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978-0-521-10536-1 - The Elusive Granary: Herder, Farmer, and State in Northern Kenya  
Peter D. Little

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This book examines the social and political dimensions of Africa's current food and environmental crises. Written by an anthropologist, it focuses on the changes and the problems faced during this century by one particular ethnic group, the Il Chamus (Njemps) of Kenya, and traces the area's transformation from a food-surplus "granary" in the late nineteenth century to one that is currently dependent on food imports and aid. By documenting the history, social structure, and ecology of the area, Peter Little is able to show that the crisis among the region's herders is rooted in processes that preceded the devastating droughts of the past decade. Drought is in fact a "normal" state of affairs in semiarid Kenya, but the processes that have inhibited herders from adequately coping with it are not. These trends include growth in absentee herd ownership, which competes for local pastures; engagement in wage labor, which constrains local labor supplies; and a form of sedentary pastoralism that overuses certain range areas while underusing others.

The author analyses the relationships between social, political, and ecological variables, and he treats topics such as land management, food production, marketing, state policy making, and labor organization in an integrated fashion. The concluding discussion on the contradictions of development shows how little government and foreign donor programs have done to alleviate poverty and underdevelopment in the area.

This is a book that challenges many of the stereotypes about African social life, agriculture, and ecology, and it will be of interest to anthropologists, academics and practitioners in development studies, historians, ecologists, and geographers.

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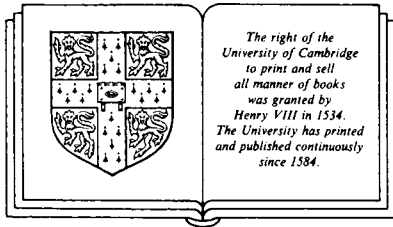
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## Preface

Current discussions of Africa are dominated by themes of hunger, drought, and environmental devastation that shape the outsider's perception of the continent. Sweeping generalizations are substituted for the empirical data and analysis required for understanding the origins and directions of Africa's contemporary crises. These broad characterizations are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Africa's semiarid rangelands, described as overgrazed, overpopulated, and over-run by "tradition-bound" herders. By addressing one particular dry region of Africa – northern Kenya – this book argues for the importance of localized data and careful analysis in deconstructing stereotypes about African agriculture and ecology.

The book has been taking shape for several years. It reflects more than a decade of my thinking about social and agrarian change in rural Africa. Although the work presents a detailed case study, it is motivated by a strong conviction that analyses of pastoral change should be placed in a comparative perspective. The first and most important period of field research for this project took place during 1980 and 1981 and resulted in my doctoral dissertation (1983). This was followed by shorter stints of fieldwork in the summers of 1984 and 1985 and the fall of 1986, and by extensive reviews of secondary data and archival materials in Kenya, England, and the United States. My perspective on pastoralism in Africa – and particularly in northern Kenya – has evolved considerably since the early phases of research. The work of 1980–1981 emphasized household economy and regional marketing, while the later phases of research focused on ecology (1984 and 1985) and development (1986). I witnessed two devastating droughts – 1979/1980 and 1984 – that provided insights into the distinctions between climatically induced cyclical changes and longer-term structural trends. On the other hand, the research benefited from observations during relatively good years, such as 1985 and 1986. In short, while the bulk of information for this book was collected during 1980–1981, I have been able to supplement it with more recent field data. By supplementing all the field data with archival materials I have been able to document important changes in Baringo, Kenya, from approximately 1900 to 1986.

Along the way, several institutions and individuals have supported the work for

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## Preface

this book. Research in Kenya was made possible by funding from the Social Science Research Council, the American Council of Learned Societies, and Indiana University. The Institute for Development Anthropology (IDA) provided a generous sabbatical that allowed me to complete several chapters of the manuscript. At IDA, David Brokensha, Michael Horowitz, and Thayer Scudder have provided helpful comments on different aspects of my Kenyan research. Vivian Carlip of IDA completed the bulk of the book's editing, for which I am very appreciative. While attending Indiana University I benefited from the ideas and suggestions of the late Harold Schneider, Ivan Karp, and Emilio Moran. Harold Schneider was particularly supportive of my research, providing professional and intellectual guidance at all stages of the work. He will be sorely missed.

In Kenya, institutional affiliation was provided by the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi. I am particularly grateful to the Institute and its faculty, especially Professors S. E. Migot-Adholla and Charles Okidi. I also thank the Office of the President, Republic of Kenya, for granting me permission to conduct research in Baringo District, and to the staff of the Kenya National Archives for helping track down obscure historical documents.

Several individuals in Baringo District assisted with the research for this book. First are my research assistants – Dickson Keis, Nickson Lolgisoi, Johnson Lenapir, and Francis Lekituli. On more than one occasion they provided me with the encouragement and collegiality essential to endure the rigors of fieldwork in northern Kenya. Second, thanks are extended to the government officers and advisers posted in Baringo, particularly Senior Chief Charles Nabori, Njemps Location, and Jeffrey Lewis, Baringo Pilot Semi-Arid Area Project (BPSAAP) – and currently of the World Bank. David Anderson, who shared a tent with me for several months in Baringo, was also a valued friend and colleague. His Scottish humor, culinary skills, and insightful suggestions about my work greatly aided the process of field research. His own writings on Baringo in the 1980s have immensely improved my understanding of the area's history. Third, I wish to acknowledge the support provided by the Catholic Mission in Marigat. Finally, and most important of all, I am grateful to the Il Chamus people for sharing their extensive knowledge and rich traditions with an outsider. They graciously tolerated the probing and often perplexing questions of a Western anthropologist. It should be noted that the author takes full responsibility for the contents of the book, and none of the views expressed should be attributed to the above-mentioned institutions or individuals.

My final debt of gratitude is to Ellen Fishburne Little, who has tolerated a part-time family member longer than is perhaps justified. In effect she has subsidized the writing of this book by assuming a disproportionate share of the tasks of raising three children – Nelly, Katey, and Peter D. While it may sound terribly chauvinistic and outdated, this book simply could not have been written without her support. I dedicate the book to her with love and appreciation.