

DEVELOPMENT AT THE MARGINS: MISSIONARIES, THE STATE,
AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF MARSABIT, KENYA
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By

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To my mom and dad

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Introduction

In 1908 Captain Leycester Aylmer of the King's African Rifles set out to survey the portion of the East African frontier that lay between the Juba River and Lake Turkana, what would become Northern Kenya. In his report Aylmer described the land, some 80,000 square miles, as a dry and sparsely populated wasteland whose unproductive character was "entirely owing to the lack of water." In spite of his own observations, Aylmer believed the region had the potential to be a financial and political asset to the British government: "...if steps can be taken to increase the water-supply by the sinking of wells and cutting of canals, the country will soon be supporting ever-increasing numbers of contented people and their cattle, who, though at present nomads, may eventually under more certain conditions of life evolve into agriculturalists. Thus Britain may some day be able to claim as an achievement, not only the change of warlike savages into peaceful subjects, but barren deserts into rich and fertile provinces."¹ In Aylmer's estimation, the value of the land depended upon the relationship between the region's water supply and its inhabitants, and the solution lay in the knowledge and resources of the British administration.

Captain Aylmer was just one in a long series of people—administrators, missionaries, consultants, politicians, development workers—who defined the problems of Northern Kenya and believed that solutions could be found in better managing natural

¹ "The Country between the Juba River and Lake Rudolf," *The Geographical Journal* 38, no. 3 (September 1911): 289–96. Though "Northern Kenya" does not refer to a politically bounded region I have chosen to capitalize it throughout this paper.

resources, introducing new technologies, and modernizing the region's population. As recent as 2011 the Kenyan government announced a new "development strategy" for Northern Kenya, aimed at more effectively integrating the region into the national economy and creating "a secure, just and prosperous Northern Kenya and other arid lands, where people achieve their full potential and enjoy a high quality of life." According to the new strategy, the foundations for the development of Northern Kenya could be divided into seven categories: infrastructure, security, human resource development, public sector reforms, natural resource management, drought management, and science, technology, and innovation.² The plan itself is very thorough, and if implemented as described, would likely benefit most of the communities and residents of Northern Kenya. But its very existence is evidence that almost all of the previous plans for "developing" Northern Kenya have failed to achieve their goals.

My interest in Marsabit—a sub-region of Northern Kenya—originated from a seemingly disconnected subject: American evangelicalism in the second half of the twentieth century. In my research I became interested in how Evangelical activism, fueled by the robust post-war US economy, created and sustained personal and economic networks with communities in sub-Saharan Africa. I began researching and writing about Northern Kenya because of my interest in what the sociologist Robert Wuthnow terms the "globalization of American Christianity." In his 2009 book, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches*, Wuthnow provides a catalogue of quantitative data to

² Government of Kenya, *Vision 2030 Development Strategy for Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands* (Republic of Kenya, 2011).

demonstrate the transnational character of American churches today.³ He also lists some examples from his research, which effectively illustrates the transnational environment of many American congregations:

A nondenominational megachurch in southern California sends teams of technical advisors to help start micro businesses in Kenya. A Baptist church in suburban Atlanta takes in a refugee family from Honduras and helps its members learn English. A Methodist youth group in Oklahoma spends a week in Guatemala painting an orphanage. A Roman Catholic parish in Philadelphia takes up a special offering to help its sister parish in Lithuania. The vestry at an Episcopal church in Chicago formulates a resolution about debt relief for countries in Africa. An independent evangelical congregation in Texas trains and supports overseas missionaries in more than a dozen countries.⁴

While Wuthnow's work focuses on American churches themselves, I was more interested in the consequences of these global networks for communities on the "receiving" end. In particular, I became interested in the consequences that had least to do with the religious content of missionary work, and my initial interest was in the environmental effects of the missionary encounter in Marsabit. The unique qualities of the region—its environmental fragility and the fact that there were few missionaries in Northern Kenya before the 1960s—made it appealing for the types of questions I was asking about the globalization of American Christianity and its non-religious consequences.

But as I made my way further into the research project, and discovered errors in my assumptions, the limitations of my sources, and complexities in my narrative, the

³ Robert Wuthnow, *Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 7. Some of these statistics include: American churches spend \$4 billion annually on overseas ministry, which represents a nearly 50 percent increase since the 1990s; 62 percent of active church members in the US have traveled or lived in another country; the Southern Baptist Convention spends around \$300 million a year on overseas ministries and the Assemblies of God churches spend nearly \$200 million; World Vision International, an evangelical humanitarian aid organization, receives \$1 billion in donations annually. Additionally, "The number of full-time missionaries serving abroad has increased steadily over the same period and is significantly larger than a half century ago when the missionary movement was at its presumed all-time high."

⁴ Ibid.

dominant theme that emerged was Marsabit itself. And so the chapters in this dissertation follow the narrative of Marsabit and the pastoralists, administrators, missionaries, and others who resided on or near the mountain in the twentieth century, but deal with various analytical themes. These themes include an emphasis on the changing social and political role of Marsabit's resources, the interplay between development policy and Christian missionary theory and practice, and the marginalization of pastoralists in post-colonial Kenya.

What follows is a general overview of Marsabit's ecology, history, and an introduction to pastoralist communities who have been living there since the nineteenth century. I'll conclude this introduction with a short discussion of the analytical themes of my research and a summary of the chapters that follow.

Marsabit

Largely as a result of its arid climate, throughout its history the Marsabit region has been *in-between*—defined more by its borders and what lies beyond them than anything else. It lies between major water sources and between ideal pastureland for cattle. In the nineteenth century it was between the social centers of the Horn of Africa—Oromo highlands, Somali coast, Kikuyu highlands, and Masai rangeland. At the outset of the twentieth century it lay between the encroaching political states of Abyssinia and British East Africa. One of the defining characteristics of the region has been its marginality. It is a region where marginal peoples, like the camel-herding Rendille and Gabra, have made their home for centuries.

Geographically, Marsabit sits within the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, north of the Rift Valley and south of the Ethiopian escarpment. The basin itself is predominantly arid

lowlands of scrub plains and desert, but Marsabit itself gently rises to a height of 1865 meters (6120 feet). Rainfall comes in two seasons: the major rains fall between March



Figure 1: Landscape of Northern Kenya

and May, while the lesser rains fall at the end of the year, between October and December. The erratic nature of these rains, which vary greatly in timing and location, along with the harsh soil conditions define a region resistant to agriculture. The Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, like much of the Rift Valley, has long been populated by groups who predominantly rely on nomadic pastoralism for their livelihoods.⁵

Though there is great linguistic and cultural variety among these pastoralist groups, they do possess a curious similarity: they all construct their dwelling places with doors that open to the west. The anthropologist Gunther Schlee suggests that while spatial orientation can be part of complex rituals, in the case of Northern Kenya the explanation is more straightforward: the wind consistently blows from the east.⁶

⁵ Neal Sobania, *The Historical Tradition of the Peoples of the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, C.1840-1925.*, 1980, 24; K. A. Edwards, C. R. Field, and I. G. G. Hogg, *A Preliminary Analysis of Climatological Data from the Marsabit District of Northern Kenya*, IPAL Technical Report B-1 (UNEP, 1979), 13.

⁶ Gunther Schlee, *Identities on the Move: Clanship and Pastoralism in Northern Kenya* (Manchester University Press, 1989), 36.

It is this same eastern wind that gives Marsabit Mountain its unique ecology, as an island of greenery in a sea of desert. The monsoonal winds from the Indian Ocean flow across the desert plains, from the Somali coast to the shores of Lake Turkana. When the winds hit the eastern slopes of Marsabit Mountain, they rise in elevation, the air temperature rapidly falls, and precipitation results in the form of rain or mist clouds. While Marsabit's average annual rainfall is over 30 inches, the surrounding lowlands average zero to eight inches annually.⁷ What made Marsabit remarkable for European explorers and colonial administrators was how the cool climate and dense tropical forest contrasted to the desert-like character of the surrounding region. One early administrator described it as "cloud-capped like a haven of rest in a wilderness always waterless and generally lava-strewn."⁸ The first missionaries to Marsabit were even told that the name meant "the place of black mist."⁹

These same easterly winds create a "rain shadow" effect on Marsabit—vegetation and watering points are concentrated on the eastern side of the mountain, while the western slopes receive little moisture, and are covered in scrub-brush. The shadow effect is clearly visible from satellite images, as dense rainforest and grassland are concentrated on one side of the mountain, and arid soil on the other.

There are a few other mountains in the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, but Marsabit

⁷ Elliot Fratkin and Eric Abella Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle: Social, Health, and Economic Consequences of the Pastoral Sedentarization in Marsabit District, Kenya*, 1st Edition. (Springer, 2010), 30. Annual rainfall measurements can be deceiving in arid and semi-arid climates. It may be the case that 70% of the total annual rainfall occurs within one month, and a period of intense flooding can be followed by prolonged drought.

⁸ Geoffrey Archer, *Personal and Historical Memoirs of an East African Administrator*, First Edition (Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1963), 35.

⁹ Alfred Barclay Buxton, "Black Mist," *Bible Churchmen's Missionary Messenger*, June 1932; David Webster, *The Shimmering Heat: Memories of a Bush Doctor in East Africa* (Rushden, Northamptonshire: Stanley L. Hunt Ltd., 2007), 5.

is unique in having permanent rather than seasonal water sources, and in its gentle slopes, which make it easier to access. In fact, Marsabit is really more of a plateau than a “mountain.” Within the rainforest are two permanent lakes formed within volcanic craters, while both seasonal and year-round springs can be accessed outside the forest.

It was almost certainly the animals who were the first to make use of these permanent springs and lake-filled craters. Elephants, rhinos, greater kudu and others made paths that were eventually followed by nomadic groups who came to the region. Being near the Rift Valley, it is possible that Marsabit was visited by some of the earliest hominids.

During the sixteenth century the climate of the Lake Turkana Basin was fairly similar to the twentieth century, and the region was populated by groups of hunter-gatherers and pastoral nomads.¹⁰ These nomads shared a common “culture of herdsmen” and spoke various dialects of the Eastern Cushitic Somaloid language. This “proto-Rendille-Somali culture” (PRS) was made up of various groups who practiced the same fourteen-year age-set system and seemed to have fluid social boundaries.¹¹

The dominance of PRS groups was upset in the latter half of the sixteenth century when Oromo groups from Ethiopia were unified and expanded across the region. The result was a period of Oromo hegemony, or *pax borana*, after the Boran, who were the southern most group of the Oromo peoples.

The expansion of the Boran south of the Ethiopian escarpment into present-day Northern Kenya split the PRS. Subsequently, all PRS groups were heavily influenced by Boran culture, but to varying degrees. Most were required to pay tribute to the Boran,

¹⁰ Schlee, *Identities on the Move*, 31–32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

though it is likely that many groups migrated to avoid their new overlords. Still others completely assimilated and were absorbed by the Boran. The Rendille and Gabra withdrew to the west, towards the shores of Lake Turkana, and remained isolated from the Islamization that came to define the eastern Somali speakers. The pax borana lasted until the nineteenth century, when internal fissures along with Somali cultural unification led to a period of decline for Oromo groups.

By the time the British arrived in Kenya, they viewed Somali expansion as a serious threat to colonial interests, and sought to retain territory for those groups that were not Islamized. Early on in their administration of the Northern Frontier District (NFD), British colonial authorities created the “Galla-Somali line,” which was designed to keep Somalis to the eastern side of the frontier district, and to retain the area around Marsabit and to the west for the Galla—a broad tribal classification used by the British that included the Boran, Gabra and others.¹²

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, the Rendille, Gabra, Boran, and Samburu have dominated the region surrounding Marsabit and regularly relied on the mountain’s slopes for dry-season grazing and occasionally for more permanent settlement. The following is a brief overview of the four groups, but at the outset it is necessary to note that the definitions and boundaries have not always been rigid, and there are numerous examples of individuals “changing” ethnicities through marriage, warfare, or personal choice.

Because of the political ramifications, the question of “first” or “original” inhabitants is still hotly debated among current residents on Marsabit. However, the

¹² Ibid., 45–46.

academic community is in agreement that the earliest inhabitants—of those who are still there today—were the camel herding Rendille and Gabra.

Today and throughout most of the twentieth century, the Rendille occupy the southern portion of Marsabit District, and speak a dialect of Somali, though they are not ethnically Somali. The Rendille proper are made up of nine clans, who define themselves by camel herding and by participation in *gaalgulamme*, a ritual gathering that takes place every fourteen years.¹³ Rendille religion is monotheistic, but has resisted the influence of Islam. Traditionally there has been an outflow of Rendille, who are then assimilated with other groups in the region, and it is very rare for the Rendille to assimilate outsiders. This outmigration is partly explained by the commitment to the camel economy and the practice of primogeniture. Camel herds grow much slower than other livestock—they have a longer gestation period, lower birth rates, and the desert environment can also make fertility less predictable. Because of the amount of time it takes to build or recover a camel herd, Rendille inheritance practices heavily favor the firstborn son, passing on the entire herd to the single heir. While the Rendille have a number of cultural practices that dampen population growth—including delayed monogamous marriage and infanticide—the livestock-poor and later-born sons often have more of an incentive to practice a different form of pastoralism. Monogamous marriage also leads to an outmigration of women, who intermarry with neighboring groups.¹⁴ Most of these

¹³ Ibid., 9 “The ‘white’ Rendille thus define themselves by the *gaalgulamme* ceremony, for which they gather once in fourteen years in a gigantic circle of houses. Attached to this fourteen-year cycle is a long series of rituals, which involve a complicated division of ritual labour and require co-operation of the nine clans. The tribe becomes visible here as a corporate whole.”

¹⁴ Eric Abella Roth, “A Reexamination of Rendille Population Regulation,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 95, no. 3 (September 1, 1993): 597–611. Roth demonstrates that Rendille practices that regulate population growth were not caused by concern for ecological limitations (carrying capacity) but by social preference, in particular the strengthening of the warrior age-set.

“former” Rendille are then integrated with the cattle-herding Samburu.¹⁵ Samburu are the northern-most Maa-speakers, making for a curious element in the social landscape of Northern Kenya: the Rendille have a closer and better relationship with cattle-herding Maa-speakers than they do with neighboring groups from their own language family.

While the Rendille have a high degree of group coherence and strong identity boundaries, the Gabra are made up of a loose collection of five phatries, which are in-themselves more central to identity, economy, and social organization.¹⁶ Gabra culture and practice represents a combination of Eastern Cushitic (Rendille and Somali) and Boran elements, leading to a variety of theories of their origins (Schlee’s PRS theory is one of a few explanations).¹⁷ The Gabra speak the Boran dialect of the Oromo language, but aspects of their dress, calendar, and rituals resemble the Rendille and Somali. They also have a similar age-grade system as the Rendille. Throughout most of the twentieth century, and continuing today, the Gabra occupy the lowlands to the north and west of Marsabit Mountain. Over the past few decades many Gabra have settled in Marsabit town or elsewhere on the mountain.

The Boran of Northern Kenya are part of the larger Oromo nation, which runs from central Ethiopia to the Tana river in central Kenya. It’s been estimated that Oromo-speakers make up nearly half the population of Ethiopia, while they are a mere sliver of the population in Kenya.¹⁸ The cattle-herding Boran played a hegemonic role in the region up until the nineteenth century, when divisions within Oromo groups, along with

¹⁵ This is the likely explanation for the existence of the Ariaal, who are a Rendille-speaking Samburu clan.

¹⁶ The five phatries are: Gar, Galbo, Sharbana, Odoola, and Alganna. See Schlee, *Identities on the Move*, 14–18.

¹⁷ See Aneesa Kassam, “The People of the Five ‘Drums’: Gabra Ethnohistorical Origins,” *Ethnohistory* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 173–93.

¹⁸ Mario I. Aguilar, *Being Oromo in Kenya* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Pr, 1998), 1–2.

Maasai and Somali expansion, led to a period of retreat from the Marsabit region. In the 1920s many Boran began to return to Marsabit, and in spite of the disapproval of the British authorities, settled on and around Marsabit mountain.

The resulting pairings have been of great interest to anthropologists. The Rendille and Gabra descend from the same proto-Rendille-Somali culture, and share a commitment to camel herding, but do not speak the same language and have frequently been in conflict. The Boran and Gabra share a common language, but do not share a common calendar or set of rituals. And the Rendille and Samburu have very close cultural ties, but descend from two different language families. But each of these groups has historically depended on livestock for their livelihoods, and share a common commitment to pastoralism.

East African Pastoralism

The following chapters illustrate Marsabit's changing social and political role over the twentieth century. A significant part of the process was the gradual exclusion of pastoralists from the mountain's resources in favor of environmental conservation and farming. The colonial and post-colonial authorities who introduced and enforced these policies also built administrative and police headquarters, permanent staff housing, and a prison on Marsabit, co-opting more of the resources to support a settled population of administrators, bureaucrats, shop keepers, and farmers. Missionaries and later development organizations were given land grants by state authorities, further reducing the acreage of Marsabit's grassland available to pastoralists. As late as 1962 the Rendille were described as "a very rich people in stock...perhaps they are one of the richest tribes

in Kenya, in stock.”¹⁹ When severe drought occurred in the 1960s and 70s, the Rendille were unable to use Marsabit’s resources to sustain their herds as they had in the past, and many livestock died. The difficulties of recovering from the loss of wealth have left many Rendille in an economically vulnerable position for decades.

The experience of the Rendille and Gabra is part of a larger trend of the marginalization of pastoralists throughout Africa and elsewhere in the world. From the early colonial days up to the present, pastoralist groups have often been characterized as “backwards” and stubbornly resistant to modernization. Committed pastoralists were a significant problem for colonial authorities in Kenya, who notoriously divided and confined Maasai groups who previously played a hegemonic role in East Africa. The semi-nomadic lifestyle and seasonal migrations made it difficult for government or missionaries to establish schools, churches, health centers, and other socializing institutions. Their resistance to market orientation and commitment to a livestock economy was seen as irrational. At best it was viewed as a poor use of resources, at worst a major cause of “desertification.” In Kenya and elsewhere, colonial policies marginalized pastoralists—directly and indirectly—by continually confining their movements and prioritizing land-use for white settlers as well as Bantu-speaking agriculturalists. These policies were continued by the Kikuyu dominated national government, leading to the situation today where groups who have traditionally practiced pastoralism are confined to a region where crisis is endemic.²⁰ The acceleration of these recurring crises in the 1970s—drought, famine, disease, unemployment,

¹⁹ Report, Field Director, “Unreached Areas Committee Trip,” June 22, 1962, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/4, Billy Graham Center Archives.

²⁰ Paul Spencer, *The Pastoral Continuum: The Marginalization of Tradition in East Africa*, Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 207–218.

disenfranchisement, poverty—led to a large number of development interventions in pastoral areas and to greater focus on the question of the sustainability of pastoralism as a way of life.

Missionaries and Development

My research on Marsabit also details the consequences of colonial development policies on the margins of empire, and how missionaries who were leery of “physical ministries” eventually justified and funded their work by using the language of development.

Informally, “development” is used in a variety of ways and can carry with it a host of ideas and assumptions. Chapter 2 goes into greater detail of the history of colonial development, so I will only briefly touch on the subject here. Frederick Cooper has defined development, as practiced by colonial and national governments, as a concept that represents “poverty as the eternal backwardness of Africa to be ameliorated by the benevolent injection of western knowledge, markets, and capital.”²¹ What began as the economic development of foreign markets for the benefit of the metropole was transformed in the post-war decades into a broader concept that was also concerned with the standards of living of colonial subjects and citizens. “Development” was increasingly justified by moral claims calling for greater intervention into the lives of colonial subjects and a focus on social welfare. Cooper describes the logic of post-war development: “If poor people are to meet basic human needs, if entire categories of people are not to be excluded from knowledge, technologies and freedom of choice from which the majority of the world’s population now benefit, then the market needs help.”²²

²¹ Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 29.

²² Frederick Cooper, “Writing the History of Development,” *Journal of Modern European History* 8, no. 1 (April 15, 2010): 10 Cooper continues, “Whatever the possible ways of theoretically defining development,

In Kenya, missionaries had long been involved with two of the pillars of social welfare: schooling and medical work. They were certainly ameliorative towards the expanding concept of development—essentially a moral obligation to change the practices and beliefs of Africans—even if they were ambivalent about greater cooperation with the state. And if development could be equated with meeting the needs of the poor, then the concept touched on practices long associated with Christianity and Christian missions in particular. Missionaries could cite various passages in their bibles that commanded service to the poor. According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus began his public ministry by reading the following passage of the Hebrew Bible: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”²³

But two of the three missionary societies that worked in Northern Kenya were originally founded in protest against denominational mission societies, which they believed had become too entangled in social programs and “physical ministries” to the neglect of preaching the message of salvation. These two Protestant missionary societies—the Bible Chuchmen’s Missionary Society and the Africa Inland Mission—operated in fairly different structures. The BCMS was formed in protest to the CMS, but still operated within the Anglican Church, while AIM was a non-denominational faith mission founded in the United States. But what they did share was a common set of evangelical beliefs and practices that emphasized the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus

the historical sequence sketched above established a conception that has proven durable: state projects, channeling resources in ways that the market does not, with the goal of improving the conditions that foster economic growth and higher standards of living.”

²³ Luke 4:18-19, English Standard Version.

Christ as the necessary means for salvation. They believed that the proclamation of this message was the foundation of all missionary work, whose aim was the conversion of non-Christians. As evangelical Protestants, the BCMS and AIM also shared a common-sense biblicism, which held the bible as accurate, without error, and able to be understood by all Christians. The populist heritage of evangelicalism, as well as the unique histories of each organization, led to missionaries who “emphasized the power of prayer and preaching over scholarship and ritual” and who expressed “an antipathy toward hierarchy and centralization.”²⁴

While the BCMS and AIM were attracted to Northern Kenya because of their evangelical theology—the region was characterized as “unreached” by previous missionaries—their responses to pastoralists and administrators were characterized by pragmatism rather than evangelical ideology. One of the main conclusions of my research is that Protestant missionaries in Northern Kenya were not guided by theology or policy as they became enmeshed in the post-colonial development apparatus. The BCMS was always a small society, but after World War II they continually struggled to maintain funding. Their decision to accept funding from the government for educational and medical work was driven more by financial need than any sort of ideology.

The AIM missionaries who setup stations in Northern Kenya in the 1960s were all second or third generation AIM missionaries, meaning they were raised “on the field” in East Africa and strongly identified as missionaries. This identity, when combined with a common sense biblicism, resulted in a shared missionary culture that valued action over introspection and which placed more trust in experience than in the advice or direction of

²⁴ Barbara MacGowan Cooper, *Evangelical Christians in the Muslim Sahel*, African Systems of Thought; Variation: African Systems of Thought. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 17–18.

committees and mission theorists. They also had an affinity for technical skills, which they sought to integrate into their evangelical mission work. In the late 1960s and 1970s AIM missionaries in Northern Kenya became involved in resettling pastoralists and conserving grasslands and forests, but these projects were ad hoc responses to the famine camps that developed around mission stations.

Throughout the period under consideration, AIM missionaries in Marsabit wrote little if anything on the topics of “Christian development” or “Christian environmentalism.” They continued to stress the pre-eminence of Christian proclamation in missionary work, but increasingly relied on their technical expertise, access to wealth, and integration into the development bureaucracy to justify their work in Northern Kenya.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 - From Pastoralist Refuge to Imperial Outpost

The first chapter articulates the ways the state altered the relationship between the mountain and the region’s pastoralists during the first two decades of British colonial administration on Marsabit, from 1909 to 1929. During this period, the colonial state’s presence was minimal and relatively weak. Colonial authorities were reluctant to invest in a region marked by instability and marginality. Rendille and Gabra communities found it relatively easy to evade British authorities in the lowlands of the Northern Frontier District, but faced greater regulation on Marsabit. In pre-colonial days pastoralists relied upon Marsabit’s pastures and permanent water sources during the dry seasons, especially during years of drought. The mountains’ resources were also used by

pastoralists who were livestock poor—from drought, warfare, or poor inheritance.

Marsabit allowed them to recoup losses, build a herd of large-stock, and return to pastoral nomadism. Impoverished pastoralists hoped the mountain's resources would give them freedom to leave the confines of the forest, and return to the region's pastures.

The transformation of Marsabit into an imperial outpost for the East African Protectorate did not end pastoralist use of the mountains resources. It did however introduce new elements into Marsabit's ecology. The forest, wild game, water, and crops were all used in different ways, and perhaps more importantly, for different purposes.

The British primarily used Marsabit's resources for political purposes. These were not disconnected from economic and social interests, but they were in the service of instilling and preserving state power. Simply put, early administrators wanted the British-controlled EAP to operate in the frontier territory and not Abyssinia (or Italy, or Germany). The state's prerogatives were certainly not absolute in this period, but by the end of the 1920s Marsabit was a tool in the hands of the state, and colonial authorities had the ability to enforce their visions of the mountain and its resources.

Chapter 2 – State Development at the Margins

Chapter 2 considers the changes in British theories of colonial development and the way these policies altered the state's regulation of Marsabit, its resources, and its population in the prior to the 1960s. In the 1930s and especially the 1940s, imperial authorities embraced the idea that colonial development needed to include the social welfare of its subjects. The Colonial Office and Parliament made imperial resources available for social services, including education and healthcare. The expanded definition of

development also carried a social reform agenda, which led to greater intervention in the lives of colonial subjects.

But at Marsabit, on the margins of the empire, the most consequential result of imperial development policy was the conservation and regulation of the mountain's forest, land, and watering points. Although elsewhere in the colony and the empire, the state expanded its role in social reform, on Marsabit, commercial and social development were subsumed by the conservationist agenda.

An emphasis on agricultural production led an increase in Marsabit's settled population and in the amount of land used for growing crops. In the lowlands of Marsabit District, Rendille and Gabra camel herders continued to operate under the benign neglect of indirect rule, perhaps unwittingly exchanging their wealth for freedom from colonial oversight. By the end of the colonial period, development policies as well as ad hoc administrative decisions marginalized Rendille and Gabra communities and secured the mountain's resources for agriculturalists and cattle herders.

Chapter 3 – “It's Their Souls We Seek”: Missionaries and Colonial Development on Marsabit

One of the ways colonial authorities hoped to provide for social welfare in Marsabit was through an agreement with the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society. My third chapter focuses on the first three decades of missionary work at Marsabit, beginning in 1931 up through the end of the 1950s.

BCMS missionaries were the only missionaries allowed to work in all of the Northern Frontier District. They did initiate the formation of a lasting Christian

community on Marsabit, but in general the society was marked by inconsistency and financial troubles. When compared with other mission societies in colonial Kenya, BCMS contributions to Marsabit and the NFD were very limited. Its missionaries did create and sustain the first primary school and medical facility on Marsabit, but largely failed to meet their own goals or those of the colonial administration. Instead, in the 1950s they became heavily dependent on government grants and the technical training of its missionaries to sustain its work at Marsabit. The BCMS school and medical facility were closed down and the lone BCMS missionary worked in the government run school. Ideologically the BCMS maintained that evangelism was the primary justification for their presence, but ultimately lost much of their influence.

The BCMS missionaries built the station at Marsabit with a vision to use the mountain to evangelize the region's nomadic population, but they ended up concentrating their efforts on the people who settled near the town and the mission station. Ultimately, mission facilities, institutions, and personal networks entrenched the position of the settled population on Marsabit, while the Rendille and Gabra generally kept their distance from mission work on the mountain. The combination of pastoralist autonomy and small-scale social welfare in Marsabit District meant that by the end of the 1950s many pastoralists were still disconnected from modern institutions, had less access to valuable dry-season grazing territory, and did not have a generation of educated elites to advocate for better resources.

Chapter 4 - A Sedentary Independence

Changes in state policy and the use of new technologies in transportation and communications led to an increase in the number of Christian mission groups in Northern Kenya in the 1960s. Roman Catholic (Consolata) and Africa Inland Mission missionaries joined the few remaining BCMS personnel, and brought stronger financial and institutional presence to the frontier region.

This same period was marked by severe drought, famine, and forced villagization, which left the lowland Rendille and Gabra more confined and impoverished than they had ever been before. Throughout the sixties these missionaries most often encountered pastoralists in settlements that arose out of conditions of poverty, leading to a series of ad hoc relief and development projects. Like others before them, they did not have a deep understanding or value of the pastoralist culture or economy. Their responses to livestock loss and prolonged settlement were informed by common sense pragmatism and evangelical theology, and not by development theories or any sort of environmentalist ethic.

By the end of the decade AIM and Catholic missionaries had solidified their role as the most important channels for resources and information, including food and water, funding for projects, and advocacy for the region's pastoralists.

Chapter 5 – Marsabit, Missionaries, and the New Economy of Development

From 1969 to 1976 Marsabit District experienced an eight-year drought.²⁵ Large numbers of livestock died and many more pastoralists were impoverished. The most destitute

²⁵ K. A. Edwards, C. R. Field, and I. G. G. Hogg, *A Preliminary Analysis of Climatological Data from the Marsabit District of Northern Kenya*, 6–8.

families and individuals set up camp around churches and mission compounds, presenting both new problems and opportunities for the region's Catholic and Protestant missionaries.

Missionaries moved even further beyond their religious expertise, and created their own development initiatives, including agricultural resettlement projects on the mountain.

For AIM missionaries in particular, participation in and contribution to development projects became a new justification for missionary presence in Northern Kenya. The tremendous growth of the AIC church meant that Kenyan Christians could now take over the traditional role of missionaries: proclaiming the message of salvation through Jesus Christ and forming Christian communities. AIM missionaries increasingly relied on their technical expertise, access to wealth, and integration into the development bureaucracy to justify their work in Northern Kenya. This was also true for BCMS missionaries, but they chose to focus their declining resources elsewhere in Kenya.

The drought in Marsabit was considered part of a larger trend in "desertification" across the Sahelian belt, which led to widespread famine conditions that received international attention. During the last half of the 1970s, the UN funded a million dollar development project centered at Marsabit. The Integrated Project in Arid Lands (IPAL) lasted for eight years and brought a new level of scientific research and bureaucracy to Marsabit.

Chapter 1

From Pastoralist Refuge to Imperial Outpost

Largely as a result of its arid climate, throughout its history the Marsabit region has been *in-between*—defined more by its borders and what lies beyond them than anything else. It lies between major water sources and between ideal pastureland for cattle. In the nineteenth century it was between the social centers of the Horn of Africa (Oromo highlands, Somali coast, Kikuyu highlands, and Masai rangeland), and at the outset of the twentieth century it lay between the encroaching political states of Abyssinia and British East Africa. One of the defining characteristics of the region has been its marginality. It is a region where marginal peoples, like the camel-herding Rendille and Gabra, have made their home for centuries.

As a cool, forested area with a permanent water supply, Marsabit became an important center for British authorities as they extended control over the arid region north of the Uaso Nyiro river. Marsabit was first established as an administrative outpost of the East African Protectorate in 1909, and over its first decade of operation it functioned as a civil and military base for those seeking to impose the Protectorate's law and order throughout the Northern Frontier District.

Prior to British presence, Marsabit had quite a different function within the social and environmental context of the East African lowlands. For centuries the region surrounding Marsabit has been home to nomadic pastoral groups, whose wealth was in

their livestock. Livestock were essential in a region where poor soil and limited rainfall made dependence on crops nearly impossible. Herds of cattle, camels, sheep, and goats, mitigated the unpredictability of rainfall by roaming across the plains, consuming natural vegetation wherever it grew, and producing human food.¹ Livestock were (and are) essential in arid and semi-arid regions because they convert grass, which is unpalatable to humans, into milk, meat, and blood.²

For pastoral societies, herding is more than an economic adaptation to conditions unfavorable to cultivation. Herding also represents a cultural ideal for pastoralists, in which wealth and social position are reflected both in the number and type of livestock owned. Livestock herding is preferred over agriculture, and large stock herding is preferred over small stock herding. Most groups practice some form of mixed livestock pastoralism involving large stock (cattle, camels) and small stock (sheep, goats). However, the large stock are preferred to small stock, and typically represent the highest cultural and economic value within pastoral societies. For pastoralists, the commitment to herding is both economic and emotional.³

During the first two decades of British colonial administration on Marsabit, from 1909 to 1929, the colonial state altered the relationship between the mountain and the region's pastoralists. In Northern Kenya, the colonial state was both weak and inconsistent, and administrators reluctantly extended their authority across a region marked by instability and marginality. In response to colonial expansion, the region's

¹ Katherine Homewood, *Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies*, 1st ed. (Ohio University Press, 2009), 51.

² John G. Galaty and Pierre Bonte, *Herders, Warriors, and Traders: Pastoralism in Africa* (Westview Press, 1991), 10.

³ Neal Sobania, "Feasts, Famines and Friends: Nineteenth Century Exchange and Ethnicity in the Eastern Lake Turkana Region," in *Herders, Warriors, and Traders: Pastoralism in Africa* (Westview Press, 1991), 121.

pastoralists often evaded colonial authority when convenient and also attempted to co-opt the administration to strengthen their own position against rivals. In the early years of the administration, it is not clear who had the upper hand, as a type of mutual dependency developed, with periodic exploitation of pastoralist resources. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1920s, Marsabit was a tool in the hands of the state, and colonial authorities had the ability to enforce their visions of the mountain and its resources.

Late Nineteenth Century East Africa

The end of the nineteenth century was a period of heightened instability throughout East Africa. The small-scale societies that populated the region suffered from a maelstrom of disease, drought, famine, and warfare. Environmental fluctuation and livestock raiding were common occurrences for these pastoralist societies, and under typical circumstances, they could mitigate the consequences through migration and reliance on regional social networks. When natural or man-made disasters severely depleted livestock herds, pastoralists could seek recovery in a number of ways. The quickest way to rebuild livestock herds was through raiding and warfare, which usually depended on numerical or tactical superiority. A second option was to rely upon small stock—sheep and goats—which reproduced at faster rates than large stock. The herds of small stock could grow large enough and eventually be exchanged for cattle (or camels). In the case where both small and large stock were lost to disaster, and there was little hope of recovery through raiding, pastoralists could turn to hunting or cultivation to survive. Throughout the nineteenth century, East African pastoralists employed this

social and cultural “flexibility” to cope with periodic disasters.⁴ But the severity and frequency of disasters during the last two decades of the century, as well as the increasing number of firearms, resulted in a region whose predominant characteristics were instability and dislocation.

Beginning in the 1880s, a series of livestock epidemics spread throughout East Africa. The first was Bovine Pleuro-Pneumonia (BPP), which originated south of Masailand, and infected cattle herds throughout the rangelands of sub-Saharan Africa.⁵ Far more devastating was the Rinderpest pandemic of the 1890s. Rinderpest had been known in Europe since the Early Middle Ages, but was first introduced to sub-Saharan Africa in the 1880s by transport animals used by Italian and British armies. The disease spread rapidly from the north and had devastating consequences, killing an estimated 90 percent of the total number of cattle in sub-Saharan Africa.⁶

Rinderpest was followed by outbreaks of malaria and smallpox, which devastated the human population directly. Under typical conditions, pastoral communities are spread out over a vast territory and have minimal contact with one another, making it difficult for disease to become widespread. But the comparative isolation also meant most communities did not have the chance to develop immunities.⁷ After the rinderpest pandemic, many pastoralists settled in more densely populated famine camps, where they were likely exposed to disease. From these camps malaria and smallpox spread among the pastoralist regions of East Africa.

⁴ Neal Sobania, *Pastoralist Migration and Colonial Policy: A Case Study from Northern Kenya*, 1988, 220–223.

⁵ Homewood, *Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies*, 172.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁷ Richard Waller, *Emutai: Crisis and Response in Masailand*, History Seminar; 1986/87, Paper No. 4; (University of Malawi, Chancellor College, History Dept., 1986), 91.

The Gabra remember 1889 as the year in which black flies covered everything and in which cattle “disappeared.” This was followed by the year of malaria, then the year of smallpox.⁸ A group of Samburu would later recall the period in the following manner:

Most of the people died of starvation...they didn't have food...so people went and hunted elephant and ate; ate rhinoceros ... A few of them had small stock [sheep and goats] and lived again... The time of starvation people scattered everywhere, is it not so? Some escaped to the Turkana, some went to the Boran, some went to the Dassanetch and some went to the Elmolo and some were killed by the Rendille while stealing livestock. Some went to the Rendille and [others] became thieves who lived in the bush and stole camels. Some went to Ndorobo and took roots from the ground... Most people died of starvation. No matter which person it was, a warrior, a child, a woman...all died.⁹

Livestock raiding and warfare followed closely after disease epidemics, which upset the balance between human and stock populations. Though disease affected all of East Africa in this period, there was great variation in the timing, location, and severity of outbreaks. Some groups suffered greatly from stock disease, but escaped the smallpox epidemic, leaving the *moran* (warrior-age set) intact, but reducing the size of herds. Other groups were left with comparatively large numbers of cattle, but a greatly reduced human population. The result was a period in which groups of *moran* roamed the East African plains, seeking opportunities to increase their herds and recover their wealth. Alliances between neighboring groups, which had prevented raiding in the past, were frequently broken. In Masailand, a period of intersectional raiding ensued in the 1890s, resulting in consolidation and recovery for the strongest sections.¹⁰ Livestock raiding was

⁸ Tablino, Paul, *The Gabra: Camel Nomads of Northern Kenya* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 178–180.

⁹ Sobania, “Feasts, Famines and Friends: Nineteenth Century Exchange and Ethnicity in the Eastern Lake Turkana Region,” 136.

¹⁰ Waller, *Emutai*, 75–93.

certainly not new to pastoralists, but the extent of raiding and warfare in East Africa at the end of the nineteenth century added to the instability of the period.

The consequences of disease, drought, and warfare were compounded by large numbers of firearms imported into East Africa in this period. Groups and individuals who had access to the arms trade, and who could avoid regulation and confiscation, had an advantage over those without modern weapons. The first wave of firearms that entered East Africa in the late nineteenth century were older muskets, previously used by European armies in the 1850s. After new developments dramatically improved the effectiveness of firearms—including rifled bores, smokeless powder, and the breach-loading mechanisms—European armies replaced their obsolete muzzle-loaders. Many of these muskets entered East Africa through Abyssinia, Djibouti, and the Somali coast. These black-powder muskets were inaccurate and occasionally exploded in the user's hands. Their effectiveness in warfare may have stemmed more from intimidation and the loud noise they created, rather than the physical harm they inflicted. But in the 1870s and 1880s European armies again updated their firearms, replacing breech-loaders with magazine (repeating) rifles, creating a surplus of breach loaders in the arms market, many of which entered East Africa. In 1890, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, and others signed an agreement to control the arms trade in East Africa. The agreement prohibited the importation of firearms, powder, and ammunition into East Africa, but was largely ineffective. The provisions of the treaty were unevenly enforced, so that while the British set up a blockade on the coast near Zanzibar, Italy and France sold thousands of rifles to Menilek's army in Abyssinia. In the 1890s Abyssinia imported hundreds of thousands of firearms and large amounts of ammunition.

In his research on nineteenth century East Africa, Neal Sobania presents evidence that gun-toting hunting parties appeared in the Lake Turkana basin in the 1880s, and that they initially relied on coercion and violence to sustain their hunt. This mainly consisted of “commandeering” cattle for food and pressing locals into service as hunting guides. Eventually a more cooperative relationship developed, but it still reflected the power shift introduced by firearms. Hunting parties were fed, allowed to stay in encampments, and given guides in exchange for *not* stealing livestock, and providing the occasional elephant, buffalo, or rhino carcass. But at the close of the century, political changes in Abyssinia led to another period of violence and disruption. Game hunters were pushed further south as Abyssinian officials attempted to expand the state into the region surrounding the lower Omo River.¹¹

The presence of gun-toting groups in southern Abyssinia, whether for game hunting or exacting tribute for Addis Ababa, threatened the security of the pastoralists in the Lake Turkana basin, and would become a major impetus in British expansion into the region.¹²

Though we do not have a detailed record of what Marsabit was like throughout this tumultuous period, there is enough of a historical record to piece together a general account of the mountain’s role in the region. This more general history of Marsabit in the late nineteenth century can be gleaned from two types of sources: oral histories collected by anthropologists who conducted their research in Northern Kenya in the mid-twentieth

¹¹ Sobania, *The Historical Tradition of the Peoples of the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, C.1840-1925.*, 236–242.

¹² R. W. Beachey, “The Arms Trade in East Africa in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *The Journal of African History* 3, no. 3 (January 1, 1962): 451–67; John Lamphear, *The Scattering Time: Turkana Responses to Colonial Rule* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1992), 115–118.

century, and the travel journals of European and American explorers who traversed the region. There are limitations to both the oral histories and travel narratives, but together they confirm the presence of human and bovine epidemics near Marsabit, a general increase in hostility and raiding, and the more frequent appearance of firearms.

For the camel-herding Rendille, Marsabit was a source of forage and water during the long dry season (May through September). Sobania describes the position of the Rendille in the late nineteenth century: “Between the Boran-inhabited uplands beyond the Goro escarpment in the north, and the Laikipiak dominated plateau to the south lived the Rendille. Here, limited by the region’s scant vegetation to rearing camels, goats and sheep, their existence focused on the dry season pasture of Marsabit Mountain and the waterholes that dotted the edge of the lava flows which emanated from it.”¹³ While Marsabit was a crucial source of water and pasture in the dry season, it threatened the health of livestock in the wet seasons. The most serious threat was trypanosomiasis, commonly referred to as sleeping sickness. The disease is transmitted through tsetse flies, which thrive in Marsabit’s wet seasons. Camels are acutely susceptible to trypanosomiasis, and the Rendille employed a strategy of avoidance to maintain the health of their camel herds.¹⁴ Fortunately, in the seasons where tsetse flourished on the mountain, water and pasture were plentiful across the lowland plains. In the nineteenth century, Rendille migrations were intended to maximize Marsabit’s resources and to minimize the risks posed to camel herds.

For the *cattle*-herding pastoralists of the East African lowlands, Marsabit became a refuge from which to rebuild the stock that had been lost to disease and warfare. The

¹³ Sobania, *The Historical Tradition of the Peoples of the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, C.1840-1925.*, 90–91.

¹⁴ Homewood, *Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies*, 167–169.

Samburu record an increase in hostility between themselves and the Laikipiak Masai in the 1880s, likely a result of cattle raiding following the outbreak of BPP.¹⁵ It is unclear how much Samburu cattle herds directly suffered from BPP. Even if the Samburu stock did remain healthy, they would have been a prime target for raiding. What remained of Samburu cattle herds fell prey to rinderpest:

When it started it only took three days to finish all the Samburu cattle. On the fourth day only people were left; none of their animals were left. What remained was only one cow. Before the disease the people had a great number of cattle...but after three days they were all left with nothing except themselves.¹⁶

In Samburu oral history this time is referred to as *mutai* (the disasters), and it was in this period that parts of the Samburu population settled on Marsabit, where they relied upon small stock and the goodwill of their camel-herding neighbors to survive.¹⁷

In addition, it is likely that the increasing number of firearms from Abyssinia directly affected the social and economic landscape of Marsabit. The mountain's dense forest and numerous watering points made it an ideal home for wild game, and therefore a likely destination for the ivory hunting parties who came from southern Abyssinia. "Ever since the 1880s the major concern of most of the peoples in this northern region—certainly of the Turkana, the Samburu, the Rendile (sic), and to some extent the Boran—had lain in the advance from the north of Ethiopian ivory and cattle raiders, who were now armed with guns."¹⁸

Human and animal disease pathogens, firearm technology, and an expanding state led to general southern migration in the Lake Turkana region throughout the nineteenth

¹⁵ Paul Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance: Symbiosis and Growth Among the Rendille and Sambutu of Kenya*, 1st Edition (Oxford University Press, 1973), 153–154.

¹⁶ Sobania, *The Historical Tradition of the Peoples of the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, C.1840-1925.*, 153.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁸ Roland Anthony Oliver, ed., *History of East Africa*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966), Vol. 1, 30.

century, which was more pronounced at the end of the century. The physical dislocations also resulted in more permeable social boundaries—broken down by violence or transcended by trade, intermarriage, and cooperation. For Marsabit, as a highland refuge in the middle of a marginalized region, the most significant characteristic within this period was social and spatial fluctuation.

When the British administration came to Marsabit they sought to establish stability on the mountain and across the region. Authorities regularly relied upon an understanding that Marsabit and the NFD had a fixed past, and there was a belief that the best decisions would conform to this past. In researching and writing about the consequences of the colonial state on Marsabit and Northern Kenya, it is also tempting to search for a fixed past, one that can help measure the impact of British conquest and perhaps even portion out blame. Whether helpful or not, it is more accurate to describe the British conquest of Northern Kenya as one of a number of disrupting forces on the social and ecological context of Marsabit.

Contact

In July of 1894, Arthur Donaldson Smith set out for the East African interior from British territory on the Somali coast. Accompanied by 83 hired Somalis, 84 camels, and a British taxidermist, Donaldson Smith planned to pioneer a new route to Lake Turkana, and in the name of science, explore territory previously unknown to Europeans.¹⁹

Though the significant geography of East Africa had been discovered and named, Donaldson Smith hoped his journey would contribute to the fields of botany, zoology, and geology. Success, according to Donaldson Smith, was not to be judged merely by his

¹⁹ Donaldson Smith was himself an American, but considered himself racially European.

destination, but by the “scientific usefulness” of his surveying work and his collection of ethnographic and biological specimens.²⁰ For this purpose he brought along “one hundred boxes containing copper vessels full of spirit for collecting reptiles, fishes and batrachia; cases for collecting birds, insects, etc.”

After reaching the shores of Lake Turkana, Donaldson Smith set out to return to the coast of the Indian Ocean. The caravan reached the region surrounding Marsabit in September of 1895, in a season marked by cooler temperatures and little rainfall. It was in the lowlands east of Lake Turkana that the caravan encountered the Rendille, whom Donaldson Smith described in favorable racial terms: “The Rendille are tall and handsome, with complexions as light as the Somalis, and strong Hamitic features.”²¹ It is possible that Donaldson Smith’s favorable impression of the Rendille resulted from their willingness to trade thirty-three fresh camels for forty-five of Donaldson Smith’s tired camels plus sixty pieces of American cloth.²² Donaldson Smith also mentions that within the Rendille population, which he estimated to be around 8,000, were a few thousand Burkeneji and Samburu, which helps to illustrate the fluidity of the region’s social groups during the late nineteenth century.

Donaldson Smith’s account of his expedition contains the earliest written description of Marsabit:

According to European ideas, nothing could be more charming than this Marsabit. Surrounded by a large forest, and lying at the top of the mountain, is a lake a mile square, clear and deep. The jagged walls of a crater form a semicircle about it, while from another side a broad road leads out from the forest to the open meadows beyond. The atmosphere is

²⁰ Donaldson Smith, Arthur, “Expedition Through Somaliland to Lake Rudolf,” *The Geographical Journal* 8, no. 3 (September 1896): 232.

²¹ Arthur Donaldson Smith, *Through Unknown African Countries the First Expedition from Somaliland to Lake Lamu*, Library of American Civilization (New York: E. Arnold, 1897), 351.

²² *Ibid.*

moist and cool. In the early morning dense clouds are swept along by invigorating blasts of cold air, combining with the dew of night to freshen up the plants and trees. Outside the forest the view is superb. For five miles you see a series of green meadows sloping gradually downward on which are grazing many sheep and goats; while far off to the west, beyond the yellow plain, rises rugged Kulol, and as still greater mountain below it, Mt. Njyiro. Living on Marsabit are many Masai, enjoying themselves in the possession of large flocks of sheep and goats.²³

The “many Masai” he refers to are most definitely Samburu, who have similar language and dress to the Masai proper. Twice he refers to large numbers of sheep and goats, but does not mention cattle. Samburu oral history confirms the lack of cattle in this period, and while it is possible that the Samburu cattle herds were grazing elsewhere after the recent long rains, it is also likely that Donaldson Smith observed the Samburu’s accumulation of large numbers of small stock, which they soon hoped to trade for cattle.²⁴

When Donaldson Smith visited Marsabit in 1895 he was unaware of the mountain’s broader social context, and just how much this context changed throughout the nineteenth century. For him, Marsabit was “charming,” idyllic, and provided rest for his caravan. The Samburu he observed living on Marsabit, who were “enjoying themselves in the possession of large flocks of sheep and goats,” were in fact evidence of the tumultuous changes that had taken place in nineteenth century East Africa.²⁵

Hugh Cholmondeley Delamere, more popularly known as Lord Delamere, made several trips to Marsabit around the turn of the century, with at least one lasting up to six

²³ Ibid., 353.

²⁴ In some instances, a single cow would be exchanged for 35 sheep. For references to Samburu trading small stock for cattle, see NFD Annual Report, 1914-1915, PC/NFD. 1/1/2, Kenya National Archives, henceforth KNA.

²⁵ Donaldson Smith, *Through Unknown African Countries the First Expedition from Somaliland to Lake Lamu*, 353.

months.²⁶ Delamere's observations portray Marsabit as a hunter's paradise that was sparsely populated by Rendille and Samburu, and heavily populated by elephants. It was a hunting expedition that first led Delamere to Marsabit and Crater Lake, and within a period of three weeks the expedition shot twenty-one elephants, harvesting an amount of ivory, which would eventually fetch £1100 in Mombasa.²⁷

In 1898 Delamere returned to Marsabit for an unreported amount of time—presumably a number of weeks—and set up camp at a spring twelve miles north of Crater Lake. According to Delamere's biographer, it was on this first trip that the local Samburu named the spot after Delamere, “for he was the first white man to make friends with the natives there.”²⁸ Whether or not the story is true, the colonial records and oral testimony from later years consistently refer to the spring as Delamere's Njoro.²⁹

Delamere settled on a vast swath of land in the East African highlands, and was instrumental in the campaigns to encourage white settlement in the East African Protectorate. He was also one of a number of men who encouraged the Colonial Office to expand administration into the arid regions between the Kenyan highlands and the Abyssinian border. In a speech given to the Colonists' Association, upon the occasion of Winston Churchill's visit, Delamere gave two reasons for extending administrative control. The first was to protect the Galla tribes from Abyssinian raiders, who were after

²⁶ Delamere's experiences and observations of Marsabit are only available through Elspeth Huxley's biography: *White Man's Country; Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* (New York, Praeger, 1968) Huxley's biography affirms Delamere's patriarchal status among white settlers. According to Huxley, Delamere “wrote no diaries and few letters,” and so the biography was based on interviews with various members of Delamere's family and his contemporaries in Kenya. I do not believe there is a need to be highly skeptical of Huxley's account, and many of the details revealed about Marsabit can be confirmed by other (though later) accounts. ; For example, the length of his stay at Marsabit is also reported by Sir Geoffrey Archer in his *Personal and Historical Memoirs of an East African Administrator*, 37.

²⁷ Huxley, *White Man's Country; Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya*, 47; Archer reports the number to be £10,000, Archer, *Personal and Historical Memoirs of an East African Administrator*, 37.

²⁸ Huxley, *White Man's Country; Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya*, 55.

²⁹ *Njoro* is the Maa word for “water.”

both livestock and ivory. The second was to open up trade with southern Abyssinia, which would presumably more than make up for the administrative burdens.³⁰ Delamere was one of the earliest and most active advocates for the economic development of British East Africa.³¹ Livestock and land would become the foundation of Delamere's wealth in Kenya, and he was instrumental in encouraging the state to settle its northern frontier. His contradictory involvement in hunting elephants on Marsabit and in restricting the ivory trade would also be reflected in early administrative policy on the mountain.

Delamere was not the only man interested in diverting Abyssinian goods into British territory. From 1907 to 1909 the Boma Trading Company established forts at Laisamis, Marsabit, and Moyale, and conducted trade in livestock, beeswax, hides, and ivory throughout the northern territory.³²

The company's fort on Marsabit was built on the shores of Crater Lake. It is a matter of conjecture why it was built there, but perhaps the large numbers of elephants that watered at the lake contributed to the company's trade in ivory. Later government reports also indicate that many of the watering points on the mountain, including Delamere's Njoro, were infested with leaches.³³ The Marsabit fort was usually staffed by one British employee and in all likelihood, the lake was the most convenient place to build a fort. The commercial venture was ultimately unsuccessful, but it established the

³⁰ Huxley, *White Man's Country; Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya*, 241–243.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

³² *Ibid.*, 233–244.

³³ Great Britain, *A Handbook of Kenya Colony (British East Africa) and the Kenya Protectorate (protectorate of Zanzibar)* (London: H.M.S.O., 1920), 371–372.

first permanent lodgings for Europeans, and when the colonial government took over administration in 1909 they built on the foundation of the Boma Trading Company.

Marsabit and the NFD

As part of the northern half of the East African Protectorate (EAP), Marsabit was an afterthought in the British conquest and development of the region. In the 1890s the British Foreign Office established the EAP along with the Uganda Protectorate. Previously the Crown was reluctant to extend direct political control in East Africa. The hope was that the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) would be able to advance imperial interests in the region, and that the commercial venture would check German expansion in East Africa. The Crown's main concern was that Germany would establish control over the headwaters of the Nile (Lake Victoria), and complicate British holdings in Egypt. The commercial development of East Africa proved to be too daunting for the IBEAC. Much of the East African interior was populated by small-scale societies who were unwilling to orient their labor practices to the needs of European markets. The Buganda Kingdom offered the best prospects for profit, as it was densely populated, agriculturally oriented, and politically united. The chief impediment to foreign investment was four to five hundred miles between the kingdom and the coast. When the IBEAC was unable to raise sufficient capital to overcome the costs of transport and communication, the company was forced to relinquish its charter to the Crown.

Railway construction began in Mombasa in 1896, and after many difficulties (the most famous of which occurred at Tsavo, where the presence of man-eating lions caused Indian laborers to strike) the railway reached the Uganda Protectorate in 1900. By 1904, 580 miles of railway were constructed in British East Africa, costing British taxpayers

£1.5 million.³⁴ Recouping this cost, and making the protectorate profitable, became the driving motivation behind Colonial Office policies. For a number of people, including Lord Delamere, the solution to British East Africa's financial problems was white settlement. In this early period, the protectorate's political and economic influence was concentrated along the Uganda Railroad and in the highland territory given to white settlers. Marsabit and the entire northern portion of the protectorate would only experience the indirect consequences of state policies.

In 1909, protectorate authorities created the Northern Frontier District (NFD). Half of the protectorate's territory was included in the 60,000 square mile administrative unit, which was closed to outsiders. The primary objective of the NFD was to check the flow of Abyssinian and Somali incursions across the recently established borders. As a handbook for NFD field officers describes it,

The history of the Administration of the Northern Frontier District may be said to commence with the appointment of Sir Percy Girouard as Governor of the East Africa Protectorate in 1909. The two main causes which impelled the Government to take this step were the ever increasing raids by bands of Abyssinian soldiers and the westward movement of Somali tribes.³⁵

British neglect of the northern frontier was met by Abyssinian expansion, and this threat of losing the protectorate's northern buffer was the main impetus for establishing administrative posts in what would become the Northern Frontier District.

³⁴ Vincent Todd Smith Harlow, *History of East Africa: Volume II. Chilver, Elizabeth Millicent,; 1914-* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 21.

³⁵ T. Shenton Thomas, *Jubaland and the Northern Frontier District*, 1st. Edition (Uganda Railway Press, 1917), 101.

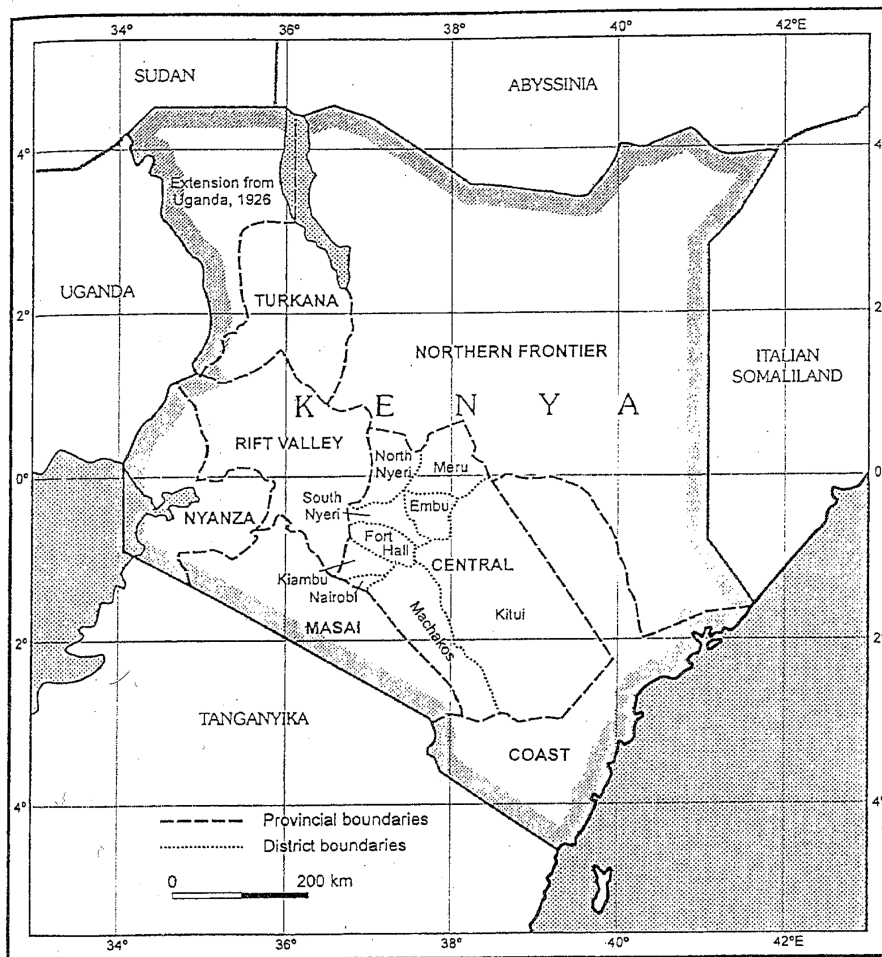


Figure 2: Northern Frontier District

British claims in East Africa, which were established by a number of European treaties in the 1890s, overlapped with the claims of Emperor Menilek II, who sought to make known the extent of Abyssinian territory and to prevent European intrusion. Abyssinian claims extended to the southern tip of Lake Turkana, while the British claimed this same territory up through the southern portion of the Abyssinian escarpment. In 1903 Sir Charles Eliot, the Protectorate's commissioner, proposed a scheme for establishing military posts along the northern frontier. The cost of civil and military administration exceeded the Protectorate's revenues by hundreds of thousands of pounds

annually, and the Foreign Office in London was unwilling to increase their investment.³⁶ Even if Eliot's proposal went according to plan, it would operate at a loss of £3000 per year, and as a result, was rejected by the decision makers in London.³⁷ Emperor Menilek II, on the other hand, was able to successfully and profitably extend his administration to the southern reaches of the Abyssinian escarpment. The problem, for the British, was that the frontier was in fact not clearly defined, and it appeared that Menilek would be able and willing to take advantage of the situation and continue to advance south. In 1907 the two governments negotiated an agreement over their frontier claims, but the treaty failed to resolve the problems created by British absence and Abyssinian presence along the frontier. For the British, the need for at least a minimal administrative presence became increasingly important throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. Encroachments across the frontier were becoming a threat to the security and prosperity of the Kenyan highlands, making it expedient to establish a number of posts along the northern frontier, even if they had to operate at a financial loss.³⁸

The first administrator to take up a post at Marsabit was Geoffrey Archer, who arrived in October 1909 with a caravan of nearly six hundred men.³⁹ Previously, Archer had spent four years in charge of the Baringo District, where he directed his energy towards bringing Turkana peoples into step with government policies.⁴⁰ His work at Baringo sufficiently impressed decision makers in Nairobi and London, who selected Archer to be

³⁶ Harlow, *History of East Africa*, 221.

³⁷ Edward C. Keefer, "Great Britain and Ethiopia, 1897-1910: Competition for Empire," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6, no. 3 (January 1, 1973): 472-473.

³⁸ For more details see Keefer, "Great Britain and Ethiopia, 1897-1910."

³⁹ Thomas, *Jubaland and the Northern Frontier District*, 102.

⁴⁰ Lamphear, *The Scattering Time*, 77-82.

the first commissioner of the NFD and to establish headquarters at Marsabit. His principle work was to help establish a line of transport and communication to Moyale, the fort on the Anglo-Abyssinian frontier. Marsabit was to be a midway station along this line, providing water and respite from the desert climate.⁴¹ In a 1913 article published in *The Geographical Journal*, Archer described the purpose and nature of his work:

The reasons for the occupation of this area [NFD] are twofold. Firstly, raids into British territory by lawless bands of Abyssinians had been of frequent occurrence, and the tribes living within our sphere had claimed our protection. Secondly, it was hoped that there was some commercial benefit to the Protectorate to be derived by the opening up of trade routes with the southern provinces of Abyssinia, which were reported to be rich in hides, gums, indigenous rubber, coffee, and livestock. It was decided in the first place to establish a Government post at Marsabit, which is some 135 miles to the north of the Uaso Nyiro, and 175 miles beyond Meru, which was then the most northerly administrative outpost of the Protectorate.⁴²

When Archer set up a government outpost on Crater Lake in 1909 he began a transformation of Marsabit's role in the East African lowlands. It would still supply impoverished pastoralists a place to recoup losses and to rebuild herds of large stock, but the mountain was now a resource in the service of the East African Protectorate. Within the NFD, Marsabit was one of a few centers of state power. The prerogatives of the state were certainly not absolute, and throughout most of the NFD in this early period, British authority was easily resisted or evaded. But Marsabit was different: when pastoral interests conflicted with state interests, British authorities had the presence and power to enforce their will.

⁴¹ Archer and others refer to this as the Uaso Nyiro-Marsabit-Moyale line. See Geoffrey Archer and G. C. Williams, "Recent Exploration and Survey in the North of British East Africa," *The Geographical Journal* 42, no. 5 (November 1, 1913): 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 421.

As an outpost within the newly formed NFD, Marsabit was intended to serve three broad purposes. The foremost of these was establishing security on the frontier, particularly on the border with Abyssinia. Marsabit was over one hundred miles from the border, but it played a critical role in the line of supplies and communications between Nairobi and outposts along the border. The second purpose was “tribal pacification” within the NFD. This involved the prevention and prosecution of livestock raiding, as well as the confinement of pastoral migration within designated tribal districts. The third and most problematic purpose for the Marsabit station was to develop the region’s economy in order to help pay for the cost of administration. At least theoretically, as the peace and security of the *Pax Britannica* spread into the NFD, so too would a new market orientation. Each of these three purposes had some impact on how Marsabit’s resources were accessed and distributed.

The primary reason for British presence in the East African lowlands was to check the expansion of the Abyssinian state. With this end in mind, British administrators in London and Nairobi viewed Moyale—situated on the Abyssinian border—as crucial to establishing British presence and securing the border. But getting to Moyale required crossing 300 miles of arid and semi-arid terrain, much of it inhospitable to oxen and wagons. The Marsabit station was positioned in the middle of this long stretch, and its role was subservient to Moyale’s security. Typically goods went from Archer’s Post to Marsabit by ox and wagon, and then from Marsabit to Moyale by camel transport. As Archer would recall of his years on Marsabit, “Ordinary administrative

tasks were non-existent, and the chief pre-occupation was the efficient running of the Camel Transport.”⁴³

The camel transport required so much administrative attention because it rarely operated efficiently. Convincing the Rendille and Gabra to sell or loan camels was a difficult task, especially because government employees had less experience with camels, and frequently worked them to death. When the government purchased camels for transport it proved to be very expensive. In 1916 the mortality rate of government camels in the NFD was reported to be 200 percent.⁴⁴ One theory was that the pastoralists were only willing to sell their weakest camels, and so offloaded sickly and undersized stock to colonial authorities.⁴⁵ Rather than purchase camels, alternative solutions involved leasing camels and using camel transport as a means of taxation. This regularly resulted in tension between administrators and camel owners, and sometimes ended in the forceful procurement of camels from pastoralists.⁴⁶ In January, 1915 the Acting Officer-in-Charge of the NFD wrote the following regarding transport and supplies:

During the year organized Government Transport was practically non-existent. Few transport animals were purchased by Government, and those we did buy, died on our hands in a very short time. The system hitherto carried out of taking camels from the Rendille as tribute had proved a failure, as these animals died on our hands owing to lack of sufficient rest after safaris, camel disease in Rendille country and Tse-Tse fly on the Marsabit-Uaso Nyiro route. It was therefore decided that in lieu of Government taking over completely camels as tax from the Rendille, this tribe should, during the year, lend the Government 4% of the total number of their camels; these animals making one safari and then being returned to their owners. This scheme worked fairly satisfactory as far as

⁴³ Archer, *Personal and Historical Memoirs of an East African Administrator*, 40.

⁴⁴ NFD Annual Report, 1915-1916, PC/NFD/1/1/2, KNA.

⁴⁵ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1915, p. 4-5, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA.

⁴⁶ Great Britain, *A Handbook of Kenya Colony (British East Africa) and the Kenya Protectorate (protectorate of Zanzibar)*, 349.

the Marsabit District was concerned, and also a few safaris of Rendille camels were sent up with loads from Marsabit to Moyale.⁴⁷

At the end of the 1920s the government began using motored lorries for transport.

However, the difficulties of the terrain and erratic rainfall meant that roads were regularly washed out and in need of repair. The government would use camels for transport in the NFD into the 1940s, but they were never as crucial as they were in the 1910s.⁴⁸

Annual reports from the period detail one of the biggest priorities and problems for NFD authorities, which was supplying food. The difficulties and unpredictability of transport meant that sufficient flour was not delivered to Moyale in 1914, and so the field officers purchased flour from Abyssinian traders. That these traders were able to charge an “exorbitant price” was one problem, but the bigger issue was that if the Abyssinian authorities decided to forbid the selling of food to the British then they would have had to abandon the fort at Moyale.⁴⁹ From the Protectorate’s point of view, dependence upon Abyssinian trade for food supply also meant dependence upon the political will of Abyssinia, which was unacceptable.

The proposed solution was to encourage cultivation on Marsabit in order to supply food rations throughout the NFD. It was hoped that by cultivating flour within the NFD it would reduce the cost of administration and solve the food security issues on the frontier.

Cultivation on Marsabit was initiated by government employees—African and Indian—who had experience with agricultural practices. They were allowed small

⁴⁷ NFD Annual Report, 1913-1914, p. 1, PC/NFD/1/1/2, KNA.

⁴⁸ NFD Annual Report, 1925, p. 16, PC/NFD/1/1/3.

⁴⁹ NFD Annual Report, 1915-1916, p. 5, PC/NFD/1/1/2, KNA.

shambas, which were mostly for personal use.⁵⁰ In 1918 the field officer at Marsabit planted a small government shamba of maize, but it was ruined by drought.⁵¹ The following year nine acres of maize were harvested, and seventeen additional acres were planted. According to the NFD's Officer-in-Charge, Marsabit possessed "an abundance of ground suitable for planting, and an area of 250-300 acres would supply all civil requirements of Marsabit, Moyale and Gurre [another NFD station]."⁵² However, this was the same land that the Rendille and Samburu had been using for dry season grazing. The mountain grasslands near Delamere's Njoro, which were especially valuable to pastoralists in times of drought, were being transformed into fields of maize.⁵³

In 1922, to encourage more food production, NFD authorities began recruiting Burji farmers from Ethiopia to resettle on Marsabit.

The Officer-in-Charge N.F.D. has decided to allow 20 Boorji or Conso settlers to come from Moyale & settle here near the Boma and to cultivate the land and all surplus maize to be sold to Government at Moyale price. They are, I understand at present making a road from Moyale to Wajhier and therefore will not be here in time to get a crop ready this year.⁵⁴

The following year a small number of Burji representatives were given a tour of Marsabit, with the hope that they would convince their fellow agriculturalists to settle on the mountain.⁵⁵ The Burji never accounted for more than a couple hundred people on Marsabit, but it is likely that they were the first full-time agriculturalists to settle on the mountain. By 1929, the settled population on Marsabit was cultivating wheat, barley, maize, "kaffir corn," potatoes, and sweet potatoes. Experiments with tobacco, pigeon

⁵⁰ NFD Annual Report, 1916-1917, p. 9, PC/NFD/1/1/2, KNA.

⁵¹ NFD Annual Report, 1918-1919, p. 19, PC/NFD/1/1/2, KNA.

⁵² NFD Annual Report, 1919-1920, p. 17; NFD Annual Report, 1920-1921, p. 28-29, PC/NFD/1/1/2, KNA.

⁵³ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1915, p. 4, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA. The 1915 report describes the distribution of Rendille sections during the dry season of 1914. Nine of the 19 listed sections were grazing "Near Delamere Njoro."

⁵⁴ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1922, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA.

⁵⁵ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1923, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA.

peas, and groundnuts were also attempted.⁵⁶ When Protestant missionaries came to Marsabit in the 1930s many of the early converts were Burji.

Though the Burji population was small, they were given significant portions of non-forested land on Marsabit that were located near permanent water sources. That administrators would give away valuable dry-season grazing land to non-Kenyan agriculturalists demonstrates their bias against pastoralists and a lack of understanding (or sympathy) of pastoralist land use. The view of many in the colonial government, and in the NFD, was that pastoralists were irrationally committed to their herds and resistant to social and economic progress. Or to use the language of the period, pastoralists were “backward” nomads. The 1928 NFD Annual Report describes this “backwardness” as “the old story of the vicious circle. The natives amass stock until the country will no longer carry it, a period of drought or disease occurs, heavy losses are incurred and the process of amassing stock again commences.”⁵⁷ This commonly accepted view had serious consequences in the NFD, as the “irrational” land use of pastoralists was often seen as the cause of environmental degradation.⁵⁸ The result was a series of policies that restricted the movement of pastoralists on and around Marsabit, and prioritized agriculturalists when it came to competition over the mountain’s land and water resources.

Marsabit’s second major function as an imperial outpost in the colonial state was the pacification of the frontier region and its peoples. Securing the frontier border and

⁵⁶ NFP Annual Report, 1929, p. 26-27, PC/NFD/1/1/3, KNA.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Sobania, *The Historical Tradition of the Peoples of the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, C.1840-1925.*, 286.

⁵⁸ George Lawrence Simpson, “On the Frontiers of Empire: British Administration in Kenya’s Northern Frontier District, 1905-1935” (Ph.D., West Virginia University, 1994), 613.

preventing armed Abyssinian peoples from entering the territory was one strategy. The other was the containment of groups who resided in the NFD within specified territories. This meant colonial authorities needed to determine the boundaries between the region's pastoralist groups and find mechanisms for the enforcement of these boundaries. The hope was that containing pastoralists, and determining their boundaries would prevent the perceived pattern of livestock raiding, warfare, and retaliation.

The colonial task of pacification also carried with it an assumption that social boundaries in the region were clear and fixed, and that the best way forward was to assign these "tribes" to specific districts, limiting the interaction between groups. According to the historian George Simpson, "Finding that most of these conflicts had at least in part an ethnic basis, British authorities assumed an increasingly interventionist posture towards their African subjects and sought to divide them on a 'tribal' basis. Consequently, officials sought to control the peoples of the NFD by separating them into different 'tribes' and by controlling access to grazing and water on the basis of ethnicity and by means of movement passes."⁵⁹

Up through the 1920s, the policy of creating and enforcing "Tribal Grazing Areas" was inconsistent and led to ironic results. The Rendille, who were the most compliant with colonial law, paid the heaviest taxes while also losing water and grazing access to Boran and Gabra groups, who were less cooperative with NFD administrators.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 16; Sobania's analysis is also relevant: "Through the activities that had led to this state of affairs, the authorities also began to establish the two operational premises upon which the future administration of the peoples east of Lake Turkana would be based. Henceforth, force and fines in the form of confiscated stock would be enjoined to see through a government decision, and the wholesale relocation of populations would be employed as an administrative technique to ensure that a society's best interests, as determined by Government, were looked after. From here it was only a short step to adopting the corollary that individual societies would best be kept apart and their movements limited through the establishment of Tribal Grazing Areas." *The Historical Tradition of the Peoples of the Eastern Lake Turkana Basin, C.1840-1925.*, 266–267.

In the annual reports from this period, Marsabit DCs regularly expressed a degree of affinity and sympathy for the Rendille, while the Gabra and Boran were described as dishonest, unclean, and racially inferior. This dichotomy was most severely expressed by DC Cooke in his 1921 Handing Over Report. In his report, intended as a primer for his successor, Cooke described the Rendille as “a pleasant, docile, and obedient people who bring in their tribute and camels without delay.” But he wrote about the Gabra with uncommon vitriol: “They are the biggest liars in Africa. Their chief recreations are buni eating and the murdering of Rendille children. The broadness of their spears is in inverse proportion to the courage of their hearts. The only hope for this race lies in the laxity of their moral code by which owing to the presence of Kavirondo askaris they may in years to come get healthy negro blood in their veins.”⁶⁰ Other DCs expressed these same sentiments, though in more moderate language. The Rendille were “very peaceable” and “upright people,” while the Gabra and Boran were “crafty and almost insolent” and “gross destroyers of forest and game.”⁶¹ Ultimately these sentiments had little effect on how the administration divided and distributed Marsabit’s resources.

In fact, the eventual result was to grant more of Marsabit’s pasture to Boran cattle herders and to restrict the Rendille movement on the mountain. Groups of Boran were first moved to Marsabit in 1914 in order to protect them from Abyssinian raiders.⁶² NFD authorities decided that the easiest way to prevent raids was to move Boran and other groups away from the border. The Boran on Marsabit were part of a general southward migration which became more pronounced during 1914-1918, when much of the NFD

⁶⁰ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1921, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA.

⁶¹ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1926, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA; Marsabit District Annual Report, 1927, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

⁶² Northern Samburu Annual Report, 1914, p. 7, PC/NFD/1/9/1, KNA.

went unadministered as a result of the Great War. Government reports from the period disapprovingly observe the migration of Samburu, Gabra, Boran, and Somali groups toward the Uaso Nyiro river, which served as the southern boundary of the NFD.⁶³ After the end of the war, colonial administrators returned to the NFD with the intention of curbing and even reversing recent migrations. In 1921 the commanding field officer at Marsabit reported that the four Boran *manyattas* on the mountain “have been definitely told to move to Moyale during the next rains. They will almost certainly try to stay here and allege as excuse for remaining the absence of rains, fear of Abyssinians, stock diseases &c. These excuses are now thread bare and should not be listened to.”⁶⁴ The following year a number of Boran groups were forced to leave Marsabit and settled near Moyale.⁶⁵

Through the 1920s, administrators continually discussed the problem of Boran groups living on Marsabit, but Boran resistance and administrative inconsistency led to ineffective policies.⁶⁶ As mentioned above, a number of Boran groups were forced to leave Marsabit and return to Moyale in 1922. Yet in 1925 the Marsabit DC reported,

Their cattle are at Marsabit and are now so numerous as to cause serious and constant harm to the Marsabit forest. This is a very serious matter. These people are always striving to move southwards and this tendency cannot definitely be arrested until those of their tribesmen who reached the Uaso-Nyiro river some years ago are returned. Although it has constantly been laid down that they should be returned, no active step has been taken so far to do this. To add to the congestion at Marsabit, some 12 *manyattas* of Moyale Boran were granted temporary sanctuary here from frontier

⁶³ NFD Annual Report, 1915-1916, p. 5-6, PC/NFD/1/1/1, KNA; NFD Annual Report, 1916-1917, p. 10, PC/NFD/1/1/1, KNA.

⁶⁴ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1921, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA.

⁶⁵ NFD Annual Report, 1922, p. 15, PC/NFD/1/1/1, KNA.

⁶⁶ The colonial records for this period reveal a general confusion about Boran identity. The administration struggled to define the Boran, and did not commonly refer to them as “Boran” until later in the 1920s. Initially, because of their close association, they were referred to as “Gabra cattle herders,” then “Hofteh,” and then “Hofteh Boran.” To make it even more complex, the administration also attempted to divide the Boran up into the Kenyan Boran and Ethiopian Boran.

persecution, but they should be returned during the next rains because there is not room for them.

In effect, the administrators could not control Boran movement effectively, which made enforcing tribal boundaries difficult. As tensions arose between the Rendille and Boran, including murders and livestock raids, the administration applied the policy of pacification by restricting the Rendille from the territory on the mountain that the Boran occupied.

The creation and enforcement of tribal grazing areas around the mountain and throughout Marsabit District resulted in a zero-sum game between the Rendille, Gabra, and Boran. While the winners and losers of this contest for grazing territory changed from year to year, or DC to DC, the trend was to allow more cattle herders (i.e. Boran) on the mountain, at the expense of the Rendille small stock.

While it is worthwhile to call attention to the way “tribal pacification” heightened tensions between these groups, this same policy of identifying “tribes” in the NFD and confining them to designated areas was greatly beneficial to the Rendille, Gabra, and Boran. NFD administrators also decided that Somali speaking groups did *not* belong in Marsabit, and restricted their movement to the northeast portion of the NFD. In 1919, NFD administrators created a “Somali-Galla line” that ran north-south through the middle of the district. The main impetus was to contain the expansion of Somali groups, whose numerical superiority, unified Islamic identity, and recent history suggested a desire to expand across Northern Kenya.⁶⁷ NFD authorities did enforce this division relatively well, largely because they believed Somalis (and Islam) were a greater threat to white settlements in the highlands. Throughout the colonial period, this policy of Somali

⁶⁷ Fratkin and Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle*, 40.

containment created an environment in which the residents of Marsabit District could believe their greatest threat came from within, rather than outside the district. For the Rendille and Gabra, the colonial practice of designating tribal grazing areas may have preserved territory that would have otherwise been occupied by the more dominant Somali groups.

Along with border security and “tribal pacification,” the imperial outpost on Marsabit was expected to generate revenue to help cover the cost of administrating the region. Collecting tribute in livestock was one strategy to minimize cost. Camels were used for transport, while the sheep and goats supplied milk and meat for government employees. Cattle were also collected as tribute, but were often traded by the government, either for large numbers of small stock, or sold for cash on the market.

Direct taxation was problematic on Marsabit and within the NFD. Many pastoralists continued to store wealth in their herds, and were not connected to the cash economy. For this reason, among others, colonial authorities hoped that development of the livestock trade in the frontier region would make administration more profitable, or at the very least, less unprofitable. From the very beginning of its existence, colonial authorities promoted the NFD’s role in the livestock trade as a source of funding. Archer suggested “that there was some commercial benefit to the Protectorate to be derived by the opening up of trade routes with the southern provinces of Abyssinia.”⁶⁸ Initially it was hoped that the administration of Marsabit would help connect frontier production to markets in central Kenya. Under Archer’s tenure, prior to the outbreak of World War I, the livestock trade in particular had a promising start. More white settlers came to East

⁶⁸ Archer and Williams, “Recent Exploration and Survey in the North of British East Africa,” 421.

Africa and many hoped to use their newly acquired land for stock-raising. This created a significant demand for cattle, which made it especially profitable to transport cattle from the frontier to the areas of white settlement. In 1913, around 7,000 head of cattle were sent from Moyale to Nairobi.⁶⁹

Settler interest in livestock would only briefly benefit the economic development of the NFD. A far more lasting consequence of European stock farming in the highlands was the closure of the NFD's livestock market. The frontier came to be viewed as a source of cattle disease, and therefore a threat to the economic prosperity of the Protectorate. The NFD was under quarantine for much of its existence, and while the government post at Marsabit was initially supposed to encourage the development of trade, it ended up playing a larger role in enforcing the quarantine of livestock, hindering trade across the frontier in the political and economic interests of white settlers.

Because the livestock market was frequently closed in the NFD, the administration had to rely on other sources of revenue. Over time, the bulk of Marsabit District's revenue came from the hut and poll tax, which up through 1926 was collected in-kind, as a percentage of livestock. Unsurprisingly, taxation was a constant source of tension between the government and the NFD's inhabitants. The rate of the hut and poll tax was determined separately for each tribe, and its collection was unevenly enforced. As a result, the groups who were most compliant were most heavily taxed. In 1921, the Rendille contributed 2,714 sheep, while the Boran went untaxed, and the Gabra contributed 30 bulls.⁷⁰ Many groups who resided in other districts within the NFD

⁶⁹ NFD Annual Report, 1913-1914, p. 7, PC/NFD/1/1/1, KNA.

⁷⁰ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1921, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

avoided taxation altogether. In 1926, only three of the seven districts within the NFD collected taxes.⁷¹

Taxation also created tension because it did not always result in the protection that the government promised. In years where raids did happen, the government would remit the tax, as was the case in 1919, when Abyssinian raiders killed fifty-seven Rendille.⁷² For some Rendille, the impression was that the government only collected taxes in periods of peace, but was unable to protect them when it mattered most.

Another source of government revenue came from the regulation of wildlife, in particular management of large game. The colony's Game Ordinance defined legitimate and illegitimate hunting, differentiating between European "hunting" and African "poaching." Authorities stationed at Marsabit collected revenue from both hunters and poachers. In 1928 the Marsabit DC reported fifty prosecutions and twenty-nine convictions under the Game Ordinance.⁷³

The Colonial State in the NFD

While Marsabit was intended to serve the above broad purposes—security, pacification, and revenue collection—it also needs to be added that the decade after the creation of the Northern Frontier District was marked by disorder and inconsistency. Throughout this decade a small and constantly changing European staff sought to establish some authority over a vast region lacking in transport, communication, and water. In 1914, seventeen European staff were assisted by six clerks, ten interpreters, and a police constabulary of

⁷¹ NFD Annual Report, 1926, p. 26, PC/NFD/1/1/3, KNA.

⁷² Marsabit District Annual Report, 1919-1920, p. 1, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

⁷³ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1928, p. 17, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

144 men.⁷⁴ At times, one or two companies of the King's African Rifles were assigned to the NFD.⁷⁵

While the general policy of maintaining the Protectorate's northern border was dictated from Nairobi and London, most of the decisions of how to implement NFD policy were made by officers, soldiers, and staff who resided in the frontier region. This was partly done out of necessity, as travel and communication were rudimentary, and waiting for a response from Nairobi took weeks to months, depending on the season. Partly as a result of this necessity, the provincial and district commissioners were valued for their ability to make decisions "on the spot" which would be in line with policy, but did not require consultation or approval. Though a formal hierarchy of command existed in the EAP, those in the field were given a considerable degree of autonomy in how they conducted His Majesty's business.⁷⁶

The extent of this autonomy meant that those in the upper echelons of command needed to select administrators who shared their values and who could be trusted to make the right decisions. Bruce Berman articulates this phenomenon in his work on the colonial state, "In the British colonial empire the Colonial Office, as a matter of deliberate policy, assumed firm control over the recruitment and training of administrative officers to ensure they possessed a common background of belief and experience that would facilitate communication and lead them to act consistently and predictably."⁷⁷ So, between 1910 and 1918, of the sixty-two men who entered the EAP as freshly trained administrative officers, forty-two of them were "Oxbridge" men

⁷⁴ NFD Annual Report, 1914-1915, p. 11-12, PC/NFD/1/1/1, KNA.

⁷⁵ Thomas, *Jubaland and the Northern Frontier District*, 115-117.

⁷⁶ Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990), 80.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

(Oxford + Cambridge).⁷⁸ Berman argues that this careful selection of officers resulted in a shared bureaucratic ideology which he terms “paternalistic authoritarianism.”

Berman’s articulation of this ideology is helpful in understanding why the first decades of British administration in the NFD were inconsistent. Inconsistency was not just a result of the Protectorate’s fiscal problems, or the necessary problems that come with “managing” a handful of pastoral tribes. Inconsistency was also a result of bureaucratic social values that rejected rationalist planning as impractical and overly theoretical.

Theory was for those who spent their days sitting at a desk engaged in abstract thinking, and who were distant from the frontlines of colonial administration. Rather, according to Berman, “Colonial administrators saw themselves as practical men of affairs and had little time and patience for abstract analysis.”⁷⁹ Effective administration was not simply the acquisition of skills, but the forging of experience with superior character. Colonial administration was supposed to be an inherent art, which one either possessed or did not possess.⁸⁰

This helps to explain why clear articulations of administrative theory, or a cohesive idea about development in the NFD, are missing in the 1910s and early ‘20s. Decisions were made by the “man on the spot,” whose competency was based on an ineffable character trait. There should be little wonder that an ideology that placed so much emphasis on individuals and rejected rationalization should result in a period of inconsistent application and enforcement.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 101.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 106.

After 1922 Kenya's economy entered a sustained period of growth, and the colony's financial prosperity increased the size and presence of the state. From 1921 to 1925 Marsabit and the NFD were under military administration. It was at the end of this period, when administration was handed back over to civil authorities, that a period of constancy ensued.

One of the first measures of the civil administration on Marsabit was to apply for the forest to be declared a Forest Reserve. This would allow them greater legal authority to protect the forest, which they argued was being harmed by the increasing number of cattle on the mountain. When applying to the colony's conservator of forests, the NFD commissioner explained, "Marsabit hill or mountain is now comparatively closely populated by Galla tribes [Gabra and Boran] and it is to be feared that, unless the forest which crowns it is protected by all means in the power of government, its destruction will proceed apace."⁸¹ In 1927 over fifty square miles (or 38,000 acres) of the mountain were declared a Forest Reserve, and pastoralists were forbidden to graze herds in the forest without permission. In 1928 the Marsabit DC reported on the positive results of the new reserve:

The Marsabit forest has been destroyed to an alarming extent by the Gabbra (sic) and their herds but since it has been actually gazetted they have all been removed from its confines and only the routes to water left open to them. It took some time and one or two prosecutions to make them realise that they must obey orders but at least they realised it and even in nine months the benefit to the forest is apparent.⁸²

Marsabit DCs, as administrators of the colonial empire, believed that they were not only trustees of the people who inhabited crown territory, but also trustees of the land itself. Part of exerting more authority over Marsabit during the latter half of the 1920s

⁸¹ Marsabit Forest, 1926-1931, PC/NFD/5/4/3, KNA.

⁸² Marsabit District Annual Report, 1927, p. 25-26, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

meant protecting the forest from what they viewed as, the harmful practices of pastoralists and their herds. Establishing the forest reserve was a rather straightforward bureaucratic process; the real challenges were clearly demarcating the boundaries on the mountain, and finding the personnel to enforce these boundaries.⁸³ Despite these challenges, which would not be fully dealt with until with after World War II, DCs began prosecuting those who violated the forest reserve.

In 1927, the same year the forest was restricted, Marsabit District authorities instituted “progressive measures” designed for a closer administration of the district’s inhabitants. “Progress” meant that the “backwardness” of the region would no longer be viewed as inevitable, and the NFD as a whole was to be brought in line with the rest of the colony’s administration. The new policy called for “the avoidance of all payment in kind,” and the collection of taxes, fines, and fees in cash.⁸⁴ Rather than the previous hut and poll tax, which was assessed as a percentage of livestock and varied by tribe, the new tax was assessed at twenty shillings per head, irrespective of tribal affiliation. The strict enforcement was successful, and revenue from the tax doubled in 1928, from 31,000 to 63,000 shillings.⁸⁵

In order to facilitate payment in cash, the new policy also called for the opening of trading centers throughout the NFD. In October 1928, the area near the Marsabit station was proclaimed a township, which would operate as the district’s primary market.⁸⁶

⁸³ Marsabit Forest, 1926-1931, PC/NFD/5/4/3, KNA; “Marsabit Forest Reserve,” PC/NFD/5/4/1, KNA.

⁸⁴ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1927, p. 2, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

⁸⁵ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1928, p. 10, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

It was during this “progressive” period that administrators began remarking on the need and benefit of missionary presence on Marsabit. In his report, the chief native commissioner wrote, “Both the Galla and Rendille do not show any sign of progress...The problem of bringing these people to a more advanced state is difficult and requires close attention. A few cases of conversion to Islam have occurred among the Rendille and it seems desirable to give both tribes an opportunity of coming under Mission influence if a society can be persuaded to send its members to establish a station at Marsabit.”⁸⁷

Changes in the Land

The transformation of Marsabit into an imperial outpost for the East African Protectorate did not end pastoralist use of the mountains resources. It did however introduce new elements into Marsabit’s ecology. The forest, wild game, water, and crops were all used in different ways, and perhaps more importantly, for different purposes. Pastoralists most often relied upon the mountains resources to recoup losses with the hopes of returning to pastoral nomadism. They hoped the mountain’s resources would give them freedom to leave the confines of the forest, and return to the region’s pastures.

The British, however, used Marsabit’s resources for political purposes. These were not disconnected from economic and social interests, but they were in the service of instilling and preserving state power. Simply put, early administrators, assistants, etc. wanted the British controlled EAP to operate in the territory and not Abyssinia (or Italy,

⁸⁷ “An Appeal to Missions,” East African Standard, May 1, 1928, quoted in Eric J. Webster, *East Africa: Land of Scattered Tribes*, Field Survey 7 (London: Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society, 1949).

or Germany). As Gunther Schlee puts it, the British were looking for nothing when they entered Northern Kenya, “but they did not want to leave this nothing to anybody else.”⁸⁸

Both pastoralists and colonial authorities were concerned with subsistence—providing enough food to eat. Both were concerned with preserving territory, and both were concerned with wealth. These interests were not always in opposition, and frequently British and pastoralist interests were thought to be in conjunction with one another (i.e. disarmament, trading routes, opening new livestock markets). But when interests did conflict, the British had the power and military technology to have the final say, especially on Marsabit. So even though British administrators and pastoralists shared Marsabit’s space and resources, the British had a larger degree of control over the region, and operated as the mountain’s managers and gatekeepers. Particularly in the control they enforced on the mountain’s population—deciding who could and could not live on Marsabit, and what they were allowed to do with the forest, watering points, and wildlife.

⁸⁸ Schlee, *Identities on the Move*, 44.

Chapter 2

State Development at the Margins: Marsabit, 1930-1965

Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century Marsabit transformed from a dry-weather haven for the region's pastoralists into the most significant center of British colonial power in Northern Kenya.¹ Beyond Marsabit's slopes, in the arid lowlands of the Northern Frontier District, bands of Rendille and Gabra pastoralists kept a comfortable distance from colonial law and the imperial economy. But beginning around the 1930s, the region's population increased, and the rains began to fail with greater frequency and severity, resulting in greater demand on Marsabit's permanent watering points and grassland. From 1930 to 1960 the population of Marsabit District grew from ten thousand to over thirty thousand residents, and droughts occurred in at least two years of each decade.² This period of increasing demand on the mountain's resources, which brought pastoralists into closer contact with colonial authorities, also corresponded to a transformation in British colonial development policy. Political and economic threats to the British Empire, along with the post-war shift in the global order, led imperial policy makers to embrace an expanding definition of development and the state's role in it. Particularly after World War II, British colonial development "manifested itself on the ground through ever-deeper interventions by the colonial state to

¹ Marsabit can refer to the mountain, the town, and/or the district. In this chapter, whenever I use the term Marsabit without specification I am referring to the mountain area. Elsewhere I specify "Marsabit Town" and "Marsabit District."

² Karen Margaret Witsenburg and Adano Wario Roba, *Surviving Pastoral Decline: Pastoral Sedentarisation, Natural Resource Management and Livelihood Diversification in Marsabit District, Northern Kenya* ([S.l.: s.n.], 2004), 133, 138–139. Data on rainfall and drought in Marsabit District compiled from NFD Annual Reports and Marsabit District Annual Reports, KNA.

alter African settlement, agricultural, and livestock herding practices, conducted by an army of scientific and technical experts abroad. In a word, Africans, African society, and African modes of production were to be *modernized* through the application of Western bureaucratic management, science, and technology.”³

As British development policies played out on Marsabit, the most consequential result was the conservation and regulation of the mountain’s forest, land, and watering points. Although elsewhere in the colony and the empire, the state expanded its role in social welfare, on Marsabit, commercial and social development were subsumed by the conservationist agenda. This prioritization was closely connected to the belief, pervasive among colonial administrators, that pastoralists were uniquely resistant to modernization, and that pastoralism was antithetical to progress and “development.”

This belief was only strengthened by the failed attempts to modernize pastoralism, through the regulation of grazing rights, water access, and livestock marketing. Almost all of these attempts at regulating pastoralists were frustrated by drought conditions, wartime migration, or inconsistencies in colonial law. The state’s emphasis on developing a market economy in the NFD, while also restricting the movement of traders and continually enforcing a quarantine of livestock is just one example the contradictions in policy. Most colonial administrators in the NFD observed how the recommendations of technical and bureaucratic experts failed to modernize and regulate pastoralism effectively. More than conservationist or agricultural development policies, the ideals set out in development plans for pastoralists were continually mitigated by the social and environmental complexity of Marsabit and the surrounding region.

³ Roderick P. Neumann, “The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa,” *Environmental History* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 28.

In Marsabit district, the end result of administrative decisions and colonial development policies was to secure the mountain's resources for agriculturalists and cattle herders. The district's lowland camel herders continued to operate under the benign neglect of indirect rule, perhaps unwittingly exchanging their wealth for freedom from colonial oversight. The Rendille and Gabra, who made up over 85 percent of the district's population, sought to maintain their nomadic traditions, and largely resisted the pattern of settlement on the mountain.⁴

Imperial Architects and British Development Policy

The formulation of British colonial policy was a complex process, involving colonial and metropolitan bureaucracies, international and parliamentary politics as well as the influence of willful individuals. Colonial governors wrangled for imperial resources with the Colonial Office, while the Colonial Office often found itself at odds with the Treasury, or the Foreign Office. Almost any type of singular policy that survived the machinery of the British Empire had undergone a great deal of tinkering, arm-twisting, and balancing of interests. Policy change was slow, but beginning in the 1930s the general trend was towards a broader definition of development, to include social welfare along with commercial growth, and for the imperial state to assume greater responsibility for colonial development. As state funding for development increased over this period, so did metropolitan planning. Policy most often reflected the aims and ideas of those in London rather than the local colonial administration.

⁴ A total of 50 Rendille and 42 Gabra are listed as residing in the township in 1960. Colonial administrators did not always detect nuances in ethnicities, and it is likely that most Oromo cattle herders were labeled Boran and camel herders were labeled Gabra. Even if this is the case, it still supports the overall point that the mountain was increasingly the domain of cattle herders and agriculturalists, and not camel herders.

The following overview of metropolitan development policy emphasizes the major shift in colonial development policy, from a commercial and market oriented policy to one that incorporated social reform and some provision for the welfare of imperial subjects. While this section highlights major trends and changes in colonial development policy and thought, it is also the case that this was a highly contested process. For brief periods, particularly when Great Britain experienced economic stress, the colonies became a topic of public concern, and historians can find a wealth of publications that espouse views concerning British colonies that span the spectrum from increasing white settlement to abandoning the colonial venture all together. My larger aim is to look at the affects of imperial policy on the margins of empire, and therefore gloss over the detailed process of policy formation in London.

In the 1920s the architects of British colonial development policy generally assumed that economic advancement went hand-in-hand with social advancement. At least when it came to British imperial endeavors, the advancement of “civilization” would serve the interests of all who were involved—British citizens and subject peoples alike. Joseph Chamberlain, who served as Colonial Secretary at the end of the nineteenth century, famously referred to the British race as the benevolent trustee: “We develop new territory as Trustees for Civilisation, for the Commerce of the World.”⁵ Frederick Lugard, who served as governor in Nigeria, reformulated Trusteeship into the Dual Mandate. Lugard acknowledged British self-interest in acquiring and administering her colonies, but argued that this self-interest was also beneficial to colonized peoples.

Let it be admitted at the outset that European brains, capital, and energy have not been, and never will be, expended in developing the resources of

⁵ Quoted in Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), frontispiece.

Africa from motives of pure philanthropy; that Europe is in Africa for the mutual benefit of her own industrial classes, and of the native races in their progress to a higher plane; that the benefit can be made reciprocal, and that it is the aim and desire of civilised administration to fulfil this dual mandate.⁶

The Dual Mandate was clearly founded on the assumption of the superiority of the “civilized” over the African “native.” But Lugard’s policy contained a highly paternalistic view of African society, and argued that the imperial government was also responsible to protect Africans from the exploitation of European settlers and merchants. Lugard’s solution, formed during his time in northern Nigeria, became known as indirect rule, in which “chiefs were made the agents of imperial rule in order that local institutions and customs could exist and adapt in some sort of syncretic rhythm with the development of resources.”⁷ Indirect rule has been rightly criticized for its fictive notion of chieftancy and its ability to isolate and segregate colonial regions. But it also limited the state’s direct involvement in African societies, assuming that these societies would change gradually over time as a result of incremental exposure to the advances of modern civilization.

For Lugard and those in the Colonial Office in the 1920s, colonial development meant commercial and economic development. The role of the British state was to build foundational institutions and where necessary, transportation networks. Private industry,

⁶ Ibid., 617. In regards to Trusteeship, Lugard wrote, “These products lay wasted and ungarnered in Africa because the natives did not know their use and value. Millions of tons of oil-nuts, for instance, grew wild without the labour of man, and lay rotting in the forests. Who can deny the right of the hungry people of Europe to utilise the wasted bounties of nature, or that the task of developing these resources was, as Mr. Chamberlain expressed it, ‘a trust for civilisation’ and for the benefit of mankind? Europe benefited by the wonderful increase in the amenities of life for the mass of her people which followed the opening up of Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. Africa benefited by the influx of manufactured goods, and the substitution of law and order for the methods of barbarism.” *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 615.

⁷ Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War And Welfare In Kenya 1925-52*, 1st ed. (Ohio University Press, 2001), 28.

with a nudge in the right direction, would do the rest to link the colonies to the imperial economy.

The strictly commercial policy of colonial development was also necessary in order to receive the approval of the Treasury. The Colonial Office and the Treasury were constantly at odds, but in the years following World War I the Treasury was particularly focused on reducing government expenditure. This required the Colonial Office to avoid proposals for long-term development plans and instead focus on small-scale projects that would lead to colonial “self-development,” or those that would bring immediate financial benefit to the empire.⁸ In essence, the Treasury would only approve funding for projects that would benefit the empire’s bottom line in the near future.

The 1921 Kenya Loan is illustrative of colonial development policy in the early interwar period. Ideally each colony would collect more in revenue each year than it spent on administration, and a portion of this profit would then be directed towards the further development of the colony. The ideal and the theory of colonial “self-development” rested upon the assumption that each individual colony should and could pay its own way, and more. The problem in East Africa (and elsewhere) was that the state had already incurred large debts to pay for the railway and for wartime expenses, and in the early twenties the annual deficits continued to increase. East African administrators had been seeking assistance from the Colonial Office since 1919, but it would take several years of bureaucratic wrangling and a ratcheting up of the crisis in order to press through the loan. In 1921 Governor Edward Northey reported an estimated

⁸ Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1984), 68, 84.

deficit of £600,000 for the following year, more than double his earlier estimates.⁹ A loan of £5 million was raised in London, with interest at six percent. The money went towards repaying previous debts, railroad construction, and generally restructuring Kenya's expenditures so that the colony would not be a burden to the treasury in the future. Imperial aid had led to self-sufficiency in West Africa prior to 1914, and the colonial office staff sought to apply this same model to East Africa in the 1920s.¹⁰ The Kenya Loan and other colonial plans of development in this period were not the result of metropolitan planning or of a clearly articulated development policy. Instead, colonial assistance was typically a response to existing problems, and as was the case in East Africa, the request was initiated by the colonial administration. Development and development policy in this period were ad hoc and focused on removing financial burdens from the Imperial Exchequer.¹¹

In a subtle way, the 1929 Colonial Development Act was the first significant and successful challenge to the policy of colonial self-sufficiency. Given the poor state of the world economy, 1929 seems an odd year in which to pass an act increasing expenditure on colonial development. In fact, it was the poor economy, and specifically rising unemployment in Britain, that turned colonial development into a salient political issue in the year's parliamentary elections. The Colonial Development Act was proposed by the Conservative Party, largely as an attempt to do *something* about the unemployment issue.

⁹ Ibid., 81. It was during this period of financial difficulty that Great Britain officially annexed Kenya as a colony (rather than a protectorate), in order to take advantage of the Colonial Stock Act, which allowed colonies to raise public stock (and not protectorates). The East African Loans Act (1926) was also based on the same policy of colonial self-development.

¹⁰ Ibid., 84.

¹¹ Ibid.

In order to deflect criticism in the coming election, Conservatives needed to find ways to at least appear to combat rising unemployment. The suggestion was hardly novel: expenditure on colonial infrastructure would create jobs and the investments would create better markets for British industrial goods. The act failed to save Conservatives, who were ousted in favor of Labour in June 1929. Upon taking office, Labour made good on its campaign promises and pushed through a number of measures, including the Colonial Development Act.¹²

The act itself set up the Colonial Development Fund, which allocated up to £1 million annually. Decisions on how to disburse the funds were to be made by the newly created Colonial Development Advisory Committee (CDAC), whose members were appointed by the secretary of state for the colonies. According to the actual text of the act, the funds were intended “for the purpose of aiding and developing agriculture and industry in the Colony or territory,” and so reflected the traditional development policy focused on commercial growth.¹³

The results of the act were disappointing to those who hoped the state would assume a larger role in colonial development. The sinking economy, the tedium of committee approval, along with tensions between the CDAC and the Treasury led to limited results from the act throughout the Empire. Just over £6.5 million of a possible £11 million were disbursed by the committee between 1929 and 1940. The CDF did fund the construction of a bridge over the Zambesi, a new water-supply scheme in Zanzibar, and a livestock research station in Kenya.¹⁴ Despite these accomplishments, colonial

¹² Ibid., 171–189; D. J. (David John) Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development*, vol. 1 (Atlantic Highland, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1980), 46.

¹³ Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development*, 1:45.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1:58.

governors were often reluctant to apply for assistance from the CDF, because the fund did not cover recurring expenses, and the terms of assistance were often not favorable enough to cover the increased administrative costs. “The ad hoc nature of aid, the terms of aid, the metropolitan bias and the limited range of services upon which CDF money could be spent were being criticised by the later 1930s.”¹⁵

There were a number of new factors that surfaced in the 1930s that led to a serious reevaluation of the assumptions that had been the foundation of colonial development policy since the late nineteenth century. It was during the Great Depression that the British government and the British public were forced to confront new challenges to the notion of trusteeship, often referred to as “the Colonial Problem.”¹⁶ “The 1930s proved to be a watershed for the Colonial Office. A more ameliorative attitude toward welfare in the colonies took root well before the threat of another world war galvanized thought into action.”¹⁷

Colonial Development and Social Welfare

The formation of the League of Nations and its relationship to mandated territories after World War I was one factor that led to greater international scrutiny of British colonial rule. During the Great War both Germany and Turkey were unable to defend their imperial territories, and under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles the defeated nations were required to concede the permanent loss of these territories. The tricky question was what to do with these newly liberated territories, which included former Ottoman territories in the Middle East and German territories in Africa and the South Pacific. For a variety of reasons, including American skepticism of British imperial ambitions, direct

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, 4.

¹⁷ Ibid., 23.

annexation of the territories was rejected. The League sought a solution that would avoid the appearance of awarding spoils to the victors, which might precipitate future conflicts between nations. The solution was drafted in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which reads in part:

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant. The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.¹⁸

The result was that the United Kingdom, along with France, Belgium, and Japan became “mandated powers,” with responsibilities to administrate the mandates on behalf of the League, until the population was judged ready for national independence.¹⁹ Article 22 also reflected the desire to distance the mandate system from traditional imperialism by forbidding the construction of military fortifications, securing equal opportunities for commerce, and perhaps most significantly, requiring mandated powers to govern the territories “in the interests of the indigenous population.” Enforcement of the article’s ideals were supposed to be demonstrated in annual reports submitted to the Permanent

¹⁸ Article 22, “Peace Treaty of Versailles , Articles 1-30 and Annex, The Covenant of the League of Nations,” accessed February 21, 2012, <http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/versa/versa1.html>.

¹⁹ The Mandated Territories were divided into three categories (A, B, and C Mandates) depending upon their preparedness for national independence. The former Ottoman territories were deemed A Mandates, who according to Article 22, “have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone.” All African territories were categorized as B and C mandates. In 1932 Mesopotamia applied to the League and became the first mandate granted national independence, subsequently called the Kingdom of Iraq.

Mandates Commission, a League body composed of non-mandate nation members.

Great Britain and the other mandated powers “found themselves subject to a new type of scrutiny relating to non-state peoples.”²⁰

A series of violent protests in the West Indies did more to draw national and international attention to the deficiencies of Britain’s trusteeship. A series of strikes and general labor unrest began in 1934, but it was the violence and more widespread rioting that developed in Trinidad and Barbados in 1937, and Jamaica in 1938 that drew considerable attention.²¹ As one member of the Colonial Office noted, “The W. Indies are, to some considerable extent, the British shop-window for the U.S.A. I am afraid it is not a very striking exhibit.”²² In response, parliament appointed a royal committee to investigate the causes of the unrest. The committee’s investigation and impending report added to the number of publications describing impoverished living conditions throughout the empire.

A series of investigations and reports published during the thirties also contributed to the “colonial problem,” as issues of health, education, and poverty in the colonies were addressed in an increasingly public manner. In 1933 Lord Hailey, former governor of India, was commissioned by the Royal Institute of International Affairs to conduct a “review of the extent to which modern knowledge was being applied to African problems.”²³ The result was the 1,800 page tome, *An African Survey: A Study of*

²⁰ Lewis, *Empire State-Building*, 24–25.

²¹ Michael Ashley Havinden and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and Its Tropical Colonies, 1850-1960* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993), 229, 234.

²² Sir John Campbell, quoted in Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940*, 235.

²³ Taken from the Foreward, written by The Marquess of Lothian, in William Malcolm Hailey, *An African Survey; a Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara, by Lord Hailey. Issued by the Committee of the African Research Survey Under the Auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), v.

Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara, published in 1938. In his survey, Hailey considers in detail the history and policy of issues related to land policy, labor, environment, and European and African institutions. His more general synopsis of “development” is worth quoting at length:

...something more than the exhibition of a spirit of humanity or the sympathetic application of the routine of administration is needed for the adequate discharge of a responsibility of this character [of European responsibility]. The needs of Africa extend beyond the maintenance of order, the institution of courts of justice, or the prevention of oppressive action by native authorities or European employers of labour. ...The special needs of Africa at this stage are for a more comprehensive study of the factors which determine the nature of its social development, and a more scientific approach to the problems of health and material well-being to which its physical characteristics have given rise.²⁴

Hailey was challenging the traditional assumption that an imperial administration focused on law, order, and commerce, would also benefit native society. Hailey’s study, along with his political connections, made his conclusions particularly influential on development policy over the next decade. At the same time, research was being compiled for a *Report on Nutrition in the Colonial Empire*, which was presented to Parliament in July, 1939.²⁵ In a forward to the report, Malcolm McDonald, the secretary of the state for the colonies, wrote, “One of the most far-reaching of political developments has been the steady broadening of the foundations of social policy and the extension over an every wider sphere of the responsibilities of Government.”²⁶ More critical publications on the colonial question included *How Britain Rules Africa* (1936),

²⁴ Ibid., xxiv.

²⁵ Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940*, 246.

²⁶ Great Britain. Economic Advisory Council, *Nutrition in the Colonial Empire: First Report* (London: H.M.S.O., 1939).

Empire or Democracy (1939), and W. M. Macmillan's *Warning from the West Indies* (1938).²⁷

The question over British colonial rule also came under greater scrutiny as a result of Germany's request for restitution of its former overseas territories. In 1935, Hitler requested the return of colonies lost in World War I, which initiated the British public's interest in the "colonial problem." The German complaint was partly that they were unfairly impeded from accessing raw materials for their economy. In response the League of Nations appointed a Committee for the Study of the Problem of Raw Materials. After Germany successfully re-occupied the Rhineland in 1936, the Foreign Office believed it would inevitably have to make colonial concessions to Germany. As a result, the cabinet set up a sub-committee to consider the "Transfer of a Colonial Mandate or Mandates to Germany." Despite strong recommendations from the committee and the Colonial Office that all mandates remain under British rule, Prime Minister Chamberlain was sympathetic to Germany's complaints, or perhaps just hopeful that concessions would smooth out Anglo-German relations. As German aggression became more apparent Chamberlain and his cabinet became even more willing to use the African mandates as a bargaining chip for German appeasement. In March 1938 and again in July 1939, after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain put forward proposals for a re-partitioning of tropical Africa and the return of German colonies in stages. But at this point the territories in tropical Africa had become peripheral to

²⁷ Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, 19; for a list of additional publications see Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940*, 230–231.

Hitler's continental ambitions, and British token concessions would not restrain German aggression.²⁸

As the Depression Decade waned, and German expansion appeared inevitable, the colonial problem continued to be a topic of public discourse throughout Great Britain. Those in favor of making concessions often pointed out the Empire's failure to live up to the standards of trusteeship and called into question the foundations of the British moral superiority in imperial endeavors. The Colonial Office and others who rejected German restitution argued that it was in the best interest of Africans and other colonial subjects to remain under British trusteeship. Both sides of the argument appealed to the welfare of colonial subjects and made British ability or inability to provide welfare central to the public debate. News of the poor living conditions of colonial subjects in the West Indies, East Africa, South Asia, and elsewhere was used both as a critique of imperialism and as evidence that more of the state's resources should be directed towards the civilizing mission.

The shortcomings of imperial funding, the problematic social conditions in the colonies, and the growing public awareness of Britain's colonial problem were all addressed in well-publicized dispatch sent by the governor of Nigeria to the Colonial Office. According to Governor Bourdillon, the traditional notions of colonial self-development and financial self-sufficiency were threatening the future of colonial rule. In April of 1939 he wrote,

...there are clear signs that a considerable section of the British public is rapidly awakening from the complacency, indeed apathy, with which it has been accustomed to regard colonial problems, and is beginning to have

²⁸ Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, 191–193.

an uneasy feeling that all is not as it should be and, in particular, that certain other powers have some justification for suggesting that they would have succeeded in doing more than we have done for the development of tropical Africa, had they been in a position to make the attempt.²⁹

The Colonial Office was more than aware of all the issues surrounding the colonial problem. In May 1938 Malcolm MacDonald, a young member of the Labour party with a distinguished pedigree, was appointed secretary of state for the colonies. Though only 36 years old, MacDonald had considerable political and imperial experience. His initiatives to expand the scope of colonial development and increase metropolitan funding were crucial to the broader policy changes that would eventually become imperial development orthodoxy after the war.³⁰ But it would take the impending war with Germany to create a domestic political situation favorable to MacDonald and the Colonial Office's more activist approach towards colonial development policy. Previously the colonies' economic value to the empire drove decisions regarding development, especially when it required the approval of the Treasury and broad support in parliament. It was the economic role of the colonies and their ability to improve unemployment in Britain that led to the 1929 Development Act. But in 1940, economic considerations were secondary to the politics of war and winning the home front throughout the empire.³¹

Directing more imperial funds towards colonial development, and expanding the meaning of development, could seem a distraction in light of the growing signs of German aggression. But MacDonald persuasively argued that a renewed commitment to

²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 192; also see Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940*, 244–246.

³⁰ Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940*, 233–238.

³¹ Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development*, 1:73.

the colonies would help minimize colonial disturbances during war time, could minimize German propaganda, and help secure international goodwill both during and after the war. In fact, even in 1940 MacDonald was concerned about the scrutiny of the empire in a post-war world. MacDonald remarked, “In future, criticism of Great Britain would be directed more and more against her management of the Colonial Empire, and it was essential to provide as little basis as possible for such criticism. It was an essential part of her defence policy that her reputation as a Colonial power should be unassailable.”³² Or as stated in a Colonial Office memo to the cabinet, “we must be able to show that our record as a Colonial Power is so good that there can be no question of our being asked to surrender our colonies to anyone else.”³³

The result was the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act, which was intended as a response to domestic and international outcry over social issues in the West Indies and elsewhere in the empire, and as an improvement to the 1929 Colonial Development Act. The new act permitted up to £5 million per year on colonial development and welfare projects, and largely as a result of Lord Hailey’s recommendations, also provided £500,000 annually for scientific research. The Colonial Office was also able to include the forgiveness of colonial debts into the act, including £5.5 million in debt owed by Kenya.³⁴ The act was a product and a symbol of the growing acceptance that colonial development also entailed provisions for social welfare, particularly related to health and education, and that this welfare was also a metropolitan concern.

³² Quoted in Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, 200.

³³ *Ibid.*, 202.

³⁴ Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy 1914-1940*, 256.

Though the war limited the application of the 1940 act, and its immediate impact upon the colonies was minimal, its larger significance was to create policies that formed the basic framework of later development acts, including the 1945 Colonial Development and Welfare Act, which was renewed in the 50s and 60s and was implemented until 1970.³⁵

The events of the 1930s eroded the confidence placed in imperial development, as many began to question the assumption that commercial development led to social progress. The British state's response was that the major problem with development was its limited scope, and the solution to colonial underdevelopment was more money and more expertise. World War II and the immediate post-war period gave administrators in the colonial office the opportunity to expand the state's role in development and to redefine modern theories of colonial development. Prior to the war the two theoretical guideposts of colonial occupation were Indirect Rule and Lugard's Dual Mandate. The war dramatically shifted both the ideological and economic foundations of empire, leading Great Britain and France, among others, to grasp for new justifications and explanations for their colonial enterprises. During the war, the British government sought to diffuse possible American criticism and to avoid precise commitments to self-rule. They did this through linking "the future of empire to the idea of development."³⁶

Some historians have referred to these last decades of colonialism in Africa—between WWII and the emergence of independent nations in the 50s and 60s—as the “second colonial occupation.” Roderick Neumann writes, “‘Development,’ in official

³⁵ See Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, 257–258.

³⁶ Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 111.

parlance, became the moral, political, and economic *raison d'être* for continued colonial occupation after World War II.”³⁷ The moral justification for empire became closely tied to the ability to carry out social reform. Officials and experts pointed to the poverty of colonial subjects as a problem, which was best solved through economic planning and state intervention. The second colonial occupation was based on a renewed faith in the state’s responsibility to bring about social and economic progress. This faith also carried a corresponding criticism of African institutions, and the fear that left unto themselves, colonial subjects would continue to lag behind modernization. But development was also a significant part of the United Kingdom’s plan for postwar economic recovery. In order to return to prosperity, the empire depended upon its colonies as sources of raw materials and in particular as markets for British manufacturers.³⁸ African colonies would become particularly crucial to the British economy after the loss of India in 1947 and in light of American dominance of the global economy.

Frederick Cooper persuasively argues that development theory was also a direct response to colonial labor unrest during the war. Urban areas in the British colonies experienced the dwindling of imports and rising food prices (in other words, a decline in “real wages”). Between 1939 and 1945 the Colonial Office confronted labor strikes in West, South, and East Africa. Dockworkers in Mombasa went on strike in 1939, 1942, and threatened again in 1945. The typical response by officials in the colonies and in London was to grant minor concessions—either an increase in wages or a reduction in hours—and to appoint an investigatory committee to address worker grievances and to submit proposals for long-term mediation.

³⁷ Neumann, “The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa,” 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Though the war deeply disrupted the British economy, the policies formed during post-war reconstruction affirmed the belief that the empire needed to direct more of its resources towards the development of its colonies, and this included social development. In 1945 parliament renewed the 1940 CD&W Act, and increased the expenditure of the act. In addition, the 1945 act also emphasized the need for long-term planning for colonial development, and made imperial funding conditioned on ten-year development plans. Perhaps the real legacy of the 1945 act, and an essential component of development during the second colonial occupation, was its emphasis on the production of development plans. The authority of these plans increasingly depended upon the analysis and recommendation of the growing scientific bureaucracy throughout the empire.

Another consequence of the CD&W acts and the second colonial occupation was the swelling of the development bureaucracy. Imperial funding of development research led to the creation of numerous committees, including the Colonial Research Committee, the Colonial Science Research Council, the Colonial Medical Research Committee, and the Committee for Colonial Agricultural, Animal Health and Forestry Research.³⁹ Between 1941 and 1961 over £24 million were devoted to research associated with the CD&W act.⁴⁰

Many of the changes in post-war colonial development policy were a response to metropolitan political and economic issues. In particular, the post-war economic problems and the 1947 sterling crisis led to government proposals aimed at minimizing American imports. The most immediate solution was to encourage increased production

³⁹ Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development*, 1:102–103. Additional committees include the Colonial Fisheries Advisory Committee and the Tsetse Fly and Trypanosomiasis Committee.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:104.

in the colonies that could substitute for American imports. Indian independence led to a new emphasis on British Africa to serve the neo-mercantilist policies of the late 40s and 50s. The Labour government's solution was to maximize production—particularly food production—in the colonies in order to serve the national market. It was the needs of the British national economy, and the desire to reduce dollar expenditure, that led to large-development projects, including a groundnut scheme in Tanganyika and an egg production scheme in the Gambia.⁴¹

The Mau Mau rebellion and the colonial state of emergency precipitated and conditioned all the development efforts in Kenya throughout the 1950s, and also affected development efforts throughout the British Empire. Kenyan development policies were always designed to bolster the state, but Mau Mau made it imperative to stem radicalism. While the immediate response to Mau Mau was military force and detention camps, there was also a need to encourage Kenyan loyalists, and this was done through a series of reforms that encouraged the growth of the middle class.⁴² The 1954 Swynnerton Plan sought to create political and economic stability in Kenya through land reform. Officially titled “A Plan to Intensify the Development of African Agriculture in Kenya,” the plan was drawn up by Roger Swynnerton, an official in the Department of Agriculture. The aim of the plan was to increase agricultural production and allow the more “progressive” Kenyan farmers to have access to credit to expand their holdings. In many ways the Swynnerton Plan sought to remove restrictions placed on Kenyan farmers, and to create a system that mimicked the practice of white settlers. Instead of blocks of land allocated by “tribal” identity, the state consolidated land and redistributed it on a family basis.

⁴¹ M. P. Cowen, *Doctrines Of Development* (Routledge, 1996), 296.

⁴² Bethwell A. Ogot, *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya, 1940-93*, Eastern African Studies; Variation: Eastern African Studies (London, England) (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), 48–50.

Additionally, restrictions on growing cash crops were removed (previously Kenyan farmers were required to grow food crops for the colony, while white settlers grew cash crops for export). By all measurements the Swynnerton Plan significantly boosted the level of African agricultural production, while also redistributing land previously held by Mau Mau supporters to those loyal to the colonial state.⁴³

As policy makers relied upon a broader definition of development, it became assumed that the role of the colonial state was to directly manage and modernize colonial subjects. Subjects were no longer referred to as “natives,” whose institutional and cultural “backwardness” was tolerated, but became “Africans.” As development expanded to include health, education, and other elements of social reform, the colonial state became more invested in modernizing its subjects and reforming their daily practices.⁴⁴

Depression, Dustbowl, and African Production in Kenya

Throughout the 1920s the colonial state came to exercise more of its authority on Marsabit, its resources, and its peoples. Despite the growing presence of the state and the stricter imposition of law and regulation, the mountain was only tenuously connected to the colonial economy. Many Rendille, Gabra, and Boran remained suspect of the market, and preferred to rely on traditional means of storing wealth, by increasing the size of herds. The continuing quarantine of the cattle market also prevented pastoralists from marketing herds. The primary exports from Marsabit and the NFD were small-stock—sheep and goats—and these were often marketed in order to purchase large stock. A resilient pastoralist tradition combined with the restrictions of the NFD to create a region

⁴³ Ibid., 48–50, 87–89.

⁴⁴ Neumann, “The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa,” 28.

isolated from the colonial and imperial economy. When the American stock market crashed in 1929 and a global depression ensued, Marsabit remained largely insulated from the economic and social dislocation experienced throughout Kenya and much of the world.

Though Marsabit was largely unaffected by the onset of the Great Depression, the Kenyan economy as a whole suffered immensely. The economic growth during the 1920s resulted in both an increase in Kenya's volume of exports and a concentration of exports. As a result, the collapse of global commodity prices strongly affected all of Britain's tropical colonies, Kenya included.⁴⁵ The steep drop in prices on colonial exports had a variety of consequences in the colony, but Kenya's white settlers experienced the most direct and drastic changes in the world economy. Most settlers depended on the export trade for their income, and their hopes for prosperity crumbled when world prices for maize, coffee, wheat, and sisal dropped by 50 percent or more in the first few years of the Depression.⁴⁶ In addition, many settlers had borrowed heavily during the more prosperous 1920s in order to expand agricultural production. Diminishing export prices also meant that settlers could not pay their debts, adding to the severity of their impoverishment. Kenya's prosperity was closely tied to the success of settler agriculture and production, and the destitution of the settler economy created both economic and political problems for the colony.

A debate over the relationship between the white settler population and Kenya's economic future was taken up in Nairobi and London. The question arose over whether the setback in settler prosperity was temporary or if it was an indication of a permanent

⁴⁵ Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, 179–183.

⁴⁶ Tabitha Kanogo, "Kenya and the Depression, 1929-1939," in *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895-1980*, ed. W. R. Ochieng (Nairobi: Evans Brothers Limited, 1989), 115–116.

change in the world economy. If it was temporary, some argued, then it would be justifiable for the government to give political and financial aid to settlers. Conversely, if the era of settler prosperity was over in Kenya and the rest of tropical Africa, then the colony would need a new role in the imperial economy. This view, that Kenya could no longer depend on settler production, was espoused in a memoranda submitted to the Joint Parliamentary Committee upon closer union in the East African Territories. In the memoranda, titled “Land Policy and Economic Development in Kenya,” Charles Speller wrote:

It is a matter of some doubt whether the profitable pursuit of agriculture for Europeans in tropical British Africa can extend beyond the next generation. It is entirely a speculation involving the problem of world production, world price and wage levels. These are not likely to move in a direction advantageous to the European producer.⁴⁷

Speller continued to argue that the only way for European producers to continue in British Africa is to lower their present standard of living. Settlers would respond to this antagonism by defending the legitimacy of their land ownership and their value to the colony. While a number of administrators agreed with Speller’s assessment, a sizeable portion of Kenya’s political elite would combat any threat to their dominance and prosperity.

The Great Depression and the political controversy surrounding the role of settlers in the Kenyan economy resulted in two important developments. The first was a more aggressive attempt by settlers to use the colonial and imperial states to protect and prop up the export economy. Although often unsuccessful, settlers attempted to use political maneuvers to advance their interests, often at the expense of indigenous producers. Early

⁴⁷ Charles Speller, “Land Policy and Economic Development in Kenya,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 30, no. 121 (October 1, 1931): 381.

in the Depression settler groups pressed for the devaluation of currency, hoping the change would stimulate the commodity markets, but were rebuffed by administrators in Nairobi and London, whose interests were opposed to devaluation.⁴⁸ Settlers were more successful in lobbying for financial assistance through low interest loans through the creation of the Land Bank in 1931, and in securing preferential tariffs.⁴⁹

The second major consequence of the Great Depression was an emphasis on indigenous production in Kenya. To administrators in London and Nairobi it was not clear that settler production would weather the storm, and while they did not antagonize settler interests, they did begin to focus more on the productivity of the African population. According to Anderson and Throup, in Kenya “the Depression produced a major reassessment of government policies, which resulted in positive attempts to maximize African output.”⁵⁰

Settler preoccupation with economic and political protection, and the administration’s emphasis on increasing African production resulted in an interesting convergence. Both agreed that indigenous farming techniques posed a serious threat to the productivity of Kenya’s land and its economy. The economic collapse of the late twenties and early thirties also coincided with a decrease in rainfall throughout East Africa, annual locust infestations, and a substantial increase in Kenya’s population. All this, combined with the international specter of the North American Dust Bowl, resulted in increased attention on measures to prevent over-production and soil-erosion.⁵¹

⁴⁸ C. C. Wrigley, “Kenya: The Patterns of Economic Life, 1902-1945,” in *History of East Africa*, ed. Roland Anthony Oliver, vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 248.

⁴⁹ Kanogo, “Kenya and the Depression, 1929-1939,” 117–118.

⁵⁰ David Anderson and David Throup, “Africans and Agricultural Production in Colonial Kenya: The Myth of the War as a Watershed,” *The Journal of African History* 26, no. 4 (January 1, 1985): 329.

⁵¹ David Anderson, “Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography, and Drought: The Colonial State and Soil Conservation in East Africa during the 1930s,” *African Affairs* 83, no. 332 (July 1, 1984): 321–43.

One part of this debate centered on African livestock and the issue of overstocking. The administrative tendency to implement and sustain quarantines while also decreasing the size of rangelands created a serious problem: larger herds of livestock became dependent upon smaller pastures. The high occurrence of drought in the early thirties exacerbated the issue, sparking concerns over the long-term damage resulting from overstocking and “overgrazing.”⁵²

African farming practices also came under increased scrutiny during the Depression. African farmers were the target of state initiatives to increase their production and to control the methods of agricultural production. These initiatives were primarily constructed and implemented by the colony’s Department of Agriculture. During the late twenties and early thirties the department’s emphasis was on capturing local and regional economies within the colonial economy. As the decade progressed, the department’s main problem was no longer resistance to economic integration, but the threat of diminishing yields believed to be the result of soil exhaustion and erosion.⁵³ From the mid-thirties on, the Department of Agriculture constructed laws and educational campaigns aimed at soil conservation, and relied upon tribal headmen and Local Native Councils to implement and enforce these measures. According to Anderson and Throup, “Local conditions and systems of cultivation dictated the particulars of these regulations, but they invariably sought to prevent cultivation in the vicinity of water-courses, to preserve vegetational cover on slopes, to encourage ploughing along the contour instead of down the slope, and where necessary to organize the labour for the construction of

⁵² Anderson and Throup, “Africans and Agricultural Production in Colonial Kenya,” 330–331.

⁵³ Nicholas E. Makana, “Increased Agricultural Production in the Midst of Escalating Ecological Distress: Bungoma District in the 1930s & 1940s,” *African Economic History*, no. 35 (January 1, 2007): 119–120, footnote 78.

ridges and terraces to protect cultivated lands.”⁵⁴ In 1938 a new Soil Conservation Service was created to continue and increase the modernization of farming practices in Kenya.

In fact, throughout the Depression Decade soil conservation was transformed from an issue individually dealt with by local administration to a topic of concern throughout the British Empire’s tropical colonies. The topic of soil conservation was discussed at the highest levels of colonial administration, and the result was a broad application of conservationist measures.⁵⁵ In Kenya as well as other British tropical colonies, concerns over conservation were fundamental in the transition during the thirties from passive “indirect rule” to more activist state intervention in African husbandry.

Conservation and Intervention on Marsabit

Conservationist projects had been implemented on Marsabit since the 1920s, which placed restrictions on the use of forest and water sources. These measures were aimed at pastoralists, and focused on preventing damage to the forest caused by livestock and the use of brushfires for disease prevention. Though 38,000 acres of Marsabit had been declared a forest reserve, administrators wanted to also designate the forest a game reserve. There were a variety of motivations for creating a game reserve, some more strictly conservationist, but there was also hope that a game reserve would attract more European hunting parties and generate more revenue. No matter the motivation, the common assumption was that pastoralist use of the forest was harmful, and that restricting their use of the forest would have little consequence. The 1933 Kenya Land

⁵⁴ Anderson and Throup, “Africans and Agricultural Production in Colonial Kenya,” 332.

⁵⁵ Anderson, “Depression, Dust Bowl, Demography, and Drought,” 341.

Commission echoed this view when responding to the proposal for the national game park on Marsabit, “We see no objection to the proposal, which does not envisage that the few natives who inhabit the country will be displaced, but naturally it must be subject to safeguards, which must provide that the number of animals must be kept down to a point at which there is no danger to their causing impairment to the land.”⁵⁶ In general, the colonial documents and administrative actions reveal a pervasive belief that nomadic peoples had less of a right to land because they did not occupy it continually, regularly, or use it in a “productive” way that contributed to the colonial economy.⁵⁷ As a result, pastoralist use of the mountain was tertiary to protecting the forest and wild game, and to agricultural use.

The growing emphasis in the colony on soil conservation during the 1930s added a new series of regulations that affected the mountain’s agriculturalists as well. Marsabit itself was a marginal area of agricultural production, but the problems elsewhere in the colony attracted a series of experts, some of whom were sent to Marsabit.

Marsabit’s economic and social marginality in the 1920s and 1930s meant that efforts to develop the mountain were either initiated by local administration, or had trickled down as a result of broad colonial oversight, which sought to apply similar conservationist measures across Kenya (and in some cases across the empire). But for a brief period beginning in 1940, Marsabit came to the forefront of the colonial administration. This time development was not aimed at preserving resources or

⁵⁶ “The Kenya Land Commission Report,” April 18, 1934, CAB 24/248/47, The National Archives, Kew.

⁵⁷ The irony here is that the livestock on Marsabit and throughout the NFD was continually quarantined, making it very difficult for pastoralists to sell livestock. Additionally, colonial regulations restricted the movement of traders throughout the NFD, making it even more difficult for a cash economy to develop.

boosting production, but at supplying military defense in the imperial conflict with Mussolini's Italy.

Italian forces invaded Ethiopia in October 1935, raising concerns in London, Nairobi, and Marsabit over the porous nature of the northern border and the effect of war on the NFD. Within the year workers were sent to Marsabit to build housing and stores for the Royal Air Force, and to keep up maintenance on the landing grounds.⁵⁸ This Second Italo-Ethiopian War did not result in any direct military conflict between European powers, but the chaos and dislocation of the Italian invasion disrupted any sense of order that existed in the frontier region.⁵⁹ The most significant issue for administrators in the NFD was the steady stream of refugees seeking to escape the conflict in Ethiopia.⁶⁰ The stream of refugees from southern Ethiopia peaked during the seven months of the war, but continued during the period of Italian occupation. According to the commissioner of the NFD, in 1936 the "Italo-Ethiopian conflict overshadowed the normal administrative activities throughout the year."⁶¹ While the expansion of the Italian empire in East Africa caused local problems for NFD administrators, it also threatened British colonial interests in the region. Mussolini's alliance with Adolf Hitler exacerbated these tensions.

World War II and Marsabit

The rising continental tensions in Europe also played out in East Africa. The colony as a whole was brought in line with British war aims, which had complex consequences for

⁵⁸ NFP Annual Report, 1935, p. 36, PC/NFD/1/1/5, KNA.

⁵⁹ The First Italo-Ethiopian War was fought in 1895-96, and ended in an Italian retreat after the humiliating loss in the Battle of Adawa. See Chapter 1.

⁶⁰ See David Wilkin, "Refugees and British Administrative Policy in Northern Kenya, 1936-1938," *African Affairs* 79, no. 317 (October 1, 1980): 510-30.

⁶¹ NFP Annual Report, 1936, p. 2, PC/NFD/1/1/6, KNA.

the colonial economy and Kenyan society—both African and settler. Kenya also was directly involved in the military effort of World War II. In a 1940 radio address on the “strategical implications” of the British East African territories, Major Humphrey Leggett stated, “The northern frontier of Kenya is thus the outpost protecting practically the whole of East, Central and South Africa, that is to say, from the Equator right down to the Cape of Good Hope.”⁶² The major’s statement was certainly an exaggeration, but it conveys the logic behind fortifying the NFD, which was also designed to prevent the Italians from dissecting the imperial connections that ran down the continent, from Sudan to South Africa.

The war front did briefly come to Kenya, as British and Italian forces fought across the Kenya-Ethiopia border for seven months beginning in July 1940. In the context of the war, the East African campaign turned out to be a minor affair, marked by small skirmishes with Italian forces who lacked supplies and motivation. Though the border conflict was brief and a relatively small operation, the militarization of the NFD, and Marsabit in particular, introduced a new degree of state control over the mountain’s resources and altered the relationship between the colonial state and its subject peoples.

In June, 1940 a company of King’s African Rifles (KAR) arrived in Marsabit to take over security from the civil authorities. The following week, as anticipated, Italy formally declared war against Great Britain. Over the next two years various imperial companies and regiments were stationed on Marsabit, including engineers from the Gold Coast, infantry from South Africa, as well as regiments composed of recently recruited

⁶² Humphrey Leggett, “The British East African Territories and Their Strategical Implications: A Broadcast Talk Given on the Overseas Empire Transmission on Wednesday, 19th June, 1940,” *Journal of the Royal African Society* 39, no. 156 (July 1, 1940): 209.

East African *askaris*.⁶³ The non-pastoral population of the mountain swelled, leading to an increase in demand of Marsabit's resources. The war also brought more of the state's financial and technical resources to Marsabit and the NFD. Local administrators had complained about the difficulties of transportation and water resources along the frontier for years. But it took the threat of Italian invasion for the colony to finance both engineers and laborers to improve the region's infrastructure. In 1940 and 1941, engineer troops worked to improve and maintain roads between Nairobi and Marsabit, built a new 180 mile stretch of road within six weeks, and engaged in deep-well boring to create new water access points. According to the report submitted by Lieutenant General Sir Alan Cunningham,

In the south [NFD] during the preparatory period Road Construction companies, covered only by very light forces, drove broad roads through the bush 70 miles forward from both the Garissa and Bura on our front line, the River Tana, and water-boring units were also at work right forward at this stage. In quite a number of preliminary operations auto-patrols from the Road Construction companies moved forward just behind the most advanced troops. This plan proved of the greatest assistance in maintaining the speed of the advance.⁶⁴

The influx of personnel and state resources during wartime also resulted in a greater degree of control of Marsabit's resources and coercion over the region's population. Perhaps the most critical resource to the imperial war effort was the actual residents who populated Marsabit and the surrounding frontier. A small number of young men who resided in Marsabit District joined the military, forming a camel transport company. Records indicate that Boran, Gabra, and Rendille responded to the

⁶³ NFP Annual Report, 1940, p. 6, PC/NFD/1/1/8, KNA; J.K.R Thorp, "War Comes to Marsabit: Some Personal Notes," Political Records: War with Italy, May 1940 – December 1941, January 1942, DC/MBT/7/1/5, KNA.

⁶⁴ "Operation in East Africa, November, 1940 - July, 1941," Supplement to The London Gazette, 9 July, 1946, 3573-3574.

call for recruits.⁶⁵ In addition, NFD inhabitants served as interpreters and guides for the police and military throughout the East African campaign. J. K. R. Thorp, the wartime Marsabit DC, later described the contribution of the local communities:

With the outbreak of war, both British and Italian tightened their control of the tribes, but owing to the extent and nature of the country, complete closure of the frontier was, of course, impossible. As a result, the checking of enemy agents on our side produced a difficult problem, and the help and assistance given to our forces by chiefs, headmen and people in bringing in strangers for interrogation, reporting the movements of persons coming in from Abyssinia and generally watching enemy attempts at espionage has been considerable. In addition to this the information obtained from tribesmen themselves regarding enemy forces and movements has been of inestimable value. Without the co-operation of loyal tribes the collection of military intelligence in the N.F.D. would have been well-nigh impossible.⁶⁶

In another report Thorp indicates that the local population certainly supplied information to the Italian side as well, but the “balance” appeared to be on the British side.

Unspecified pastoralists provided detailed reports on the location of Italian forces, including the fact that they were retreating from Moyale and that the Italian forces were suffering from low morale and supply issues.⁶⁷

The NFD’s livestock was also an important resource during the war, as camels provided transport, and sheep and cattle provided meat necessary to feed the military population. Thorp again described this contribution as a sign of local support for the war effort:

Large armies consume vast quantities of meat, and in order to feed the troops the N.F. (sic) tribesmen have put their slaughter stock at the disposal of the military authorities. The demand has been great and so far the supply has never failed. To understand the true sacrifice made by the tribes on behalf of the war effort, one must first realise that to these

⁶⁵ “Notes on the War Effort of the NFD Tribesmen,” Political Records: War with Italy, May 1940 – December 1941, no date, p. 2, DC/MBT/7/1/5, KNA.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁷ “War Comes to Marsabit,” 5-6.

nomadic peoples their cattle are their lives, the be-all and end-all of their existence. They are of course, paid in full for all meat supplied, but to them money has little value, and, while they realise that it represents trade goods in lieu of their cattle, their needs are few. Their loss is real and that it is on the whole cheerfully borne shows the fine spirit of these desert peoples. The organisation of the meat supply has been carried out by the chiefs and headmen under the general directions of the District Commissioners' and their work in this direction has been most praiseworthy, especially as war conditions have added to their other duties.⁶⁸

By January 1941 the needs of the troops stationed in the NFD were estimated at 16,000 pounds of meat each day.⁶⁹ Though the military paid for slaughter stock, there was a degree of coercion in these transactions. Boran cattle herders who resided on Marsabit bore the brunt of this requirement, and according to the DC, they "felt the influence of the war considerably," more so than the Rendille.⁷⁰

The increase in population also put stress on the mountain's water supplies, and the military occupation of Marsabit forced pastoralists and agriculturalists living on the mountain to make concessions. In December, 1940 the Boran were forced to give up watering at Sokorte Guda (Paradise), Balessa Bongole, and Ullanula.⁷¹ These three main watering points along with Sagorte Dika and the township water supply were used by the South African troops on Marsabit, and were only open to military use.⁷² The DC remarked that if it had not been for the excellent long rains in 1941, the pastoralists would have suffered considerable hardship from lack of water and grazing.⁷³

⁶⁸ "Notes on the War Effort of the NFD Tribesmen," 5.

⁶⁹ "Diary of Events, June 1940 – December 1941," Political Records: War with Italy, May 1940 – December 1941, no date, p. 3, DC/MBT/7/1/5, KNA.

⁷⁰ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1941, p. 3-4, PC/NFD/1/2/3, KNA.

⁷¹ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1940, p. 3, PC/NFD/1/2/3, KNA; "Diary of Events, June 1940 – December 1941," 2.

⁷² "Time Table for Drawing Water," Political Records: War with Italy, May 1940 – December 1941, December 30, 1940, DC/MBT/7/1/5, KNA.

⁷³ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1941, p. 3, PC/NFD/1/2/3, KNA.

As it turned out, the imperial conflict in East Africa was short lived, and British forces occupied Ethiopia near the start of 1941. Marsabit had served as an important staging area for the invasion of southern Ethiopia, but its importance to the colony and the empire was short-lived.

Post-War Plans and Pastoralist Development

In 1943, at the request of the Kenyan government, Mr. D. C. Edwards and Dr. F. Dixey toured the NFD. Edwards was the Senior Agricultural Officer and Pasture Research Officer of the Kenya Agricultural Department, and Dixey was the Director of Water Development in Northern Rhodesia. Their survey of the NFD resulted in two reports on grazing and water supplies in the region, and these reports helped set the foundation of pastoralist development policy on Marsabit throughout the next two decades. The reports on grazing and water supplies in the NFD were most immediately used to convince the metropolitan development committee to approve the funding of Kenya's Post-War Five Year Development Plan.

Edwards produced a twenty-seven page technical report containing sections on climate, topography, vegetation, soils, and "population and livestock" in the NFD. The main purpose of his report, and his tour of the arid region, was to provide an explanation for the persisting difficulties of governing the NFD. In Edwards' view, much of the problem stemmed from pastoralist competition over diminishing resources. The deterioration of grassland was a major problem preventing a better distribution of tribes and livestock across the NFD. "There can be no doubt that the root cause of all the damage to the vegetation of this region can be attributed to lack of adequate water supplies, which makes impossible an advantageous distribution of livestock and brings

about year-long concentration at a few points.”⁷⁴ Edwards concluded his report with nine general recommendations, the first being to “Investigate and regulate the ownership of permanent water supplies and seasonal grazing grounds.” He also recommended that the government,

Devise and apply a scheme of deferred grazing based upon pasture units, consisting in each case of a permanent water supply with clearly defined dry and wet season grazing reserves; the former surrounding the permanent water and the latter dependent upon well-distributed temporary water supplies in an outlying area; the responsibility for each such unit to be placed upon a definite tribal community.⁷⁵

Dixey spent six months conducting research in the NFD, and submitted his “Hydrographical Survey of the Northern Frontier District, Kenya” in January 1944. Like Edwards, Dixey’s report relied on a large technical section to support recommendations about the regulation of pastureland and the improvement of water supplies. Both reports cited the paucity of permanent water sources and indigenous practices as causes of overgrazing and soil erosion. Dixey summarized the problem in the following way:

The problem of water supply is intimately bound up with that of grazing. As matters stand, in many places where there is permanent water, there is no grazing within reach, and where there is grazing, there is no water. Numerous new water points, both temporary and permanent, are required in order to serve the unused or little-used grazing areas and to rest the exhausted grazing areas around all the permanent water points.⁷⁶

Dixey further articulated the issue,

In order to prevent further damage, and to improve areas already denuded, the first essential is to induce a better distribution of stock by the provision of adequate and well-distributed water supplies. Given improvement in this direction, it is probable that the pastoral tribes would be readily amenable to simple methods of grazing control designed to safeguard the

⁷⁴ D. C. Edwards, “Report on the Grazing Areas of the Northern Frontier District of Kenya,” November 20, 1943, p. 16, PC/NFD/3/5/2, KNA.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 23.

⁷⁶ “Hydrographical Survey of the Northern Frontier District, Kenya,” January 1944, p. 7, PC/NFD/5/2/8, KNA.

vegetation by periodical protection. ... Given adequate distribution of permanent water, simple methods of rotational grazing management should be applied, the object of these methods being to prevent a continual removal of the young growth of the herbage, and to permit partial re-establishment from seed at intervals.⁷⁷

Dixey proposed that the drilling of boreholes throughout the district would provide a better distribution of watering points, which would open up more pastureland in the dry season, and prevent the large concentration of herds that led to overgrazing and soil erosion. These two points, the improvement of water supplies and the implementation of grazing control would become the cornerstone of the NFD Five Year Post-War Development Plan and subsequent state development efforts in the 1950s.⁷⁸

Those who drew up the NFD's Post-War Development Plan relied on two overarching themes to justify the time and cost of the plan. First, they argued that the colony and British Empire were indebted to the people of the NFD for the sacrifices they made during World War II. As loyal subjects and taxpayers, the inhabitants of the NFD deserved more of the state's attention and resources. The government plan states, "The tribespeople—few though they may be—have now given for a number of years a good deal in cash, kind, losses and suffering which has benefitted Kenya, and they are justly entitled to considerate treatment."⁷⁹

The second justification for comprehensive development of the region was that continued neglect would threaten the security and future prosperity of the colony as a whole. "It is now clear that unless adequate attention is given to the N.F.D. it will

⁷⁷ Ibid, 15.

⁷⁸ In April 1947, the Northern Frontier District was combined with the Turkana Districts and renamed the Northern Frontier Province. For the sake of consistency, instead of using "NFP" after 1946, I've chosen to use "NFD" throughout the colonial and post-colonial period. In fact, "NFD" is still used in Northern Kenya, even though the north has been divided into various provinces since the 1960s.

⁷⁹ "Post War Five Year Development Plan for the NFD of Kenya," 1944, preamble, PC/NFD/2/1/3, KNA.

become a menace—or at least a serious nuisance—to the southern half of Kenya.”⁸⁰ In particular, the Post-War Plan was concerned with the southward migration of Somali speakers and the problems this could create for the colony. The initial proposal contains a section titled “Why Kenya May Suffer if the Somalis are Neglected,” which explains,

This southward movement is becoming a serious menace to the southern half of Kenya and it must be stopped. The only practical way of dealing with it is to improve conditions in the desert areas which the Somalis inhabit so that they may be able to live and be contented in their own country. To make these nomadic people more static it is necessary not only to provide better water supplies so that their stock may be distributed more evenly all over the grazing areas, but facilities must also be given for marketing of their animals and for education and such agriculture as is possible.⁸¹

In a number of ways the plan was inherently conservative. Its aim was to expand access to water and grazing in order to preserve the pastoralist economy of the region, which might keep Somali and Galla peoples from “menacing” the more profitable and export-oriented regions of the colony. The plan also called for the preservation of tribal identities, and viewed “detrribalization” as a major problem for the NFD. The concept of detrribalization was first addressed in the late-nineteenth century by British colonial officials in West Africa, but became an empire-wide topic in the 1930s and 40s. Detrribalization was closely connected to the theory of Indirect Rule, and was based on the assumption that Africans did not “traditionally” make decisions as individuals, but through tribal structures. The best way for the colonial administration to succeed in its endeavors—creating productive laborers and civilized subjects—was to rely on the existing tribal structures and to avoid practices that usurped this structure. As issues of urbanization, unemployment, and political unrest increased in the 1930s, administrators

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, 3.

in London and throughout the empire pointed to detribalization as the major cause of these social ills. In many cases officials pointed to European style education as the problem, which went beyond technical skills and basic literacy. The result, they believed, was a class of young Africans who were literate, savvy, and in pursuit of social mobility. The problem of detribalization also highlights the tension between social development and political stability by means of preserving traditional structures.⁸²

These fears of detribalization informed the Dixey and Edwards reports, along with the Five Year Plan, which emphasized the importance of working through existing headmen and preserving tribal boundaries. Ownership of watering points and grazing rotations were to be assigned by tribe, and so for the plans to work, tribal structures needed to be reinforced and legitimized.

The most progressive measure of the plan was its emphasis on education. The plan cited lack of schools and the prevalence of illiteracy in the NFD as major problems for governance, and so the Post War Plan included provisions for providing more access to education.

The importance of education is obvious. At the present time there is not in existence in the whole of the N.F.D. even one proper school for the education of Somali or Galla boys. The result of this has been that the people are very ignorant, and being of an excitable temperament are liable to become unduly agitated and rebellious over political and religious questions. Moreover since there are practically no men in the whole territory who are literate it is impossible to make a proper start with any of the activities of closer administration or social development. Another reason for the necessity of education is that these people, in common with most others in Africa, are gradually tending to become detribalised, urbanised and sophisticated. Since there are no facilities here for learning anything, those of them who leave their tribes usually drift into the

⁸² Alan Cousins, "Governing Africa: The Imperial Mind in British Colonies, 1938-1947, in the Light of Indian Experience," *Social Scientist* 27, no. 7/8 (July 1, 1999): 155-160.

southern half of Kenya where they are mostly unemployable and become a nuisance in the townships.⁸³

The report makes it clear that the social progress that might result from schooling and literacy came from a politically conservative motivation. This should be unsurprising in a state-sponsored development plan, but it does point to one of the ways that state development in the NFD was different than in other parts of Kenya.

In fact, the Post War Development plan for the NFD was mostly political in character, designed to result in contented subjects who could be more easily administered. The plan was not void of social and economic motivations, but ultimately these were secondary to the political objective of curtailing the southward migration of pastoralists. In fact, the main economic incentive of the Post War Plan was to protect the highly productive regions of central and coastal Kenya. The goal was not to develop trade in the NFD and to incorporate its peoples into the imperial economy, but instead to prevent the NFD from disrupting the colony's productivity. As a result, the Post War Plan reinforced the NFD's economic and social isolation.

The actual implementation of the post-war plans for pastoralist development on Marsabit quickly became problematic. Grazing control measures and restrictions over tribal movement were implemented, but when it came to providing access to additional water resources, most of the state efforts had limited success.

The history of the Dixey Scheme, as it became known among NFD and colonial officials, is illustrative of how the ideals of development planning were mitigated by the social and environmental complexity of Marsabit and the surrounding region. Largely as a result of Dixey's technical report, in 1946 the Colonial Development Committee

⁸³ "Post War Five Year Development Plan for the NFD of Kenya," 3.

approved the expenditure of £483,700 over ten years on the provision of water supplies throughout the NFD. The source of this funding was the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund. A portion of the funds was initially used to pay pastoralists to build dams and excavate pans in order to preserve rainwater. According to Pinney, the officer in charge of the NFD, throughout the region “gangs of tribesmen have been employed under the supervision of District Commissioners in excavating pans and tanks in areas as far removed as possible from the permanent water supplies. A site is chosen where rain water is known to collect in a slight declivity in the ground and the tanks are dug as deep as possible... The work is performed by labourers from the local tribe, and while they are paid at the usual rates, the Headmen are made to undertake as much supervision as possible and to provide camels for carting water and meat for the men.”⁸⁴ Pinney hoped that paying for labor and the maintenance of water catchments would only be necessary for a few years, and then the pastoralists would see the value in maintenance and “regard elementary water conservation as their own responsibility.”⁸⁵

By 1950, local construction and maintenance was all that resulted from the Dixey Scheme. Most of the half-million pounds remained unspent, and according to administrators in the NFD, the colonial government was unable to spare the necessary staff to implement the more technical aspects of Dixey’s suggestions. As a result, the government contracted out the scheme to a private engineering firm, Howard Humphries and Sons. After an initial survey in 1950, Humphries estimated that constructing new boreholes would cost between £3500 and £10,000 each, but that these units could be designed to yield ten thousand gallons per day. The estimate was considerably higher

⁸⁴ NFD Annual Report, 1946, p. 9-10, PC/NFD/1/1/8, KNA.

⁸⁵ NFD Annual Report, 1947, p. 5, PC/NFD/1/1/9, KNA.

than administrators expected, and they decided to reduce the original scope of the Dixey Scheme, and to initially fund a pilot scheme of less than twelve boreholes.⁸⁶ The results of the pilot scheme were disheartening: of the twelve boreholes drilled, four were completely unsuccessful, three yielded less than one hundred gallons per hour, and another only yielded saline water. Only four of the twelve were deemed “successful,” but only one of those had a yield that approximated ten thousand gallons of water per day.⁸⁷ The high price of drilling, fitting, and maintaining boreholes, and the failure of the pilot scheme led colonial administrators to restrict water development in Marsabit and the NFD to the construction and maintenance of surface catchments, including pans, dams, and tanks.⁸⁸

Seven years later, the government had paid Humphreys and Sons a total of £381,774 for the construction of “5 pans, 24 tanks, 6 dololos, 9 dams, 23 successful boreholes and 9 wells.” By the time the Dixey Scheme wrapped up in 1957, Marsabit was the only district in the NFD to not benefit from the scheme. All of the projects had concentrated on outlying areas (largely Somali areas), and despite all of Dixey’s plans, Marsabit was unaffected by the scheme.⁸⁹ While in 1949 the district officer at Marsabit could write, “The whole question of water and grazing will be radically altered if the Dixey Scheme is put into effect,” in 1960 the DO concluded that “The only benefit this district derived from the Dixey Scheme was one bore-hole at Log Logo.”⁹⁰ The scheme

⁸⁶ NFP Annual Report, 1950, p. 33, PC/NFD/1/1/9, KNA.

⁸⁷ NFP Annual Report, 1951, p. 51, PC/NFD/1/1/10, KNA.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

⁸⁹ NFP Annual Report, 1957, p. 32-36, PC/NFD/1/1/11, KNA. A *dololo* is described by the engineers as “A hollow or excavation in a water course which holds water after a flood has passed. See “The Northern Frontier Province and Samburu District Water Development Scheme, 1950-1958,” October 1958, glossary, PC/NFD/5/2/7, KNA.

⁹⁰ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1949, p. 5, DC/MBT/2/3, KNA; Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1960, p. 22, DC/MBT/2/4, KNA.

had simply run out of money before plans were implemented on Marsabit, and in their concluding report Humpheys and Sons wrote, “Thus there has been little improvement in the water position in the [Marsabit] District since 1943.”⁹¹ The exception, they noted, was Marsabit Town, which helped provide for the mountain’s swelling settled population, but did little for pastoralists.

Grazing Control, Forest Conservation, & Piped Water Schemes

Despite the fact that pastoralist use of water resources changed little on Marsabit Mountain and around the district, the administration attempted to enforce grazing control measures and to monitor and restrict pastoralist movements. Since the 1920s colonial authorities on Marsabit attempted to restrict pastoralists from the forest. These restrictions were inconsistently enforced, and largely depended upon the success or failure of seasonal rains. After World War II, the increase in colonial resources for development resulted in greater surveillance and enforcement, which led to a more thorough implementation of Edwards’ recommendations concerning grazing.

In 1945 the boundaries of the forest were adjusted, both to make them more accurate and so that they could be clearly marked. In his report, the assistant conservator of forests described the value of the forest, at least from his department’s perspective. First, he emphasized that the forest could not be expected to generate significant revenue, and that it would not be able to cover the costs for its own conservation. However, the

⁹¹ “The Northern Frontier Province and Samburu District Water Development Scheme, 1950-1958,” 62. The full paragraph reads: “Since Dr. Dixey made his report some works have been carried out by the Administration, but although a general reconnaissance was made by the Resident Engineer in 1953 and some geophysical investigations were carried out in the Halisiruwa area by the Public Works Department at about the same time in the expectation that some work would be done under the Scheme, nothing else, other than the one borehole (D53) which was drilled as part of the Pilot Scheme, was done before the Scheme was closed down. Thus there has been little improvement in the water position in the District since 1943. On the other hand the Public Works Department have improved water supply to Marsabit township...”

forest's value was not financial, but environmental. In all caps he wrote the following paragraph:

Situated as it is, and standing out as a well preserved forest island in the midst of low lying arid country fast turning to nothing short of desert, its principal function is climatic. It is high enough to catch the mists, large enough to attract rain, and forested enough to conserve water to support the boma [township] population plus a considerable number of agriculturalist immigrants who can only practice agriculture thanks to its presence.⁹²

He failed to mention that most of Marsabit's permanent water sources—lakes, wells, springs—were contained within the forest boundaries, and that these watering points had significant value to the region's pastoralists during the dry seasons. The forest boundaries were finally demarcated in 1947, and two forest guards were posted to patrol for violations.⁹³ But the problem remained that during the dry season, and especially during drought years, pastoralists needed access to the watering points within the forest. In annual reports, Marsabit DCs regularly described “giving concessions” to the Rendille and Boran to water their livestock in the forest.⁹⁴ The Dixey Scheme, among other plans, attempted to solve this problem by expanding access to water in the lowlands and the non-forested areas of Marsabit. In the minds of the planners and NFD authorities, the development of water resources, the close management of livestock movement, and protection of the forest were three prongs of the same development strategy. Each of the three prongs were complimentary, and were supposed to benefit the livelihood of all of the district's residents. Yet even when efforts at increasing the number of watering

⁹² “Working Plan Report,” Marsabit Forest Reserve, December 1945, p. 7, PC/NFD/5/4/1, KNA.

⁹³ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1947, p. 10-11, PC/NFD/1/2/4, KNA.

⁹⁴ As one DC reported, “It is unfortunate that the permanent waters of Marsabit Mountain are all within the Forest Reserve without exception. The wells in the Sagunte ‘lugga’ are permanent and we have an excellent supply. These waters are within the Forest Reserve but may be used by the Boran, after receiving permission from the District Commissioner, who will only allow them back to this permanent dry weather water supply when he is really satisfied that all the seasonal pools, of which there many North of the Forest, are dry.” From Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1947, p. 30, DC/MBT/2/2, KNA.

points failed, colonial authorities still pressed forward with restricting pastoralist access to the forest and grazing land.

In 1948, a Grazing Control Scheme was submitted and approved by the Development and Reconstruction Authority (DARA). The scheme initially combined grazing control on the mountain with the addition of permanent water supplies, but the DARA decided to divide the scheme into two separate parts, focusing first on controlling pastoralist movements. The modified scheme, which was a re-iteration of Edwards' recommendations, was first implemented the following year, 1949.⁹⁵ In order to implement the scheme, the authorities organized a group of grazing guards to monitor and police pastoralist movement. Their task was to make sure pastoralists kept their herds within designated tribal grazing areas, and to prevent them from moving "prematurely" to the highlands during the dry season. The plan was to make greater use of lowland grazing during the wet season and to decrease dependence upon highland forage, where grazing was available year-round. It was also hoped that the funding for the guards would eventually come from taxes paid in the NFD. However, as the DC observed in 1950, "it will, however, not be possible to persuade the tribesmen to agree to an increase in the Poll Tax rate unless and until a start is made on the Dixey scheme."⁹⁶

In 1951 the NFD DO reported, "Substantial progress was made towards a clearer definition of tribal grazing areas and a more systematic control of the use of dry and wet weather pastures."⁹⁷ This was accomplished by the use of fifteen "grazing guards" in each district, including Marsabit, who enforced tribal boundaries and prevented

⁹⁵ NFP Annual Report, 1949, p. 40, PC/NFD/1/1/9, KNA.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 41.

⁹⁷ NFP Annual Report, 1950, p. 30, PC/NFD/1/1/9, KNA.

pastoralists from moving livestock to higher elevations and permanent water sources until the dry season.

In 1952 the Kenyan government approved the Marsabit Mountain Grazing Control Rules, which were designed to give the DC legal authority over all of the livestock found on the mountain. According to the rules, all stockholders had to receive licenses from the DC that specified the number and type of stock they were allowed, and the time of year these stock were allowed to graze on the mountain. According to the rules, “The District Commissioner may by order specify the land on which the licensee shall be permitted to graze or pasture his stock and the water at which he may water his stock.” The grazing rules also set out the following equation for numbering livestock: “one camel, horse, donkey or mule or five sheep or goats shall be equal one head of cattle and an unweaned foal, calf, lamb or kid shall not be taken into account in the reckoning number of stock.” To add to the complication, each license had to be renewed annually.⁹⁸

The 1952 rules were primarily a response to complaints about the increasing amount of Boran cattle on the mountain. Marsabit’s officers suggested that natural growth and migration of Boran cattle herds were straining the mountain’s limited resources, and they sought to place limits on the size of cattle herds on the mountain. The most controversial aspect of the 1952 rules was the provision that allowed the DC to require each licensee “to produce his stock for the purpose of being inspected, counted or branded.”⁹⁹ The Boran had previously been limited to 10,000 cattle on the mountain, but this was nearly impossible to enforce if the cattle were not branded. The threat of

⁹⁸ “The Crown Lands Ordinance (Cap 155),” The Marsabit Mountain (Grazing Control) Rules, 1952, PC/EST/2/2/14, KNA.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

branding cattle elicited a strong response from the mountain Boran, many who threatened to move to Ethiopia (which, according to government reports, was not really a threat).

The rules were in fact more an exercise of colonial imagination, and enforcement was continually delayed. The Mau Mau emergency delayed initial attempts at enforcing the new restrictions on livestock, as the DC's attention was needed elsewhere.¹⁰⁰ The rules were first implemented in March 1958, and the following year the DC reported favorably that the Boran had "adhered to the maximum numbers of cattle permitted to remain on the Mountain."¹⁰¹ However, when the rains failed the following year, the DC retracted his praise for the Boran: "In spite of the optimistic statement in last year's report that the Boran accepted the Marsabit Mountain Grazing Rules they deliberately brought nearly 10,000 head of extra cattle back onto the Mountain. By the end of the year lists of permitted stock had been prepared but the problem of the disposal of surplus stock was as intractable as ever... Marsabit will know no peace till the Boran problem is solved."¹⁰² Compliance would continue to depend upon the success or failure of the rains.

The frequency of droughts in the 1950s continued to make it difficult for Marsabit's administrators to control the movement of livestock and to keep them from watering and grazing in the forest reserve. One solution was to pipe water out of the forest, and to create access points near the grasslands and pastures on Marsabit's slopes. Piped water schemes were first implemented in the township in the 1940s, as springs were fenced off and access was more easily regulated by the military and colonial

¹⁰⁰ The prison on Marsabit served as an important detention center for Kikuyu leaders during the British response to Mau Mau.

¹⁰¹ Northern Province Annual Report, 1959, p. 19, PC/NFD/1/1/12, KNA.

¹⁰² Northern Province Annual Report, 1960, p. 13-14, PC/NFD/1/1/12, KNA.

administrations. The first scheme for pastoralists was proposed in 1953 and completed by 1955. The Songa Gambella Scheme, as it was called, was designed to open up grazing on the south side of Marsabit by making use of metal piping and gravitational flow. The Songa spring was located in the middle of the forest, but the water was piped into a reservoir tank at the forest's edge, 1.5 miles away. The reservoir then funneled into concrete watering trough, where livestock could access the water without entering the forest.¹⁰³ All records indicate that the scheme operated successfully, and it opened up newly sanctioned territory to Rendille livestock. Songa Gambella served as the model for two additional piped water schemes that were completed on Marsabit in 1957.¹⁰⁴

Though these schemes gave the administration even more control of the permanent water resources around the mountain, the results were also beneficial for those pastoralists who were granted access. Of all the colonial interventions and development initiatives on Marsabit, the Songa Gambella scheme was exceptional in that it improved pastoralist access to water and grazing, and opened up new areas of the mountain for grazing during dry seasons. For the Rendille, this could be viewed as a return to the precolonial and early colonial days, before the influx of Boran from Ethiopia and before pasture was plowed into shambas. The principal improvement was that they could access the same water without entering the forest, which they had always done reluctantly, aware of the threats posed by tsetse flies, elephants, and other wild game.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Water Supplies and Boring, Marsabit District, 1954-1961, PC/EST/7/38, KNA.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.; NFP Annual Report, 1957, p. 36-37, PC/NFD/1/1/11, KNA; Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1960, p. 4, DC/MBT/2/4, KNA.

¹⁰⁵ For unknown reasons these schemes were no longer used by the 1970s. Ironically, the pipes and water catchment were refashioned by the missionary Earl Andersen as an irrigation system for farms to resettle impoverished Rendille and Samburu. See Chapter 5 for details.

Agricultural Development on Marsabit

As the population on Marsabit increased after World War II, the farming population expanded its use of the mountain's resources, often at the expense of pastoralists. This transformation was largely a result of convenience rather than a product of state planning or formal development policy. The development plans aimed at pastoralists were continually frustrated by drought, political instability, and administrative inconsistency. In addition, the nomadic patterns of the pastoralists and their resistance to a cash economy made it easier for them to evade regulation throughout most of the colonial period. As a result, colonial authorities on Marsabit found it much easier and more convenient to regulate farmers and their *shambas* than the nomadic livestock herders. The state's first priority was conservation of the mountains resources, and over time priority was given to the population that was most easily regulated and compliant with colonial plans for Marsabit.

The regulation and development of agricultural practices reached its height during the second colonial occupation. The administration first began attempts at modernizing agricultural practices on Marsabit in the 1930s, but it was not until 1948 that the Agricultural Department appointed a full-time officer to the district. The appointment of Mr. H.M.A. Sutton, an officer of the Agricultural Department, to Marsabit in 1948 began a period of increased state regulation and the transformation of settlement patterns on the mountain. In fact, Sutton was initially posted to Marsabit in order to conduct survey of grazing areas throughout the NFD, and was trained for the task by D. C. Edwards (who drafted the grazing recommendations). But upon arrival he was asked by the Marsabit

DC to reorganize the areas under cultivation on the mountain.¹⁰⁶ A proposal submitted that year for the Marsabit Soil and Water Conservation Scheme expressed the views of Sutton and other colonial authorities towards the mountain and its agricultural population:

Marsabit has great natural advantages, good soil, good grazing and in the past unlimited water attracted many people from Abyssinia. Unfortunately the type of person that has come to the mountain cannot be expected of his own free will to co-operate in any scheme that is proposed for the good of the land, so that any scheme for his betterment will have to be imposed upon him. The proper maintenance of any conservation scheme will therefore have to be strictly supervised and controlled...¹⁰⁷

The report also describes how prior to 1948, the Marsabit DC was occupied with numerous responsibilities that prevented him from organizing the mountain's population. The result was a sizeable increase in the number of shambas across the mountain, whose organization and cultivation practices were considered "backward."¹⁰⁸ These "backward" practices and the lack of regulation led to soil erosion and overstocking, which colonial authorities connected to increasing drought and the deterioration of the mountain's ecology.

As the newly appointed Marsabit District agricultural officer, Sutton set out to accomplish four main tasks. The first was to conduct a census and to evict the "large number of people who had no right to be cultivating."¹⁰⁹ Sutton attributed the recent increase in Marsabit's population to the wartime conditions, which unsettled the population in southern Ethiopia, and created a temporary need for laborers on the

¹⁰⁶ See "Handing Over Notes," Agricultural Development, Marsabit, 1941-1960, December 27, 1950, Doc. 105a, PC/EST/2/2/15, KNA.

¹⁰⁷ "Marsabit Soil and Water Conservation Scheme," Agricultural Development, Marsabit, 1941-1960, no date, Doc. 60a, PC/EST/2/2/15, KNA.

¹⁰⁸ "Outline of the Marsabit Scheme," Agricultural Development, Marsabit, 1941-1960, no date, Doc. 95a, PC/EST/2/2/15, KNA.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

mountain. His theory was that initially a few cultivators came over during the war, and because of the colony-wide food shortage, they were given shambas on which to grow food. Because the DC was preoccupied with other duties, both immigration and cultivation went unregulated. Sutton continues, “The situation very soon got out of hand, as more and more people came over, lured by the prospect of getting land, and an easy life, for the minimum of effort. The practise was to work for a few months and then ask for their discharge. The individual would then settle down, and devote all his time to extending his shamba and harbouring the multitude of his kind that followed.”¹¹⁰ Sutton does not mention the fact that in the 1920s the government recruited some of these settlers to cultivate on the mountain. In order to determine who “belonged” on the mountain the DC interviewed the cultivators and “unless they had a claim or were a benefit to the community (e.g. a blacksmith) were given notice.”¹¹¹ It is not clear exactly what kind of claim a settler could make—perhaps a contract to work for the government during the war, or evidence that he had settled on the mountain prior to the war. What is clear is that it was ultimately the DC’s discretion that determined who belonged on the mountain and who did not.

During the census Sutton also discovered that some of the Burji settlers, who were originally recruited by the government to settle on Marsabit in the 1920s, had secondary shambas on another part of the mountain. These, Burji, who lived on their plots in Majengo and Karantina, which were closer to the township, also maintained shambas further down the mountain in Sagante.¹¹² At an earlier time in Kenya’s history it is easy to imagine the local administration praising the Burji’s entrepreneurial spirit and

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ “Handing Over Notes,” Agricultural Development, Marsabit, 1941-1960.

¹¹² Ibid.

encouraging greater agricultural production for the market. But by the late 1940s Sutton and others were more concerned about soil erosion and environmental conservation than they were about African agricultural production. This was particularly true in Marsabit, which was not expected to be an economic asset or an agriculturally productive region.

After conducting the census, Sutton's second task was to determine boundaries and reorganize the five different areas under cultivation on the mountain: Marsabit Town, Sagante, Majengo, Karantina, and Ullan Ulla. All of these areas were within two miles of the township. Karantina, for example, was first cultivated by African state employees, and the name derives from the fact that the area contained a quarantine station ("Quarantina"). Sutton demarcated each area's external boundaries and divided each into rectangular plots of eight, four, and three acres. At this point, the Burji who maintained two shambas were given the option to move to a new plot at Karantina or Majengo, or of moving to Sagante or Ullan Ulla. Cultivating shambas in two locations was not an option.¹¹³

In order to take possession of the shambas, the Burji and other cultivators had to register with the DC. This was Sutton's third task, creating the legal infrastructure to allow the DC and other authorities to punish plot-holders who did not comply with the expected farming practices. In order to cultivate on Marsabit, a plot holder had to sign a contract that required him to reside on his shamba and required him to seek the DC's approval to erect any building on the property, to transfer any land, or to sell or trade any produce from the shamba. The agreement also stated that the shamba was Crown Land, and could not be inherited. Sutton recognized that this would require the eviction of widows, who were problematic in his mind. His prescribed solution was to arrange a

¹¹³ Ibid.

meeting with the agricultural committee member, the Burji headman, and the widow, and “tell her that she has a limited time in as much to reap one crop and then insist that either she returns to her own country or moves in with a family of her own tribe. There is always a large waiting list of able bodied males who should after vetting with yourself and the District Commissioner be given the vacant shamba.”¹¹⁴

The last provision of the agreement states, “That the said D.C. may at any time terminate my right to occupy the said plot by giving to me any such notice to quit the said plot as he may think fit.”¹¹⁵ An earlier draft of the contract specified that the plot holder must maintain “sanitary conditions,” that he could be required to contribute up to twenty-four days a year in free labor for the government, and that he was required to mark the boundaries of his plot. However, a counselor at the Kenya Attorney General’s office amended the contract, and suggested these same measures could be achieved “under the threat of eviction.”¹¹⁶

Sutton’s last task was to submit a proposal for external funding in order to continue the work on the soil conservation scheme over the next few years.¹¹⁷ Sutton finished his work and left Marsabit in 1950, and his role was eventually filled by an African representative from the Agricultural Office. His two-year effort at organizing and regulating the mountain shambas had a lasting effect on Marsabit’s landscape and population. By 1959, 73 different farms had been surveyed on the mountain, covering over 400 acres. In return for their cooperation, these farmers were given priority over

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “Temporary Occupation Licences (sic) for Agricultural Plots on Crown Land,” Agricultural Development, Marsabit, 1941-1960, January 5, 1949, Doc. 66, PC/EST/2/2/15, KNA.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ “Outline of the Marsabit Scheme,” Agricultural Development, Marsabit, 1941-1960.

pastoralists in accessing the permanent water sources near their shambas and the township.¹¹⁸

1960 Marsabit District Development Scheme

In 1960 colonial officials drafted a new development plan for Marsabit. At the beginning of the drafting process, the Marsabit district commissioner signaled that the newest scheme would be more comprehensive in nature: “It has been decided that it would be advantageous to treat development of the Mountain as a whole.”¹¹⁹ The 1960 scheme, influenced by officials in the agriculture, game, and development departments, concentrated on four priorities. The first priority was to purchase tractors and other machinery to create firebreaks and demarcate “grazing blocks.” The plan argued that these measures would protect the forest (from fires set by pastoralists to reduce tsetse fly), and that clear boundaries would result in better enforcement of grazing schemes. The second priority was “the institution of a controlled grazing system,” and improvement of grazing areas by eradicating an invasive weed species (*triumfetta flavascens*) on the mountain. The weed would be eradicated by controlled burning, adding to the importance of constructing firebreaks. The third priority was increasing the number of piped water schemes for pastoralists, bringing water out of the forest into the new grazing blocks on the slopes of the mountain. Finally, the fourth priority was agricultural development. The mechanical equipment used to create firebreaks and grazing boundaries would also be used “for preparation of agricultural land on which a high priced cash crop (coffee) can be grown, as well as food for the district’s needs.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Northern Province Annual Report, 1959, p. 38, PC/NFD/1/1/12, KNA.

¹¹⁹ P. J. Browning, “Marsabit Mountain Development Scheme,” Marsabit District Development Scheme, 1960, September 27, 1962, PC/NFD/5/1/10, KNA.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Over the next two years the scheme was delayed by internal disputes, concerns over recurring costs, and administrative turnover. The main dispute concerned the various boundaries on Marsabit, and how the firebreaks and grazing boundaries would correspond to the boundaries of the forest reserve and the game reserve. All departments shared the concern of preventing pastoralists from grazing livestock in or near the forest, but they each relied on different maps with different boundary lines. After the boundary issue was resolved, the principal concern was planning for the recurring costs of the scheme. The initial cost of the scheme, estimated at £10,000, was to be funded by colonial office's African Land Development Board (ALDEV). Recurring costs were projected at £5,000 annually, and in order to receive the initial outlay from ALDEV, planners had to convince the board they could cover annual costs. By 1962, the planners decided to reduce the amount of annual expenditure by relying on unpaid pastoralist laborers, and by collecting fees for access to piped water and grazing blocks. The fee was eventually set at fifty cents per head of cattle per month.¹²¹

It's unclear if any of the proposals of the 1960 Marsabit development scheme were implemented, or if the scheme ever received the £10,000 from ALDEV. The colonial office and British administrators in Kenya were preoccupied with the transition to national independence. As Kenyan independence approached, it was unclear if the NFD would become part of the new nation, or if it would be allowed to align itself with Somalia.

¹²¹ Ibid.; "Marsabit Mountain Development Scheme: Declaration of 'Controlled Area' and Imposition of 'Fee', Marsabit District Development Scheme, 1960, no date, p. 1, PC/NFD/5/1/10, KNA.

Conclusion

Between the start of World War II and Kenyan independence in 1963 the population of Marsabit District tripled.¹²² In the 1930s the settled population on the mountain numbered around one hundred people: mostly Africans laboring directly or indirectly for the government, and a handful of Burji cultivators. On the eve of independence Marsabit Township contained over two thousand residents, a majority of whom were Boran, Somali, and Burji who had come to the mountain in the 1950s.¹²³ Rendille and Gabra, who made up over 85 percent of the district's population, sought to maintain their nomadic traditions, and largely resisted the pattern of settlement on the mountain.¹²⁴ As British development policies played out on Marsabit, the most consequential result was the conservation and regulation of the mountain's forest, land, and watering points. Although elsewhere in the colony and the empire, the state expanded its role in social reform, on Marsabit, commercial and social development were subsumed by the conservationist agenda. The district's lowland camel herders continued to operate under the benign neglect of indirect rule, perhaps unwittingly exchanging their wealth for freedom from colonial oversight. The end result of the administrative and development policies in Marsabit was to secure the mountain's resources for agriculturalists and cattle herders. It is likely that the colonial state had little to do with initiating this process, which was probably inevitable given the significant increase in the overall population of East Africa. They did however manage Marsabit's population

¹²² The NFD remained under Crown control until 1964.

¹²³ Witsenburg and Roba, *Surviving Pastoral Decline*, 133, 137.

¹²⁴ A total of 50 Rendille and 42 Gabra are listed as residing in the township in 1960. Colonial administrators did not always detect nuances in ethnicities, and it is likely that most Oromo cattle herders were labeled Boran and camel herders were labeled Gabra. Even if this is the case, it still supports the overall point that the mountain was increasingly the domain of cattle herders and agriculturalists, and not camel herders.

growth, and made marginal improvements to mountain's commercial infrastructure. At the end of the colonial period, Marsabit and the NFD remained socially and politically isolated from the rest of Kenya. This isolation would lead to a post-colonial period marked by a lack of state regulation and the heightened influence of foreign missionaries and NGO workers.

Chapter 3

“It’s Their Souls We Seek”: BCMS Missionaries and Colonial Development on Marsabit

Over the last half of the 1920s the colonial state exercised its authority on Marsabit, setting up forest boundaries, forming Local Native Councils, and collecting taxes from its subject peoples. Colonial authorities regarded these measures as “progressive,” and hoped that the increased enforcement of law and order would bring about the pacification of the NFD and lead to increased prosperity for both the colony and the region’s various peoples.¹ There were a number of ways in which Marsabit and the entire NFD stood apart from the rest of Kenya Colony, and the absence of missionaries was one of these. Up until this point, colonial authorities had forbidden missionaries from working in the NFD, assuming that the presence of missionaries would create additional problems for the frontier’s administration. In particular, they were aware of the tensions that Christianization had created within indigenous communities elsewhere in the colony, and viewed this as a possible barrier to instilling law and order in the NFD. Yet by the end of the 1920s, the administration began to make a subtle turn away from indirect rule, as their faith in changing the NFD through existing social structures began to wane. Instead, they began to turn towards a form of development through the provision of social welfare.

¹ See Chapter 1 for more background.

It was during this “progressive” period that administrators began remarking on the need and benefit of missionary presence on Marsabit. The DC during this period, H. B. Sharpe, noted in his 1927 annual report that there were no missionaries in Marsabit, but he “should favour one and would prefer the Roman Catholic.” Sharpe had discussed the idea of stationing a missionary at Marsabit with one of the White Fathers of Mombasa, who informed him that the Northern Frontier was outside of their scope.² In a report published by the government in Kenyan newspapers, the chief native commissioner wrote:

Both the Galla and Rendille do not show any sign of progress. The Rendille have remained unchanged for eighteen years of partial administration; they make no attempt to trade or market their stock. The problem of bringing these people to a more advanced state is difficult and requires close attention. A few cases of conversion to Islam have occurred among the Rendille and it seems desirable to give both tribes an opportunity of coming under Mission influence if a society can be persuaded to send its members to establish a station at Marsabit.³

As the note indicates, the authorities expected that the influence of missionaries could help them in two ways. First, they hoped that missionaries would encourage the Rendille, Gabra, and Boran to adapt to a modernized cash economy, helping solve the marketing problem in the district. Second, they hoped that missionaries could combat the influence of Islam, which was synonymous with the less cooperative Somali communities in the northeast of the NFD. The Somalis were the most organized and most resistant group to colonial rule, and the authorities wanted to do as much as possible to prevent their influence from spreading.

² Marsabit District Annual Report, 1927, p. 14, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

³ “An Appeal to Missions,” *East African Standard*, May 1, 1928, quoted in Webster, *East Africa: Land of Scattered Tribes*, 15.

Though colonial authorities were generally ambivalent and at times critical of missionary influence over “natives,” the missions also established schools and medical dispensaries that bolstered colonial authority with little cost to the state. Mission-educated locals could serve in the ranks of the colonial bureaucracy and assisted with tax collection among other administrative duties. DCs could also point to the spread of modern medicine as a benevolent result of *Pax Britannica*, helping to fulfill the Dual Mandate. In short, the administration hoped that the social provisions that missionaries offered—schools and hospitals—would lead to a more compliant population in the NFD.

The mission organizations in Kenya supported both the expansion of colonial authority and its civilizing mission, but they ultimately had different motives. Particularly when it came to education and medical work, the goal was religious conversion and the establishment of church communities throughout Kenya. Missionaries and colonial authorities generally were willing to use the same means to reach different (though not antagonistic) ends.

The fact that the NFD was untouched by missionary presence, which had become prevalent throughout the rest of the colony, made it particularly alluring to the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society. The BCMS was a fundamentalist-oriented Anglican mission society that originated from a theological schism within the Church Missionary Society (CMS). When the BCMS was founded in 1922, most of Kenya had already been divided up into spheres of influence by the three dominant Protestant societies: the Anglican CMS, Scottish Presbyterians (CSM), and the American-based Africa Inland Mission (AIM). But the northern half of Kenya Colony was outside of these Protestant

spheres of influence, and this “unreached” and “pagan” nature made it particularly appealing to the BCMS, who saw their role as “pioneering” missionary work in areas unreached by Christianity.

For the BCMS, an agreement to setup a station at Marsabit seemed like a ripe opportunity to bring the message of Christianity to the Rendille, Gabra, and Boran. In fact, they hoped that establishing a station on Marsabit would be the first step towards the evangelization of all the nomadic peoples near Lake Turkana, and hoped that their mission work would eventually expand to Uganda and Sudan. Though they were wary of the trappings of social institutions, which they viewed as the source of growing secularism and liberalism in the CMS, they also believed that if educational or medical work was undertaken by missionaries with the right theological beliefs, then those works could be directed towards what they believed to be the highest ends: Christian salvation and the formation of new church communities. If the government required schools and dispensaries, then the BCMS would provide them, but in the service of evangelization.

Like elsewhere in the colony and throughout the British Empire, missionary presence in Marsabit was the result of a convergence of compatible means. Certainly, the NFD administration and BCMS missionaries knew that the church and state sometimes worked at odds with one another. This became especially clear during the Kikuyu circumcision crisis that erupted in 1929. But underneath these periodic tensions was a common belief in the goodness of the colonial project, and a trust that social uplift and Christianization were complimentary to the colony's economic development. Both

believed in the Dual Mandate, and that the state could depend upon missions to help bring about indirect rule.⁴

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, many of these assumptions and imperial justifications were seriously challenged by the worldwide economic blight of the 1930s and the powerful rhetoric of the Allies in World War II. Though elsewhere in Kenya and the empire, the state became more directly involved with social welfare beginning in the 1930s, in the NFD the authorities continued to expect the BCMS to provide the medical and educational institutions for the region's peoples.

BCMS work at Marsabit in the colonial period illustrates two parallel processes. The first involved the transformation of the relationship between the BCMS and the colonial government. From the beginning of BCMS work at Marsabit in 1931, there existed an unequal but mutually dependent relationship between the mission and the state. During its first decade of work at Marsabit, the missionaries set up their own religious and social institutions, and conducted most of their work on the ten-acre mission compound. At the end of the 1950s, BCMS missionaries found themselves operating within government-run schools and hospitals, and a church that was increasingly independent of European control. The work of BCMS missionaries on Marsabit was always dependent upon the goodwill of government administrators and the local population, but over time mission-run institutions gave way, and missionaries found themselves operating in "foreign" institutions. The social and religious dimensions of missionary work were always intertwined for BCMS missionaries, but they regularly affirmed the primacy of the religious dimension—particularly conversion. In their evangelical formulation, the only justification for missionaries partaking in social work

⁴ See Chapter 2.

was that it served an evangelistic end. But as the BCMS lost control of educational and medical institutions, they also relinquished their ability to define institutional goals. On Marsabit, the schools and health facilities went from being evangelical institutions to state institutions in which evangelical individuals could work. The role of the missionaries transitioned from one in which they controlled social institutions, and could conform them to their evangelical goals, to evangelical individuals working within state-run institutions.

The second process was the formation of a Christian community centered around the township. The BCMS' original vision was to draw converts from the region's nomadic Boran and Rendille populations, but they were never very successful at making connections with pastoralists. Instead, most of the members of the Christian community came from the Burji population that had settled on the mountain. Part of the story of this chapter is the formation of a mission community, centered around the mission compound and led by missionaries, and its transition into an "Africanized" Christian community. The persistence and vitality of this first group of Christians on Marsabit, along with its institutional connections outside of the NFD, gave it significance beyond its small numbers.

Ultimately, mission facilities, institutions, and personal networks entrenched the position of the settled population on Marsabit, while the Rendille and Gabra generally kept their distance from mission work on the mountain. The combination of pastoralist autonomy and small-scale social welfare in Marsabit District meant that by the end of the 1950s many pastoralists were still disconnected from modern institutions, had less access

to valuable dry-season grazing territory, and did not have a generation of educated elites to advocate for better resources.

The Bible and the CMS

How the BCMS found itself in the inhospitable and marginal region of the NFD is partly explained by their theological emphasis and institutional history.

The BCMS was born out of a schism within the Anglican Church Missionary Society. At the heart of the schism were disagreements over the definition of evangelical orthodoxy and the precise wording of doctrinal statements concerning the bible. For Protestant missionary societies, the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh expressed the ideals of Christian unity and cooperation towards the goal of “world evangelization.”⁵ Conference reports called for greater respect for foreign cultures and non-Christian religions, but reaffirmed the necessity of conversion and the exclusivity of the tenets of Christianity.⁶

But the period following the Edinburgh conference witnessed a variety of disputes over the grounds for missionary cooperation and the degree to which doctrinal matters were being compromised for the sake of unity. Specifically, CMS members were in disagreement over the appointment of new missionaries and the doctrinal statements they

⁵ See Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 26–31. The Edinburgh Conference was a “working conference” that gathered Protestant leaders and missionaries from all over the globe in order make plans and strategies for the evangelization of the world. The organizers of the conference established 8 commissions to research and prepare proposals for the conference. John Mott served as the chairman of the general conference and of Commission I, “Carrying the Gospel to All the non-Christian World.” One of the significant documents of the Edinburgh conference, and of Christian missions in the twentieth century, was the report of Commission IV—“The Missionary Message and the non-Christian Religions.” The report included a variety of opinions, some arguing that Christianity was the fulfillment of the world’s religions. The “fulfillment” theory began by finding a degree of value and truth in non-Christian religions, but asserted that Christianity fulfilled what was lacking in these religions. Missionaries in India, for example, believed that Hindus had long been searching for monotheism, and that the positive aspects of Indian spirituality and this longing for monotheism were found in Christianity. .

⁶ Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission* (IVP Academic, 2001), 39–40.

should be required to affirm regarding the historical accuracy of scripture. CMS leadership attempted to resolve these disputes in 1922, and called three meetings of the general committee. These meetings resulted in a resolution designed “for the allaying of widespread unrest as regards the faithfulness of the Society to fundamental doctrine.” The resolution affirmed the CMS’ “unwavering” acceptance of the Nicene Creed, the articles of the Church of England, and committed itself to only appoint candidates who could affirm these statements.⁷

But for a small group of Society members the statement was unsatisfactory, and the committee’s rejection of specific doctrinal language regarding the historical validity of the bible was seen as evidence that “modernist” beliefs had infiltrated the Society’s ranks. In October 1922 a small group of clergy and laity met and decided to form the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society. The BCMS would still operate as a society within the Church of England, but as the name suggests, its members were required to explicitly affirm precise doctrines regarding the bible and other theological “fundamentals.”⁸

Daniel Bartlett, one of the founders of the new society and its first secretary, took up the responsibility of explaining the need for a new missionary society. In his pamphlet, “Why a New Society?,” Bartlett argued that the CMS was founded on Protestant and Evangelical principles, and that in recent years these principles had become compromised by “strange new views.” Specifically, the founding of the BCMS became necessary as a result of views that “represent the Bible as untrustworthy in its

⁷ “Resolution of the General Committee, 12th July, 1922,” Gordon Hewitt, *The Problems of Success: A History of the Church Missionary Society, 1910-1942: Volume I, In Tropical Africa, The Middle East, At Home*, First Edition (SCM Press, 1971), Appendix I.

⁸ For a fuller account of the schism, see *ibid.*, 461–473.

history and the Christ as limited in knowledge, [which] have found utterance under the auspices of the Society in the pagan world, and in the preparation of missionaries at home.”⁹ Bartlett also explained why he and others were not satisfied by the conferences in 1922. Though these conferences affirmed statements about the authority of scripture, they also failed to censure society members, including “90 per cent of the educational missionaries in India,” who held views that “the Flood, the Ark, and the Tower of Babel are prehistoric myths; that the translation of Elijah is a similar story to that of Ke Hung, a Taoist sage; that the thoughts ascribed to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, are Jewish conceptions of times as late as 450 B.C.; and that Christ’s acceptance of these records may be simply an evidence of His own limitations.”¹⁰ Bartlett and others viewed themselves as reformers, and believed that the BCMS represented the orthodox Christianity abandoned by the CMS.

Along with this self-proclaimed theological distinction, the BCMS also sought to distinguish itself from the CMS and other societies by focusing on “pioneer work,” or on areas where Protestant missionaries were not present. The first of the BCMS’ pioneer mission work was in Saskatchewan, Canada, which they considered in danger of falling under the influence of French Roman Catholic missionaries. Within the first few years the BCMS also had missionaries in remote areas of Western China, Upper Burma, and Central India.¹¹

The founders also hoped that focusing on pioneering mission work would help the society maintain its emphasis on conversion and evangelistic work while allowing it to

⁹ Daniel H. C. Bartlett, “Why a New Society?,” no date, p. 7, Collection: Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society: MS47 Box 40, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ See Walter Stewart Hooton, *The First Twenty-Five Years of the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society: (1922-47)* (London: Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society, 1947), 17–26.

avoid the institutionalism of educational and medical work. As stated in their constitution, “The object of the Society shall be to preach the Gospel to every creature in fulfillment of our Lord’s command, it being clearly understood that preaching is the primary function of missionary enterprise, taking precedence over medical and other auxiliary ministries.”¹² Avoiding a preoccupation with “auxiliary” ministries was crucial to the founders of the BCMS because they saw it as one of the major avenues for the infiltration of theological liberalism. As they saw it, the CMS and other societies had attracted missionaries who were more devoted to social uplift than spreading the orthodox Christian message.

BCMS at Marsabit

In November 1929, Alfred Buxton, who had recently associated himself with the BCMS, trekked around Lake Turkana and arrived at Marsabit. For Buxton, Marsabit was a strategic location for evangelizing the nomadic and pagan peoples of Northern Kenya. The mountain plateau, with its permanent water sources and fertile soil, could serve as a base for missionaries as they regularly made “safaris” to the lowland pastoralists, and it also helped that Marsabit served as a gathering place for the region’s peoples. Buxton’s strategy was similar to the government’s, but instead of pacification and taxation, he sought to use Marsabit as a base for preaching, teaching, and for bringing “pagan” nomads into the fold of the church. As Buxton wrote, “The waterhole is the inevitable magnet. To the waterholes, therefore, we must go.”¹³

In order to make use of Marsabit, and to ensure the support of the BCMS, Buxton had to get the approval of the colonial government. Since the government had been

¹² Appendix C, *ibid.*, 223.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 59.

publicly and privately soliciting mission societies to work in the NFD, the approval was not difficult to come by, but it did mean that the BCMS presence was dependent upon terms set by the colonial administration. The BCMS mission station would represent the convergence of missionary and government means.

When Buxton, along with fellow missionary Hamilton Wilkes, first visited Marsabit in 1929, he met with DC Sharpe, and scouted out a plot of land near the newly established township and the forest waters. An agreement was written-up, and the BCMS was granted a Temporary Occupation License for a ten-acre plot of land near Karantina. In exchange, Buxton signed an agreement promising that the Society would place a medical doctor at Marsabit and begin medical and educational work.¹⁴ Buxton then hired a retired African soldier to guard the ten-acre plot, and returned to England for furlough and to recruit missionaries for Marsabit and the NFD.¹⁵

In his report for 1929, DC Sharpe noted, “It is not considered they will have an easy time to start with but if they work the people through education and medicine they will I think progress.” In the same report, Sharpe also commented on the poor condition of the district’s medical situation, remarking that “The only hope of medical care is from the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society, one feels.”¹⁶

Buxton returned to Marsabit on January 17, 1931 with two recruits, Eric Webster and Charles Scudder. After spending a few days at the government *boma*, the three missionaries moved to their own plot of land, the site of the future mission station.

¹⁴ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1930, p. 17, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA; Eric Webster, *East Africa: Land of Scattered Tribes - Field Survey Series No. 7*, 1949, p. 15-16, MS47 Box 39, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

¹⁵ Buxton, “Black Mist.”

¹⁶ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1929, p. 15, PC/NFD/1/2/1, KNA.

Writing back to England later that week, Buxton provided his own detailed description of the plot:

Picture us on a flat-topped knoll. It is covered with grass about three feet long. A few trees are dotted about. Under the large one in the centre of the site is our tent. We have divided it, using the fly as bedroom, and the inside as dining-room. Our bedroom especially has the appearance of an Arctic expedition. All available and unavailable space is utilized. Beds are ranged along the sides, boxes down the centre. It acts, moreover, as tool shed, store, dispensary, and chick coop... In front are two hills, one grass covered, the other clad in forest with huts and plantations cut in. Behind us is the forest through which trickles in a rock-hewn gully the little stream that provides our water. Round each side of the grass-covered hill we look into the far distance across that hot waterless plain. Those two long vistas will help to keep our vision expanded, reminding us that our base may be Marsabit but our parish lies out there in the 25,000 square miles that encircle it. Up here may be a fold, but down there are the sheep. Moses may pray on the mountain, but Joshua must fight in the plain; and we have the double role to perform.¹⁷

On that first evening, the three men dedicated their plot to God, reading the story of Solomon's dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. Buxton noted an odd but encouraging parallel: Solomon's prayer begins with the statement, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness." The very name for Marsabit, Buxton was told, meant "the place of black mist."¹⁸

Buxton and the BCMS intended to use Marsabit in order to convert the region's nomadic population, particularly the Boran, Rendille, and Samburu.¹⁹ The Boran were particularly strategic for the missionaries, for they believed that the "evangelization of the Boran would have a widespread influence not only in Northern Kenya but also in many regions of Abyssinia."²⁰ During the first year of operation at Marsabit, the missionaries' strategy for evangelization involved two main elements: going out to the lowlands to

¹⁷ Buxton, "Black Mist."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*. The biblical passage comes from 1 Kings 8:12.

¹⁹ At the early stage the BCMS missionaries did not distinguish the Gabra from the Boran.

²⁰ Alfred Barclay Buxton, "The Boran," *Bible Churchmen's Missionary Messenger*, August 1931.

preach and teach, and attracting people to the mission station itself. The missionaries were to spend part of their time travelling around the frontier district, contacting the nomadic population and teaching them about Christianity. Additionally, they would build up the medical and educational work at the Karantina station, and preach to those who came for their services.

As it turned out, the preaching safaris were both difficult and unsuccessful. During that first summer in 1931, Scudder and Webster made their first safari to the Rendille. Scudder reported the safari as a success, and described receiving a warm reception from the Rendille. But it is also clear from Scudder's report that the missionaries were a hindrance to their hosts: "It was fearfully hot down amongst the Rendille and we were unable to march during the day, but they allowed for our weakness and tramped through the cold nights with us quite cheerfully." Additionally, the lorry that dropped off the missionaries failed to return, and Scudder and Webster ran out of food. Two Rendille used their own camels and helped return the men to the mountain. Scudder's rendition of the safari is all the information available, and he was both grateful for Rendille hospitality and interpreted this as a sign of goodwill between the camel-herding population and the missionaries. It is also easy to see how the few Rendille may have had a less favorable impression of the missionaries, who came uninvited, and could not provide for themselves.²¹ The missionaries conducted a second safari to the Rendille the following year, and met with "great hardship and danger."²² In 1933, a missionary at Marsabit described why preaching safaris had diminished, for "the thought of the tremendous distances involved causes one to turn at once to other proposals, for it is

²¹ Charles Scudder, "Latest News from the Field," *Bible Churchmen's Missionary Messenger*, October 1931. Scudder's letter is dated July 29, 1931.

²² Hooton, *The First Twenty-Five Years of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society*, 61.

possible to travel for three or four days or even more without seeing a single soul.”²³ As a result, the BCMS missionaries at Marsabit spent most of their time building up the mission station and focusing their evangelistic work on the people who lived on the mountain.

In place of the longer and more arduous safaris to the lowlands, Webster and the others visited those people who were settled on the mountain, the Mountain Boran and the Burji settlers.²⁴ Especially during the dry seasons, various Boran *manyattas* were spread across Marsabit. Richard Hacking, a new missionary who arrived at Marsabit with his wife in 1935, described these manyattas:

Each of these villages consists of a few grass-covered houses, enclosed, together with the usual cattle compound in a stout thorn fence. The average population of each place is about two or three dozen men and women, besides children. . . . These villages are more or less the same over the whole of the mountain side. No thronging crowds to address, no curious multitudes pressing around, but instead a series of talks either at the door of a house or sitting around the fire—and often good walks between each talk.²⁵

Hacking also provides the most detailed description of what these preaching safaris entailed, and his description is worth quoting in full:

It was after nightfall when we made our way to the nearest village, to the home of one well-known to us. Here we were given low native stools and bidden to draw nearer the fire in the middle of the floor. While we were waiting for others to come in, we passed the time singing choruses and hymns, Webster playing his concertina [similar to a small accordion] whilst I endeavoured to “make a joyful noise unto the Lord.” Fortunately, the Boran are not very musical or it might have been rather a trial for them—as it was, we were all satisfied. We gave our message in song, and they were delighted with the “box of whistles.” As we continued to sing

²³ A. Wesley Haylett, “Latest News from the Field,” *Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Messenger*, July 1934. Letter dated December 5, 1933.

²⁴ For Webster’s short description of the first visit to Boran residing on the mountain see Eric J. Webster, “Latest News from the Field,” *Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Messenger*, August 1931. An additional attempt was made to settle among the Samburu, which also failed. See 1933 NFD AR, 46.

²⁵ Richard Hacking, “The Word of God in Action: Amongst the Boran,” *Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Messenger*, November 1935.

and converse, the people from other houses came in to join us until we felt that the time had come for a definite message to be given. By now our audience was more or less complete, and thoroughly in keeping with the usual “congregation” out here. There were six or seven men, a number of women, and several children all sitting as near to the fire as they could with comfort, and behind them were one or two cows—the odd corners being filled with a calf or sheep tethered to the wall.²⁶

Throughout the first decade of BCMS work on Marsabit, the missionaries sporadically engaged in local preaching safaris, travelling for a day or two to meet those who were settled on the mountain. But the majority of the missionaries’ time was spent on their own station at Karantina, putting the ten-acre plot in order for educational, medical, and ultimately church work. Because BCMS correspondence and publications emphasize the NFD’s pastoralist population, they obscure the fact that Webster and the other missionaries spent most of their time interacting with Marsabit’s smaller Burji population.

Within the first three months, before they set out on a single preaching safari, Webster and another BCMS missionary, Stanley Metters, set up a school classroom and a dispensary at the station. It was also during this early period that the missionaries began hiring members of the local population to help in the organization and maintenance of the station. For the most part, missionary correspondence omits details about hiring laborers, but these working relationships were certainly foundational for the missionaries’ introduction to Marsabit and its social organization. For example, in July of 1931 Scudder wrote a letter describing the station’s development, including the acquisition of two milking cows and the construction of a garden plot containing maize and potatoes. It is safe to assume that the two resident missionaries received help in these endeavors. Scudder also mentions a man named Paul, who applied to be the station cook. When the

²⁶ Ibid.

missionaries discovered that he was both Christian and literate, he was hired to teach “beginners” in the school. The only other detail Scudder provides about Paul is that he was “of the same tribe as the majority of our nearer neighbours.”²⁷ The implication is that Paul was Burji, and it is likely that the missionaries hired various workers from the mountain population, most of whom were Burji agriculturalists who helped in clearing, planting, and cultivating on the mission station. Others were likely hired for additional daily tasks. When the compound purchased a new mill and a saw bench in 1934, they were used both by the missionaries and hired laborers.²⁸

As the mission school developed, students were expected to work on the compound to help in the cost of their education. In 1938 Edith Webster, Eric Webster’s sister, wrote home to supporters: “Another cause for praise is that more Boran young men are now working on the Station and reading in the school and are thus having numerous opportunities of hearing the Gospel Message.”²⁹ The BCMS compound became another source of employment on Marsabit, and the missionaries embraced these interactions and viewed them as opportunities for evangelism. The line between employee, student, and church member was often blurred, and this could benefit the motivations of the missionaries as well as Marsabit’s inhabitants.

The district administration, on the other hand, often found the growing mission population to be a nuisance, and expressed concern about the role of the Karantina station in “de-tribalization.”³⁰ BCMS missionaries at Marsabit had to operate within this tension,

²⁷ Scudder, “Latest News from the Field.”

²⁸ Haylett, Wesley, “The Word of God in Action: Among African Blacks at Marsabit,” *Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Messenger*, December 1934.

²⁹ Letter to Bartlett, January 6, 1938, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

³⁰ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1939, p. 11-12, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA. For a discussion of “detrribalization,” see Chapter 2.

as they were expected to help modernize pastoralists while preserving indigenous social structures. But, as happened in mission communities throughout Africa, many of the earliest converts were those who were most eager to leave their old society and remake their identities in the church context. BCMS missionaries saw this as divine orchestration, while the administration had a different view. One DC remarked on the disorder of the BCMS station, and the missionaries tendency of “[c]ollecting vagrant Burji and other undesirables and calling them ‘adherents.’”³¹

During the first year the school was well attended, and a good portion of those attending were employed by the government, who had an interest in building their literacy and knowledge of English and Swahili. School attendance could vary dramatically depending upon the time of year. In 1933 the average attendance in January was reported to be twenty-three pupils, while in December it had grown to sixty-six.³² Throughout the 1930s Webster helped run two day schools—one on the mission station at Karantina and another at government headquarters in the township. Additionally the BCMS set up a boarding school for children whose homes were further away. The number of students enrolled in BCMS schools at Marsabit varied year-to-year and season-to-season, but never exceeded seventy students. In 1936, the Marsabit DC, who kept tabs on the BCMS, reported a daily average attendance of twenty-eight students at the Karantina school and ten at the government school. His additional explanation demonstrates the value of mission schools to the government: “The increase in the numbers at latter School was because it was arranged that a number of Rendille Levies should attend for 2 ½ months in order to learn the rudiments of Swahili before proceeding

³¹ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1937, p. 12, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA.

³² NFP Annual Report, 1933, p. 46, PC/NFD/1/1/4, KNA.

to join the Police patrol which was guarding the Lake area.”³³ Like all mission schools during the period, the BCMS used texts and stories from the bible, confessional statements, and other explicitly Christian propaganda in their schools, and most of the mission’s converts came from the schools. As Webster would later write, “the Church has been largely built on school evangelism.”³⁴

When they arrived in 1931, Webster and Scudders also set up a dispensary on the mission station. While the BCMS could not supply a doctor, they hoped that sending Wesley Haylett, who was trained as a pharmacist (“chemist”), would help fulfill their obligation to the government and provide positive interactions with the region’s population. In 1933, Haylett wrote, “The dispensary has gone ahead with nearly 7,000 attendances during the year, and is proving its value as a means of breaking down prejudice.”³⁵ During the rainy season the attendance at the dispensary averaged ten to twelve people, but increased significantly in the dry seasons.³⁶ Haylett also reported that “A number of Boran visit the dispensary, some coming from fair distances, twenty-six to fifty miles or more, and so spend the night at the Mission. I sometimes spend an evening with these folk, and though they seem usually to be terribly slow in comprehending... yet some of the talks have gone home.”³⁷

As the decade progressed, the colonial authorities became impatient with the Society’s inability to provide a doctor, which was part of the original agreement.

According to Webster’s account, the BCMS became “very unpopular” with the

³³ NFP Annual Report, 1936, p. 57, PC/NFD/1/1/6, KNA 1936.

³⁴ “Appraisal of BCMS Mission Fields - East Africa,” 1952, MS47 Box 31, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

³⁵ “Among the Boran and Rendile Tribes,” Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society, no date, p. 88, MS47 Box 34, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

³⁶ A. Wesley Haylett, “Latest News from the Field,” *Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Messenger*, March 1934.

³⁷ Haylett, “Latest News from the Field,” July 1934.

authorities, and the provincial commissioner of the NFD threatened to withdraw the Society's temporary occupation license.³⁸

The situation was remedied in 1939, when the BCMS assigned Dr. Reginald Bunny and his wife to Marsabit. After Dr. Bunny arrived, the number of people visiting the dispensary increased. In a letter back to the Society's president, Webster described how important the medical work was to the evangelistic work, as "a Gospel talk is given each day before treatment commences."³⁹

In a number of cases the medical work and the educational work complimented one-another, as those who visited the dispensary often gave permission for their children to attend school. In 1938, Webster reported to the DC Reece, "There is an increasing response amongst the women in seeking help and advice especially for the babies. Through the increasing number of midwifery cases conducted among the Mission people under European supervision an opening has been made to teach child welfare, and the young women particularly are keen to learn more hygienic methods. Instruction classes in knitting and sewing are also held for the women."⁴⁰ In another case, a Boran "youth" visited the dispensary for eye treatment and meanwhile began attending school. Soon after, according to Mrs. Webster, "he stood up after the evening service and testified as to how he had found the Lord Jesus through attending school, and he exhorted all present to come to our Saviour."⁴¹ A young girl named Salete, who was paralyzed in both legs, was brought to the mission compound by her mother in 1933. Though nothing could be done

³⁸ Eric Webster, Letter to Houghton, January 13, 1945, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

³⁹ Letter to Bartlett, November 17, 1939, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁴⁰ NFD Annual Report, 1938, p. 40-41, PC/NFD/1/1/7, KNA.

⁴¹ Ruby G. Webster to Bartlett, April 6, 1940, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

for her paralysis, she eventually began to attend school, where according to Wesley Haylett, “she is hearing day by day of the wonderful Saviour Who came and healed the sick, cheered the broken-hearted and hopeless, and gave His life that sin, sorrow, and suffering might be ended. It is too much even yet for Saleté to take in, but she is beginning to love the Lord Jesus and to look forward with joy to receiving a whole body.”⁴²

While the school and the dispensary attracted people to the mission station, these interactions did not result in the conversions that the missionaries hoped and prayed for. After nearly two years at Marsabit, Haylett optimistically reported, “There are no startling conversions or sudden acceptances of the Gospel, but the daily setting forth of the Way of Life is slowly bearing fruit, and many believe as far as they understand.”⁴³ Numerically, only two people were baptized within two years, and during the first four years of BCMS work at Marsabit, a combined total of ten people were baptized. Missionary reports confirm the DC’s observation, “While the Boran and Gabbra still show little enthusiasm for religious or literary instruction, the Rendille refuse absolutely to respond to the invitations of the Missionaries, so the latter have a particularly difficult task.”⁴⁴

While Buxton, Webster, and other BCMS missionaries at Marsabit sought to use their position on the mountain to evangelize the region’s nomadic population, they ended up concentrating on the people who had settled near the town and the mission station. These people were predominantly Burji, who had moved from southern Ethiopia to

⁴² Haylett, “Latest News from the Field,” July 1934.

⁴³ A. Wesley Haylett, “Latest News from the Field,” *Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Messenger*, March 1933.

⁴⁴ NFP Annual Report, 1937, p. 37-38, PC/NFD/1/1/6, KNA.

Marsabit in the 1920s, originally at the request of the government.⁴⁵ They made up a majority of the mission's adherents and converts, and used their experience as agriculturalists to work for the mission and help maintain the ten-acre plot at Karantina.

Colonial authorities began to see the growing Burji population as a nuisance, and had more cynical interpretations of why the Burji were attracted to the missionaries: “Unfortunately a number of local Burgi (sic) and kindred tribes have in the past regarded the Mission Station as somewhere where something can be got for nothing and even some of the local Somalis used to send their children there to learn reading and writing without any intention of following the Christian faith.”⁴⁶ While Webster was on furlough in England, the DC reported fining the mission adherents for “drunken brawls and forest offences,” and found that “undesirable Burji tried from time to time to justify their existence in Marsabit by claiming they were ‘Mission pupils’.”⁴⁷

Interestingly, the missionary correspondence from the 1930s makes little mention of the Burji, but continually refers to the Boran population. The occasional reference does indicate that the missionaries did distinguish between the two groups, but continued to refer most often to the Boran. A 1947 appraisal of BCMS work at Marsabit described the first decade as a period in which “the chief people to hear the Gospel were the Boran, but Mr. Haylett made a special attempt to influence the Rendile (sic). Neither of these two peoples responded to the Gospel on any large scale, but another agricultural people, the Burui [Burji], showed a greater response.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ For details, see Chapter 1.

⁴⁶ Marsabit District Handing Over Report, 1938, p. 5, DC/MBT/2/1, KNA.

⁴⁷ NFP Annual Report, 1936, p. 57-58, PC/NFD/1/1/6, KNA.

⁴⁸ Hooton, *The First Twenty-Five Years of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society*, 145–146.

Buxton's original vision was for missionaries use Marsabit as a base for conducting safaris to evangelize the nomadic peoples in Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda. Buxton only stayed at Marsabit for a short time, and it soon became clear that Buxton's strategy needed to be adjusted. Haylett described this shift in strategy as early as 1933:

Two courses of evangelization are open; the people may be reached by safariing; but the thought of the tremendous distances involved causes one to turn at once to other proposals, for it is possible to travel for three or four days or even more without seeing a single soul. The alternative is to concentrate on work at a base, i.e., Marsabit itself, and there endeavour by God's grace to build up and train a band of evangelists and native teachers; these would then go out to live and move with the Boran. This, then, is the special work to which we are committed...⁴⁹

After just a few years the BCMS missionaries at Marsabit had abandoned itinerant preaching and the idea of directly evangelizing the pastoralist peoples in the lowlands.

At the outset of the decade, the mission's medical and educational works were conducted alongside evangelistic preaching. By the end of the 1930s, the primary school and the dispensary were the primary means of evangelization. This was partly the result of the mission being short-staffed and the society's failure to supply the necessary resources. Though the Marsabit mission grew for the first few years and had five missionaries in 1936, by 1938 Eric and Ruby Webster were the only ones remaining at Marsabit. In many ways the decade had been a disappointment for the BCMS, who had much higher expectations for their work. In 1939 Webster wrote, "The nature of our Missionary work at Marsabit is such that it is not always easy to tabulate results or record progress."⁵⁰ The Marsabit DC was a little more candid, "...in view of the small amount

⁴⁹ Haylett, "Latest News from the Field," July 1934. Letter dated December 5, 1933.

⁵⁰ NFD Annual Report, 1938, p. 40-41, PC/NFD/1/1/7, KNA.

of progress that has been made during the past ten years with evangelistic work it is a pity that” the BCMS could not provide a doctor.⁵¹

WWII in Marsabit

In 1939, Great Britain’s impending war with Germany disrupted the Society’s work at Marsabit in a number of ways. The first impact was financial, as the BCMS budget contracted and all of the Society’s mission fields were asked to make cuts and tighten their belts. In November 1939, Webster wrote to the Society’s president:

We here realise how difficult the war must make it for you to raise funds for missionary work and to create and maintain interest. It would be surprising if the funds did not drop off. Disappointing as it will be to all of us to have to cut our work down, we do feel that it is up to us to help you all we can. ... We agree with you that evangelistic work must, above all other things, be maintained and even advanced. As you are aware, of course, a lot of our evangelistic work is done in and through both the school and dispensary.⁵²

But the greater disruption occurred in the summer of 1940, when Italy formally entered the war. On June 11, the missionaries were required to evacuate Marsabit and travelled by lorry to Nairobi. With the missionaries gone, and the mission station closed for fear of Italian air raids, the school and dispensary were forced to close.⁵³ Webster was able to return to Marsabit for a short time in 1940, and shortly after his departure he reported,

Before leaving Marsabit, I made what arrangements I could for the carrying on by our Christians of such work as was possible. I have left one of our trusted Christians responsible for the upkeep of the Compound, and I also left a teacher carrying on with a small school of day scholars a little way from the Compound itself. The children seemed very disappointed at the prospect of missing their school altogether. I have

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Letter to Bartlett, November 17, 1939, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁵³ Eric Webster, Letter to Bartlett, August 5, 1940, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

made arrangements for the Society to pay these two men through the District Commissioner for as long as is necessary.⁵⁴

Webster served as a chaplain for the East African Forces for the duration of the war, and would not return to Marsabit until January 1945.⁵⁵

In the meantime, during the East African campaign of the war, in which British troops routed the Italian forces in Ethiopia, the mission station was used by the soldiers residing on Marsabit. When the armed forces left Marsabit in 1943, the mission grounds were returned to the mission adherents. It was at this point that Stephen Dere, a Burji evangelist who had recently completed schooling and religious training down-country, agreed to return to Marsabit and take charge of the mission adherents.⁵⁶ In the missionaries' absence, and under Stephen Dere's leadership, the church at Marsabit continued to convene and even added to its numbers. So despite the failure of the BCMS to accomplish their goal of converting pastoralists of the NFD, their work on the mountain and amongst the Burji community did survive the war years. Webster and his family returned to Marsabit for a week in January 1945 and "came away most encouraged."⁵⁷ It had been three years since he had been able to visit the mountain and five years for his wife, Ruby. As Webster wrote in a report, the church continued to grow in their absence:

The Church elders, led by Stephen Dere Boko, our African evangelist, are carrying on magnificently. On our last day there, a Sunday, I baptised nine children, born since we left Marsabit, and eight adults. Twelve others took their stand publicly as Catechumens. Many of these were new to us; a real tribute to the constructive work that is being done in our absence.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Letter to Bartlett, October 12, 1940, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁵⁵ The BCMS headquarters in London were bombed during the war, which has resulted in some of the limitations of doing archival work on the pre-war period.

⁵⁶ Webster, *East Africa: Land of Scattered Tribes*, 30.

⁵⁷ "Safari to Marsabit," March 1945, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The church members had also rebuilt the church from their own funds, and were regularly sending out evangelistic safaris to Boran encampments.⁵⁹ It is difficult to pinpoint when the Christian community at Marsabit developed, but the continued presence of the church during World War II is evidence that a small but self-sustaining Christian community was able to operate independent from the missionaries.

The Post-War Mission at Marsabit

For the Society as a whole, the principle issue of the post-war period was funding. The war and the recovery were financially devastating for the British, and like most missionary organizations and voluntary societies, the BCMS saw a drop in private contributions. As a result, the BCMS withdrew its missionaries from Canada, Persia, and western and southern China.⁶⁰ Webster described the BCMS' financial trials in 1950, "Unfortunately, in common with all other missionary societies, and in consequence of general post-war conditions at home, the Society finds itself faced with a severe financial crisis necessitating a general cut in its already existing work."⁶¹ In the same year, the Society agreed that the East African field needed to reduce its costs (not including missionary salaries) by 20%, and that the budget cuts would need to be permanent.⁶²

The declining budget resulted in two developments in the Society's policies in East Africa. The first was a greater willingness and need to cooperate with the colonial government, which often meant seeking government grants and funding for medical and

⁵⁹ Webster, *East Africa: Land of Scattered Tribes*, 30.

⁶⁰ "Notes on the Sessions," Correspondence regarding 1952 Conference, no date, p. 2, MS47 Box 31, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁶¹ Letter titled "Subject for discussion with the Hon the Chief Native Commissioner," March 28, 1950, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁶² Houghton, Letter to Webster, Marcy 7, 1950, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

educational work. Fortunately, this corresponded with an increase in grants available from the 1945 Colonial Development and Welfare fund. But in accepting government funds, the BCMS also had to make concessions to restrict religious aspects of their social work. Or as the Society put it, “It is important that first and foremost the work of the Mission should make for peace and good citizenship as far as the Government is concerned.”⁶³

The second major consequence of BCMS budget problems was an emphasis on the “Africanization” of the church, which meant that the local members of the church would be responsible for its management and funding, not the missionaries. The policy of Africanization led to a great deal of internal dispute between the mission and church-adherents, but this dispute was not unique to BCMS communities.

Social Services and “Auxiliary” Ministries

Just after the war, the Society’s general secretary, A. T. Houghton published a pamphlet entitled, *It’s Their Souls We Seek: The Primacy of Evangelism in Missionary Work*. In it he stated, “The object of the Society shall be to preach the Gospel to every creature in fulfillment of our Lord’s command, it being clearly understood that such preaching is the primary function of missionary enterprise, taking precedence over medical and other auxiliary ministries.”⁶⁴ Houghton continued to believe the missionary enterprise was threatened by theological liberalism and the abandonment of evangelism. He wrote, “By no stretch of the imagination could anything that He [Jesus] said be construed into an

⁶³ “Notes on the Sessions.”

⁶⁴ Houghton, A. T., *It’s Their Souls We Seek: The Primacy of Evangelism in Missionary Work*, Silver Jubilee 2 (London: Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society, 1946), 19.

attempt to preach social uplift or rural reconstruction or any of the other humanitarian projects which characterise so much missionary work to-day.”⁶⁵

Despite Houghton’s caution about “auxiliary work,” the post-war period for the BCMS at Marsabit was marked by a decrease in private funding and increasing pressure from the government for the mission to fulfill its duty to provide medical care and schooling. These financial problems were also reflected in the society as a whole. Throughout the 1930s, the BCMS averaged over £15,500 in donations and subscriptions. In 1946 they only received £6,950. The decline in private donations was made up for by fees and grants for its auxiliary ministries.⁶⁶

In his preparation for returning to Marsabit, Eric Webster expressed his concern that unless the Society demonstrated its commitment to provide a doctor for Marsabit, their relationship with the government would be further strained, and it might even be possible that the BCMS would not be allowed to return to Marsabit. Although the Society had been granted the plot based on an agreement that they would supply a doctor, it had taken until 1939, when Dr. Bunny arrived, to fulfill this agreement. Webster feared that if Dr. Bunny did not return, or the Society did not find someone to immediately replace him, that the mission’s work at Marsabit would be threatened. In a letter to the mission’s leadership in London, Webster wrote, “...may I say that I believe that Government has already been reviewing our site, possibly with the object of taking it over itself should we

⁶⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁶ Hooton, *The First Twenty-Five Years of the Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society*, 231 Appendix E.

show no keenness to return now that the war is over. I think, too, that I can say with certainty that they would not welcome us without a doctor.”⁶⁷

The Websters, with their two young sons returned to Marsabit in 1947. In the meantime, Dr. Bunny and his wife had settled in Naivasha and established a fruitful medical practice in that part of the colony. A considerable amount of correspondence took place between Bunny and the BCMS about his return to Marsabit. Questions were raised about whether or not the Bunny’s would be of greater service by remaining at Naivasha, which had large enough population to sustain the medical practice and so required less financial backing from the Society. Bunny was also appointed to the Naivasha Township Council, and had developed a good reputation with the government officials. Marsabit’s population, on the other hand, was small in number and in financial resources. Most of the people could not afford to pay for their own medical care (at least in cash), and the state of the medical facilities was also in question. In particular, during his short time at Marsabit before the war, Bunny had found the water-source at the mission station (Karantina wells) to be inadequate and government officials less than cooperative.⁶⁸ By 1950 an agreement was reached between government, the Society, and Dr. Bunny that seemed satisfactory to all involved. Bunny would return to Marsabit, the government would pay him an annual salary, and the DC promised to take care of any issues that arose with medical facilities.⁶⁹ Everything seemed to be in order for Bunny to return to Marsabit at the beginning of 1951, but on the journey to Marsabit, the elderly

⁶⁷ Letter to Houghton, January 13, 1945, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁶⁸ Bunny, Letter to Houghton, October 10, 1949, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham; Webster, Letter to Bunny, February 24, 1949 MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham; “Subject for discussion with the Hon. the Chief Native Commissioner on Tuesday, 28th March, 1950,” MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham

⁶⁹ Bunny, Letter to Houghton, November 14, 1951, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

Dr. Bunny suffered a number of acute health problems, which eventually led to his retirement from the Society and a return to England.

The society continued to struggle recruiting missionary candidates, and the loss of Dr. Bunny from the field was a significant blow to their plans for Marsabit. Even though the government had promised to pay the salary for a missionary doctor at Marsabit, the BCMS did not have anyone in line to take the position. In 1952 the East Africa Field committee wrote, “The greatest need at the moment seems to be a doctor at Marsabit in place of Dr. Bunny... The development of medical work in our East African field would seem to be one of the great needs of the tribes people as well as the most hopeful means of furthering the Gospel, yet at present there is only one missionary nurse in the whole field, and no doctor.”⁷⁰

Though Dr. Bunny’s agreement with the government never came to fruition, the BCMS continued to pursue agreements with colonial authorities over medical services in East Africa. Eric Webster, who had become the BCMS Field Secretary for East Africa, remarked on a new agreement in Karamoja, in northeast Uganda, and how this type of agreement marked a transition for the society:

...it offers a splendid opportunity to the Society for development without cost to the Mission. Although the scheme involves a new approach to missionary work in Karamoja and affects long-term policy and the recruitment of technical and teaching staff, the Field Council when it meets will have no reasonable alternative but to accept the scheme as a fait accompli. Undoubtedly, the Society stands in need of the financial help that the scheme offers, and it would be wrong to turn it down without good reason, such as the lack of adequate safeguards; provided... the spiritual side of the work is not sacrificed to the material gain afforded.⁷¹

⁷⁰ “Notes on the Sessions,” 2.

⁷¹ Letter to Houghton, August 29, 1952, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

The society was finally able to station a doctor at Marsabit in 1953, but he soon complained that the number of patients was too low, and asked to be transferred to where his services could be put to better use. In light of a sudden vacancy at a Methodist hospital, the doctor was allowed to temporarily transfer to Meru to fill the need. A considerable debate took place about the need for a doctor at Marsabit, and in the end the society sought to renegotiate its agreement with the administration.⁷² It's not clear how government responded to this request, but it would take until 1962 for the BCMS to again supply a doctor on Marsabit.

BCMS educational work was similarly transformed by the society's financial problems and trouble recruiting missionaries. The society had already been receiving government grants to cover the cost of the construction and maintenance of school buildings, but felt that the additional expenses were on the rise and becoming a burden. As one missionary described it, "Where the men of the tribe are normally naked, the mission subsidy has sometimes included the provision of clothes, as well as food and free tuition, and if boys have done work on the compound, or to grow their own food, they have been paid for it, so as to earn money to buy schoolbooks etc."⁷³ In 1952 the Society attempted to make the primary school in Marsabit and schools elsewhere in East Africa entirely "self-supporting." All expenses for the educational work would need to be covered by government grants, funds from the "indigenous" church, and "the growing of

⁷² Webster, Letter to Pouncy, December 28, 1953, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham; Letter to Webster, December 14, 1953, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁷³ "Appraisal of BCMS Mission Fields - East Africa," 1952, MS47 Box 31, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

food should be encouraged, and pupils should be expected to provide the labour for this without pay.”⁷⁴

BCMS financial issues also affected the missionary personnel at Marsabit. Eric Webster, who had first come to Marsabit in 1931, submitted his resignation to the BCMS in 1955. He had accepted the position as the senior prisons chaplain in the colony—a position most likely created as a result of the Mau Mau emergency—and explained that the sole motivation for his resignation was the need for better pay in order to send his sons to college.⁷⁵

Webster was the mission’s most fixed presence on Marsabit and the station’s most influential advocate within the society. Webster and his family had been central to the Society’s work at Marsabit, and after their departure the Commission discussed reallocating missionaries and leaving the Marsabit church to be run by its members. In 1956, they voted to ordain the lay reader, Petro Oce, and to withdraw European staff from the mountain. According to a government report, “A decision was reached that the Bible Churchman’s Mission Society School at Marsabit should close down and that the pupils should be absorbed into the Government African Primary School for which now buildings, on a new site, are being built to accommodate 50 boarders and 50 day pupils.”⁷⁶

Despite this formal decision, the BCMS did retain a missionary at Marsabit, Bernard Brown.⁷⁷ At the end of 1957, Brown wrote, “At the moment I am the only

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Webster, Letter to Hacking, August 2, 1955, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham; Excerpt from Field Council Minutes, 1955, MS47 Box 31, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁷⁶ 1956 NFD AR, 36.

⁷⁷ Preparing Committee minutes, April 30, 1956; *Committed to Action: A Report of the Work of The Bible Churchmen’s Missionary Society, Story of the Year* (London, 1958), 15.

ordained missionary in this whole Northern area of Kenya, covering thousands of square miles. There are so many problems connected with each of the stations in East Africa that the situation needs constant prayer, so please pray without ceasing.”⁷⁸ When the new government school was finished in 1958, Brown was appointed by the government to be the district educational supervisor, which meant he was also drawing a government salary.⁷⁹

By the end of the 1950s the medical and educational work that had originally been considered as “auxiliaries” to the evangelistic work in Northern Kenya became the necessary foundation for the mission’s continued presence.

Africanization

In the same 1952 report in which the East Africa field committee viewed medical work as the “most hopeful means for furthering the gospel,” they also criticized what they saw as the missionaries’ unhealthy dependence on educational work for evangelism. The committee reported, “It is probable that there has been an over emphasis on education as the result of Government demands, with an unbalanced Church as a result.”⁸⁰ The unbalance they referred to related to the age of converts and communicants in BCMS churches. Most church members converted to Christianity during their primary school years, and the churches were predominantly made up of younger members. The other issue with using schools as the primary means of evangelism was that children had little influence over their families and conversion often isolated them from their kin. The lack of older and mature church members and families presented a problem for BCMS missionaries who were being called to give over control of the churches to Africans. In a

⁷⁸ Brown, Bernard M. N., “East Africa,” *The Missionary Messenger*, February 1958.

⁷⁹ Northern Province Annual Report, 1958, p. 57, 66, 68, PC/NFD/1/1/12, KNA.

⁸⁰ “Notes on the Sessions,” 2.

section on the “Development of Indigenous Church” the East Africa committee wrote, “Unfortunately, the government stipulations about education have stood in the way of the natural foundation of the Church by adults and in families, and the example of free education and maintenance by mission subsidy has militated against self-support. Nevertheless there is the nucleus of a Christian church among most of these tribes, and if the missionaries themselves fully appreciated indigenous principles and were not so strongly tied to school evangelism there would be a hope of building up a strong, virile and balanced Christian Church.”⁸¹

The second major shift in BCMS policy in the post-war period was the Africanization of ecclesiastical work. For the BCMS, advocating for indigenous leadership in the church was a financial necessity and a means of strengthening the mission churches. There were both pragmatic and theological justifications for encouraging greater leadership by Africans in religious matters. For one, the shrinking contributions necessitated a reduced role for the missionaries and a need to find funding from other sources.

When Webster returned to Marsabit in 1947, the government began placing more restrictions on plot-holders. Sutton, the newly appointed Marsabit District agricultural commissioner, sought to place restrictions on the number of cultivators living on the mountain, and to regulate their methods of cultivation. In this process, the commissioner discovered that some of the Burji settlers had secondary shambas on another part of the mountain. These Burji, who lived on their plots in Majengo and Karantina, also maintained shambas in Sagante. At this point, the Burji who maintained two shambas

⁸¹ “Appraisal of BCMS Mission Fields - East Africa,” 1952, p. 2, MS47 Box 31, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

were given the option to move to a new plot at Karantina or Majengo, or of moving to Sagante or Ullan Ulla. Cultivating shambas in two locations was not an option.⁸²

Most of the church members and students came from the Burji population, especially those who cultivated near the mission station at Karantina. The forced move led Webster to put in a request with the DC for a BCMS plot at Sagante, where they could build “a small church-school.”⁸³ Though the small building would be built with BCMS funds, it would also be a chance to develop African leadership. Originally, Webster planned to have Stephen Dere run the church and school at Sagante.⁸⁴

In 1950, a list of proposals for the East Africa field included the following: “The indigenous Church should be responsible for Church buildings and support of African workers engaged in Church work. Voluntary witness should be inculcated rather than paid evangelism, and if paid evangelists are required they should be the responsibility of the Church.”⁸⁵ The missionaries also hoped that greater financial independence would communicate a sense of empowerment to the Christian communities, and that it would be a sign of Christian maturity. While there were theological justifications to Africanization, some accused the mission of abandonment and hypocrisy. After all, why completely cut the minimal salaries of African church workers and not reduce white missionary salaries at all? Webster laid out some the broader reasons for Africanization in a 1949 publication:

⁸² Eric Webster, Letter to Houghton, September 16, 1947, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁸³ Letter to Houghton, September 16, 1947, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁸⁴ Eric Webster, Letter to Houghton, July 17, 1950, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁸⁵ “Appraisal of BCMS Mission Fields - East Africa,” 1952, p. 2, MS47 Box 31, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

In many places, and especially in East Africa, there is a growing recognition of the fact that Nationals themselves must be given, and must be trained to take, a larger share in the responsibilities of their own Church and schools, and already in many places in East Africa the work is largely self-supporting: that is to say, the missionary society's main contribution to the work is to supply and support the missionaries it sends.⁸⁶

The irony for the Marsabit church was that it had been African-led and self-supporting for most of the 1940s.

The example of Stephen Dere is illustrative of the tensions that resulted from the new policy. In May 1950, Webster notified Dere of the Society's decision about indigenous workers, and that the Society would no longer pay his salary of 65 Kenyan shillings per month.⁸⁷ Both Dere and Webster appealed to the committee overseeing East Africa, asking that the mission *gradually* withdraw its portion of Dere's salary. As Webster had written elsewhere, it was particularly difficult, "if not impossible," to expect churches in pastoralist areas to "bear the whole burden of maintaining paid African workers."⁸⁸ Unfortunately, the committee denied their appeal. Webster wrote in December that "Stephen's future position here has been in doubt, and [is] most unsatisfactory."⁸⁹ Webster continued to describe how problematic Dere's departure would be for the mission at Marsabit, and the agreement they reached:

Altogether we had a very difficult time, and were faced with the prospect of having to close half the school, since there was no one who could adequately take Stephen's place in school. After much prayer for guidance for a wise approach we were able, I am glad to say, to settle our differences and to get Stephen to stay on. It was necessary for us personally to accept responsibility for what would have been the Mission's share of Stephen's salary on the decreasing scale, as proposed in our

⁸⁶ Webster, *East Africa: Land of Scattered Tribes*, 7.

⁸⁷ Eric Webster, Letter to Houghton, July 17, 1950, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁸⁸ Webster, *East Africa: Land of Scattered Tribes*, 42.

⁸⁹ Letter to Houghton, December 22, 1950, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

Minute of last F.C. [Field Council], had this recommendation been accepted.⁹⁰

The solution lasted for over a year, but near the end of 1951 Dere chose to leave Marsabit and return to southern Ethiopia.⁹¹ It appears that Dere's departure was amicable, and Webster was able to give him a financial gift in appreciation for his years of service with the mission. The next mention of Dere's name occurs in 1958, when he welcomed BCMS missionaries to Moyale (near the Ethiopian border), as an ordained member of the Norwegian Lutheran Mission.⁹² So at least in Stephen Dere's case, the BCMS' Africanization policy failed to accomplish the goal of strengthening the mission communities. Instead, Dere was able to find employment with another mission, who, more than likely, was willing to pay him a salary.

The church community at Sagante developed despite the decrease in funding and the difficulty of finding and paying for a church worker. In 1954, missionary Joan Taylor described how the township church helped fund and build a new building at Sagante:

Certainly the church at Marsabit felt they must celebrate the day when they had completed the small church at Sagante. All the funds had been raised in Marsabit itself, and much voluntary labour had gone into the building. Sagante is a newly-developing area, four miles away from the Mission compound and main church, and several Christian families who have moved there find it difficult to support the church as they used. So they have longed for this meeting place where they could gather their neighbours, Moslem and pagan, to hear the News which has meant new life to them.⁹³

Her description of the celebration ceremony gives helpful details of what the new church looked like, and of the activities of Marsabit's small Christian community:

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Eric Webster, Letter to Houghton, February 14, 1952, MS47 Box 26, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

⁹² Brown, Bernard M. N., "Kenya Challenge - Marsabit," *The Missionary Messenger*, December 1958; In 1963 Stephen was still working for the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, though possibly in a different location. See Benson, D., "The Boran Church," *Bible Churchmen's Missionary Messenger*, April 1963.

⁹³ Joan Taylor, "E. Africa," *The Missionary Messenger*, February 1954, 3-4.

Having bumped and jolted our way along the tracks and the grass paths to Sagante, we arrived at the grass-thatched building which was the new church. Large doors at one end, a window space barred with a rusty grill at the side, a small table at the far end with a bunch of wild flowers on it, and plenty of dry grass on the ground to seat those who could not squeeze onto the benches. The men-folk went straight to the church—the women to a nearby hut, from which issued smoke,—to leave their contribution for the ensuing feast. ...The church was full, the singing was hearty, and on this special occasion were two speakers. The first reminded us all of our sinfulness and of our need of Christ's saving and cleansing grace day by day. The other pointed us to the real purpose of this new church, and with a vision of the needs of those who do not know the Saviour's love and power we turned to Him in prayer.⁹⁴

Both the financial decline and Africanization meant that the Society would have fewer missionaries in the field and that these missionaries would spend less time preaching and evangelizing. The BCMS continued to promote evangelization and church-growth as the primary tasks of missionaries, but they devoted fewer resources towards these ends.

Conclusion

When BCMS missionaries opened their station on Marsabit in 1931, they were hopeful that their work would lead to the evangelization of all the pastoral peoples in the Lake Turkana region. At the same time, Marsabit and NFD administrators hoped that the missionaries would demonstrate the tangible benefits of British rule by providing for the social welfare of the region's inhabitants.

Ultimately, the BCMS was a weak and gradually diminishing mission society. It's missionaries did create and sustain the first primary school and medical facility on Marsabit, but largely failed to meet their own goals or those of the administration. Instead, in the 1950s they became heavily dependent on government grants and the

⁹⁴ Joan Taylor, "E. Africa."

technical training of its missionaries to sustain its work at Marsabit. The BCMS school and medical facility were closed down and the lone BCMS missionary worked in the government run school. Ideologically the BCMS maintained that evangelism was the primary justification for their presence, but ultimately lost much of their influence.

But BCMS missionaries did help to found a Christian community that would last beyond their own institutional presence on Marsabit. On August 5, 1957, the diocesan bishop arrived at Marsabit to dedicate the community's new church. After recovering from the flu and the long drive across the desert, the bishop presided over the dedication of the Church of Saint Peter, Marsabit. Immediately after, another service was held for the Confirmation of eleven church members, including a Kikuyu chief who was being held at Marsabit as a result of Mau Mau. Brown reported that the event was attended by 150 people, "many coming from the Police Lines which are near the new Church...and from the outlying district to which most of the population has moved."⁹⁵ The Church of Saint Peter, Marsabit, which could seat over one hundred congregants, was built with stones from the recently demolished mission buildings at Karantina—a fitting symbol of the relationship between the mission and church.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Brown, Bernard M. N., "East Africa"; *Committed to Action: A Report of the Work of The Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society*, 16.

⁹⁶ NFP Annual Report, 1957, p. 46, PC/NFD/1/1/11, KNA.

Chapter 4

A Sedentary Independence

Though the colonial government increased its expenditure throughout the NFD at the end of the 1950s, the entire region was generally regarded as lacking in physical and social infrastructure. Decades of colonial neglect meant that the Rendille, Gabra, Boran, and others in the north did not yet have a generation of educated elites to participate in national or even local politics. Most of the down-country Kenyan elites were educated in mission schools in the 1920s and 30s: a period in which there was only one school throughout the entire NFD, a primary school that largely drew from the small Burji population. The political developments of the 1960s were accompanied by a series of severe droughts, famine, and forced villagization, which left the lowland Rendille and Gabra more confined and impoverished than they had ever been before. At the same time, the adoption of new technologies and a change in state policies led to an increase in the number of Christian mission groups in Northern Kenya. The flagging BCMS was joined by Roman Catholic and Africa Inland Mission missionaries, whose societies had a stronger financial and institutional presence in Kenya. Throughout the sixties these missionaries most often encountered pastoralists in settlements that arose out of conditions of poverty, leading to a series of ad hoc relief and development projects. The missionaries placed a lot of trust in their own resourcefulness and in technological and social modernization to allow pastoralists to escape their recent impoverishment. Like

others before them, they did not have a deep understanding or value of the pastoralists' economy. Their responses to drought, famine, livestock loss, and prolonged settlement were informed by common sense pragmatism and evangelical theology, and not by development theories or environmental policies.

A secessionist war and the national politics of the post-colonial period led to a decline in the effectiveness of state regulation across Northern Kenya. Most of the resources that Kenyatta's government sent to Northern Kenya were directed towards military rather than civil regulation. The colonial government had regulated the number of people permanently residing on Marsabit Mountain and in the township, as well as the livestock grazing on the mountain. They also prioritized protecting the mountain's natural resources over using those resources for the pastoralist economy. The Kikuyu dominated civil authorities who took over from the British were less stringent in enforcing the colonial policies, and were generally more motivated by national and party politics than by local pressures. Partly as a result of these changes, the number of people permanently residing on Marsabit tripled throughout the sixties, increasing from under three thousand to nearly nine thousand residents by 1969.¹

By the end of the decade AIM and Catholic missionaries had solidified their role as the most important channels for resources and information, including food and water, funding for projects, and advocacy for the region's pastoralists.

NFD Commission and the Shifta War

For most of Kenya, the themes of decolonization and African nationalism dominated public discourse in the late-fifties and early-sixties. As it became clear that national

¹ Fratkin and Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle*, 111–112.

independence would become a reality, the question became, what form of government would the new Kenyan nation take, and who would control the new state? But as British authorities met with KANU, KADU, and other political parties to create a new Kenyan constitution, the question arose over what to do with the NFD.

At the 1962 Kenya Constitutional Conference, Duncan Sandys, the secretary of state for the colonies, proposed the formation of a committee to investigate public opinion in the NFD regarding Kenyan independence and constitutional developments. For Sandys, the question was whether or not the inhabitants of the NFD would be part of Kenya, or not, and so whether they should be represented at the constitutional conferences.

The Northern Frontier District Commission was formed in October 1962, and the two members of the committee spent a month traveling around the NFD by plane, holding public *barazas* at various locations in each district: Isiolo, Garissa, Mandera, Marsabit, Moyale, and Wajir. According to the commission's report, they "heard oral representations from 134 delegations and received 106 written submissions."²

The nineteen-page report was detailed and fairly nuanced, but concluded that the when it came to the political future of the NFD, the population was divided into two groups, which they termed the "Kenya Opinion," and the "Somali Opinion." The largest and most organized groups were those who supported the Somali Opinion, or the view that the NFD should secede from Kenya and join the newly independent Somali Republic. The communities who lived in the northeast of the NFD (to the east of the

² Northern Frontier District Commission, *Kenya Report of the Northern Frontier District Commission* (London: H.M.S.O., 1962), v. Interestingly, Canon Webster served as one of the interpreters for the commission, presumably to interpret Borana.

Galla-Somali line) unanimously supported the secession, and had formed the Northern Province Peoples Progressive Party (NPPPP). According to the report,

The areas in which we found the people supporting the Somali Opinion are the biggest in total population and size and are in fact one. They extend from the Somali frontier to the Somali-Galla Line and beyond, to include the grazing lands of the Adjuran. We found that the people there almost unanimously favour the secession from Kenya of the N.F.D., when Kenya attains independence, with the object of ultimately joining the Somali Republic.³

The center of those supporting the Kenya Opinion was Marsabit, where Boran, Gabra, Burji, and others feared that secession would lead to their political and social domination by the Somali (and Muslim) majority.⁴ The committee found that religious affiliation was the most profound indicator of opinion, and “noted that the division of opinion almost exactly corresponds to the division between Moslem and non-Moslem (sic).”⁵

When the commission held hearings in Nairobi, Kenyatta and Tom Mboya spoke on behalf of KANU, and strongly opposed secession. Kenyatta insisted that KANU had many supporters in the NFD, and that he was representing their views. In their report, however, the commission noted that they found KANU activity in the north to be insignificant.⁶

The Commission’s hearings, which were announced in print and over loud speakers far in advance, were major events in the NFD in 1962. The committee members

³ Ibid., 18.

⁴ The commission’s comments on the Rendille are interesting and worth noting. Though the Rendille unanimously supported the Somali Opinion, the commissioners doubted whether this could actually be true. They attributed Rendille opinion to recent tensions with the Gabra, and cited Rendille cultural affinities with Samburu and Masai, as well as their resistance to Islam as to “not accept their opinion as given.” In general, the commission concluded that the difference of opinion in the NFD corresponded closely with religious and social connections (all Muslims supporting the Somali Opinion), but that the Rendille proved to be the outliers (the only pagan group supporting the Somali Opinion).

⁵ Northern Frontier District Commission, *Kenya Report of the Northern Frontier District Commission*, 18.

⁶ Ibid., 10, 17.

saw the Commission as a way to reveal and record public opinion regarding national independence. But while they hoped to simply take measurements, they also created large wakes in the process. The very existence of the public hearings encouraged political organization throughout the NFD, and set the question of the region's political future as the topic of public discourse. As the report itself states, "Until the agitation for secession began there was hardly any political activity in the Northern Frontier District. The population was mainly preoccupied with the struggle for existence and was largely unaffected by Kenya Politics (sic) in the south."⁷

According to one of the BCMS missionaries at Marsabit, "attempts to secure the secession of the Northern Province of Kenya to Somalia have embittered local and inter-tribal relations."⁸

Though the Commission felt obligated to remind people that it was "purely fact-finding and was not required to make any recommendation as to the future government of the Northern Frontier District," it certainly created an expectation that public opinion was valued and would be taken into account—for why else would government representatives hold public hearings, asking questions about participation in a newly independent Kenya?⁹

But, as was often the case with the northern region, their own interests were subsumed by those of the ruling party in the new nation. KANU refused to even discuss the possibility of sovereignty for the north. Daniel Branch points out that this was not a result of any belief in the value of the northern peoples, or even that the territory might possess economic value (like oil). Instead, the fear was that granting or discussing

⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁸ "The Political Background," *The Missionary Messenger*, April 1962, 7.

⁹ Northern Frontier District Commission, *Kenya Report of the Northern Frontier District Commission*, 1.

autonomy to any part of Kenya, even the arid north, could lead to discussions of sovereignty throughout the nation. In particular, KANU was concerned with aligning those in the Rift Valley with a strong central state: “Autonomy for the Rift Valley would have been much harder to resist had North Eastern Province [NFD] been granted some form of self-rule. And the Rift Valley and the lands to be vacated by the European settler farmers were the real prize of independence, not the north.”¹⁰

British negotiators were also willing to overlook the overwhelming opinion for sovereignty in northeastern Kenya, and accepted KANU's position in exchange for guaranteed protections of settler farmers after independence.¹¹

The result was an armed resistance by Somali ethnic groups in the north that lasted as a formal conflict from 1963 to 1967. Referred to as the Shifita War, this conflict was characterized by small-scale clashes and raids throughout the north. Initially shifita fighters were supplied with weapons and ammunition from Somalia, and looked to local supporters for food and shelter. The influx of weapons along with the general chaos of warfare meant that while many fought for political independence, others took advantage of the opportunity to take up interethnic feuds and gain access to valuable resources.¹²

Though the scale of the conflict was minor, the consequences for the residents of Marsabit were drastic, as they found their movements and livelihoods limited both by the presence of Shifita fighters and a government policy of surveillance and control.

¹⁰ Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2011), 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Hannah Alice Whittaker, “The Socioeconomic Dynamics of the Shifita Conflict in Kenya, C. 1963—8,” *The Journal of African History* 53, no. 3 (January 1, 2012): 391–408.

The Shifta conflict first reached Marsabit during Easter Week, 1964. In these initial raids, which came during the night, six residents were killed and much of the town's property was destroyed. According to BCMS missionary Stephen Houghton, "Many people fled; many lost their homes and/or property; almost everyone lived in constant fear, especially at night; public morale became very low; and everything was apparently against progress and advance of any kind."¹³

The government had declared a State of Emergency in December 1963, but expanded this to include Marsabit District in September 1964. The emergency declaration included the enactment of the Preservation of Public Security Regulations, which gave state authorities permission to arrest without a warrant, imprison individuals found in "prohibited zones," and seize or destroy property from anyone suspected of criminal activity. In 1966 the government took further steps to confine the peoples in the shifta-affected areas, requiring all adults to register and carry identity cards.¹⁴ This was to assist in the next measure of anti-shifta strategy: forced villagization. Kenya's strategy in the conflict, which was influenced by similar efforts by the British to contain Mau Mau in the previous decade, was to force the people of Northern Kenya to settle into villages. This served the dual purpose of making it difficult for sympathizers to provide shifta groups with support, and it protected others from livestock raids. "By denying shifta units easy access to food supplies and intelligence, and by keeping local populations under surveillance, the government hoped the new villages would break the back of the insurgency."¹⁵

¹³ "Say to This Mountain," *Mission*, August 1965, 7.

¹⁴ Whittaker, "The Socioeconomic Dynamics of the Shifta Conflict in Kenya, C. 1963—8," 404.

¹⁵ Branch, *Kenya*, 32.

Throughout the shifta affected areas the government planned for 28 villages. The locations were a combination of existing towns or trading centers, and common seasonal gathering areas for pastoralists. In Marsabit, enforced villages were formed on the mountain in Marsabit Town, Manyatta Jillo, and in the lowlands at Laisamis and Loglogo.¹⁶ Because the residents of Marsabit were considered loyalists to the Kenya government, their confinement was less brutal than villages created elsewhere in the northeast, where the army used violent tactics, including torture, burning houses, and killing livestock.¹⁷

Within the first few years of the war, the concentration of livestock led to a rapid decline in available grassland and an increase in livestock disease. The onset of drought in 1965 exacerbated the problem for pastoralists, and led to crop failure and the need for famine relief measures in Marsabit and other areas of Northern Kenya. In 1966, shifta warriors began using land mines, creating additional hazards for government and pastoralists seeking to move their herds.¹⁸

A BCMS medical missionary, Dr. Peter Cox, described how the Shifta War continued to affect Marsabit in 1968:

The people live either in the town—traders, police, officials, and the like—or in *shambas* (gardens) which are plots of several acres purchased by a man or a group of men, on which they build a house and farm; or in

¹⁶ Hannah Whittaker, “Forced Villagization during the ‘Shifta’ Conflict in Kenya, Ca. 1963-1968,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012): 352 (see footnote 62 for details of enforced villages in Marsabit).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 358–359. “The first [village type] is associated with Marsabit district, where, unlike the rest of the former NFD, residents broadly supported the Kenyan government and were considered as ‘loyalists.’ Marsabit district was at the center of political opposition to secession in the NFD area and as such residents suffered disproportionately from attacks by shifta. Villagization was therefore considered as being in the interest of civilian protection, and government villages were known colloquially as yaa. The term yaa is related to the ‘traditional’ Boran belief system, referring to a village or community with special ritual attributes. A yaa is formed when a specific group of people move together and form a settlement for a ritual purpose. A yaa is described as having a cheerful and peaceful atmosphere despite the demands of ritual ceremonies that have to be carefully planned and performed.”

¹⁸ Eastern Province Annual Report, 1966, p. 4, PC/EST, KNA.

two very big *manyattas*, or groups of houses, holding several thousand people. These are four to six miles away. This latter existence was introduced as a security measure in the Shifta troubles. ... There are also great opportunities in the two great *manyattas* where there are terrible conditions, illness, and devil-worship. As soon as security conditions allow, these thousands of people will return to their scattered nomadic plains far below; so now is the time.¹⁹

Since the 1930s, missionaries struggled to find ways to create meaningful and prolonged interactions with the pastoralist population in the NFD. Like other missionaries, Dr. Cox viewed the causes of pastoralist settlement as tragic, but also believed the settlements provided an unprecedented opportunity for contact and evangelization.

The Shifta War officially ended in 1967, but minor raids persisted over the next few years. Hannah Whittaker, who has done the most recent and in-depth research on villagization during the war, concludes:

It is certainly the case that once the *shifta* conflict formally came to an end in 1967, the Kenyan government did not continue to control and regulate village life as it had done and people were free to leave. That said the villages that were established by the Kenyan government during the villagization program still exist. In part this is a consequence of the effects of governmental interventions in Northern Kenya during the shifta conflict, which had negative implications for the operation of the pastoral economy and initiated a process of long-term sedentarization due to impoverishment and livestock loss.²⁰

The Rendille, Gabra, and Boran of Marsabit district did not suffer to the degree of the non-loyalist pastoralists in the NFD, some of who lost 90-95% of their livestock.²¹ Nevertheless, the political consequences of the Shifta War, accompanied by drought, livestock disease, and famine, profoundly diminished their wealth and resulted in new levels of permanent and semi-permanent settlement throughout the district. All of this

¹⁹ "Mud!," *Mission*, October 1968, 8.

²⁰ Whittaker, "Forced Villagization during the 'Shifta' Conflict in Kenya, Ca. 1963-1968," 357.

²¹ Richard Hogg, "The New Pastoralism: Poverty and Dependency in Northern Kenya," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 56, no. 3 (January 1, 1986): 319-33.

took place during a time in which additional mission and church organizations expanded their work into Marsabit District. They built their own homes and mission stations, including schools and dispensaries, in these newly created villages, and engendered the continuity of permanent settlements.

Roman Catholic Missions in Northern Kenya

Up until the 1960s, the BCMS was the only missionary organization in the Northern Frontier District.²² Colonial policies, and the preference of provincial administrators, repeatedly rebuffed attempts by other churches and missionary organizations to expand into the north, claiming that one organization was enough for the region's limited population.

After World War II, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church began to express their interest in establishing a presence in the NFD. In 1948, Bishop Charles Cavallera was appointed vicar apostolic of Nyeri and prefect apostolic of Meru, which meant that the church entrusted him with the spiritual oversight of the NFD. Bishop Cavallera first visited Marsabit in July of that year, and met with both the district commissioner and Eric and Ruby Webster. The DC, who himself was a Catholic, told the bishop that there was no point in applying for a mission station at Marsabit, as the government did not place two missions over the same "territory." The church might be able to open a technical school on Marsabit, but its ecclesial functions would be limited.²³

²² Actually renamed the Northern Frontier Province in 1955, and then broken up at national independence. Marsabit became part of the Eastern Province.

²³ Tablino, Paul, *Christianity Among the Nomads: The Catholic Church in Northern Kenya* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), 153.

On this visit Webster introduced the Bishop to Paulo Dalle, a Burji resident of Marsabit who had been baptized by the White Fathers (Catholic) in the twenties.²⁴ Dalle would later be instrumental in establishing a chapel in Marsabit Town. Though Cavallera was encouraged to meet Dalle, he was disheartened by the rest of his tour, which revealed little to no accommodation for the Catholic Church in the NFD.

Cavallera returned to Marsabit and the NFD two years later, in September of 1950. He met with the provincial commissioner, Richard Turnbull, to obtain permission for the expedition and to informally make his request known for opening mission stations in the territory. Turnbull's response, as reported in a secondary source, demonstrates why colonial administrators preferred to limit missionary expansion in the north:

[Turnbull] was also against the opening of missions in the part of the province that bordered Somalia, because the population there was totally Muslim, and the civil administration was convinced that a Christian presence would create a situation of potential conflict in the area, thus producing new problems between Christians and Muslims. He would therefore prefer to allow the Borana to continue in their situation of peace and allow them to remain islamised (sic). This would apply to areas such as Garba Tula, Habaswein, Wajir, Buna and Moyale. It was true that at Marsabit there were pagans, but a Protestant mission was already there, quite sufficient for a population of about a thousand.²⁵

It was on this trip in 1950 that Cavallera appointed Paulo Dalle as the catechist at Marsabit, in charge of organizing and educating the small Catholic community on the mountain. A number of the Catholics in Marsabit were government workers, and the DC agreed to find a place for them to meet. So even though Cavallera was unable to establish a mission station at Marsabit, or anywhere in the NFD, the Catholic community itself was established.²⁶

²⁴ See footnote 120 in *ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 154–155.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 156. As catechist, Dalle was given a regular salary by Bishop Cavallera.

In 1952, Cavallera negotiated the opening of a mission station at Baragoi, among the Samburu. Though it was just outside the border of the NFD, it was considered the first Catholic mission in Northern Kenya.²⁷ Throughout the 1950s Cavallera repeatedly pressed colonial authorities for permission to expand the Catholic mission in Northern Kenya. Like others before him, Cavallera offered to provide schools and healthcare in areas where it was then lacking, but regularly came up against administrative reluctance and opposition from the BCMS. In July 1955, the bishop met with “the Protestant minister,” presumably Eric Webster, and discussed the possibility and need for cooperation:

During the talk the bishop vigorously opposed the old principle of “zones of influence” which had formerly prevailed in the colony. He instead defended the principle of coexistence by which various denominations could work in the same area, provided that one denomination would not build an institution similar to one the other had already started in the same place. Therefore the Catholics could build a technical school of which there were none at Maralal [in NFD], while the Protestants would continue to have the monopoly of the primary schools, which they had built a long time since.²⁸

At Marsabit, the Catholic community finished construction of a chapel in 1958. The chapel, like many of Marsabit Town’s more permanent structures, consisted of a concrete slab and corrugated iron sheets.²⁹ In 1963 the Marsabit DC requested that Cavallera use his resources to build two primary schools in the lowlands surrounding the mountain. The schools would be in North Horr and Laisamis, which traditionally served as seasonal encampments for Gabra and Rendille during the long dry season. Both schools would both need to be boarding schools to accommodate for the nomadism of the Gabra and Rendille. The DC also suggested that Marsabit be used as a permanent base

²⁷ Ibid., 158–159.

²⁸ Trevisiol, cited in *ibid.*, 163.

²⁹ Ibid., 165–166.

for the Catholic missionaries, and as place of respite from the desert. In 1964 two Italian priests came to live in Marsabit Town and formally began the Catholic mission in Marsabit District.³⁰

The two catholic missionaries, Paulo Tablino and Bartholomeo Venturino, were Italians who had much in common. Both were born in the same Italian province in the same year. Both attended the same seminary and according to Tablino, both “received the same humanistic and scientific education, studied philosophy and theology with the same teachers, received the same spiritual formation from the same priests.”³¹ They also both responded to Pope Pious XII’s call in 1957 to send more diocesan priests as missionaries to Africa, and by 1960 were teaching at seminary in Nyeri.³² Tablino and Venturino developed an interest in the pastoral population of Northern Kenya, and connected with Bishop Cavallera’s vision of opening mission stations in the NFD.

The personal interactions between the BCMS staff and Catholic priests were friendly and civil. The missionaries, who lived in such an isolated place, likely found camaraderie in being able to speak the same language and in their experience as outsiders residing on

³⁰ Ibid., 171–173; 177.

³¹ Tablino, Paul, *The Gabra*, 7.

³² From Pope Pius XII, “Fidei Donum: Encyclical on the Present Condition of the Catholic Missions, Especially in Africa,” *New Advent*, April 21, 1957, http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_pi12fd.htm: “The Church in Africa, as well as in other parts of the mission field, needs missionaries. Hence We appeal once again to you, Venerable Brethren, beseeching you that with every resource at your command you show your zeal in supporting all those who have been divinely called to undertake the burdens of the missionary apostolate, whether they be priests or religious men and women. . . . It is not enough, however, to make your people more zealous in supporting this work; much more is required. Not a few dioceses are so well supplied with clergy, thanks be to God, that no loss would be felt if some of their priests should enter the mission field. To such dioceses We would apply, with fatherly solicitude, the Gospel saying: what you have that is over and above your needs, give that to the poor.[27] Our heart goes out to Our brother bishops who are filled with distress and fear as they see the number of candidates for the priesthood and the religious life growing fewer, and are thus unable to provide properly for the spiritual needs of their own flocks. We share their anxiety and say to them as St. Paul did to the Corinthians: “Not that the relief of others should become your burden, but that there should be equality.”

Marsabit and learning about the peoples living around them. Upon Father Tablino's arrival on Marsabit, the Anglican Rev. Stephen Houghton lent him a bed and mattress.³³ Despite the cordial personal relationships, the BCMS was among the group of Protestant mission organizations who rejected most forms of ecumenical cooperation in the 1950s and 1960s, and generally regarded members of the Roman Catholic Church as outside the fold of God. Thus, the growing presence of Catholic missions in Northern Kenya was seen as a threat to the BCMS, and was often cited as an example of why the mission could not relinquish its effort in the region. Throughout the colonial period, NFD officials regularly reminded the BCMS that if they did not hold up their end of the bargain in regard to the orderly running of schools and hospitals, then another mission could be found to take their place.

In 1958, Rev. Bernard Brown wrote:

From Kenya a fresh challenge has come before the Society with reference to its work in the Marsabit, Wamba and Nandi areas. Ordained men are urgently requested for all three and the Committee desires that the need should be made known as widely as possible throughout the constituency. We may well be called upon to relinquish our interests in Marsabit or Wamba [Samburu] if we are unable to reinforce our present staffs in the very near future. The situation therefore demands a fresh review of the task which still awaits fulfillment. ...The Church needs to be more completely equipped if it is to be grounded and established in the faith, and able to withstand the increasing influence of Islam and Rome.³⁴

Brown himself experienced the influence of "Rome" in the changing institutional arrangements in Kenya and the NFD. When the colonial government began providing more direct funding for schools in the 50s, they also took away control from mission agencies. So even though Brown was given charge of the government-run school at Marsabit, he could do little about the fact that the three Kenyan teachers the school hired

³³ Tablino, Paul, *Christianity Among the Nomads*, 176.

³⁴ Brown, Bernard M. N., "Kenya Challenge - Marsabit."

were Catholic (it is also the case that few down-country Kenyans wanted to live and teach in the NFD, so the options were limited).³⁵

Africa Inland Mission in the NFD

The BCMS was not alone in viewing Roman Catholic mission stations as a threat to the spiritual wellbeing of the peoples of Northern Kenya. In 1956, AIM's Kenya field director sent a memorandum to the organization's field councils in Kenya and the home councils in the US and the UK. In summarizing AIM's general position in Kenya, he stated that "false religions" were increasing and presenting a greater threat to the people of Kenya. The spread of Islam was one of these threats, but,

The biggest threat is from the "all out" efforts of the Roman Catholic Church. It is their aim to take over East Africa in the next ten years. Every effort is being put forward to this end by bringing literally hundreds of priests and nuns into this country. Unprecedented effort is being put forth in their educational and medical programs because they fully realize that these are the keys to winning the African today.³⁶

AIM's fear reflected the reality of the Roman Catholic Church's commitment to expanding missionary work throughout Africa. Conversely, part of the justification for Catholic energies was the growth of missions and churches that expressed more hostility towards Catholicism, of which AIM was a prime example.

AIM was one of the earlier Protestant missions in East Africa, beginning in its work in Kenya in late nineteenth century. AIM was founded in 1895 by Peter Cameron Scott, a Scottish-American, after his own Presbyterian denomination declined to support his vision for East Africa. Scott then founded AIM as an interdenominational and

³⁵ "Key to Africa's Future," *The Missionary Messenger*, June 1959.

³⁶ Erik Barnett, "Memorandum from the Kenya Field for Presentation to our Central Field Council and the Home Councils," August 18, 1956, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/4, Billy Graham Center Archives.

evangelical faith mission, following in the steps of other faith missions like Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission and the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). Like the other faith missions, AIM was formed partly out of frustration with denominational missions, and sought to avoid the trappings of the civilizing mission and the inter-denominational squabbles, all of which detracted from the evangelistic element of mission work.

At their outset, the faith missions narrowed the work of missionaries to direct evangelism, intentionally avoiding educational and medical work. Barbara Cooper, in her history of SIM in Niger, describes some of the distinctives of faith missions in their founding decades: "The difference in emphasis in the faith missions lay primarily in their sense of being distinctive in placing evangelism before social transformation, in their willingness to take on missionaries who were eager to serve but might have little in the way of training or resources, and in a fundamentalist understanding of Christianity and salvation."³⁷ Faith missions also were a joint venture between American and British missionaries, and had more of a transnational character than denominational societies like the CMS and CSM. The "faith" element referred to the rejection of "worldly" fundraising techniques, which meant that faith missionaries did not solicit funding for their work, which they considered human effort rather than divine provision. Additionally, in reaction to denominational mission boards, the AIM was not governed by a board or committee in the US or Great Britain, but was run by the missionaries who were in the field.³⁸

³⁷ Cooper, *Evangelical Christians in the Muslim Sahel*, 7.

³⁸ Stephen D. Morad and Shelly Arensen, *The Spreading Tree: A History of the Africa Inland Church in Kenya, 1895-1995*, unpublished, p. 328, Collection: Papers of Stephen D. Morad: CN689/1/1, Billy Graham Center Archives

By 1915 AIM had sixty-six missionaries in Kenya who ran sixteen stations spread out among lands of the Kamba, Kikuyu, Masai, Kalenjin, and Luo. Initially AIM mission stations included simple efforts at school and medical work, focusing more on learning the language and culture, Bible translation, and construction. After World War I, despite the mission's ideological preference of avoiding civilizing efforts, AIM missionaries were pressured by the government to improve the quality of their schools and to accept grants-in-aid. AIM missionaries discovered that setting up higher quality schools was necessary in order to continue to receive land grants from the colonial administration, and to satisfy the growing African demand for education. Within the first few decades AIM did create a governing board and regional structures, but the missionaries also retained a degree of autonomy. As one later observer remarked, AIM could also stand for the Association of Independent Missionaries.³⁹

As AIM churches grew, there were a number of serious issues that divided the missionaries and the African members of the churches. The most well known controversy was the female circumcision crisis among the Kikuyu in 1929, but additional issues over the ordination of African clergy, responses to nationalist movements, church discipline and funding all threatened to divide AIM churches. Partly as a result, AIM went through two periods of significant tension and internal reorganization, one in the 1930s and the other in the 1950s. Despite the periods of tension, the mission and AIM churches continued to grow. Over six hundred AIM missionaries served in Kenya in the

³⁹ Paul Robinson (anthropologist who worked closely with Gabra and AIM missionaries in 1970s), phone interview with author, May 20, 2014.

1950s and there were “several thousand” AIM churches spread throughout the colony.⁴⁰ The growing acceptance of Kenyan nationalism was also accompanied by an increasing pressure to Africanize the churches, which led to a formal split between the mission and the church in 1955. The African Inland Church (AIC) was formed with its own constitution, fully independent of missionary control and missionary finances. The split was amicable, and to a degree was desired by mission and church leaders. After the formation of the AIC, new debates surfaced about the cooperation of AIC and AIM in the education of clergy, evangelistic missions, and the role of AIM missionaries. The main question was whether or not AIM missionaries would serve under the direction of AIC leaders, and in what capacity. According to Erik Barnett, the East Africa field director, the eventual agreement was that “the Mission and the Church are recognised as autonomous organisations, each with its sphere of service, but each working together in partnership in the Lord’s work.” Additionally, AIM missionaries could serve on AIC committees, but only at the request of the AIC.⁴¹

As AIM missionaries sought to define their new role in cooperation with the AIC, the mission claimed the work of pioneer evangelism as its primary task. In Kenya, as the AIC took control over the more populated regions, missionaries began looking at expanding their work to the unevangelized pastoralists in the Lake Turkana region.

Early Experiences with Famine Relief & Pastoralist Development

AIM missionaries had their first experience with famine relief in Northern Kenya with the Turkana during the drought of 1960-1962. For a number of years AIM had sought

⁴⁰ Erik Barnett, “Memoranda on need for possible changes in A.I.M. Policies and Operations, in order to meet rapidly changing conditions in Africa,” May 1964, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/32/5, Billy Graham Center Archives.

⁴¹ Ibid.

government approval to open stations among the Turkana, but it was not until after the Mau Mau Emergency, when colonial development policies became more concerned with health and education, that AIM was given permission. In 1958 the government approved AIM's request to open a medical mission station in south Turkana. The NFD commissioner reported that the AIM station, which also included a primary school, "should exercise a benign influence in an area where there has been little development."⁴²

The new station in Turkana was headed up by Dr. Dick Anderson and his wife Joan who served as a teacher and linguist. The expansion of AIM work in Turkana and the rest of Northern Kenya was also the result of new access to changing technologies. For years missionaries and government officials believed it was impossible to have a permanent station in the desert lowlands and that the only way to administer and evangelize pastoralists was through periodic safaris. But the Anderson's station in Turkana served as an important precedent:

However this is the first time our mission has had the scientific and engineering knowledge to cope with the problem of a station in the desert itself. The impossible terrain, the vast distances, the waterless wastes had thus far made a permanent station among the Turkana impossible. Now in Lokori, modern means are making life possible for missionaries. A permanent home with a water supply, a radio transmitter and an airplane ready to come on call, and medicine to draw the tribesmen to the missionary—all these are having a valuable part in this pioneer effort.⁴³

The Anderson's relied on the long established strategy of attracting pastoralists to the mission station and engaging in evangelism through medical treatment and education. The novelty was the location of the station in the arid lowlands, closer to the Turkana population, which was possible because of mechanized boreholes, air transportation, and radio communication. AIM's close relationship with the growing fleet of non-

⁴² Northern Province Annual Report, 1958, p. 5, 68, PC/NFD/1/1/12, KNA.

⁴³ "Modern Means to Win an Ancient People," *Inland Africa*, 1961, 11.

governmental aviation organizations in Kenya would prove highly influential on medical service throughout Northern Kenya. All of these new technologies also reflect the mission's dependence on the booming American economy.⁴⁴

When the Turkana were hit by a severe drought and famine in the early 60s, the colonial government organized famine camps, and asked missionaries for assistance. AIM was able to increase the number of missionaries in Turkana as well as the number of mission stations. The famine also attracted the attention of the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCCK), which channeled the resources of many mainstream Protestant churches in Kenya toward alleviation of poverty and other social ills.⁴⁵ At the outset, the NCCCK sent food, financial resources, and personnel to assist AIM missionaries, who worked with the government to organize famine camps, distribute food, and establish orphanages in the affected areas.

The severity of the drought, which was immediately followed by flooding, meant that many Turkana lost most or all of their livestock. Many who came to receive food relief had no way of returning to their former livelihood, and permanently settled at the famine camps. AIM and NCCCK workers observed the tragic consequences of their relief efforts: a growing population living in squalid conditions, completely dependent on government and mission for food and water. The distribution of emergency relief had solved the immediate need for food and prevented starvation, but it also created another

⁴⁴ Andrew Walls has drawn attention to the close connection between missions and capitalism: "For the voluntary society to operate overseas implies the existence of cash surpluses and freedom to move them about. It cannot operate if the surplus of production is marginal or if the movement of surpluses is controlled by the wider community. America provided par excellence the economic capability for voluntary societies to operate overseas, just as it had provided a favorable social and political climate for their development." Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 225.

⁴⁵ Agnes Chepkwony, *The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Development: A Study of the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCCK), 1963-1978*, Studia Missionalia Uppsaliensia; 43 (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1987), 89.

set of long-term problems for the Turkana population. AIM's first tactic was to create a work-for-food program in the camps. Then, when it became clear that most Turkana could not return to livestock herding, AIM, AIC, and NCKK worked together to establish a fishing cooperative on the shores of Lake Turkana, where they hoped to help the Turkana escape the poverty of famine camps by teaching them to fish.⁴⁶

The early resettlement scheme in Turkana was also the result of AIM's growing theory about evangelizing pastoralist peoples. Most AIM missionaries assumed that for a Turkana to become a "genuine" Christian, he would have to cease to live in the manyatta, and therefore cease to be a pastoralist. To explain this anti-pastoralist view, Dick Anderson described a debate between those who supported the mission station approach to AIM's work in Turkana, and those who criticized this as a return to colonial style mission work. Anderson cites the advice of John Mpaayei, a university educated AIC leader and a former Maasai pastoralist:

"You have no idea of the depths of sin in a Maasai manyatta," [John] said quietly. "your people here in Turkana are just the same. They cannot remain Christians in their old environment. In Maasai, any convert must change his nomadic manner of life completely. He has to move his home and settle down alongside the Mission Station." John's message 'clicked' with his missionary listeners. They felt God was showing them that there was to be nothing new in the principles underlying their work. They were to follow in the footsteps of a host of pioneers in East Africa. Turkana needed Mission Stations with a strong emphasis on preaching the Word and training the church leaders and evangelists of the future.⁴⁷

This belief that the pastoralist lifestyle was fundamentally antagonistic to Christianity conditioned much of AIM's work in Northern Kenya throughout the 1960s, and went hand-in-hand with government policy towards pastoralists. Though missionaries could expand their work into the lowlands of the desert, mission stations would still rely on

⁴⁶ Paul and Betty Lou Teasdale (AIM missionaries), interviews with author, January 18-19, 2014.

⁴⁷ Dick Anderson, *Team for Turkana* (London: Africa Inland Mission, 1967), 73-74.

medical work and education to evangelize pastoralists and draw them out of their society. Within AIM circles, this anti-pastoralist view was not significantly challenged until the late-1970s.

Though the famine relief work aided in the de-pastoralization of the Turkana, the missionaries also found the dependency to be a barrier to effective Christianization. Again, Dick Anderson relates the experience of AIM in Turkana: “Hard experience in the famine camps had taught the missionaries that free hand-outs of food and medicine, although sometimes a Christian duty, beget a selfishly demanding spirit which is most unresponsive to the Gospel.”⁴⁸ Additionally, missionaries had trouble distinguishing what they called “rice Christians,” who professed belief for the material benefits without the intention of remaining part of the Christian community. In Turkana, the solution was to require some form of payment for services, and to seek resettlement outside famine camps for those who were willing—typically the Christian population.

These first experiences with relief and development in Turkana were ad hoc responses to the problems that presented themselves to AIM missionaries and the NCCK. In the coming years, neither organization would spend time systematically defining and formulating a development policy. Instead, individual missionaries learned from their own experiences and the experience of others in their network of relationships. The response to severe famine in Turkana served as an important foundation for missionary involvement with the Rendille and Gabra in the 1960s.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 67.

Generations of Missionary Experience – AIM in Marsabit

In the 1960s, AIM and the BCMS were drawn together by a common evangelical theology, and perhaps more important, common opposition to “liberal” theologies and institutions like the World Council of Churches. The increased cooperation also resulted from the decline of the BCMS’ financial and human resources and the economic strength AIM gained from the postwar American economy.

In June 1962, representatives of AIM’s Unreached Areas Committee were invited by Rev. Stephen Houghton to visit Marsabit District. Erik Barnett, a member of the AIM committee, described their first Sunday at Marsabit:

We spent Sunday at Marsabit [Town], having a quiet restful day, joining in the Church Service at the B.C.M.S. Chapel with the Rev. Steven Houghton (sic). He had asked Paul Barnett [AIM] to preach, the message being interpreted from Swahili into Boran. There were approximately 100 at the service, the spirit of the meeting was very good. A Holy Communion Service followed the preaching service, led by the Rev. Steven Houghton. After lunch and a rest, we had tea with Steven and discussed plans for the trip starting the following day. Because of Steve’s illness he had not yet had the opportunity of fully discussing the plans with the new District Commissioner, Mr. Dale, who had come to Marsabit; but that evening he had the opportunity of speaking to Mr. Dale and discussing matters with him.⁴⁹

The majority of the trip was spent driving across lowlands around Marsabit Mountain, in order to observe and discuss the various peoples who lived in the region and the opportunities for opening new mission work. In their report, the committee concluded that the Boran, Burji, and Samburu were “being reached” by the BCMS stations at Marsabit, Wamba, and Maralal. The Boran and the Somalis to the north of Marsabit, most of whom were Muslim, were possibly interested in medical work, but ecclesial work was reportedly impossible.

⁴⁹ “Unreached Areas Committee Trip,” June 22-30, 1962, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/4, Billy Graham Center Archives.

However, the committee did see promise in organizing work amongst the Rendille: “The Rendilli (sic) tribe have no Christian witness. In collaboration with the B.C.M.S., and with the necessary approval of Government, these people could receive a Christian witness.”⁵⁰ By 1965 AIM had begun to raise funds specifically for mission work in Rendille territory, and made numerous trips to the region to negotiate with the government and the Rendille people about where stations could be built.

Over the next two years AIM missionaries opened new stations at Loglogo and Gatab. This work around Marsabit was directed by two families: Paul and Betty Lou Teasdale, and Earl and Esther Andersen along with two of their adult sons, Howard and Herbert. This small group of missionaries held a pragmatic view of missionary work and generally placed more confidence in their own experiences than in any conceptual approaches to missions or development. The Teasdales and the Andersens had an outlook that was similar to the paternalistic authoritarianism of early colonial administrators in the NFD. They generally viewed rationalist planning as impractical and the result of a bureaucracy that did not actually live in the NFD.⁵¹

Earl and Esther were the oldest, and both were raised in Kenya as the children of missionaries. Earl’s parents were AIM missionaries, and he was born in Kijabe (western Kenya) in 1913. He was sent to the US for high school and bible college, but when his father became ill five years later, he returned to Kenya. His father died within a few months, and Earl stayed with his family and continued his father’s work. In 1935 he was formally accepted as an AIM missionary.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ See Chapter 1.

Esther came from a line of missionaries. Her grandfather served with the Friends Mission in Jamaica, as well as her parents. Esther was born in Jamaica in 1909, but moved to Kenya when she was three, where her parents continued to work with the Friends Mission in western Kenya. Like Earl, she returned to the US for schooling, and eventually applied to be a missionary with the American Friends Board in order to work with her father. According to Esther, “They requested that I withdraw my application, saying they were accepting no new candidates. However it was very evident that they were not desirous of enlisting any more ‘fundamentalists.’”⁵² Despite the rejection, she returned to Kenya to help her father, and was soon appointed a teacher at AIM’s Rift Valley Academy. It’s not clear how Earl and Esther met, but when they were engaged they both applied to be AIM missionaries, and were assigned to the Litein station, near Kericho in western Kenya. Their three sons, Herbert, Willard, and Howard, would become fourth generation missionaries, and third generation AIM missionaries. In 1958, just a few years prior to moving to Loglogo, Earl earned his certification in aviation mechanics, which would greatly aid AIM work in Kenya’s desert frontier.

Paul and Betty Lou Teasdale also grew up in East Africa as the children of AIM missionaries. Paul grew up in Kenya’s central province, among the Kikuyu, and Betty Lou was raised in the Congo. They met while at Wheaton College near Chicago, and were accepted as AIM missionaries in 1959. After language training they were stationed in Congo. They were transferred to Kenya in 1962, after the violence in Congo resulted

⁵² Esther Andersen, AIM Application, N.D, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/40/10, Billy Graham Center Archives..

in the execution of missionaries. After a short time in Central Province they were assigned to a station in Turkana, and worked with the fishing scheme on Lake Turkana.⁵³

These family pedigrees meant that AIM missionaries in Marsabit strongly identified as missionaries. This identity, when combined with a common sense Biblicism, resulted in a common missionary culture that valued action over introspection and which placed more trust in experience than in the advice or direction of committees and mission theorists. They also had an affinity for technical skills, which they sought to integrate into their evangelical mission work. Growing up on mission stations, it is likely that they had observed the value of accompanying preaching with efforts at modernization and meeting physical needs.

In 1966 Earl and Esther Andersen moved to Marsabit, and were given use of a house by the BCMS.⁵⁴ Like the missionaries before them, the Andersens lived on the mountain, and struggled to find a way to evangelize the nomadic camel herding population who lived in the lowlands. Though modern vehicles made traveling in the lowlands easier than in the past, the mid-sixties were the height of the Shifta War, and the regular movements of the Rendille were disrupted. Despite these difficulties, AIM missionaries were able to establish two mission stations in the Marsabit District: one at Loglogo and the other at Gatab.

Loglogo was the first station to be opened, and it was largely the work of Earl and Esther Andersen. The Andersens made use of the same strategy that AIM found

⁵³ Paul and Betty Lou Teasdale, interview.

⁵⁴ Meeting Minutes, Unreached Areas Committee, November 29, 1965; Meeting Minutes, Unreached Areas Committee, July 18, 1966, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/4, Billy Graham Center Archives. AIM eventually purchased the house and plot of land from the BCMS for 10,000 kShs (See Northern Area Committee Meeting notes, July 11, 1966, CN081/34/9).

productive in Turkana, which was to build a mission station near a permanent source of water, and set up a school and a dispensary to attract the population. Permanent sources of water were particularly difficult to come by in the lowlands, but the Andersens were able to make use of a government made borehole along the main road from Marsabit to Nairobi. The borehole, called Loglogo, was drilled in 1952 as part of the districts grazing scheme.⁵⁵ But as a result of overgrazing, in 1962 the government decided to close both the borehole and the trading center that had developed around it for a minimum of two years.⁵⁶ In 1965 the Andersens obtained permission to open a mission station at Loglogo, which had recently been re-opened as part of the government's anti-Shifta strategy. The Andersens began work in the lowlands at a forced settlement for Rendille and Samburu pastoralists and a station for Kenyan troops.

Within the encampment, the Andersens first attracted an "audience" by paying them wages. To build the mission station the Andersens hired laborers from the surrounding area (presumably Samburu and Rendille), and insisted that these workers attend the morning and evening prayer meetings. Earl Andersen described the content of these prayer meetings:

[each] session was a half hour of song, Bible lesson and prayer for safety, which was very meaningful in time of danger. Since this took time out of their work period the workmen felt initially that they were paid to attend. However this attitude soon changed as they became interested in the Word. ...The teaching in the sessions covered the necessity for salvation, the nature of God and His relation to the Lord Jesus, how to be saved, and

⁵⁵ NFP Annual Report, 1953, p. 42, PC/NFD/1/1/10, KNA; Northern Province Annual Report, 1960, p. 29, PC/NFD/1/1/12, KNA.

⁵⁶ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1962, p. 17, PC/EST/2/3, KNA: "The M.O.W. continue to maintain and run Log Loggo. The area around Log Loggo has become a dust bowl. It is now necessary to close the trading centre and borehole for a period of not less than 2 years."

how to maintain a Christian life through the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Teaching was by interpretation from Swahili into Rendile.⁵⁷

There is no other record of these meetings, so it is difficult to tell what the Samburu and Rendille workers thought of these sessions. Andersen does grant that there were various motivations for attending the prayer meetings, which were not always in line with missionary intentions. While Andersen describes them as “interested in the Word,” it is more telling that none of them were baptized.⁵⁸

By June 1966 the workers had built a school with two classrooms and an office and a store, and two small houses for teachers.⁵⁹ According to a 1967 progress report,

[Loglogo] [h]as been under development for 1 year and 6 months. There are 6 ready for baptism. The boarding school has standards 1 and 2 with 56 attending. A girls dorm is urgently needed as well as cooking facilities for the school. A permanent dwelling for missionaries is needed before the next school year as the present house is required for the additional teachers. The medical work is averaging over 150 treatments per day. Qualified personnel is needed for the dispensary. This is the largest existing Renilli [sic] population center.⁶⁰

While the first buildings were being built in Loglogo, AIM was also laying plans to open a second mission station in Samburu territory at Gatab. Paul and Betty Lou Teasdale had spent two years working in famine camps among the Turkana, and went on furlough in 1965, expecting to return to the Kalokol fishing scheme on Lake Turkana.

Upon returning to Kenya AIM leadership informed the Teasdales that their assignment

⁵⁷ Andersen, “Evangelism in Turkana,” Paper presented at International Evangelical Conference, Wheaton, Illinois, 1983, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/68/13, Billy Graham Center Archives.

⁵⁸ My assumption that no workers were baptized is based on the fact that the Andersens never did not mention it, and I believe it is safe to assume they would have mentioned this, as they are typically quick to write about conversions/baptisms.

⁵⁹ Minutes, Unreached Areas Committee, July 18, 1966, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/4, Billy Graham Center Archives.

⁶⁰ Minutes, Northern Area - East Rudolf Sub-Committee, June 2, 1967, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/9, Billy Graham Center Archives.

had changed, and that they were being sent to Gatab to open a new station.⁶¹ In the foothills west of Marsabit, Gatab had a permanent water source, and like Loglogo, was seen as both a gathering place for Rendille and Samburu families and a place where missionaries could setup permanent residence.

While Loglogo was located along the main road from Isiolo to Marsabit, Gatab was initially impossible to reach by land rover or plane. So AIM's first work was to demarcate an airstrip and to fund the construction of a twelve-mile road to the area.⁶² In 1966 AIM was formally granted twenty acres at Gatab, and soon began the process of constructing their mission station:

A permanent guest house has been started, and it is hoped to have this completed soon. A 5-ton lorry has been bought for the station. The cement mixer and stone crusher have been repaired and put into use. Sunday services average 75 and the attitude of the people is very favourable. Medical work is around 35 with large variations. It is anticipated that only permanent buildings will be put up from now on. More road work is needed when funds are available. Steps need to be taken to get aid for [the] Gatab school. Appreciation is recorded for the help given by Dr. Propst and the others in the installation of the windmill electric plant; and to Kijabe for help in acquiring the stone crusher, cement mixer and various things.⁶³

Gatab was also in disputed territory, and was the site of frequent clashes between Boran and Samburu cattle herders. Part of the Teasdale's role would be opening up the territory to Samburu, and protecting against Boran encroachment. The Teasdale's were deeply affected by their experience with famine camps in Turkana. At Gatab, they

⁶¹ Paul Teasdale attributes this reassignment as a result of disagreements and a falling out with Dick Anderson. It's unclear the exact nature of this disagreement, though a few comments seem to indicate it may be related to the controversy surrounding the charismatic renewal movement in evangelical circles. Dick Anderson was very much influenced by the Christian spiritualism advanced at the Keswick conferences. Paul Teasdale's simple explanation was that Anderson thought they "preached too much bible." Paul and Betty Lou Teasdale, interview.

⁶² Minutes, Unreached Areas Committee, July 7, 1966, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/4, Billy Graham Center Archives.

⁶³ Meeting minutes, Northern Area, East Rudolf Sub-Committee, July 2, 1967, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/9, Billy Graham Center Archives.

combined their evangelical theology and technical pragmatism to modernize pastoralists in a way that prevented the social and moral decay they observed in Turkana. As Paul Teasdale put it, “But progress means the semi-destruction of traditional values and that can be devastating. I’ve seen it—drunkenness, child neglect, dereliction. You have to substitute a good moral code.”⁶⁴

The Teasdales were not alone in their concern about the effects of modernization on the Rendille, Gabra, and other communities in the frontier region. Upon the occasion of national independence, Steven Houghton, BCMS missionary at Marsabit, cautioned BCMS supporters that political independence would fail to bring true freedom to the residents of Marsabit and Northern Kenya. Houghton argued that while the nation was now politically free, this freedom did not change the other types of “bondage” that were evident in the region: illiteracy, disease, poverty and malnutrition, and spiritual poverty. Houghton wrote:

But if Kenya is free politically, what shall we say about some of the other forms of bondage in the country? The first is that of ignorance. The new Marsabit District covers 37,000 square miles—three-quarters the size of England. But its inhabitants are only some 35,000! Of these, less than 10 per cent. (sic) can read and write, and less than two per cent. are at school at the moment. No one from the area has yet had any higher education, and only two young men have passed School Certificate. The vast majority have never been outside their own tribal area and cannot speak either of Kenya’s lingua francas—Swahili and English. ...Because of these forms of bondage, political freedom, however valuable in itself, will prove unsatisfying, and fail to liberate.⁶⁵

Houghton also set out a specific course of action for BCMS work on Marsabit to combat these forms of bondage, which combined religious instruction, evangelism, medical work, and education. Specifically, Houghton sought to build a community center in

⁶⁴ “Down-to-Earth Missionary Paul Teasdale Brings an Unlikely Tool to His Calling in Tribal Africa,” *International Harvest World*, 1970, 4.

⁶⁵ “Free Indeed,” *Mission*, March 1964, 4.

Marsabit Township and to increase medical safari work.⁶⁶ The BCMS was in fact no longer involved with education at Marsabit, and in the future their largest contribution was to supply the government with medical doctors.

The Northern Frontier Medical Mission

The regular use of small aircraft for travel across the frontier was transformative both for missionary and medical work in the 1960s. In 1965, BCMS missionaries at Marsabit first began to use small planes to make monthly visits to different population centers in the lowlands.⁶⁷ Based on the new mobility provided by regular access to these planes and the growing number of airstrips throughout the region, the BCMS' Dr. Peter Cox began to organize a cooperative of missionary doctors called the Northern Frontier Medical Mission.

Dr. Cox applied to serve as a "medical missionary" with the BCMS after his service in WWII. In 1957, after the BCMS made an agreement with the government of Uganda, he and his family were stationed among the Pokot peoples in the arid northeastern region of Uganda.⁶⁸ By the early 1960s, Cox had established relationships with the other medical missionaries working across Northern Kenya. Dr. Graham Fraser and his wife Janet were BCMS missionaries stationed on Marsabit, while Dr. Dick

⁶⁶ Ibid. Houghton listed out seven specific ways the BCMS should work at Marsabit: "1. Build a Community Centre in Marsabit Township, for imparting Christian teaching, in the widest sense, to all who will come; we already have the site; 2. Build up medical safari work under Dr. Graham Fraser, who joined us in 1963; 3. Build two or more simple churches where there has never been more than occasional Christian Witness before, at the request of the partly evangelized people; 4. Continue primary and follow-up evangelism and teaching over a wide area; 5. Start simple courses of teaching and training, even before the Community Centre is built, for various groups, with the special aim of training leaders; 6. Continue to sell simple reading and writing materials, and Christian literature, cheaply; 7. Continue, as a priority, to translate the New Testament into Boran."

⁶⁷ "Kenya – Famine and Feast," *Mission*, May/June 1966, 11.

⁶⁸ "Condolences, Dr. Peter Cox (1957-79)," no date, Collection: Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society: MS47 Box 24, Special Collections, University of Birmingham.

Anderson and his wife Joan were AIM missionaries working in the Turkana region. The nature of medical missionary work in Northern Kenya and northeastern Uganda was characterized by a common set of circumstances: arid conditions, poor infrastructure, and scattered nomadic populations. These, combined with the shared values of the evangelical mission organizations, led Dr. Cox to organize the Northern Frontier Medical Mission in 1966.

The NFMM was designed to be a cooperative venture among evangelical missions, such as BCMS and AIM, as well as Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF), but would also include the Kenya government and the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF), who provided the East African Flying Doctor Service. At the start of the new venture, the BCMS reported:

One of the most exciting and imaginative developments of the year was the working out of a plan for medical outreach in the Northern Frontier District. This is an area occupying almost a third of the country, made up largely of desert and arid bush, and peopled by various nomadic tribes. BCMS and other missionaries have been at work in this area for some years, but there have been many difficulties. The vast distances have meant that travel by Land-rover, when it was possible, was tiring and time-consuming. The nomadic nature of the many tribespeople has made continuous contact with individuals almost impossible. A way through these difficulties has, we believe, been found.⁶⁹

Over the next year or so, the idea of the NFMM evolved into one that would also be highly cooperative with and dependent upon the Kenya government. What started as an organization for cooperation between mission organizations, began to function as medical staffing agreement between church, mission, and the state.

In 1968 Dr. Cox was appointed the Medical Officer of Health for the NFD, and he and his wife Liza moved to Marsabit to take up their government position. Early on Dr.

⁶⁹ "Change and Advance," *Mission*, May/June 1967, 5.

Cox wrote, “It seems strange being a ‘Government Doctor’ after ten years as a ‘Mission Doctor’—yet I am finding that when one gets down to the job, the differences are slight, and the missionary on government work has as much opportunity as his ‘pure-bred’ colleague.”⁷⁰ The main difference was that the state now paid his salary, and drove a government vehicle rather than a mission vehicle.

Dr. Cox’s appointment was intended to serve as a model for the NFMM, which would supply doctors and medical personnel to staff the facilities throughout Northern Kenya, but these workers would be government employees on the government payroll. Cox was hopeful that mission organizations would get what they wanted: Christian influence in the region, and that the result would be better medical care for various peoples of the NFD. As the founder of the NFMM, Cox was also put in the role of promoter, as he wrote various mission organizations, including his own: “Our relationship with government has been most interesting; we have been welcomed and, above all, we are known as ‘missionaries’, although acting as full Medical Officers of Health on full government pay and allowances.”⁷¹

In 1969, the NFMM was seeking to staff nine government hospitals in Northern Kenya and Dr. Cox wrote optimistically of the future:

Diocese, Government, and Mission all unite to operate the Northern Frontier Medical Mission. Marsabit, Maralal, and Kapenguria, are three hospitals at which BCMS missionaries were engaged during the year, but there is need for several more doctors. There are obvious difficulties in

⁷⁰ “MOH of the NFD,” *Mission*, Jan/Feb 1969, 5.

⁷¹ “A New Approach,” *Mission*, May/June 1969, 7-8. “So we approached the Ministry of Health and proposed (in effect) that we would be prepared to provide Christian doctors for the hospitals in remote areas, and keep them manned, if we could have certain assurances regarding posting and certain powers—with full consultation, of course. The Ministry was keen on the idea, and sufficiently far-sighted to allow us these privileges and demand that we start—at once [bold]. It was plain that here was an excellent opportunity for Christian doctors who did not want to devote a lifetime to service abroad, or who were not yet sure of God’s calling to years in an unknown situation, and it was on this potential that we based our hopes.”

such a scheme, but the possibilities it opens up and the convenience provided by Missionary Aviation Fellowship and African Medical Research Foundation planes, are something undreamed of ten years ago. Doctors can be engaged on a short-term basis of two-year contracts with salaries provided by Government, or can serve in NFMM as full missionaries of the Society. One thing has been made abundantly clear, nothing else can reach as many individuals of the nomadic tribes as medical services.⁷²

By the end of the decade, the government seemed to share in the optimism regarding Northern Kenya's future. In his 1969 annual report, the Marsabit district officer wrote there was a "new era of development and progress in this district." He also praised the efforts of the district's missionaries: "The work of the missionaries in this district must be commended. Perhaps without the aid of the Missionaries[,] particularly the Catholic, some remote areas of this district would have remained without schools and hospitals for many years. These missionaries have erected magnificent buildings for schools and hospitals in several remote areas of the district. Whatever other motives they may have in the district their work should be encouraged and protected."⁷³

Harambee, Self-help, & Development

By the end of the 1960s, the handful of missionaries in Marsabit District were much more integrated into the lives of the Gabra, Samburu, and Rendille pastoralists than they had been a decade earlier. Catholic, AIM, and BCMS missionaries built new roads, landing strips, schools, and health clinics throughout Marsabit District. They supplied teachers and doctors, and regularly served as advocates on behalf of the region's pastoralist communities. The critical role missionaries played in the social and political infrastructure of Northern Kenya would only increase in the coming decades, as the national government failed to deliver on promises of development.

⁷² "Kenya – Approached Differently," *Mission*, July/August 1969, 7.

⁷³ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1969, p. 18, PC/EST/2/3/12, KNA.

Upon national independence, Jomo Kenyatta famously relied upon the concept of Harambee as the rallying cry for Kenyan unity. Most literally translated as “pull together,” Kenyatta touted harambee as a way for Kenyan’s to prioritize national unity over ethnic divisions, to consider nation building a personal responsibility, and to reject the unsavory aspects of aid from foreign governments. On Kenyan Independence Day in 1963, Kenyatta told the immense crowd,

My friends we are now an independent nation, and our destiny is henceforward in our own hands. I call on every Kenyan to join me today in this great adventure of nation building. In the spirit of HARAMBEE, let us all work together so to mould our country that it will set an example to the world in progress, toleration and high endeavour. ...All things we must do together. You and I must work together to develop our country, to get education for our children, to have doctors, to build roads, to improve or provide all day-to-day essentials. This should be our work, in the spirit that I am going to ask you to echo, to shout aloud, to shatter the foundations of the past with the strength of our new purpose...HARAMBEE.⁷⁴

The rallying cry of Harambee, and the numerous government sponsored Harambee projects, also served as a political patronage system to strengthen Kenyatta’s control of his party and the nation. While at the same time, Kenyatta’s government could excuse itself from investing in larger and more expensive development and infrastructure projects.

M.A.H. Wallis has drawn the connections between the colonial practice of “community development” and Harambee. Like Harambee, community development was first touted as a way “to promote better living for the whole community with the

⁷⁴ Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, *Suffering without Bitterness: The Founding of the Kenya Nation* (Nairobi: East African Publ. House, 1968), 217; cited in M. A. H. Wallis, *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Rural Communities in Kenya*, Manchester Papers on Development,; Issue No. 6; Variation: Manchester Papers on Development ;; Issue No. 6. (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1982), 71–72.

active participation, and if possible on the initiative of the community.”⁷⁵ The Colonial Office found that community development carried with it political and economic benefits, and relied on it as a frequent tactic throughout the 50s and 60s.

First, community development acted as a state sponsored mechanism to channel and control political resistance. In Kenya, the response to the Mau Mau uprising relied upon military force *and* a renewed emphasis on community development. Wallis refers to community development as part of the British “counterinsurgency” efforts in post-Mau Mau Kenya. The creation of youth groups, women’s groups, and various community councils created avenues for organizing and airing grievances, but were led by individuals who benefitted from cooperation with the colonial government. In 1950s Kenya, community development was designed to curb the influence of violent resisters, and replace them with those who were willing to work within the colonial system.

Second, both community development and Harambee were conservative elements of change, encouraging small-scale projects that needed broad community support to succeed. As conservative means to development, both community development and Harambee relied on the existing social structures, rather than remaking them.

Community development, as a tool of colonial rule, “was seen as part of the general need to achieve development whilst softening the traumas of rapid social change.”⁷⁶ The Colonial Office had learned that development “traumas” could cost as much or more (financially and politically) than the social issues they intended improve.

Third, community development was cheap. This was particularly expedient for the Colonial Office immediately following World War II.

⁷⁵ Colonial Office, *Community Development: A Handbook*, 1960, 2. Cited in Wallis, *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Rural Communities in Kenya*, 1.

⁷⁶ Wallis, *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Rural Communities in Kenya*, 4.

In a similar way, Kenyatta was able to use Harambee to mitigate the expectations Kenyans placed on their new nation, and on the nation's financial resources. The spirit of Harambee encouraged Kenyans to resolve issues of education, health, and infrastructure by first looking to themselves and to their community.

As the 1960s came to a close, many Kenyans began to lose faith both in Kenyatta and the benefits of Harambee. Often, communities were able to raise funds to build a school or rural hospital, but then were unable to pay for staff and regular upkeep. Like most elements of Kenyan society, Harambee was made to bolster the single party dominance of KANU, and operated within the Kikuyu dominated patronage system.

According to Daniel Branch, the state's unwillingness to become involved in larger scale development had profound consequences for private organizations working in Kenya: "Put simply, Kenyatta's policy of 'development on the cheap'—dressed up in the rhetorical finery of self-help—placed too great a responsibility on private individuals and organisations for the delivery and management of key public goods."⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Branch, *Kenya*, 98.

Chapter 5

Drought, Desertification, & Development

“In many countries the Church has been established and has a major voice in the sort of help required. Pastoral and evangelistic workers will not be as necessary as before; the need will be for those with specialist training.”
- BCMS Secretary, 1972¹

“So we have an interplay here where we find we are in the center of rather conflicting goal. On the one hand, we have the church development side; on another, we have government and what they perceive as development; and finally, we have the donor NGOs which want development as they perceive it”
- Dilly Anderson, AIM Missionary²

After the turmoil of the Shifta conflict and drought of the 1960s, many hoped the new decade would bring greater stability to Northern Kenya, and greater integration into the national economy. The most tangible, and symbolic, evidence of this new season of development was the construction of the Nairobi-Addis Ababa highway. By 1970 the road reached Loglogo, with plans to run through Marsabit on to Moyale. According to the DC, “The progress being made in construction of the Addis/Nairobi road has astounded the onlookers. Some optimists think the road would be in Marsabit by next June instead of October 1970 as scheduled. Marsabit will then no longer be cut off from the rest of the country when it rains.”³ Additionally, a new hospital and new district headquarters were under construction in Marsabit and were completed in 1972.

Marsabit also drew international attention in the early 70s because of its most famous resident, Ahmed the elephant. Ahmed first came to the attention of the Marsabit

¹ Canon Alan Neech, “Change Under God,” *Mission*, Autumn 1972, 11.

² Paul W. Robinson, *An Assessment of the Hurri Hills Grazing Ecosystem Project*, August 1988, p. 51, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/105/6, Billy Graham Center Archives.

³ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1969, p. 16-17, PC/EST/2/3/12, KNA.

forest service in the 1960s, and was reputed to have the largest tusks in all of Africa. Observers noted that Ahmed's tusks were so long that he would rest them on the ground while still standing. Another popular story about Ahmed claimed that his tusks were so large and so closed to the ground, it was impossible for him to walk uphill without catching his tusks in the ground. Instead, he had to walk backwards if we wanted to go uphill. The soaring price of ivory led to a marked increase in poaching, and Ahmed became the symbol of an international movement to protect elephants from poachers. In 1970, Ahmed was the subject of two documentaries that aired on network television in America, as well as a French documentary. Taking cues from the media attention, students in Kenya's primary schools participated in a letter writing campaign to President Kenyatta, asking for the protection of the giant-tusked Ahmed. In response, Kenyatta declared Ahmed a national monument, and assigned armed guards to provide 24-hour surveillance and protection of Ahmed.⁴

Ahmed's international fame, along with new infrastructure, a decline in political unrest, and a growing tourism industry all pointed to a period of greater economic and social integration for Marsabit's residents. But by the time Marsabit and the rest of Northern Kenya moved towards integration with the nation in the 1970s, it was clear that Kenyatta's promises of a new brand of African socialism had devolved into a political system based on patronage. This patronage system was based on ethnicity, and it was the Kikuyu, and Kenyatta's own Kiambu Kikuyu who benefited most from the nation's

⁴ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1970, p. 13, PC/EST/2/3/12, KNA. John Heminway, "Opinion: Killing of Great Tusker in Kenya Recalls Lesson From the Past," June 19, 2014, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/06/140619-satao-tusker-tsavo-kenya-ahmed-elephant-poaching/>. Ahmed died of natural causes in 1974. In his death, his guards reported that they found his body leaning against a tree with his head supported by his great tusks. Kenyatta ordered his body to be preserved, and a statue of Ahmed along with his skeleton are displayed at the Nairobi National Museum. After his death his tusks were weighed, and were not in fact the largest in the world. It turned out that Ahmed was fairly short for an elephant, which created an illusion that his tusks were larger.

resources. Northern Kenyan's were certainly not alone in being passed over by national development—even many Kikuyu Mau Mau veterans protested against the redistribution of Kenya's land and resources after independence.⁵ But the legacy of neglect in Northern Kenya meant that the region's population would experience harsh circumstances resulting from population growth and drought, and came to depend upon international and non-government sources for disaster relief and development.

From 1969 to 1976 Marsabit District experienced an eight-year drought.⁶ The severity of the drought varied from year to year, and within the district, but the overall effect was a contraction of the region's lowland resources. Large numbers of livestock died and many pastoralists were impoverished. One result of the drought was a new level of pastoralist dependence upon the church and missionary organizations in Marsabit, who helped organize food distribution when famine accompanied drought. The most destitute families and individuals set up camp around churches and mission compounds, presenting both new problems and opportunities for the region's Catholic and Protestant missionaries. The drought in Marsabit was considered part of a larger trend in “desertification” across the Sahelian belt, which led to widespread famine conditions that received international attention. During the last half of the 1970s, the UN funded a million dollar development project centered at Marsabit. The Integrated Project in Arid Lands (IPAL) lasted for ten years and brought a new level of scientific research and bureaucracy to Marsabit. The project's goal was to protect against environmental degradation through livestock management and marketing. In effect, it represented a

⁵ Branch, *Kenya*, 89–94.

⁶ K. A. Edwards, C. R. Field, and I. G. G. Hogg, *A Preliminary Analysis of Climatological Data from the Marsabit District of Northern Kenya*, 6–8.

significant effort to preserve a more modern but sustainable pastoralist economy, but the failure of the project led many to conclude that unless pastoralists found new livelihoods they would continue to live in poverty.

Population growth was also a leading factor in the contraction of resources in Marsabit in the 70s, and heightened the consequences of drought. Like all of Kenya, Marsabit experienced significant population growth after independence as a result of medical developments leading to a decline in infant mortality rates and an increase in life expectancy. A civil war and revolution in neighboring Ethiopia created additional population pressures on Marsabit, as refugees fled south into Northern Kenya. In 1969, the government recorded a population of 51,581 for Marsabit District. By 1979 the number of people living in the district had increased by nearly 90 percent, to 96,216. The greatest pressures were placed on the mountain's resources, as the mountain population increased from 6,635 to 17,768. Over half of the mountain's population, roughly 9,000, lived in Marsabit Town.⁷

AIM and Catholic missionaries, who came to Marsabit to evangelize the nomadic population, were confronted by a series of new problems arising from the prolonged settlement of pastoralists who previously relied on seasonal migration to sustain their economy. Missionaries moved even further beyond their religious expertise, and created their own development initiatives, and participated in efforts initiated by the state and international development organizations. Missionaries served as important channels of resources to pastoralists, and as mediators between the state, international donors, and the local population.

⁷ Witsenburg and Roba, *Surviving Pastoral Decline*, 138–140.

For AIM missionaries in particular, participation in and contribution to development projects became a new justification for missionary presence in Northern Kenya. The tremendous growth of the AIC church meant that Kenyan Christians could now take over the traditional role of missionaries: proclaiming the message of salvation through Jesus Christ and forming Christian communities. AIM missionaries increasingly relied on their technical expertise, access to wealth, and integration into the development bureaucracy to justify their work in Northern Kenya. This was also true for BCMS missionaries, but they chose to focus their declining resources elsewhere in Kenya.

BCMS Decline

From the inception of its missionary work at Marsabit, the BCMS struggled to maintain a vigorous presence in the area, and colonial administrators regularly threatened to withdraw permission to work in the NFD if the mission did not fulfill its commitment to building and maintaining schools, health centers, and a doctor. While AIM and Catholic missions were strengthened in the 1970s, BCMS presence declined and eventually the small Anglican mission society decided to focus its resources on other areas in Kenya. Part of the problem for the BCMS was the financial situation in Britain. In 1972 the BCMS secretary wrote to supporters, describing the situation:

Devaluation and inflation have been twin difficulties in this last decade. Everywhere the cost of Christian work has increased. Support for BCMS has shown a steady growth and has come from the magnificent response of hundreds of sacrificial, prayerful donors. But the fact is that the rate of growth has not kept up with increased costs. This has meant that the total number of missionaries sent out has not increased but has rather gone down.⁸

⁸ Canon Alan Neech, "Change Under God," *Mission*, Autumn 1972, 11.

As the BCMS' resources dwindled, the organization also reinforced the need for missionaries with technical skill and specialist knowledge. Like other mission agencies throughout Kenya and Africa, the BCMS sought to redefine its purpose in light of national independence, the growth of African independent churches, and calls for the "Africanization" of leadership in Anglican churches and dioceses. The same 1972 letter from the BCMS secretary that explained the financial straits of the organization also described the changes taking place in the religious landscape of the mission field. One major area of change was a result of the growth of the church: "In many countries the Church has been established and has a major voice in the sort of help required. Pastoral and evangelistic workers will not be as necessary as before; the need will be for those with specialist training."⁹

Doctors were among those missionaries with "specialist training," and BCMS medical work at Marsabit is illustrative of some of these changes that took place in missionary work over the decade. Dr. Peter Cox, who helped found the Northern Frontier Medical Mission in the 1960s, had moved to Marsabit in 1968 as the government medical officer. While working among the Pokot he had contracted Schistosomiasis (a parasitic infection) and an unknown viral infection. After recovering in a Kampala hospital, doctors recommended a change in climate, and the BCMS made plans to transfer the Coxes to the cooler climate of Marsabit. After two years in Marsabit the Coxes went on home leave in 1970, and upon returning to Kenya were allowed to return to their work among the Pokot—though this time in Kapenguria, on the Kenyan side of the border.¹⁰ Between 1972 and 1976 BCMS sent two doctors to Marsabit, the first

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Webster, *The Shimmering Heat*, 33–37.

served for two years, the second for three years.¹¹ The last of these doctors was David Webster, the son of Eric and Ruby Webster who founded the BCMS mission at Marsabit. Dr. Webster, his wife Rosemary, and their two sons moved to Marsabit in December 1973. Webster continued the working arrangement organized by the NFMM: ordained and sent as a BCMS missionary, but employed full-time as the district's Medical Officer of Health (MOH). He was paid a salary by the Kenyan government, which was supplemented by grants from the British Overseas Development Administration.¹²

Webster has written a memoir about his time as a missionary doctor in East Africa, and I was also able to interview him over the phone. There are certainly some instances of his experience that were unique, but in general they give a much fuller picture of the work the BCMS doctors were doing in Marsabit during the 60s and 70s. As MOH, his primary task was to run the newly constructed hospital and oversee the government appointed medical staff of 85 men and women. A portion of his medical work involved treating patients the same way BCMS nurses had done in colonial days. But as MOH, he was also required to conduct post-mortems to establish a cause of death on suspicious cases, to inspect the local prison for to ensure adequate conditions, and to witness the corporal punishment of prison inmates.¹³

¹¹ "In charge now at Marsabit Hospital are Dr. Ralph and Mrs. Ceri Settatee. In January, only a month after they wedding, they flew to East Africa to work with the Northern Frontier Medical Mission as BCMS associates. The NFMM aims to supply Christian doctors for the scattered government hospitals of Northern Kenya. After gaining experience at the hospital at Nyeri, Ralph and Ceri joined Peter and Liza Cox at Marsabit. When the Coxes return to Kenya at the end of September they expect to work in the hospital at Kapenguria in the Pokot area—within striking distance of the hospital they pioneered at Amudat, where the Pokot language is used." *Mission*, Autumn 1972 (Vol. 9, No. 4), 15.

¹² Webster, *The Shimmering Heat*, 133–134.

¹³ "My job was to examine the prisoners before the beating, and to pronounce if they were fit enough for it. If they were they would be strapped to a frame in a spread-eagled position, a wet cloth placed over their buttocks (to prevent cutting of the skin), and the due number of strokes (usually twenty or thirty) applied with a cane by a burly prison officer. My role was to witness and count the strokes, and finally to examine the prisoner again." *The Shimmering Heat*, 141.

Webster's missionary work did not involve any preaching or church work, but consisted of applying his medical skills to the best of his ability, and being a good government employee. Webster, along with Dr. Cox and other BCMS medical missionaries regularly wrote articles for BCMS publications to explain their dual role as missionary and government employee. In these articles they often defended themselves against hypothetical challenges that missionaries should focus on evangelism and works—the types of challenges they might have heard from BCMS' founders. In an article titled "Why we serve," Webster argued that meeting the physical needs of those in need was a Christian imperative, just as evangelism was:

Some would say...that the sicknesses, and epidemics and starvation of people overseas are not our concern. Our concern, they say, is purely for men's souls and their salvation. Medical work, if carried out at all, should be seen as purely a means to this end—one method of evangelism. Yet, as we read the Gospels, we cannot help being struck by Jesus' compassion for anyone in need—He cared about them for their own sake, and did something for them simply because they needed His help, and had asked for it. And that, the 'Good Works' brigade would say, is all that medical missionary work is about—to do good, to help those in need, to try to emulate Jesus. So we have the two extremes of motivation. ...[But] Doctors don't save lives; they merely prolong them. Man's greatest need is of a solution to his eternal disease, sin. And unless our medical work takes account of that, it is as though we are treating a man for his corn and ignoring his cancer. ...So service and evangelism are both motives, with the former perhaps quite unconsciously giving effectiveness to the latter. For service, missionary medical work must be medically effective. For evangelism, it must be spiritually alive.¹⁴

The NFMM itself never grew beyond supplying three doctors for government positions, but it did create an important precedent for mutual dependence and cooperation between a mission organization and government. The Websters returned to England in

¹⁴ David Webster, "Why we serve," *Mission*, September/October 1971. See also Peter Cox, "Government Missionary or Missionary Medical Officer?" *Mission*, Winter 1973.

1976, and BCMS records state that they supplied an “African doctor,” of which there is little additional information.¹⁵

The most constant BCMS presence during this period of transition was that of Stephen and Eve Houghton. Stephen served as a minister in the Diocese of Mt. Kenya, and spent most of his time translating the New Testament into Boran, and training other members of the diocese. In 1976, the new Diocese of Mt. Kenya East was created, which despite its name, was inclusive of the Marsabit churches. The Kenyan Rev. David Gitari was appointed bishop, and Marsabit church work was handed over to Manasses Maina, who was appointed the vicar of Marsabit in 1977. Andrew Adano, a Gabra evangelist, was ordained in 1975.¹⁶ BCMS and Anglican leaders viewed the creation of the new diocese and the appointment of Kenyan ministers as a triumph of missionary work and a successful implementation the process of Africanization within the church.

After 1975, the Houghtons returned to Marsabit briefly, but were then transferred to Moyale. They continued to devote time to translation, working on a new Boran prayer book, and educating and training African priests. BCMS missionaries would rely more and more on their technical training and specialized knowledge to justify the need for British missionaries, but after the middle of the decade they did not send any staff to Marsabit. Instead they focused on medical and agricultural work among the Pokot in Kapenguria, and translation and theological training elsewhere. BCMS missionaries

¹⁵ Dr. Webster’s explanation for why the BCMS did not send another doctor after he left was that it was likely that the government was able to find a Kenyan doctor. He believes that there was a brief window after national independence where the supply of Kenyan doctors was low enough that none of them had to fill the least preferable positions—such as the position at Marsabit. In his memoir and in my interview with him, Dr. Webster emphasized that for down-country Kenyans, Marsabit was often seen as a backwater appointment, and was even used as a punishment for employees in the Ministry of Health. “The remoter hospitals, such as Marsabit, were sometimes a dumping ground, a disciplinary posting, for staff who had misbehaved themselves elsewhere.” David Webster, phone interview with the author, September 10, 2014; *The Shimmering Heat*, 135.

¹⁶ *Mission*, Spring 1976 (Vol. 13, No. 1), 7.

were no longer involved in direct evangelistic work, but they still sought to retain the primacy of Christian proclamation. In 1977, Stephen Houghton wrote, “ Medical work, educational work and relief work, when done in Christ’s Name (sic) and his Spirit, can be a wonderful demonstration of God’s love. But they are not the priority. For Jesus did not come primarily to relieve physical need but to meet spiritual need.”¹⁷

Relief and Majengo

As the BCMS focused on other regions in Kenya, Catholic and AIM missionaries became more directly involved in finding solutions to the impoverishment and sedentarization of the region’s pastoralists. Catholic and AIM missionaries became more thoroughly integrated into the pastoral economy in the 1960s, and they played a critical role in the distribution of famine relief.¹⁸ The absence of a strong state presence in Northern Kenya—especially in the lowlands—meant that the mission stations would serve as the most crucial institutions for many pastoralists during the severe and prolonged drought. One of the persistent problems that emerged from this heightened level of dependency was the formation of *majengos*, or slums, around mission stations.

The Catholic mission, which had been formed into the Marsabit Diocese, established a number of mission stations throughout Marsabit District in the 1960s. Each station was built on a model designed to provide space for a church, living quarters for

¹⁷ “Three Missionary Principles,” *Mission*, Spring 1977.

¹⁸ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1970, p. 16, PC/EST/2/3, KNA: “[Missionary] work has been exemplary and unchallengeable[.] They deserve a word of compliment. Had it not been for their effort especially Catholics no doubt some parts of the district would have remained without schools, hospital and other essential services. They have by the year built schools in Loiyangalani, South Horr, North Horr, Kargi, Maikona, Moyale, Sololo, Marsabit Booma, Laisamis and plans are underway to build another mission at Karare. In all these places they have small dispensaries to serve the people always manned by a sister. The missionaries have also been found very useful and helpful in supplying the Famine relief food to the distressed people especially the Elmolo. They also assist in petty employments in their schools and in the missions”

missionary personnel, a medical dispensary, and a school.¹⁹ The Catholic mission had built a significant amount of infrastructure that was spread throughout the lowlands of Marsabit District, and as a result, when famine occurred they were put in charge of food distribution. The mission distributed corn, rice, soybean flour and other grains that had been donated by a host of international agencies, including USAID, UNICEF, and CARE. The result was that mission stations transformed into “mission towns,” as large numbers of impoverished Gabra and Rendille began to settle around food distribution centers. In particular, the Gabra settled at North Horr and Maikona, while Rendille settled around Korr and Kargi.²⁰

The story of Maikona is illustrative of the sedentarization that took place throughout Marsabit District in the 1970s. Maikona is in the northwestern lowlands of Marsabit District, and like most areas of settlement, was built around a permanent water source. Though Maikona possessed permanent wells, it was surrounded by rocky soil that prevented vegetation growth, making it of little value to the region’s pastoralists. At the time of national independence, Maikona was a very small trading center for Gabra and Boran, without mission or government presence. The merchants were supported by the small wells and the trade conducted with Gabra camel herders. In 1966 the Catholic mission was granted a 20-acre plot, and by 1970 local workers had built a dispensary, a primary school, and a number of homes for the missionary personnel. The station was staffed by five to seven nuns—members of a Milanese group called The Mothers of Reparation—who moved from Burma to Maikona in 1967. The sisters ran the dispensary

¹⁹ Tablino, Paul, “The Missionary Factor in the History of Northern Kenya during the Second Half of the Twentieth Century,” *Ethnohistory* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 224.

²⁰ Fratkin and Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle*, 43.

and the primary school, while the diocesan priests evangelized, conducted church services, and administered the sacraments.²¹

At Maikona, the mission station and the trading center attracted Gabra who had lost their livestock, who formed settled in the majengo. After the droughts and famine of the early seventies, the majengo grew from a few dozen people to hundreds and eventually thousands. Father Tablino, who was frequently stationed at Maikona, described the formation of the majengo and its connection to the Catholic community:

In the majengo there were several hundred Gabra who, because of the severe droughts of the early 1970s, had settled near the shops and the mission where we were distributing famine relief food provided by the diocese. A few kilometres from the town were several more or less permanent Gabra villages composed of families who just sent part of their animals to distant places for pasture. The mission attracted people not only because we had the dispensary and the nursery and primary schools, but also because we gave food to the more destitute people in the majengo and, during the droughts, to the nearby manyattas. Thus people were ready to listen to us. In this way we could start our preaching. ...It was among these Gabra in the majengo and in the semi-permanent surrounding villages that the Maikona Catholic community came into being, when sixteen men and women were baptized in 1972.²²

At the beginning of the 1970s, Korr was an outcropping of trees and bushes in the lowlands to the southwest of Marsabit Mountain that served occasionally as a wet-season encampment for Rendille groups. The main impetus for its transformation was the work of a single Catholic father, Redento Tignonsini. Tignonsini came to Kenya in 1968 from Brescia, Italy. After spending a couple of years near the Ethiopian border, Tignonsini was assigned to live and work among the Rendille, as part of Bishop Cavallera's larger plan to increase the efforts at evangelizing the nomadic population of Marsabit. The

²¹ Tablino, Paul, *Christianity among the Nomads Volume II The Catholic Communities in Marsabit, Moyale and Samburu Districts of Northern Kenya*, Christianity among the Nomads vol.2 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006), 164–166.

²² *Ibid.*, 166–167.

exact chronology is unclear, but Tignonsini himself settled near Korr in 1972, managed to have a borehole drilled as a source of permanent water, and distributed free food to those in need. In 1973 he helped set up a dispensary and a small market that sold *posho* (maize flour), sugar, tea leaves, cooking oil, and other goods. He also arranged for mission and diocese resources to be used for road construction, with the hope that the improved infrastructure would make it easier to visit the scattered Rendille manyattas. Tignonsini raised funds to purchase a bulldozer and a grader, and paid local workers to help with the construction of dirt roads throughout the area surrounding Korr.

As a result of Tignonsini's resources, most importantly the distribution of free food and a permanent water source, Korr grew from six year-round residents to over 100 residents within a few years. Korr was essentially a mission town, and a large portion of its residents also became catechists under Tignonsini and the diocese's direction. By 1975, the Korr parish had over 40 catechists, who also participated in the distribution of food and water, and some made visitations to outlying manyattas via bicycle.

Tablino, who was a contemporary of Tignonsini (and who is the source of the above biographical details), described the dilemma faced by the Catholic mission at Korr and elsewhere in Marsabit:

...the distribution of relief food and the giving of material aid constitute a danger for the Catholic community, in that it gives the impression of richness and of power, enticing people to ask to become Catholic not really for spiritual need, but for material convenience. This has been a constant problem for missionaries in all of northern Kenya...and there is no simple solution to it.²³

²³ Ibid., 133.

Additionally, the success of Tignonsini's relief and development work led to a new permanent settlement at Korr, which placed greater strain on the region's already fragile resources. According to the parish's own history,

...before the arrival of Fr. Redento [Tignonsini], Korr was a bush with a lot of trees of different kinds and very common wild animals. The nomadic people stayed here only in the rainy season as grass and water were easily available. ...It is only with the arrival of Fr. Redento that Korr became a permanent settlement as he dug boreholes to provide water for the survival of life. With the people setting down, the trees and the animals began to disappear. While the wild animals moved away to safer places, the trees were ruthlessly cut down for fuel and fencing.²⁴

The issues faced by Catholic missionaries at Korr and Maikona were also seen at other locations around Marsabit District. North Horr, a small police post among Gabra territory, grew from 200 people to nearly three thousand in the 1970s and early 1980s.²⁵

The Andersens and the Teasdales, missionaries with AIM, had experienced the problems of distributing famine relief and the formation of slum villages in Turkana in the mid 1960s. After setting up stations in Marsabit district in 1966, drought and instability led some Rendille and Samburu to settle around AIM stations at Loglogo and Gatab. The missionaries believed the pastoralist settlements would be temporary, but as drought conditions persisted in the early 1970s, the situation worsened. In 1970, the Marsabit DC summed up the year in the following terms:

Food situation was terribly acute (sic). Most of the people in the district lived on famine relief food-stuffs. ... This was the poorest [livestock conditions] ever recorded in Marsabit district. All the livestock were thin, stunted and thus many of them died due to lack of adequate water and grazing.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 144.

²⁵ Ibid., 157.

²⁶ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1970, p. 11, PC/EST/2/3, KNA.

The failure of the rains in 1971, and again in 1973, led to large losses of stock for the Rendille, as herds were forced to travel long distances in search of water and grazing. Drought and the collapse of the pastoral economy led to famine, which was widespread enough to attract national attention. Churches across Kenya participated in famine relief measures for the north, funneling resources through AIM and Catholic missionaries. The creation of food distribution centers, the loss of livestock, and persisting drought conditions led to larger and more permanent majengos.

Both AIM and the Roman Catholic mission sought ways to alleviate the poverty and dependency they observed in majengos. AIM, in participation with AIC and the National Council of Churches Kenya (NCCCK) sought to solve the problem by organizing and sponsoring a series of agricultural settlement projects in Marsabit District.

Mediating the Pastoral Culture

AIM and Catholic missionaries proposed a variety of responses to the sedentarization and impoverishment of pastoralists in Marsabit District. These solutions were based on their understanding of pastoralist culture and economy. The Consolata missionaries were connected to new theological trends stemming from the Second Vatican Council and the ecumenical movement, which provided new ideals for the engagement of missionaries with non-Christian cultures. These trends influenced much of their engagement with the Gabra and Boran.

AIM missionaries also expressed a new openness and understanding toward African cultures, but this was more of a gradual adaptation to the political context of Kenyan nationalism, and the greater role of the Africa Inland Church. Neither of these influences placed value in the pastoralist economy or culture, but instead portrayed

pastoralism as outdated and incompatible the modern economy. AIM missionaries tended to rely on common sense pragmatism and the tenets of evangelicalism in their evaluation of Rendille and Samburu culture. When responding to famine conditions, the Andersens and Teasdales sought to prevent dependency and permanent impoverishment, which to them meant an abandonment of pastoralism.

Catholic missionaries, led by Tablino and Tignonsini, were influenced by new trends within the Catholic Church on the relationship between Christianity and non-Christian cultures. Tablino later reflected that the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, particularly *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate*—a declaration on inter-religious dialogue—“were the foundation and the inspiration” for the missionary approach to the Boran and Gabra.²⁷ *Ad Gentes*, or the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, reads in part,

Let the disciples of Christ, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit, know the people among whom they live and establish contact with them, so that, through a sincere and patient dialogue, they may learn what treasures the bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth. And at the same time, let them try to illumine these treasures with the light of the Gospel, to liberate them and bring them under the authority of the saving God.²⁸

²⁷ Tablino, Paul, “‘Mutual Inculturation’: The Missionary Approach of Lambert Bartels and Its Influences on Catholic Missionaries,” *Journal of Oromo Studies* 12, no. 1–2 (2005): 36.

²⁸ Quoted in Tablino, Paul, *The Gabra*, 9 The above selection is Tablino’s. The actual English translation of the *Ad Gentes* section reads, “Even as Christ Himself searched the hearts of men, and led them to divine light, so also His disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should show the people among whom they live, and should converse with them, that they themselves may learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth. But at the same time, let them try to furbish these treasures, set them free, and bring them under the dominion of God their Savior.”

In order to prepare for this “patient dialogue” with the people of Northern Kenya, Bishop Cavallera encouraged his missionaries to formally study the language and culture of the Gabra and Boran, which included engaging in the existing anthropological literature.²⁹

One of the motivating forces behind *Ad Gentes* and Consolata mission work in Kenya was the concept of *inculturation*, which itself was influenced by cultural anthropology. In his work on the history of theology of Christian missionaries, David Bosch compares inculturation to an earlier concept of *indigenization*, also referred to as cultural adaptation.³⁰ Both Catholic and Protestant missionaries had been practicing cultural adaptation for centuries. Among missionary historians, the most famous articulation was the “three-selves” church put forward by the American Congregationalist Rufus Anderson and Anglican Henry Venn in the nineteenth century. Venn and Anderson argued that the goal of missions was to create indigenous churches that no longer depended on missionaries, but would be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Venn provocatively described this process as “the euthanasia of missions.” While indigenization and the three-selves theory led to greater respect and autonomy for new churches and converts, it also reinforced the superiority of Western Christianity. Bosch uses the metaphor of a kernel and husk to describe indigenization: missionaries defined what comprised the theological kernel of Christianity, and gave permission for the local church to make decisions about the husk. Missionaries brought and protected the essential content of Christianity, while local churches were given authority over the

²⁹ Ibid., 10.

³⁰ Bosch has a clear preference for inculturation and presents his comparison in a somewhat prescriptive tone. My intent is not to use the comparison of indigenization and inculturation as normative in order to critique missionaries in Marsabit, but instead to identify distinctions between theological views and their implications for engagement with pastoralists. Views of non-Christian and non-Western culture become crucial in the 1970s, as missionaries act as representatives and advocates for the Gabra, Boran, and Rendille, and are placed in control of resources that allow them to exercise power over pastoralists.

non-essential. In the indigenization process, “the kernel had to remain intact but adapted to the forms of the new culture; at the same time, these new cultures had to be adapted to the ‘kernel’.”³¹

In general, indigenization viewed cultures as a composition of elements, and missionaries could choose which elements were capable of adaptation and reject those they believed were incompatible with Christianity. Inculturation, on the other hand, tended to portray cultures as the relationship between all the elements, and expected the acceptance of Christianity into a new cultural group to produce something new—religious and even theological innovation was the norm rather than a heretical practice to be guarded against. Proponents of inculturation argued that Christianity was both “at home” and “foreign” to all cultures, including Western cultures, and that missionaries and the older churches could in fact learn from the new churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They could even learn theologically, as a “fourth self” was added to the classical formulation—self-theologizing.³²

In many ways, the distinction between indigenization and inculturation is subtle, particularly when it comes to observing missionary practice and interpreting motives. For example, David Gitari, the Anglican bishop who presided over the Mt. Kenya East diocese, wrote, “In our evangelism we must go to the Gabbra people not as to pagans, but as to people who can hear the Good News from their own cultural context and express the Gospel in their own nomadic thought forms and philosophy.”³³ Gitari is certainly arguing for a change in missionary approach to Gabra culture, but it is not clear whether

³¹ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 447–457.

³² *Ibid.*, 451.

³³ David Gitari, “The Claims of Jesus in the African Context,” *International Review of Mission* 71, no. 281 (2011): 13.

expressing the Gospel includes self-theologizing or merely a cultural wrapping on the Christian message. What is significant for understanding missionary interventions in Marsabit in the 1970s is to know that the Catholic missionaries were at least informed by inculturation even if they did not practice it consistently. There was at least an ideal of genuine dialogue and mutual learning between missionaries and pastoralists. The Consolata fathers came with an expectation that the Gabra and Boran were authorities on their own culture *and economy*, and that their knowledge had much to offer missionaries and other outsiders residing in Marsabit. While AIM missionaries did not discount all of pastoralist culture, they placed more trust in their own ability to make decisions about what was best for the Rendille. They also tended to express more concern for individuals or small groups rather than for the broader culture, and relied on forms of cultural adaptation, even if they would not have expressed it in those terms. In the face of the growing economic and social problems in Northern Kenya, this paternalistic view led AIM missionaries to engage in more interventionist measures among Marsabit's pastoralists. It is worth noting that neither Consolata nor AIM missionaries articulated an environmental ethic in their responses to pastoral sedentarization.

AIM Interventions in the Pastoralist Economy

By the end of the 1960s AIM had setup five mission stations in Northern Kenya. Three of them were west of the lake, in Turkana, and the other two were in Marsabit District.³⁴ One of the ways AIM responded to drought and pastoral sedentarization was to create agricultural resettlement projects. AIM had previously been involved in famine relief in

³⁴ Kenya Field Council Minutes, March 5, 1968, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/4, Billy Graham Center Archives.

Turkana, but the way the organization came to be involved with agricultural projects in Marsabit District was rather ad hoc, and was largely the work of one family: the Andersens. As a mission organization, AIM had spent considerable time debating the appropriateness of “social ministries”—especially school and medical work. But the relief and development work that took place in Northern Kenya was not a result of mission policy or any deliberate strategy. Instead, it was a byproduct of the emphasis on working in “unreached” areas, and the initiatives of the individual missionaries.

Earl and Esther Andersen were the first AIM missionaries stationed in the Rendille territory south of Marsabit Mountain. The mission station was strategically situated at Loglogo, where a borehole provided year-round water and regular contact with Samburu and Rendille herders. The Andersens began constructing the mission station during the Shifta period, and their evangelistic work was initially made easier by wartime law that required the Rendille to remain in large encampments. The Andersens primary task was the conversion, and they tried a variety of means to reach this end, including work projects, school, and health centers. Earl Anderson describes some of these tactics and their work among the Rendille:

A couple of teachers from Kalenjin churches (a similar tribe) came to teach our school for a couple of years. They did a good job of backing up the missionary’s teaching, also showing that there were other Africans committed to Christianity. No evangelists as such were sent out for two years. After that we tried to use young men to teach reading and writing in villages and indirectly evangelize. This was not too successful. However it let the Nomadic Rendille people know we were available. We also tried medicine using it on the station and carrying minor medications for eyes and first aid to the villages. Later we started 3 agricultural projects to teach mixed farming. These were a great asset in that a static population came under Bible instruction.³⁵

³⁵ “Church Cared for by Itinerant Pastors: Evangelism in Turkana,” 1983, p. 12, Collection: Wheaton ’83 Conference: CN598/17/1, Billy Graham Center Archives.

The Andersens and AIM did not initiate missionary work in Marsabit in order to start settlement schemes, but once there they discovered that such agricultural projects seemed to provide for the needs of impoverished Rendille, and also resulted in a stable population that was more open to hearing the Andersens' message.

In 1972, Earl Andersen helped implement three agricultural projects designed to resettle destitute Samburu and Rendille who were living in the majengo at Loglogo. The resettlement projects led to the formation of new farming communities at Songa, Kituruni, and Nasikakwe, on the slopes of Marsabit Mountain.³⁶

Kevin Smith interviewed residents of Songa in the 1990s, and put together the following narrative of the resettlement projects, which squares with my own research. According to Smith, it was the Rendille elders settled in the famine camp at Loglogo who approached Earl Andersen and asked him to teach them how to farm:

Anderson (sic) told these elders to round up a few more friends and they would search for suitable farmland on the mountain. After taking the main road to Marsabit town, Anderson, accompanied by seven elders, took his land rover on an old road built by colonialists to patrol the area. He showed these elders two sites, Songa and what is today another agricultural settlement called Kituruni. Anderson told the elders that these were both suitable places to farm, but that it was easier to get water in Songa. The elders chose Songa and they then returned to Marsabit town to get sheet metal for a roof and built one house for all seven elders to live in. The elders stayed for one year, each having a small plot on which to grow maize, carrots and *sikuma wiki*. There was no irrigation at the time; water was obtained from a nearby well. During that year Anderson provided the elders with food and came once a week to check their progress. After one year the elders harvested their maize and brought it back to their families at Loglogo. They then returned to Songa with their families...clearing more bush for larger farms. This was the same year, 1972, that the AIC founded a church in Songa.³⁷

³⁶ Fratkin and Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle*, 112, 139.

³⁷ Kevin Christopher Smith, "From Livestock to Land: The Effects of Agricultural Sedentarization on Pastoral Rendille and Ariaal on Northern Kenya" (Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, 1997), 83–84,

In 1973, Andersen and the NCKK helped establish a primary school and a demonstration farm to encourage more Rendille and Samburu to settle on the mountain and take up farming. As the resettlement projects grew, the need for water increased. Andersen and the newly settled Rendille made use of pipes and water catchments that were left by the colonial administration and constructed an irrigation system that carried water out of the forest and into tanks and household taps that were easily accessible to Songa residents. The materials they used were from one of the few successful colonial projects that allow pastoralists better access to watering points within the forest. Originally constructed in the 1950s, they were unused by the 1970s.³⁸ While the initial group of Rendille who settled in Songa came from Loglogo, others came from the lowland towns of Laisamis, Kargi, and Korr. All were livestock poor and dependent on famine relief to survive.³⁹

According to Smith, Songa and similar resettlement schemes at Kitiruni and Nasikakwe did not originate from a planned development project, but from the ideas of Rendille and Samburu elders and their personal relationship with Earl Andersen. In colonial days, the resettlement projects might have been directed by AIM missionaries with government approval. But in the 1970s, Andersen coordinated with AIC leaders and the NCKK. At some point during the decade the NCKK took over the resettlement project, and were able to secure additional funding from Oxfam. In 1979 the district commissioner remarked on projects throughout Marsabit: “Some private agencies like the NCKK and the Catholic Mission have been supplemental to Government effort in the

<http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/docview/304369770/abstract/F0FAF09755C74E7B/PQ/1?accountid=14816>.

³⁸ For details on the piped water schemes, see Chapter 2.

³⁹ Smith, “From Livestock to Land,” 84–85.

drive to develop water resources in the district, although to a very limited degree. The Songa NCKK settlement scheme has rehabilitated over 40 nomadic families with piped water made possible for irrigation. Another NCKK irrigation scheme at Kituruni is in the offing with the aid of Oxfam funds. More NCKK plans are under-way at Sori-Adi where the first borehole and a road leading to the proposed schemes have been made possible.”⁴⁰

The Hurri Hills Project – Part I

In 1973 Earl Andersen began lobbying his own organization and the government to invest in a settlement project for the Gabra of Marsabit District. The project would be located in the Hurri Hills, southwest of Marsabit Mountain. Andersen wrote to AIM leaders, “If some method of holding or storing water could be found, the Hurri hills (sic) would surely be a very productive and healthy area. I estimate about 600 sq. miles are very useable land, either for farming or ranching.”⁴¹

Like the resettlement schemes, the Hurri Hills Project began with a personal request, this time from Gabra and Boran traders residing on Marsabit. These traders organized a trip to give Andersen a tour of the Hurri Hills, a grassland plateau located southwest of Marsabit Mountain. According to Andersen’s report, they were interested in developing permanent water resources on hills.

Andersen, who had seen the results of pastoralist sedentarization at Loglogo and resettlement at Songa, sought to persuade AIM directors of the evangelistic benefit of funding such a project:

⁴⁰ Marsabit District Annual Report, 1978, p. 53, PC/EST/3, KNA.

⁴¹ “Trip to Badha-Hurri, Gabra Tribe,” February 19-20, 1973, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/34/5, Billy Graham Center Archives.

The problem of the Hurri Hills is a big one but if anyone is willing to expend some money on dams or other water conservation schemes, there would be plenty of local people moving to the Hurri Hills. In fact, a large scale scheme of dams and agriculture could provide a large, static population of Gabra who could be reached by the Gospel through the scheme, school and church. A more thorough survey needs to be made and a site chosen for such a scheme, and I am sure it would be successful.⁴²

For the scheme to be successful, Andersen saw the need for a new type of missionary, with expertise in agriculture. It would be this technical knowledge that would justify the missionary's presence in Northern Kenya, but it was merely new means to the same evangelistic ends: "It would seem to me that somewhere in the Northern Area we could use a full time agriculturalist to get viable schemes to keep the people so that education and church planting could be facilitated. ...the Gabra need to be reached by evangelical witness and the above suggestion is one way of doing so."⁴³

AIM directors did approve the Hurri Hills Project and assigned a missionary technician to direct the project. His technical expertise was not in agriculture, but in mechanical engineering, following in the footsteps of his tinkering father. The director of the project was Earl's son Herbert (Dilly), who was assigned to implement and expand his father's vision for the Hurri Hills. The Hurri Hills Project marked a significant departure for AIM, and for most development projects in Northern Kenya up to that point. Instead of an agricultural scheme, Dilly directed the project towards strengthening and sustaining Gabra pastoralism.

Dilly was a fourth generation missionary, third generation AIM missionary, who had been born and raised in Kenya. He went to the United States for college to train as

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

an engineer, and returned to Kenya to become an AIM missionary. Before returning to Marsabit District, Dilly spent time at AIM mission stations among the Pokot and Turkana. At Marsabit, Dilly first worked alongside his parents at Loglogo, working with the small AIM/AIC church there and working on well rehabilitation. An AIM promotional publication described some of the work that Dilly did while at Loglogo:

...lead prayers twice a day, teach baptismal classes, overhaul a gasoline powered generator, make by hand a key-way for a well pump, negotiate a labor dispute, remove a broken axle from a dump truck, develop a plan for removing a water tank from a crater that was about one thousand yards deep, lay a cement floor, install a septic tank...⁴⁴

According to Dilly Andersen, it was during his time at Loglogo in the early 1970s that the Kenyan Government approached the AIC and requested his help on water development, tree planting, and environmental impact studies throughout the district.⁴⁵

At the government's request, Dilly began working closely with the Gabra elders and put together a proposal for the project. Dilly himself had been involved in well and borehole rehabilitation work around the district, and had seen the environmental degradation surrounding many of the permanent water sources, particularly in the lowlands. The initial plan for the Hurri Hills Project was to use low-tech and temporary watering points to open up new rangeland for Gabra herds. Specifically, he proposed the construction of hand-dug water catchments and windmill powered wells. Along with

⁴⁴ "Third Generation M.K." *Inland Africa*, Jan/March 1976, 8-9.

⁴⁵ Paul W. Robinson, *An Assessment of the Hurri Hills Grazing Ecosystem Project*, August 1988, p. 51, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/105/6, Billy Graham Center Archives: "It has been government policy that no water development may be done without environmental impact studies. My own [Herbert Andersen] involvement with the area stems from such a study which was done by my father, Earl Andersen, which he then submitted to the NCKK (at that time the National Christian Council of Kenya) under whose auspices it was later circulated. By submitting it to them, the document got into government circulation and local district circulation and finally the government took action. The Kenya Government is the one who approached the Africa Inland Church to move me from the well rehabilitation and church work I was doing at Loglogo to come up here to do water development, tree planting and environmental impact studies."

water resource development, Dilly the proposal included plans to plant trees, establish baselines through environmental impact studies, and involve the Gabra community in the early phases of the project.⁴⁶ Though the government requested Dilly's help, they did not provide funding for the project. After approaching a few different donors, the Hurri Hills Project was funded by a grant from Lutheran World Relief in 1976.

The inauguration of the Hurri Hills Project coincided with a new United Nations led development project with a vast scope. Dilly Andersen later reported, "One of the conditions of our work up here [Hurri Hills] was that IPAL would monitor what we were doing. We have worked very closely together. Beginning in 1975, we and IPAL-UNESCO developed much information sharing and in some instances, resource sharing." Andersen's new partnerships with Lutheran World Relief, the Kenyan government, and UN funded researchers signaled the dawn of a new era in missionary work and development projects in Northern Kenya.

The UNESCO-IPAL Project

By the middle of the 1970s, the persistence of large-scale droughts and famines across the Sahelian belt attracted international attention. In 1976 the UN formed its Integrated Project on Arid Lands (IPAL), co-sponsored by the Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Environmental Programme (UNEP). IPAL was formed in response to the international concern over "desertification" and its effects on famine and drought. A later UN publication describes the context driving the focus on desertification: "In 1973 the Sahelian region of Africa, the southern margin of the Sahara, had seen five years of uninterrupted drought. Lake Chad had shrunk to a third of its

⁴⁶ Dilly Andersen, correspondence with author, September 2013; Robinson, interview; Robinson, *An Assessment of the Hurri Hills Grazing Ecosystem Project*.

normal size, the Niger and Senegal rivers had not flooded, leaving barren much of the best agricultural land of the area. Shallow and seasonal wells dried up. Vegetation disappeared as hungry animals stripped the land. Patches of newly created desert seemed to grow and link with the great desert to the north. As people fled the stricken area in large numbers the world was faced with a series of unanswered questions.”⁴⁷

The individual most closely connected to the formation and execution of the project was Hugh Lamprey, a wildlife ecologist who was previously the director of the Serengeti Research Institute in Tanzania. Lamprey, who was appointed as IPAL’s director, initially submitted a proposal requesting \$3 million to fund IPAL stations in Northern Kenya, Tunisia, Sudan, and the Middle East. In 1976 the UN organizations approved the funding of the Northern Kenya sites for the pilot project, likely with an eye towards the UN Conference on Desertification scheduled to convene in Nairobi the following year.⁴⁸ By linking Marsabit and Northern Kenya to the global issue of desertification, IPAL introduced an unprecedented level of attention, funding, and research to the otherwise marginalized region of Kenya.

Lamprey and others saw over-grazing, poor agricultural practices, and the mismanagement of rangelands as primary causes of drought and desertification in semi-arid regions like Marsabit. As a result, they envisioned IPAL as a way to combine research with policy (hence “integrated”), the result being rationalized planning for land-management on a large scale. As early IPAL documents explained, the project was designed to “provide the scientific basis for the rehabilitation and rational management of

⁴⁷ “Round-Up, Plan of Action and Resolutions,” in *United Nations Conference on Desertification*, 1978, <http://www.ciesin.org/docs/002-478/002-478.html>.

⁴⁸ Elliot M Fratkin, *Surviving Drought and Development: Ariaal Pastoralists of Northern Kenya* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), 95.

arid and semi-arid zone ecosystems, through integrated programmes of research (including survey, observation and experimentation), training and demonstration.”⁴⁹

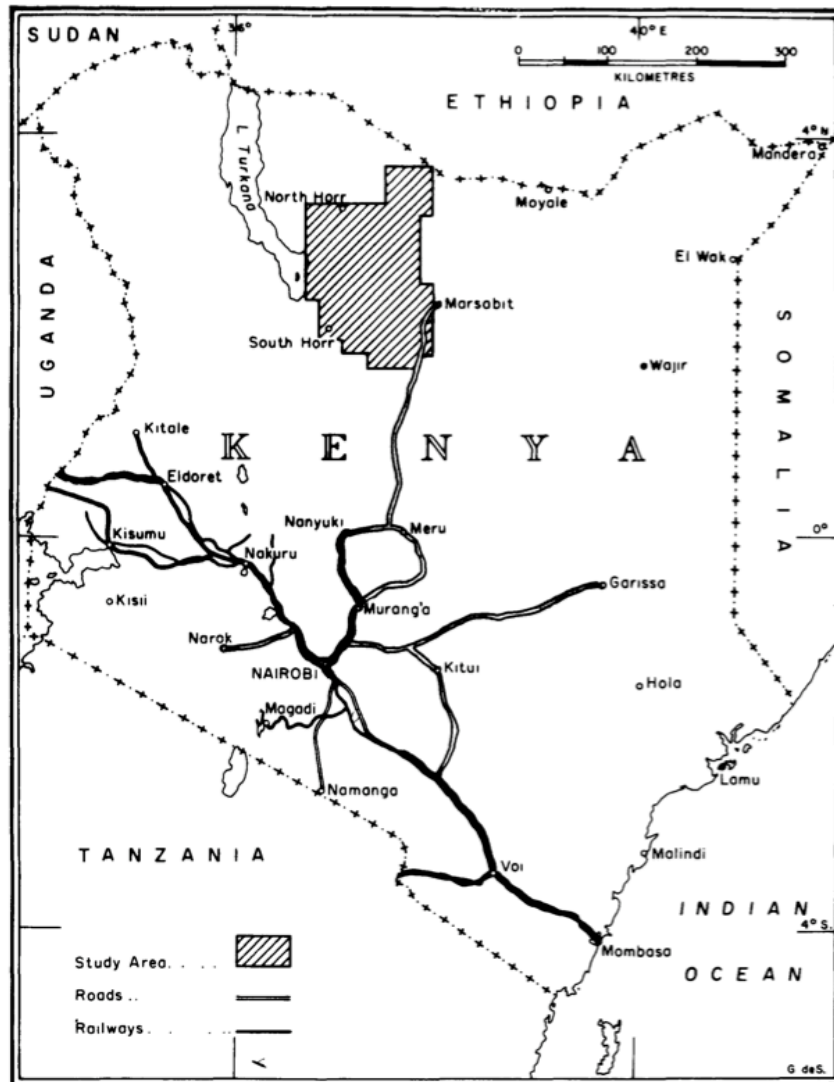


Figure 3: IPAL Study Area
(Source: IPAL Report on Smallstock and Cattle Productivity, 1985)

The project first established headquarters on Marsabit Mountain, and by 1979 IPAL was operating five field stations in the surrounding area, one at Gatab on Mount

⁴⁹ “Summary Introduction to IPAL and the Technical Report Series,” in K. A. Edwards, C. R. Field, and I. G. G. Hogg, *A Preliminary Analysis of Climatological Data from the Marsabit District of Northern Kenya*, 1.

Kulal and four others in the lowlands.⁵⁰ Lamprey summarized the work done during the initial research phase of the project:

During the first four years of the work, the collection of an inventory of baseline data on the climate, soils, water distribution, vegetation, wildlife, domestic animals and of human populations has been a major focus of the project. Vegetation, soil and geomorphological maps have been made, using ground and aerial reconnaissance, aerial photography and satellite imagery.⁵¹

IPAL's first phase was only aimed at collecting research, and Lamprey insisted that it was not at that point a development project. But prior to the action and implementation phases of the project, the work of IPAL researchers had important consequences on the way the administration and missionaries perceived Marsabit's problems.

The missionaries were typically more concerned with the social consequences of drought and poverty, while IPAL researchers defined desertification as the problem, and sought to find its environmental and social causes. The shared concern was for the long-term success of the region's inhabitants—Rendille, Gabra, Boran, and others. And a major question was how to overcome the concentrations of poor pastoralists that resulted from relief work. Catholic and AIM missionaries agreed with IPAL and government that the growth of majengos had negative consequences for pastoralist society and the environment that supported their livelihood.

At the end of the first phase, Lamprey reported that evidence suggested that the current "densities of people and animals, if distributed evenly across the region, would

⁵⁰ The lowland locations are indicated as Olturot, Kargi, Korr and Ngurunit. From Neal Sobania, *Background History of the Mt. Kulal Region of Kenya* (UNEP-MAB Integrated Project in Arid Lands, 1979), 1.

⁵¹ H. F. Lamprey and Hussein Yussuf, "Pastoralism and Desert Encroachment in Northern Kenya," *Ambio* 10, no. 2/3 (January 1, 1981): 132–134.

not constitute over-population except during drought periods.” However, the concentration of people and livestock around permanent water sources was “particularly destructive in its impact on the savanna ecosystems,” and, “As a growing proportion of the population becomes settled and as other nomadic families spend increasing periods of time in the vicinity of the settlements, these areas of localized denudation spread and eventually coalesce into large tracts of desert.”⁵²

IPAL researchers, particularly during the first phase of the project, were predominantly biologists and ecologists, and their stated goal was to measure “the interaction of pastoralists and their livestock with the soils and vegetation of their environment.”⁵³ Their assumptions and conclusions pointed to pastoralist practices and mismanagement of livestock as the root cause of the region’s environmental problems. Rather than saying that drought caused sedentarization, which led to impoverishment, Lamprey and others reversed the causal chain. Pastoralists and their herds over-exploited the vegetation, leading to “desertification,” which explained the increasing frequency of drought.

IPAL’s research and recommendations helped popularize the concepts of “desertification” and “carrying capacity” into the development paradigm in Northern Kenya. While these concepts contained ideas that had long been held by administrator and missionaries working in Marsabit, such as “over grazing,” the new research meant that community and economic development was sure to be founded upon these new concepts, which pointed to the mismanagement of herds as the primary problem that needed fixing.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ K. A. Edwards, C. R. Field, and I. G. G. Hogg, *A Preliminary Analysis of Climatological Data from the Marsabit District of Northern Kenya*, i.

The concept of “carrying capacity” is illustrative of this process. Lamprey wrote an article title “Pastoralism and Desert Encroachment in Northern Kenya,” in which he reported, “Aerial surveys reveal that about 20 percent of the lowland portion of the IPAL study area has a carrying capacity which has been exceeded by smallstock and camels alone. These high stocking rates occur near settlement and water. Meanwhile some 40 percent of the study area is unused due to fear of inter-tribal raids.”⁵⁴ Technically carrying capacity was a measurement of the maximum number and type of livestock a particular piece of land could support. This capacity was determined by a complex equation that relied on figures such as number of animals per hectare, animal weight-gain per hectare, and recovery rate of different types of vegetation.

The geographer Andrew Warren has found that IPAL and other projects relying on the concept of carrying capacity “paid scant attention to some crucial environmental and cultural features of African grazing systems.” The model was actually based on observations of livestock in fenced in pastures and whose value was in the meat they produced. The carrying capacity equation did not account well for nomadic movement of herds or the cultural and social value that Marsabit’s pastoralists placed in their livestock.⁵⁵ The IPAL research station set up at Gatab, near the AIM station, was tasked with determining a more precise measurement of carrying capacity, but this was still not completed when the project closed in 1985.

Even though the model was never successfully adapted to the conditions of Northern Kenya, it was clear to IPAL researchers that the carrying capacity in Marsabit

⁵⁴ Lamprey and Yussuf, “Pastoralism and Desert Encroachment in Northern Kenya,” 133.

⁵⁵ Andrew Warren, “Changing Understandings of African Pastoralism and the Nature of Environmental Paradigms,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 20, no. 2 (January 1, 1995): 195.

had been exceeded. The remaining question was how much of the livestock needed to be removed (destocked) in order to return the land to carrying capacity.

After a few years under Lamprey's direction the project began to receive criticism from Marsabit's political representatives. Their primary complaints were that IPAL researchers did not engage with the district's population, and that the project only employed Europeans in research positions. Additionally, the Kenyan government became frustrated with the continued research and began to insist that the project take measures to improve the economy in Northern Kenya. IPAL's funding sources responded to the criticism, and in 1980 Lamprey was removed as the project director and replaced by Dr. Walter Lusigi, a Kenyan ecologist who had trained in Germany.⁵⁶

Under Lusigi's direction IPAL reoriented its work "from the ecology and management of the natural resources towards the ecology and management of the comprehensive 'human use system'."⁵⁷ Rather than collecting the measurements of natural resources (the goal of phase I), the project would now direct its resources towards creating a market for livestock. Practically this involved improving security, building roads, digging wells, providing banking and credit opportunities, and organizing livestock auctions.

Plans

In 1980 both IPAL and the Hurri Hills Project entered their "implementation" phases. Dilly Andersen and his staff had worked closely with IPAL researchers, and incorporated IPAL research on vegetation, geology, human ecology, and livestock into their own baseline measurements. Even though IPAL was much larger in scope, both projects used

⁵⁶ Fratkin, *Surviving Drought & Development*, 100–101.

⁵⁷ UNESCO, *Integrated Project on Arid Lands (IPAL), Terminal Report* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985), 3.

similar means to reach similar ends. The goals were to achieve a form of sustainable pastoralism by teaching pastoralists new resource management practices and encouraging greater market orientation.⁵⁸

The second phase of the Hurri Hills Project was again primarily sponsored by Lutheran World Relief. According to project literature, the goal of the second phase was “implementation of all agricultural, forestry and water findings and continuation of all other work begun in Phase I.” This included maintain two different nurseries to test exotic tree species that might adapt well to the soil and climate, an attempt at large scale re-forestation on Hurri Hills, the creation of Gabra owned fodder plots, veterinary care, and education and training on tree and well maintenance. The project also built roads and holding pens to help market livestock.

Within a few years both projects faced significant challenges to implementing the proposals. Many of the problems stemmed from pastoralist resistance using the market to reduce the number of livestock. Instead, some pastoralists sold their small-stock at the market so they could purchase more large-stock. Others used the wages they were paid by IPAL to purchase stock at the auctions—the exact opposite of what project planners had in mind.⁵⁹

But the biggest disruption to IPAL and the Hurri Hills Project was the 1984-85 drought and the ensuing famine. Paul Robinson, an anthropologist and researcher for the Hurri Hills Project wrote the following account of the drought:

⁵⁸ Ibid. According to Lusigi, the long-range goal of the project was to develop “a system of land use that can be adopted in the near future and which will reverse the present trends of degradation and establish sustained production within the livestock economy in the Marsabit District at a level adequate to provide for the needs of a growing and (probably) partially sedentarized population.”

⁵⁹ Fratkin, *Surviving Drought & Development*, 103–104.

By September, 1984, no rain at all had fallen in the Gabbra (sic) rangelands south of the Ethiopian frontier for a period of twenty-two months. Nearly all the pastures in the lowlands had been exhausted by the livestock or were located too far from water resources to be utilized. Even the usually verdant Hurri Hills with their abundance of perennial grasslands were brown, dusty and barren. ...Indeed, by May of 1984, the losses of livestock among those Gabbra in Marsabit district had reached critical proportions, and were estimated at being ninety-five percent of the cattle, sixty percent of goats, forty percent of the sheep and five percent of the camels.⁶⁰

AIM and Catholic missionaries partnered with the Kenyan government and other organizations to distribute famine relief. According to Robinson, by the end of 1984 the mission station near the Hurri Hills was distributing famine relief to over 17,000 Gabra.⁶¹ For three years, from 1984 to 1986, “a substantial portion of the resources and energy of the Project’s personnel was diverted from development to efforts at averting famine, starvation and widespread human mortality.”⁶²

In 1985 the UN withdrew its funding from IPAL and project officially disbanded. After ten years and millions of dollars in funding, the results of IPAL were discouraging to those looking to preserve and modernize the pastoralist economy in Northern Kenya. Two priorities of the project were to reduce environmental degradation and to develop the livestock market to help reduce stress on Marsabit’s limited resources. The extreme drought of 1984 killed off large numbers of livestock as well as vegetation, and even after the rains returned, many of Rendille, Samburu, Gabra, and Boran remained settled, either around mission towns in the lowlands, in Marsabit township, or on the slopes of the mountains.

⁶⁰ *An Assessment of the Hurri Hills Grazing Ecosystem Project*, August 1988, p. 34, Collection: Africa Inland Mission, International: CN081/105/6, Billy Graham Center Archives.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

One consequence of the project, according to Lusigi, was the influence it had on missionary thinking about interventions in Marsabit: “The missionaries, who have been key implementors of various development programmes, now accept the need for a sound information base before undertaking such activities as drilling boreholes or opening schools and have approached project staff for advice and discussion before undertaking development activities.”⁶³

Though IPAL itself was disbanded, some of its projects and personnel would live on. Before the end of IPAL, new proposals for development projects in Marsabit had already been submitted and approved. The Kenya Arid Land Research Station (KALRES) project secured \$1.7 million from the Federal Republic of Germany. But KALRES and most of the development projects that followed IPAL viewed pastoralism as a lost cause, and concentrated on improving farming efforts on Marsabit Mountain.⁶⁴ Just a few years later Lusigi wrote, “Current policies have one thing in common: they assume that destitute nomads have no chance of resuming nomadism in the light of environmental deterioration and the apparent threat from continued drought conditions. Therefore ‘new ways of living’ must be found for pastoralists.”⁶⁵

In 1987 the Hurri Hills Project failed to secure funding and also disbanded. Lutheran World Relief was no longer willing to sponsor the project, primarily because they were unhappy with aspects of the project’s implementation. Specifically, they “judged the level of expatriate staffing, outside ideology and Gabbra dependency to be too great.” In the end, the Hurri Hills Project was in operation for eleven years and

⁶³ UNESCO, *Integrated Project on Arid Lands (IPAL), Terminal Report*, 66.

⁶⁴ Fratkin and Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle*, 44.

⁶⁵ Oba, Gufu and Lusigi, Walter J., “An Overview of Drought Strategies and Land Use in African Pastoral Systems” (Overseas Development Institute, London, 1987), 21–22, quoted in Robinson, *An Assessment of the Hurri Hills Grazing Ecosystem Project*.

received \$525,000 from Lutheran World Relief, \$313,00 from the Canadian International Development Agency and World Concern, and \$50,000 from the Ford Foundation. Additionally, numerous donors provided funds to help with the response to the 1984-85 drought.⁶⁶

A New Migration

Both projects did have a lasting effect on Marsabit's economy, though not in the way they intended. IPAL and the Hurri Hills Project employed hundreds of pastoralists between 1975 and 1987, and introduced a new means of livelihood to Marsabit. It is true that some pastoralists previously found employment with the government or on the mission station, but the numbers were minimal. According to Paul Robinson, over thirty Gabra found employment with the government or development agencies as a result of the work they did with the Hurri Hills Project (the frequent departure of staff to higher paying positions was a regular problem for the project).⁶⁷ IPAL reports did not list their non-technical staff, but the ensuing KALRES project employed twenty-five local support staff at Marsabit alone. These positions included drivers, watchmen, herdsman, assistants, a librarian, a typist, a turnboy, and others.⁶⁸

IPAL, and to a lesser extent the Hurri Hills Project, were harbingers of the new aid and development institutions that would come to populate Marsabit Mountain. IPAL was given a 20 hectare plot of land just outside Marsabit Township, where according to the final report, they constructed "an extensive administrative block with conference room, a laboratory block, with separate sections for livestock and vegetation research, a

⁶⁶ Robinson, *An Assessment of the Hurri Hills Grazing Ecosystem Project*, 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15, 32.

⁶⁸ UNESCO, *Kenya Arid Lands Station (KALRES) - Project Findings and Recommendations* (Paris: UNESCO, 1988), Appendix I. A turnboy is a driver's assistant.

library, a three-bedroom house for the Coordinator, a senior type two-bedroom house for a scientist, a minor type house for the Station Supervisor, and a house of four rooms for four subordinate services staff.”⁶⁹ The economic and social issues that were thoroughly cataloged by IPAL researchers persisted, and Marsabit came to serve as regional headquarters for various international development agencies and NGOs. The wealth and employment opportunities these organizations brought to Marsabit led to another transformation of Marsabit’s role in social and economic context of the region. The mountain now attracted the younger generation of educated Samburu, Rendille, Gabra, and Boran who used the patronage of development organizations for employment, job training, and social mobility.

⁶⁹ UNESCO, *Integrated Project on Arid Lands (IPAL), Terminal Report*, 8.

Conclusion

Looking back at the historical record, “the failure of the rains” was a regular but unpredictable occurrence on Marsabit. When the first colonial administrators observed drought conditions, they relied on pastoralists to put the conditions into perspective. When the rains failed in 1914, and most of the year-round watering holes dried up, the DC reported that the severity of drought was uncommon: “Natives say that this has not happened before within the memory of the present generation.”¹ Drought conditions were again recorded by the colonial administration in the years 1919-22, 1928-29, 1934, 1945, 1949, and 1960. After independence the rains failed with greater frequency: drought occurred in at least three years of every decade, and since 2004 has occurred almost every-other year.²

Historically, one of the biggest strengths of pastoralism has been its flexibility in response to drought and unpredictable rainfall in arid and semi-arid regions. The most obvious adaptive strategy of pastoralists is migration—seasonal and permanent movements designed to maintain the health of livestock herds. In Northern Kenya, where poor soil and limited rainfall made dependence on crops nearly impossible, livestock were essential. Herds of cattle, camels, sheep, and goats, mitigated the unpredictability

¹ 1914-1915 NFD AR, 13.

² Drought years include: 1971, 1975-76, 1980, 1983-84, 1992, 1996, 1999-2001, 2004-2006, 2008-09, 2011, 2014-15. Fratkin and Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle*, 42; Government of Kenya, *State of the ASALs Report for the Medium-Term ASAL Programme (MTAP) - Marsabit County*, Unknown, 55, <http://www.ndma.go.ke/images/Marsabit%20Final%20Draft.pdf>.

of rainfall by roaming across the plains, consuming natural vegetation wherever it grew, and producing human food.³

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when drought combined with disease, famine, and regional warfare, pastoralists employed a variety of means to survive and maintain their livelihoods. Those who were able to maintain their herds did so by migration, warfare, and recouping losses through livestock raids. Yet others were left destitute of all livestock, and turned to other means for survival, including hunting and small-scale cultivation. Famine, in particular, resulted in high levels of desperation and dependency. Schlee and Sobania have argued that during this period the permeability of ethnic boundaries increased, as the destitute presented themselves as dependents in order to survive. Taken together, in the nineteenth century, East African pastoralists employed migration, livestock raiding, and cultural flexibility to maintain their pastoralist livelihoods and to simply survive.⁴

Under colonial rule, pastoralists in Northern Kenya responded to drought conditions in slightly different ways. The state spent much of its energy on limiting warfare, restricting pastoralists movement to defined grazing areas, and “distributing” the region’s resources to groups it deemed legitimate. In many ways, legitimacy was defined by cooperation with British rule and with individual colonial administrators. Particularly in Northern Kenya, the state sought to define itself as the protector of its subject peoples and the region’s natural resources. Under the banner of protection and conservation, the state created and enforced policy that expanded modernized agricultural production on the slopes of Marsabit, while at the same time regulating and restricting the movements

³ Homewood, *Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies*, 51.

⁴ See Chapter 1.

of pastoralists. The creation of “tribal grazing areas,” designated particular watering points and grazing territory for each “tribe,” and attempted to schedule their seasonal movements. The inconsistency of colonial policy and its enforcement created problems for the Gabra, Rendille, and Boran. But maintaining their livelihoods as pastoralists required that they present themselves as loyal subjects, learn to navigate colonial bureaucracy, and figure out which laws could be disregarded without serious penalty. Despite the increased confinement, and contradictory policies on modernizing Marsabit’s economy, consistent rains in the 1950s helped pastoralists maintain the size of their herds, and therefore their wealth, without needing to rely on the mountain’s resources.

After independence, dramatic population growth and drier conditions resulted in an increasing number of people depending on Marsabit’s dwindling resources, ultimately heightening the consequences of drought. Like all of Kenya, Marsabit experienced significant population growth after independence, which was largely a result of medical developments that led to a decline in infant mortality rates and an increase in life expectancy.⁵ A civil war and revolution in neighboring Ethiopia created additional population pressures on Marsabit, as refugees fled south into Northern Kenya. According to government census data, the population of Marsabit District increased by nearly 90 percent in the 1970s, and this same pattern occurred in every decade since. In 1969, the government recorded a population of 51,581 for Marsabit District. In 2009, this figure

⁵ Charles Hornsby, *Kenya: A History since Independence* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 18: “Most of Kenya’s problems can be attributed to its rapid population growth before and in the first two decades after independence. In a perfect world, the economy could have sustained such a rise indefinitely, but Kenya was never in this position. Experts knew that one of the highest population growth rates in the world was unlikely to be matched with the fastest economic growth in the world. Kenya had an almost uniquely rapid demographic transition, which in only five decades has nearly quintupled the population. Some of today’s poverty, youth alienation, loss of identity and politicized ethnicity can be blamed on the cultural attenuation of such rapid growth in a period of unparalleled complexity and foreign influence.”

had increased 464%, to 291,166. Within the district, the greatest pressures were placed on the mountain's resources, as the mountain population increased from 6,635 to 46,502.⁶

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the consequences for pastoralists were severe, leading to a collapse of the traditional economy. Marsabit and Northern Kenya were increasingly characterized by poverty, drought, and hunger, drawing national and international attention. The result was another transformation of Marsabit's social and economic role in the region, as a new economy formed around the growing number of development institutions. Throughout the 80s and 90s, a host of new organizations began projects in Marsabit. State sponsors included the Canadian Organization for Development Through Education, GTZ (development arm of German government), and USAID. Private or non-governmental organizations included Food for the Hungry International, World Vision, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya, Farm Africa, SALT LICK, CARE, Intermediate Technology Development Group, and OXFAM.⁷ For some of Marsabit's young and educated residents, development institutions provided new opportunities for social mobility, and more often than not, a ticket out of Northern Kenya.

Evangelical Christians, like those involved in the Africa Inland Mission, have continued to play a central role in the development economy on Marsabit, serving as publicists, fundraisers, and project managers. Food for the Hungry International (who recently changed their name to FH) is typical of many of the new evangelical organizations, who attempt to preserve the theology and activism of evangelical Christianity, but also strive for legitimacy within development circles. The result is an

⁶ Fratkin and Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle*, 138–140; Witsenburg and Roba, *Surviving Pastoral Decline*, 111; Government of Kenya, *2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census* (Nairobi, Kenya, August 2010), 65, <http://statistics.knbs.or.ke/nada/index.php/catalog/55>.

⁷ Marsabit District Development Plan, 1997-2001, PC/EST/1, KNA. SALT LICK is in fact an acronym, standing for Semi Arid Lands Training and Livestock Improvement Centres of Kenya.

organization that espouses a modern evangelicalism focused on “earthly” matters like hunger, poverty, and education, and has in many ways attained of a larger degree of respectability outside of evangelical circles. When a severe drought hit Marsabit in 2011, FH wrote to its supporters to describe the crisis and ask them to pray for a recent application to USAID for additional funds for the emergency.⁸ This request for a rather secular prayer—seeking divine intervention in the bureaucratic process of reviewing and approving grant proposals—is a small but helpful illustration of the ways evangelicals have been shaped by their participation in the development economy.

⁸ “How to save lives during extreme drought: Give water to the animals,” July 20, 2011, <http://blog.fh.org/2011/07/how-save-lives-extreme-drought-give-water-animals/>.

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