had looser morals but because they sought socioeconomic independence from men (White 1990). This may be an unpalatable truth. Ole Kaunga did not refer directly to Maasai women’s involvement in urban prostitution today, but he coyly mentioned how women are increasingly visiting towns and leaving their families at home, which “opens up the chances and opportunities for promiscuity and increases the risk of HIV/AIDS infection,” as if men do not also indulge in risky sexual behavior.

My full response to this article, submitted to *Indigenous Affairs*, respectfully suggested that indigenous peoples should beware of “buying into” old colonial stereotypes, and urged the journal to check the accuracy of contributors’ claims before publishing them. The editors did not reply let alone publish my heretical remarks. But my concerns remain: a very powerful stereotype was created in the mid- to late nineteenth century, largely by European travelers and missionaries, and this is still evident in some self-descriptions of who the Maasai are today, which do not do them any favors. It was subsequently added to and amplified by other writers and producers of images, a process that Neil Sobania, John Galaty, and others have described (Galaty 2002, 347–67; Sobania 2002, 313–46; and other chapters in this volume). It has been internalized to some extent by some Maasai, a point ignored by Galaty. Among non-Maasai, there are countless examples in the public arena (such as coffee table books, advertising,

tourism promotion, and film) and in the private sphere of the longevity of the stereotype. For an example of what people "privately" think, correspondence sent to me by white Kenyans and former British colonial officials regarding my research contains classically derogatory remarks about the Maasai's alleged unbridled aggression, warlike "nature," sexual promiscuity, conservatism, arrogance, backwardness, idleness, waste of good land, and so on.

Where does all this come from? Let us now turn to the fount of the stereotype—Joseph Thomson, a fascinating character whose writings are ripe for deconstruction.

Travelers in Maasailand

Passing through the forest, we soon set our eyes upon the dreaded warriors that had been so long the subject of my waking dreams, and I could not but involuntarily exclaim: "What splendid fellows!"

—THOMSON 1885, 160

The early European explorers of this region damned the Maasai faintly with praise while overemphasizing their ferocity. The ambivalent tone was set here by Thomson, a precocious twenty-five-year-old geologist dispatched by the Royal Geographical Society in 1883 to find a direct route between the coast and Lake Victoria. German naturalist Dr. Gustav Fischer had taken the same route weeks earlier but was forced to turn back at Lake Naivasha by Maasai enraged at his party's behavior. A few other Europeans had already made contact with Maasai groups but had not explored their heartland. Thomson was by then the veteran of a major 1878–1880 expedition to Central Africa, and a smaller one in 1881 (Thompson 1881).⁶ In Maasailand, he consciously paved the way for commercial exploitation of the territory; the Imperial British East Africa Company was formed in 1888, and in 1895, the protectorate (precursor to Kenya colony) was founded. Pioneer administrator, naturalist, and traveler Sir Harry Johnston, whose posts included special commissioner to Uganda in the late 1890s, called Thomson "the real originator of British East Africa" (Johnston 1908).

The roots of the colonial relationship between the Maasai and the British were embedded in these nineteenth-century encounters. In their writings, these earliest travelers (who included emissaries of the crown, naturalists, hunters, and missionaries) produced a damagingly stereotypical

image of the Maasai that influenced subsequent views and policy toward them. This was so powerful that it shaped early administrative policy and continues to resonate today. A direct line can be drawn from travelers' perceptions (not that these were totally uniform) to those of early administrators and influential settlers, via ethnographers and others. In some cases, ethnographers and administrators were the same people; for example, British officials Hinde, Hopley, Hollis, and the German Merker (in neighboring German East Africa), all combined their duties with amateur ethnography, which served government and facilitated the imperial classification and control of ethnic groups (Hinde and Hinde 1901; Hopley 1910; Hollis 1905, 1909; Merker 1910).

Many of these travel texts had scientific pretensions that overlaid an expansionist colonizing ethos and were written primarily by white middle-class men who came to map and measure "nature." While classifying African fauna and flora, the travelers also spent a great deal of time and energy categorizing "primitive" peoples, defining themselves and the culture they represented in relation to the exotic Other. Although it is dangerous to see everything in starkly dichotomous terms, some of which break down under closer examination, white, civilized, clothed, moral, industrious, and Christian were self-defining qualities counterpointed by the classifications black, wild, naked, immoral, idle, and pagan. Anthropologists broadly followed suit, and the categories hardened as British administration advanced upon the Maasai and adopted the early taxonomies.

Although travelers expressed a wide range of views of the Maasai, the dominant and longest-lasting image was an overwhelmingly derogatory one. I suggest Thomson was primarily responsible for producing this; other scholars have laid the blame elsewhere. This chapter critiques some key travel texts and the novels they inspired, and challenges other scholars' accounts. It will begin by looking at Thomson's work before discussing, in less detail, other travelogues, some of which present alternative views. This does not claim to be an exhaustive trawl of the literature; in particular, it omits German texts that were not translated into English, since my interest is in writings that directly influenced the English-speaking public and the British colonial administration. Neither will it analyze visual portrayal, a story in itself. From the 1890s onward, pictures of "bushmen" and Maasai and Zulu warriors dominated popular representations of African peoples in books, lantern slides, postcards, and colonial exhibitions. The warriors came to represent their respective ethnic groups, powerfully reinforcing the idea in the Western mind that these "tribes" were predominantly martial, and indigenous women played a lesser (usually decorative) role.⁷

The reputation of the Maasai as a bloodthirsty, martial race had prevented European commercial exploitation of upcountry East Africa; this was a deliberate ploy by coastal slave and ivory traders.⁸ Thomson slew the dragon by proving it was possible to move unscathed through Maasai territory. He set out on this journey in some trepidation, but when he finally met the Maasai, he was agreeably surprised. He noted their "astonishing gravity" and "aristocratic dignity." They exhibited a "natural fluency and grace . . . and a dignity of attitude beyond all praise." He was particularly struck by their powers of oration (a spokesman addressed him "with all the ease of the professional speaker") and the absence of "obtrusive, vulgar inquisitiveness or aggressive impertinence," which had so vexed him among other Africans (Thomson 1885, 161–62). Far from being astonished and curious on seeing a white man, the warriors coolly surveyed him. But two pages later, they were fighting over gifts Thomson had brought to buy his way through Maasailand. He likened them to animals: "They rave and tear like a couple of dogs over a bone. . . . A pack of half-starved wolves suddenly let loose on small animals could not have made a more ferocious and repulsive exhibition" (170). The "beautiful beasts" tag would remain with the Maasai forever.

In the meantime, Thomson went happily upon his way. "Greatly struck by the unusual manners of these savages, so different from the notion we have formed of them, we move on, not a bit inconvenienced by crowding or annoyed by rude remarks." He noted with approval the great beauty and style of both men and women. Some elders dropped into camp, "visiting us with all the dignity of lords of the creation." He was filled with admiration (Thomson 1885, 168–69, 272).

Thomson had expected to be met with aggression. His fears were compounded by the news that his rival, Fischer, journeying ahead of him, had clashed with the Maasai, and at least three of the latter had been shot dead. It seemed highly likely that the community would take revenge on the next European to come along. In fact, he found the Maasai in a conciliatory mood. A posse of men came to discuss the deaths and their implications for Thomson's safe passage, and did so in a reportedly calm and reasonable manner. Agreement was reached, and there was no suggestion of violence. Later, threats from Maasai still angry about Fischer forced Thomson to return briefly to the coast for reinforcements, but despite his worst fears, he was never physically attacked. Yet he ended up damning them as "ferocious," seeming to forget later in the story just how friendly he had found them to be. What had happened to change his perception of events?

One answer lies in Thomson's intent as a writer. The ascendancy of the explorer-writer coincided with the development of print and cheaper mass production. As some of his contemporaries suspected, he sought to spice up the story—the racier the tale, the better its likely reception and the healthier his sales would be. Wild tales of African “savagery” sold well, while gentler stories of amenable indigenes did not, simply because they did not satisfy the public appetite for lurid representations of the Other, now whetted by a series of published travelogues that had brought fame to their authors. These included sagas by James Bruce (1790); Mungo Park (1799); Richard Burton (various from 1856); David Livingstone (1857, 1866, 1874); John Speke (1864); James Grant (1864); and Henry Morton Stanley (1872, 1878). Livingstone and Stanley in particular directly inspired Thomson, and he sought to compete with the heroism of fellow Scotsmen, Bruce, Park, Clapperton, Grant, Livingstone, and Cameron. By the time he began writing, certain norms had been established in travel texts about Africa, which included

the distinction between “savage Negro” and “civil Mohometan,” and the commentaries on the Africans' indolence, their unbridled passions, and their cruelty or mental retardation. . . . They formed part of the series of oppositions and of the levels of classification of humans demanded by the logic of the chain of being and the stages of progress and social development. Explorers just brought new proofs which could explicate “African inferiority.” (Mudimbe 1998, 13; also see Brantlinger 1985)

More fundamental reasons for Thomson's change of tack link to power relations and fragile masculinity—his own interior journey. With regard to the first, Thomson expected to be regularly entertained by aboriginal dancers while he played voyeur and demigod, looking down upon the show. The whole circus was horribly reversed among the Maasai. He had made the mistake of inventing a medicine-man act, designed to inspire fear and awe and thus keep the Maasai at a safe distance. When he wanted to demonstrate his powers (particularly to show that he could control the epidemics then decimating Maasailand, for which he feared he might be held accountable), he brewed up Eno's fruit salt, “sang an incantation—generally something about ‘Three blue bottles’” and whipped his false teeth in and out. Such antics earned him the title of white *laibon* or prophet/medicine man, and at first, they were well received (Thomson 1885, 286). Anne McClintock has described this as an attempt to “manipulate the other by mimicking what [explorers] took to be the other's specific fetish,” and that Thomson's ritual use of gloves, sextant, gun, and

Eno's in fact revealed "his own faith in the power of his fetishes" (McClintock 1995, 229).

As time passed, Thomson realized his error, as he was constantly made to perform by an audience that was no longer amazed but invasive—not that the coolest of warriors had been particularly impressed before. His personal space was violated. As the distance between "actor" and audience evaporated, so did the initial awe shown by black of white. "They played with us as a cat does with a mouse" (Thomson 1885, 379). He had unwittingly set himself up to be knocked down, becoming indignant as the Maasai showed less and less respect. Worse, he was now the joke and they the jokers—"who laughed at whom? [was] one not insignificant guide to who was in control," writes Philip Morgan of colonial encounters in the South Pacific (Daunton and Halpern 1999). Complaining about "the atrocious life one is compelled to lead among the Masai savages," Thomson wrote:

They ordered us about as if we were so many slaves. I had daily to be on exhibition, and perform for their delectation. "Take off your boots." "Show your toes." "Let us see your white skin." "Bless me! what queer hair!" "Good gracious! what funny clothes!" Such were the orders and exclamations (anglicized) which greeted me as they turned me about, felt my hair with their filthy paws. (Thomson 1885, 337)

Only a few miles down the road, yet he had come a long way from this earlier description of receiving a curious warrior into his tent: "After I have exhibited to his untutored gaze all the marvels of my person and tent, he may be cajoled out." Thomson was no longer in control of the exhibition. The "savage gaze" was now tutored, the "savage" voice imperative. By the time Thomson's party had reached Mount Kenya, he said, "The sooner I was clear of the Masai the better. . . . Eno's fruit salt and a couple of artificial teeth were no longer novelties" (Thomson 1885, 304, 388). The lack of distance between self and Other had become dangerous: "I had to sit continually on exhibition." By now, Thomson was not so much afraid of the Maasai as of his own fragility as a theatrical event. Greg Denning notes, "Priests in their rituals cannot afford to be seen as actors. Nor can scientists" (Denning 1996, 113). Thomson was posing both as "priest" and scientist and was, therefore, in double trouble. The theater of awe was reversed, and a welter of confused emotions arose in him:

We had to eat humble pie to propitiate their lordships . . . and yet, strangely enough, in the midst of it all we made great friends with some of the elders, who delighted to sit and talk with us, showing a frankness and an

absence of suspicion such as I have never seen elsewhere among Africans. . . . In some respects I began almost to like the Masai (men as well as women), as I gradually became accustomed to their arrogant ways. . . . The damsels, of course, would have been without fault, if they had only discarded clay and grease and used Pears' soap. (Thomson 1885, 337–38)

In spite of his qualms, Thomson found discourse easy and enjoyable with people who were “tremendous talkers as well as fighters.” It was all very confusing. The Maasai were likeable in certain ways, and not so unlike Europeans, while their pubescent girls were surprisingly attractive, apart from their smell: “They are really the best-looking girls I have ever met with in Africa” (Thomson 1885, 428). Sexual innuendo runs throughout this text. Playing the medicine man earned Thomson female approval, which he clearly relished, and he flirted constantly with Maasai maidens.

Masculinity and Moral Dilemmas

This brings me to the second point: Thomson's fragile masculinity. The inner confusions evident in *Through Masai Land* were more fully aired in a later work of fiction, *Ulu*, cowritten with former fellow student Miss Harris-Smith, which is essential reading as a supplement to the travelogue (Thomson and Harris-Smith 1888). This has been overlooked by most scholars and misread by Thomson's biographer, Rotberg.⁹ In the two-volume novel, Thomson rehashed the expedition story to make his Scottish adventurer hero Tom Gilmour emerge triumphant from his brush with the Maasai. Most importantly, the barriers to sexual attraction between white and black were leapt as Gilmour courted Ulu, a beautiful half Chagga, half Maasai girl. The novel provided Thomson with a license to rove, exploring subjects that were out of bounds in the travelogue. Gilmour fantasized about marrying Ulu, a union that would “bring his contempt for society and social frauds to a fitting climax” (Thomson and Harris-Smith 1888, 1:34).

To marry a negress for the sake of having something to care for besides one's self! Plenty of room for self-sacrifice there, I should fancy! I wonder, now, if I *could* care for a negress? After all, why not? A man grows fond of his dog, and even gets to have a certain feeling of companionship for him; I suppose it would be equally possible with an M-Chaga maiden—some fresh, budding young child of nature, even though black and barbaric. (Thomson and Harris-Smith 1888, 1:36)

Thomson described Gilmour as “passing through some great mental and moral crisis.” It is tempting to see this crisis—also of masculinity and cul-

tural identity—as his own. Brantlinger comments on the “adolescent quality” of this and similar tales, noting that “Africa was a great testing—or teething—ground for moral growth and moral regression; the two processes were often indistinguishable” (Brantlinger 1985, 189–90). While attracted to Ulu, Gilmour admired Kate Kennedy, a virtuous missionary’s daughter who was the foil to everything Ulu represented: “To Gilmour Kate was Europe personified.” Kate’s father chided Gilmour over his marriage plans, asking how he could “reconcile his low opinions of the capabilities of the savage nature with your intention of marrying her [Ulu]?” The answer was that Gilmour had no intention of reconciling them. But he was very taken with the idea of “developing what of good there may be in her.” At other times, he questioned the wisdom of “civilising” Africans, arguing with the missionary, “Has it never occurred to you . . . what the true significance of this cry of ‘opening up of Africa to civilisation’ really is? . . . Do you call old clothes, new diseases, additional vices and drudgery, along with gin, rum and gunpowder, Europe’s best and noblest?” (Thomson and Harris-Smith 1888, 1:122–23, 142, 168, 2:19–22, 32). It is impossible to know how much of this was written by his coauthor, but Gilmour/Thomson swung wildly between the extremes of imperialist triumph and self-reflective guilt. It was an early “development” discourse.

Ulu and other local people mistook Kate for a deity. Gilmour hoped they would also see him as godlike, but he feared he had gotten too close to the “natives” for such reverence; Thomson was clearly warning readers against the kind of overfamiliarity that had caused him so much trouble in Maasailand. Kate was kidnapped by Maasai warriors, and Gilmour pursued them, fearing—in so many words—that she might be raped. (“Better death than *that!*”) The kidnappers were portrayed as “these licentious, blood-thirsty savages, the indulgence of whose brutal passions was their sole rule in life.” Kate was the total antithesis of this; Gilmour caught sight of the Maasai and the virginal girl, “their swarthy figures throwing her white dress into more marked relief.” A meat feast was described in the crudest possible way, the captive Kate looking on in horror at warriors gorging on and fighting over raw flesh (Thomson and Harris-Smith 1888, 2:38, 54, 65–66, 71–75). This scene amplified four key stereotypes: violence, unrestrained greed, consumption of raw meat and blood, and beastliness. On another occasion, Ulu was mauled by a lion. In this passage, the authors again bracketed the Maasai with criminals and dangerous animals: “‘El-Masai!’ ‘Robbers!’ ‘Buffaloes!’ ‘Lions!’ were the terror-striking words that passed from lip to lip” (Thomson and Harris-Smith 1888, 2–3).

This novel represents Thomson's wishful rewrite of his own relationship with the Maasai, in which he was restored to his "rightful" place. Yet the subtext—Gilmour's self-disturbing attraction to Ulu and all she represented—renders the story much more complex. Gradually, Gilmour fell in love with Kate and spurned the "savage" child, who died in Kate's arms. Thomson appears in *Ulu* to have faced up to his fear of becoming an "other among others."¹⁰ He crossed the line and embraced the Other openly, pondering what would happen if he totally abandoned his old life and immersed himself in Africa. Ultimately, he chose Europe, and Africa expired.¹¹

To return to the travel text, on leaving the Maasai behind, Thomson greeted other Africans with evident relief. The ideal "native" was unsophisticated, polite, and Thomson fearing, and they performed dances on demand. By comparison, he left the reader with an impression of the Maasai as beautiful but beastly, idle occupants of a land too good for them, who existed only to talk, fight, and fornicate—though he did acknowledge their oratorical strengths and suggested that the warriors were reformed by marriage. It was a refrain that was to be repeated often. Furthermore, Thomson is frequently described as having "penetrated" Maasailand (and said so himself), but in fact its inhabitants successfully penetrated his frontline defenses. There are many examples of this in the travel text (such as bodily invasiveness and violations of personal space), but nonphysical forms include intellectual invasion through cross-examination, mockery, and making him the butt of jokes. Public ridicule is a social sanction among Maasai, and Thomson was thereby put in his place.

But in the longer term, he achieved more in Maasailand than he ever intended. His writings helped to spawn the erroneous idea that pastoralists wandered aimlessly, failing to occupy, fully use, or appreciate the land, and therefore they had no claim to it. This would be used by colonial administrators to justify land snatching and forced moves. Most importantly, in emphasizing what he saw as the profound ethnic differences between Maasai and other Africans, and their fierce independence, Thomson helped to create a stereotype that underpinned later development interventions in both Kenyan and Tanzanian Maasailand. It was in the interests of early colonizers to maintain and exploit ethnic difference, but this view changed as administrators began to see it as a barrier to development and modernization. By the 1920s, the Maasai were routinely condemned for their stubborn conservatism and apparent unwillingness to join the twentieth century. Difference had become a danger to the modern state (see Hodgson 2000, 58–78). This language is still used to condemn them today.

Much of what I have said about Thomson is negative. But he was also a talented writer who produced a hugely entertaining page-turner in *Through Masai Land*. Fabian has shown, with reference to the Central African Lakes text, and Simpson with reference both to this and the Maasai text, that Thomson could also be perceptive, culturally sensitive, mature for his age, frank, and self-reflective (Fabian 2000; Simpson 1975, chaps. 12 and 14). Today, the value of these works to scholars lies in their rich historical detail.

Thomson's Influence and Reception

The Maasai travelogue possibly reached millions of readers through being copublished in the United States and translated into German and French. Though Thomson published other accounts of other journeys, this made his name. His influence was not only direct but diffused, threaded as it was through best-selling contemporary fiction.

Western images of Africa were forged by tales of exploration and deriding-do, and Rider Haggard (among others) amplified them. He acknowledged Thomson as the inspiration for his fictional hero Allan Quatermain, chief protagonist of the novel of the same name.¹² So far as I am aware, other scholars have not spotted the significant similarities between *Through Masai Land* and this novel. *Allan Quatermain* described the adventures of an Englishman and two friends who set out to find a white race believed to live in the highlands of the African interior. However, its early chapters are dominated by descriptions of European clashes with the Maasai, whose warriors are repeatedly described as "bloodthirsty savages" having "the face of a devil," as "cruel and savage men," and as "rascally," "bloodthirsty villains," a "dog of a black savage," and so on. There is a ludicrous early scene in which the travelers are attacked at night by "swimming Masai" while anchored midstream because they did not consider it safe to sleep ashore after a "ferocious" warrior shook his spear at them. Many rural Maasai cannot swim and detest immersion in water, but according to Haggard, they were in the habit of lurking in lakes and rivers in order to attack passing boatmen. A warrior with a "dim but devilish-looking face appeared to rise out of the water" and knifed an African servant lying asleep in the canoe. Quatermain severed the attacker's hand with a Zulu battle-ax, but "he uttered no sound or cry. Like a ghost he came, and like a ghost he went, leaving behind him a bloody hand still gripping a great knife . . . that was buried in the heart of our poor servant." This is the Maasai as "ghastly apparition," as ghouls who haunt one's waking dreams—a specter raised by Thomson in the first quote of his I cited (Haggard 1887, 24–29).

The party's next adventure mirrored the trials of Kate Kennedy in *Ulu*, which Haggard must have read in draft form or discussed with Thomson since his plagiarism is obvious. On arrival at a mission run by the Reverend Mackenzie, the travelers meet his small daughter, Miss Flossie, known as "Water-lily" to local Africans and allegedly regarded as a deity because of her white skin and fair hair. Soon afterward, Miss Flossie was captured by Maasai; in a passage strongly redolent of the Kate/warrior imagery, she was riding a white donkey when apprehended by the black "savages." A warrior came to tell Mackenzie that his daughter would die at dawn unless he swapped her for one of Quatermain's companions. Speaking in strangely Shakespearean English, he added, "If thy answer is late thy little white bud will never grow into a flower . . . for I shall cut it with this' and he touched the spear" planted in the ground beside him. Miss Flossie's virtue was clearly threatened. Slaughter ensued; the white men rescued the girl in a daring dawn raid and gave the Maasai a good hiding. While held captive, Miss Flossie was continually stared at by warriors who had never seen a white person before and "handled her arms and hair with their filthy paws"—exactly Thomson's words (Haggard 1887, 59, 72–82, 88). Haggard seems to have taken the story of Ulu, interwoven it with scenes from Thomson's travelogue, and created a fantastic concoction that thrilled generations of schoolboys. His stories had an incalculable effect on grown men, too. British administrator Frederick Jackson only went to East Africa after being urged to do so by Haggard, his neighbor in Norfolk.

Leaving aside contemporary press reviews, there has been remarkably little subsequent criticism or attempts to deconstruct his texts. Elspeth Huxley described *Through Masai Land* as "a thrilling tale of adventure . . . a classic among books on Africa." The history of the interior did not start with any certainty, she said, until Livingstone, Speke, Thomson, and other "great Victorians" made their journeys (Huxley 1943, 241, 238). Less predictably, Dr. Norman Leys—left-leaning champion of Maasai land rights in the 1900s—also eulogized Thomson in his preamble to the story of the Maasai moves, calling *Through Masai Land* "one of the best books of exploration in existence" (Leys 1924, 91). Thomson is still written about in glowing and largely uncritical terms. Beachey claims, "He did much to bring the country of the Maasai and the Maasai themselves into clearer perspective, demythicizing [*sic*] much of the lore and nonsense that had been built up around that tribe in the nineteenth century" (Beachey 1996, 99). While the first statement may be true, the second is not; Thomson produced significant quantities of myth and nonsense himself.

Robert Rotberg claims, "Unlike so many other explorers and the men of advancing empires, Thomson ostensibly approached Africa and Africans with methods worthy of admiration" (Rotberg 1970a, preface, 9).¹³ Unlike, say, the German explorer Carl Peters, he did not shoot his way through tribal encounters, but this is still too easy an appraisal (Peters 1891). Rotberg concedes that Thomson had his faults, including a tendency to overdramatize, but that we should applaud his courage: "As a dogged personal triumph over adversity and infirmity, it is unsurpassed in the annals of African exploration" (Rotberg 1968, xi–xiii). He mostly fails to look beyond the survivalist and Pax Britannica discourse. (Other scholars' critiques will be covered in the next section.)

Missionaries Krapf and Rebmann

These two Germans, employed by the British Church Missionary Society (CMS), separately explored the Kilimanjaro, Ukambani, and Usambara regions between 1847 and 1852. They first published their travel journals in English in missionary magazines, and these formed the basis of a book by Krapf, published in German in 1858 and in English two years later (Krapf 1860). Since they did not travel as far as the Maasai heartland of the northern Rift Valley, their account of this community borrowed heavily from the perceptions of coastal traders, who had a vested interest in demonizing the Maasai in order to deter other visitors.

Johann Ludwig Krapf was the elder of the two and arrived in East Africa from Ethiopia after abandoning an attempt to convert the Galla (Oromo) people. His most often-quoted observation of the Maasai is, "They are dreaded as warriors, laying all waste with fire and sword, so that the weaker tribes do not venture to resist them in the open field, but leave them in possession of their herds, and seek only to save themselves by the quickest possible flight." He also described them as "these worst of heathen"; "these truculent savages" who "conquer or die, death having no terrors for them"; and said "[they] do not make slaves of their prisoners, but kill men and women alike in cold blood" (Krapf 1860, 359–60, 365–66). However, like Thomson, he also noted the "wisdom [and] fluency of speech" of the so-called chiefs. His account included descriptions of their beauty, polygyny, and trading patterns with neighboring peoples (which contradicts claims that the Maasai were always on the attack); their diet (said to include game, which was only eaten when people faced severe famine); and their use of land, roaming the great plains in search of water and grass. He noted their "great distaste for agriculture" and their belief

that eating cereals enfeebled people. Their perceived arrogance and land greed was plain: they considered themselves “the exclusive possessors of the plains and wildernesses” (Krapf 1860, 358–59, 362). The picture drawn was of a primarily martial people, greedy for more land than they needed or profitably used.

Knowles and Collett in a 1989 paper, and Collett in a 1987 book chapter, claim that Thomson’s was a “reasonably balanced account” of the Maasai, that it was Krapf who emphasized their warlike aspects, and that “Thomson’s description of the Maasai was subsequently ignored by most administrators and settlers in Kenya, who instead adopted the imagery of Krapf’s description and further elaborated upon it.”¹⁴ Collett states that Thomson’s account “did not survive the advent of British administration” but quickly gave way “to an ethnocentrically ‘British’ image of both the Maasai and Maasailand” (Collett 1987, 137). It is not clear what this means; Thomson was also ethnocentrically British. Collett rightly points out that the “fearsome reputation” of the Maasai predated Thomson, but he wrongly says it was “enhanced by the murder of Fischer . . . in 1883” (Collett 1987, 137). He was not killed by the Maasai but returned to Germany to tell the tale of his adventures, dying in Berlin in 1887.¹⁵ (He is possibly confusing Fischer with German murder victim Dr. Albert Röscher.)¹⁶

Collett suggests that administrator Lord Lugard, in remarks made in 1893 about Maasai diet and failure to cultivate fertile land, was responsible for creating “the most prevalent stereotype” and introduced the idea that the Maasai were not fully utilizing the land (Lugard 1893, 417). Though important, this is arguably not the most prevalent one. Also, Thomson had previously suggested that Laikipia was empty and was therefore available to European settlers, which is a different concept. Collett claims that it was “Lugard’s emphasis on the warlike nature of the Maasai” that was used to justify British annexation of their land, but Krapf, Thomson, and minor travelers such as Hildebrandt clearly got in first; Lugard was merely repeating what had been said many years before (Collett 1987, 138; Hildebrandt 1877).

Knowles and Collett rightly state that “the reaction of the early Europeans to the Maasai . . . is important because the images that are adopted by the Europeans play a central role in subsequent events” (Knowles and Collett 1989, 433). But to call Thomson’s text “reasonably balanced” does not suggest a close reading. Thomson, they say, painted a much more complex picture both of the internal workings of Maasai society and its relations with neighboring agriculturalists, largely because he had firsthand experience that Krapf lacked. Agreed, this is what sets the two texts apart.

But Krapf devoted relatively little space to the Maasai in proportion to his description of other peoples—nine pages, plus short references—whereas Thomson devoted the best part of a lengthy book to them and their habitat. It is also simply not common sense to suppose that Krapf, a German, had the greater impact on British perceptions and administrative policy, particularly when one takes into account the fictionalized repetition and amplification of Thomson's Maasai stereotypes in *Ulu* and *Allan Quatermain*, which I have covered in some detail because they are important and hitherto overlooked adjuncts to the travel text. Krapf inspired later missionary activity and possibly played a part in attracting European settlers. But it was Thomson who reveled in wild imagery of unreasoning "savages" who settled scores through violence, which was not justified by his experiences. And by describing rich pastures, forests, game, water sources, and other environmental delights in a climatically healthy, apparently underpopulated place, he played a key role in attracting European farmer-settlers, who also loved shooting, to the highlands of Kenya.¹⁷

Largely based on Krapf, these authors reduce early myths about the Maasai to two: their warlike tendencies and their dietary preferences, linked to a loathing of cultivation. They say British administrators then used the latter to develop further myths about land use (the Maasai failed to reap the maximum economic benefit from land by farming it) and emphasized Maasai use of raw foods (milk, honey, blood) and meat in order to "remove them from the category of cultured human and place them in the category of natural man" (Knowles and Collett 1989, 441). Also, in seeing the Maasai as purely pastoral, "this eliminated the need to understand how a 'predatory' group could simultaneously terrorise and trade with neighboring peoples" (Collett 1987, 138). There were undoubtedly contradictions embedded in these representations. But colonial official Harry Johnston understood that pastoral women and older men bartered with other communities for vegetable food, and he devoted almost as much space to the habits of agricultural Maa speakers as he did to the pastoral sections, certainly in *The Uganda Protectorate* (1902).¹⁸ His was a highly influential and important voice, central to the "scramble" for East Africa, who barely appears in Knowles and Collett's references.¹⁹ In a particularly influential 1908 article, which recommended concentrating the Maasai in one reserve, Johnston accused Boer farmers, not the Maasai, of failing to develop the highlands (Johnston 1908). Though much of what they say is valuable, I suggest that Knowles and Collett make too much of "the dietary myth" at the expense of other important and interconnected misrepresentations such as immorality, idleness, and land greed. Collett in

particular devotes disproportionate space to Lugard's views, virtually ignoring Johnston.

Other Dissenting Voices

Reading the remarks of some of Thomson's contemporaries, one wonders if they were writing about the same people. (In one sense, they were not: some of these travelers explored present-day Tanzania and met different groups of Maa speakers such as the Ilparakuyu, not necessarily the northern sections described by Thomson.) "The Masai were very kind in their manner to me wherever I met them," wrote missionary J. T. Last of a journey made in November 1882, though he realized this was linked to expectations of gifts. He spoke of "hours of pleasant conversation" with elders (Last 1883, 522–23, 527). Medical missionary Dr. Baxter, "having made friends with the Masai . . . found them most kind and hospitable." Archbishop Farler "found them a very peaceful people."²⁰

Hungarian Count Teleki's "adventures among the Masai" in 1887 and 1888 were told in two volumes by his companion Ludwig von Höhnel (1894). Hunting tales were interwoven with amateur ethnography and fulsome descriptions of landscape, fauna, and flora. The Maasai, with one or two exceptions, were found to be friendly, peaceable, charming, and helpful. The visitors' early fear of "the dreaded inhabitants of these districts" gave way, on closer acquaintance, to admiration. They were greeted at first with presents of oxen, not demands for gifts. Höhnel declared, "We had no reason to complain of the behaviour of the natives" and called them "the noble race of the Masai . . . by far the most interesting and most powerful people with whom we came in contact." Warriors joined Teleki in a buffalo hunt, while other Maasai traded cattle, donkeys, leather, and fuel with the visitors. Women and children brought firewood to their camp, and children made themselves useful by fetching water, while "old men squatted down round the fires to chat with our men." There was no suggestion of the mutual "ethnic" hostility emphasized by Thomson between the Maasai and coastal porters. The author remarked upon the Maasai love of "talking and listening" as much as cattle raiding, their "great command of dialectics," and the "parliamentary etiquette" evident in debates (Höhnel 1894, 83, 131, 132–33, 242). When it finally came to distributing presents, Höhnel refuted Thomson's account and put the record straight:

Remembering Thomson's description . . . [of the violence which greeted his distribution of gifts], we expected a fight to ensue for the spoil, and we awaited the onslaught with bated breath; but nothing of the kind occurred,

and it seemed as if the warriors knew that for us the dark cloud of terror enveloping them had rolled away. If I did not explain further, these remarks might very easily be misunderstood, so I will add how it was that, even before we had seen any of them, we had decided that the Masai were an unusually brave, but at the same time a bloodthirsty and covetous, people. We had had no need to refer to old accounts and rumours, but had got our information from the reports of Dr. Fischer and Joseph Thomson. . . . Thomson describes the Masai in very much the same style as the ivory traders, but does not give any instances of bad treatment at their hands, and further acquaintance with these much-dreaded warriors convinced us that travelling amongst them was not fraught with any special danger. (Höhnel 1894, 132–33)

Höhnel had virtually accused Thomson of lying. He also believed the Scot had said rather too much about licentiousness—the “free love” prevailing in the warrior camps—since many warriors actually stayed true to one sweetheart. Among the numerous insightful observations in Höhnel’s text are those about women, notably references to a “clever” old woman called Nakairo, whom the travelers hired as their go-between with the Maasai and the Kikuyu (Höhnel 1894, 292, 295).

In 1891, J. R. L. Macdonald led a preliminary survey for the Uganda Railway, which brought him into frequent contact with Maasai (Macdonald 1897). He noted how friendly they were toward his colleague James Martin (Thomson’s deputy on the Maasailand expedition), despite being refused gifts: “In fact, the Masai became so friendly that, when one of his Indians went astray, they fed the wanderer like a fighting-cock, and three days later brought him back to the depot.” With few exceptions, civility and peacefulness characterized all exchanges. Warriors approached the party with the point of their spears covered with balls of cotton wool, a sign of peace. All they wanted to do was shake hands, to such an extent that the gesture became very tiring. The warriors were asked to back off and became annoyed, and their leader lectured Macdonald on the need for Europeans to tolerate Maasai customs if they wanted to visit Maasailand. Peace was agreed. Later, “the Masai loyally adhered to their word, and, though next day we marched northward amidst hundreds of them, we had absolutely nothing to complain of, and at each successive kraal were hailed with cheery greetings.” A couple of near altercations were averted through diplomacy. On the final leg of his journey, Macdonald reported “nothing more eventful to chronicle than peaceful meetings with Masai and a hostile encounter with a troop of lions” (Macdonald 1897, 61, 68–71, 100, 102, 321). The supposed threat of Maasai aggression toward travelers on

the railway, and Europeans living nearby, was to be one of the major reasons for their forced removal from the Rift in 1904 and 1905, but there is little evidence for such claims in this text.

The Views of Early Administrators

First, I shall examine remarks made by administrators who were relatively admiring of the Maasai, before turning to those who were most condemnatory. Sir Gerald Portal worked with Macdonald in Uganda. He was “Commissioner for the British sphere on the mainland” and agent and consul-general at Zanzibar when he traveled to Uganda in 1893 to investigate what was happening there. In his account of this journey, but before he had met the Maasai personally, Portal retold a “tale of a thrilling nature” about an alleged Maasai attack on a caravan of coastal traders who had passed the same way four months earlier. This passage is redolent of Thomson and Haggard and illustrates how the Maasai stereotype was being adopted and amplified. The traders had set up camp and were sleeping confidently in the open when

they were rudely awakened by a din as of the infernal regions. By the fitful firelight, as they started up, they caught a vision of immense weird forms, apparently above the height of men, towering above whose heads were strange shapes and devices—horns of antelopes and of cows, crowns or halos of long eagle-feathers, the skins and grinning heads of monkeys, of leopards, and of cats, and as they moved there was a clash of many bells attached to their thighs, knees, and ankles; like demons these huge forms flitted and bounded about between the fires, while the light glanced from their strange head-gear, their garters and anklets of bells, from great shields painted with patterns of red, black, and white, and above all, from mighty spears seven feet high. . . . Barely had [the traders] time to realise that these tall and active forms were not ghosts . . . but veritable Masai warriors in all their war dress . . . when the ghoulish, triumphant laughter which burst from the leaping warriors was mingled with more than one despairing shriek. (Portal 1894, 65–67)

When Portal actually met some Maasai near Lake Naivasha, he was as smitten with the warriors as Thomson had been. Again, they were “splendid fellows.” Portal was particularly taken with the heraldic motifs painted on each warrior shield—the coat of arms of fellow aristocrats. Ambivalence was in the air again.²¹ He could not disguise his admiration for what he saw as the raw physical and intellectual superiority of the Maasai, especially when contrasted with the despised figure of the “semicivilized native” rep-

resented by his Zanzibari porters. Portal exhibited a typically European love of the African in his raw state (whatever that was imagined to be), which went hand in hand with contempt for the half-educated pretender. He soon contradicted his earlier tale, declaring that future travelers need not fear the "dreaded, all-conquering, and triumphant 'bogie' of ten years ago." Their glory had declined since they had lost so many cattle to disease. However, he still considered them a great curse because their raiding and reputation checked the development of neighboring "tribes" and had cleared populations from large areas.

Like Höhnel, Frederick Jackson, who served in British East Africa before becoming governor and commander in chief of Uganda (1911–1917), refuted Thomson's scaremongering. He felt it was part of a deliberate ploy by traders. He wrote, "There is a point in Thomson's book that I have never been able to account for, unless it was part of the scheme of the traders to choke off other Europeans, and that is his account of the insolent and overbearing manner of the moran [warriors], and the gross indignities to which he was subjected by them." Given the number of guns his party carried and the fact that he was regarded as a great white medicine man, "Why, then, did he submit to such indignities?" Jackson concluded that "the terrors and dangers of entering Masailand were very grossly and purposely exaggerated by a small clique of traders" in order to "keep the door closed as long as possible and their happy hunting-grounds free of poachers" (Jackson 1930, 190–91). To illustrate the saying "give a dog a bad name" and show the damage done by imagination and rumor, he described how a mild disagreement between him and some warriors was "converted into a desperate fight" by a couple of porters who took the embroidered story back to the coast. Jackson's direct experience of the Maasai was "a complete revelation to me. It was an experience so totally different from anything I had expected. No one could have been more friendly than they were, from start to finish" (Jackson 1930, 132).

Johnston veered more erratically than Jackson between praise and condemnation of the Maasai, indicating in his writings that he had read both Thomson and Krapf (Johnston 1910). In a quasi-ethnographic survey, he placed "the Apollo-like Masai" high up the scale of "types" of Africans (Johnston 1902, 1:vi; 1910, 822). Though the pastoral sections had had "a devotion to cattle which caused them to raid and ravish in all directions," this was now diminished, while the so-called agricultural Maasai lived in peaceful, permanent villages and grew large crops. He denied that they still posed a military threat, noting that commerce was "slowly but surely humanizing" them; the majority now preferred trading to fighting. He refuted

the idea that they were work shy, saying, "All Masai men are adept at milking both cows and goats, for which reason they are much in request as herdsmen in the employ of Europeans." As for diet, only the warriors ate nothing but milk, blood, and meat (Johnston 1886, 537; 1902, 789, 803, 810, 812–13, 818–19, 834).

Sidney Hinde, collector of Masailand, was based at Machakos Fort from 1886, where he employed local warriors to mount punitive raids on other "tribes." With his wife, Hildegard, he wrote *The Last of the Masai*. This title was not meant to sound a death knell for the whole race, but only those dwindling persons of "pure blood" who remained culturally "uncontaminated by admixture with Bantu elements and contact with civilisation." The Hindees chronicled the supposedly pure elements of this culture, lamenting the fact that the Maasai in their unadulterated state were fated to disappear. Their book was a hymn to waning virility; under European rule, they said, Maasai raiding could no longer be tolerated, but at the same time, "the destruction of so virile a race would, nevertheless, be a permanent loss to East Africa." They commended the Maasai for their dignity, their "undoubted gift of oratory," their "keen perception of justice," and their "considerable reasoning faculties." Like Thomson, the Hindees emphasized the profound differences between the Maasai and neighboring peoples. All little girls were "prostitutes." Echoing Thomson and Haggard, the ghostly Maasai were said to "haunt certain districts"; while this can simply mean to frequent a place, its other connotation is more sinister. Sir Charles Eliot, second commissioner of British East Africa, also used the term (Hinde and Hinde 1901, xiii, 33–36, 72, 91, 109; Eliot 1905, 134).

The Routledges devoted a chapter to denigrating the Maasai in *With a Prehistoric People*, a tribute to the Kikuyu as the progressive African of tomorrow. (Huxley repeated this juxtaposition three decades later when using large photographs of a naked warrior, captioned "A Young Masai Warrior—The Old Africa," and a Kikuyu clad in European clothing complete with felt hat, "Kikuyu Man—The New Africa," on facing pages of a guide to East Africa [Huxley 1943, 244–45].) They wheeled out every stereotype, from moral depravity to unadaptability and a propensity for mindless violence, concluding, "The Masai is by nature greed personified—sulky, morose and vindictive; a born thief, an arch liar. . . . For any form of manual labour he is mentally disinclined and physically unfit. He is material that civilisation cannot grind up in her mill" (Routledge and Routledge 1910). Now the categories were hardening as administration advanced, and attempts to control and develop the Maasai were seen to be failing.

In Charles Hopley's memoirs, published nearly two decades later, one can clearly see the Thomson and Krapf refrains woven through a textbook guide to "native" ways and colonial remedies. He referred to Maasai blood-thirstiness and the risk that they would, if unchecked by the British, have swept the country and trampled upon the "wretched cultivators." According to this view, shared by Portal, not only were the Maasai not amenable to development, but they also threatened the development of others. However, he was by no means entirely unsympathetic, believing that Maasai herds were potentially great assets to the country and that their owners could become "very useful members of the community" (Hopley 1929, 59–61). In 1904, when assistant deputy commissioner for the protectorate, he had spoken up for Maasai land rights in the Rift Valley in correspondence with the colonial office.

It was Charles Eliot who did most to employ the early stereotypes in the course of administering the Maasai, and it is his views that have been most frequently quoted long after all these other individuals have been forgotten. In 1904, he wrote an erudite introduction to Hollis's work on Maasai language and folklore, in which he acknowledged that his information about the Maasai was drawn from Thomson, Krapf, Johnston, and Merker. He repeated some of Thomson's condemnatory remarks and added several of his own. He emphasized Maasai military organization, said their men did little else but fight and tend cattle, and viewed the disasters of the 1890s (famine and epidemic disease) as just desserts for a community that had grown prosperous through plunder. In other writings, he declared,

The future of these people is not an easy problem. They resemble the lion and the leopard, strong and beautiful beasts of prey, that please the artistic sense, but are never of any use, and often a very serious danger. Even so the manly virtues, fine carriage and often handsome features of the Masai arouse a certain sympathy; but it can hardly be denied that they have hitherto done no good in the world that any one knows of; they have lived by robbery and devastation, and made no use themselves of what they have taken from others. (Eliot 1905, 143)²²

In a 1903 memorandum, he claimed, "The customs of the Masai may be interesting to anthropologists, but morally and economically they seem to me to be all bad, and it is our duty, as it will also be to our advantage, to change them as soon as it is practicable" (Eliot 1903, 12). These views were shared by leading settler Lord Cranworth:

Here we have a people who, beautiful to look at and in some ways attractive in character, have as far as we know never been of any use to any living soul.

Like ravening beasts, they have lived on the weakness of their neighbours, amongst whom they were classed with pestilence, famine, and disease. Have this people any inherent right to be conserved in this condition? Have we not rather a duty to execute by leading them, or forcing them, to be of some economic use, or perish? (Cranworth 1912, 37)

Many times, Eliot damned the immorality that allegedly accompanied Maasai militarism, and he urged officials not to tolerate the “free love” practiced by warriors and unmarried girls. This was a vision of vice and idleness intertwined, a theme later picked up with enthusiasm by Rupert Hemsted, officer-in-charge of the Southern Maasai Reserve, who wrote in 1921, “The Masai are a decadent race, and have only survived through being brought under the protection of British rule. . . . They remain primitive savages who have never evolved and who under present conditions, in all probability, never can evolve. Their environment is fatal. They live under conditions of indescribable filth in an atmosphere of moral, physical, and mental degeneration” (*Masai Annual Report 1921–1922*, 9).

Finally, George Sandford regurgitated and concretized the stereotypes in his administrative history of the Maasai. Now they officially existed. Having explained their (logical) aversion to wage labor—they found manual work degrading, did not need cash because they had very few personal needs, and enjoyed enormous wealth in livestock—he damned the “unemployed” warriors who refused to work for Europeans. In the reserve, they were able to remain idle in a state of “opulent apathy” that was leading to unhealthiness and degeneration, both physical and mental. Military qualities were no longer required, and with it, the warriors’ *raison d’être* had disappeared (Sandford 1919, 2, 4, 7). Their supposed degeneracy and enfeeblement were then used to justify oppressive controls.

Persistent Paradigms

There are echoes of the earliest negative imagery in later perceptions of Maasai deviance from a colonial and postcolonial norm. The Maasai largely defied attempts to harness them to the colonial economy. With some exceptions (warrior mercenaries on punitive expeditions, caravan guides, mail runners, herders, and even stokers on the Uganda Railway),²³ they refused in the early days of contact to engage in wage labor for Europeans, though this changed over time. Not being peasant cultivators but proud and self-sufficient stockmen, the Maasai did not fit the lord-peasant model that underpinned early white settlement. Africans who would not work for

the state were deemed to be against it. In order to justify coercive and ultimately repressive measures against the Maasai, the British had to relegate them to the level of inherent deviants requiring correction. The twin poles of their perceived deviance were economic backwardness and moral depravity, sometimes used almost interchangeably. These can be further broken down:

- Economically, they had allegedly failed to evolve from herders to cultivators in the linear progression by which civilization was measured.
- While "rudimentary capitalists," they allegedly refused to sell surplus cattle for cash (Spencer 1984, 67).
- They largely refused to sell labor surplus to their own requirements. Their young men, a potential workforce, were seen to be idle and therefore both useless and menacing.
- Their mobility rendered them less controllable than settled communities. Without actively doing anything to harm the state, they were nevertheless seen to be out of control.
- They were beautiful beasts, physically of an "ideal type," but predatory of others. Again, this rendered them useless—except as raw material to anthropologists.
- They were morally depraved because they had "stolen" land and practiced polygyny and "free love." Their male dress was indecent, and they had foul eating (and other) habits. Perceived sexual greed paralleled their alleged land greed.

In current tourism promotion of Kenya and Tanzania, in which the Maasai reluctantly feature, some of these supposed characteristics are used to market them as national symbols. (Also, as Sobania [2002] notes, cattle rarely appear in these and earlier images; visually, at least, the Maasai have finally been destocked, a long-term aim of British officials who accused this community of overstocking). They are the face of "old Africa," portrayed as persistent primitives whose beautiful beastliness and aristocracy—implying "pure blood," a total fiction—are a major draw for foreign visitors seeking the titillation of tribal contact. A priority for wildlife tourists has always been to get close to large, dangerous animals in the wild; now the trend is toward offering close encounters of a tribal kind.²⁴ In both tourism promotion and glossy fashion magazines (which frequently use tribal people as fashion accessories in order to suggest wildness, authenticity, and sexual frisson between white female models and black youths),

those perceived to be the most beautiful, noble, martial, endangered, and animal-like repeatedly feature.²⁵ Educated Maasai in particular are uncomfortable with such portrayals, but since many communities gain financially from tourism (and fashion teams often stay at community-managed lodges like Shompole, a David Bailey favorite in Kenyan Maasai territory), they risk shooting themselves in the foot by challenging this. They share a conundrum facing many indigenous communities around the world: how does one take one's fair share of tourist dollars without compromising dignity, exposing private culture and sacred sites to public scrutiny, and allowing intellectual and cultural property to be ripped off? The situation is not helped by the activities of certain self-appointed "cultural ambassadors" abroad; middle-aged men who dress up as warriors in order to tout "Maasai-ness," they arguably promote a false image to the U.S. public and media in particular. Community activist Daniel Salau expresses skepticism: "They have no mandate at all from the community, are commercially driven by self interest, and only serve to further the Kenyan government's objective of using the Maasai as objects of charity" (personal communication).

The traditional defensive role of the warriors has now fallen to young, politically charged activists, which is maybe why people still cling to the warrior ideal: they see themselves as defending and safeguarding the community in the widest sense. "Militarism" is one response to environmental and political pressures. Since the summer of 2004, Kenyan Maasai are again publicly redefining who they are, in relation both to the former colonial power and the independent nation state, in order to call for reparations and land restitution.²⁶ A divided community is presenting itself as united, although splits are sorely apparent. In memoranda presented to the British and Kenyan governments, activists are again quoting derogatory remarks about the Maasai from colonial documents, but this time around, these are loudly condemned. However, the warrior past is being invoked in erroneous claims that hundreds of warriors bravely fought and died in defense of their motherland, when in fact the Maasai did not violently resist colonial intrusion. This historical revisionism reflects a failure to accept that an earlier generation of warriors did not prevent the British from taking their land. As a consequence of land losses and the supposed disappearance of social structures, it is claimed "the Maasai are losing their identity" (Simel 2003).²⁷ That is highly doubtful, if not impossible. It has always been fluid and continues to evolve in response to internal and external factors.

Notes

1. *Maasai* is the correct spelling, but *Masai* will be used when citing colonial-era records. The KLC was a government-appointed commission of inquiry into African land issues. The forced moves were the subject of my doctoral thesis, "Moving the Maasai: A Colonial Misadventure" (University of Oxford, 2002). A revised version will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2005.

2. A second edition was published in 1887, and a third in 1968. All quotes are from the first.

3. For one example of an exception, Daniel Salau of SIMOO (Simba Maasai Outreach Organisation) urges the Maasai to engage with the globalization process in a 2002 paper for *Civicus*. There is no mention of warriors or of celebrations of supposedly timeless traditions; it only urges the Maasai to safeguard their culture while simultaneously embracing the modern world, www.globalpolicy.org/globaliz/cultural/2002/0920masaii.htm.

4. Viewable at www.montelis.com/satya/backissues/dec97/maasai.html. This credits Thomson with the "discovery" of Maasailand.

5. He may not have written this, but he would presumably have approved it.

6. A paper on the 1881 journey is in *Proceedings of the RGS* (1882). See Rotberg's (1885) introduction to the third edition of Thomson's *Through Masai Land*; Rotberg 1970a; Fabian 2000.

7. Besides Sobania (2002) and Galaty (2002), see Landau and Kaspin (2002); Stevenson and Graham-Stewart (2001).

8. This is not a contradiction of the claim that Thomson was primarily responsible for producing the derogatory image. The crucial difference was that he disseminated it in printed, mass-produced form.

9. Brantlinger (1985) calls it an "African Pygmalion story" (189). Rotberg (1970a) rightly says *Ulu* "provided a superb outlet for many of Thomson's fantasies," but claims, "The setting is true, the action—except for the denouement—reasonable plausible, and the dialogue acceptable if occasionally stilted" (239). Elsewhere (1970b), he writes that it was only in *Ulu* that Thomson fully expressed how Africa "satisfied a deep streak of romance" in him—a gross understatement (304).

10. "When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one, and consequently at the same time, when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with destruction by our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just *others*, that we ourselves are an 'other' among others" (Paul Ricoeur 1955).

11. Naudé (2003) discusses other colonial texts that flirt with cross-racial sex, including William Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* (1926), Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), and *She* (1887). In Haggard's texts, white men have brief affairs with African women who die before the affair is consummated. Says Naudé, "It is not unusual for the white male explorer-heroes of colonial literature to admit to their

being sexually attracted to the female inhabitants of the explored (and ultimately conquered) territory—yet without fail the plot prevents the physical culmination of said attraction, frequently through the convenient death of the black woman.” Brantlinger makes a similar observation regarding *King Solomon’s Mines* and links the fates of the African women Foulata and Ulu. “Like aristocrats in Renaissance pastoral, [Haggard’s white heroes] cleave to their own kind and return to the light” (192).

12. “Authorities,” a postscript to Haggard (1887). Allan Quatermain and friends also feature in *King Solomon’s Mines*, but this plot does not so obviously mirror Thomson’s story.

13. Thomson’s brother also wrote a biography, published 1896.

14. Quotes are Collett in Anderson and Grove (1987), 137; Knowles and Collett 1989, 434.

15. “He brought home the first news about the Masai” (Schnee 1920 1:627–28). Fischer wrote *Das Masai-land* and *Mehr Licht im dunkeln Weltteil* (both published in Hamburg, 1885).

16. Röscher was murdered by members of “Wahiao tribe” near the coast in March 1860. *Proceedings of the RGS*, news series (1881), 3:686; Schnee 1920, 3:182.

17. This is enlarged upon in a chapter on imperial travellers in Beinart and Hughes, forthcoming 2006.

18. The Maasai are divided into socio-territorial sections called *il-oshon*. Some have disappeared, or been absorbed into other sections, since the nineteenth century. Members of certain ‘defunct’ sections, such as the Il-Aikipiak, are currently re-asserting their ethnic identity.

19. There are two brief references in Collett (1987, 138, 140) regarding wild animals Maasai allegedly killed for food and the creation of game reserves respectively. There are none in Knowles and Collett (1987).

20. Baxter and Farler took part in a discussion at the RGS following Last’s paper (1883, 539, 540).

21. British ambivalence toward, and admiration for, the “aristocratic” qualities of the Maasai are explored by Tidrick (1990, chap. 5).

22. Excerpt quoted in Collett (1987, 139), who also points out Eliot’s use of stereotypical images.

23. Eliot (1905) said Maasai were employed as stokers, work “which they do not consider as derogatory to a warrior, possibly being analogous to tending cattle” (100).

24. This is not new, except in the way that such encounters are expressly marketed today by tourism promoters. For a colonial example, David Bunn has written of early tourism in South Africa’s Kruger National Park: “In many English tourist accounts it is clear that the experience of proximity to ‘raw natives,’ as they were called, was a crucial aspect of enjoyment for whites” (Bunn 2003).

25. For example, see “Big Game,” a fashion shoot by David Bailey at Shompole, Kenya, in *British Vogue*, January 2004.

26. The history of these claims is more fully discussed in Lotte Hughes (2005).
27. A memorandum presented by Maasai representatives to the British and Kenyan governments in August 2004 was partly based on this earlier paper but did not repeat this phrase.

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