

SPATIAL-TEMPORAL DISCOURSES IN SAMBURU, NORTHERN KENYA: MANIFEST DESTINY, QUANTUM DEVELOPMENT AND THE ECONOMY OF APPEARANCES

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The integration of nomadic pastoralists into nation states has created broad reaching changes in spatial practices, as well as in pastoralists' cultural constructions of space. Among Kenyan Samburu, spatial models were previously oriented around movement, in regard to both historical migrations and ongoing shifts in search of pasture. Thus, differences among places were principally environmental/economic, focused on the needs of livestock. As nomadic Samburu became increasingly sedentarized, however, differences among areas acquired social dimensions. Identities became fixed to particular places and differing lifestyles developed in these areas, owing to such factors as environmental potential for farming, presence of missions and western education, and access to capitalist markets. Thus, Samburu identities are increasingly constituted in spatial-temporal terms, tied to ideological notions of Progress; Highland Samburu are considered more developed, and thus largely superior, while lowland ones are seen as backward, living "a life of long ago."

Here I am concerned with the ideological implications of this spatial-temporal model, particularly regarding the dynamic of the spread of "Development." Notions of "Progress" are an explicit component of this spatial-temporal model, holding that development is a positive force that spreads inevitably and irreversibly to people/areas that have been left behind. In contrast, I draw on several case studies to suggest that this is not a natural, unidirectional, or even process, but frequently the work of interested actors for whom "Progress" justifies entrepreneurial projects. For instance, paralleling the notion of Manifest Destiny that justified white conquest of American wilderness from Native Americans, relatively high productivity areas have been grabbed by groups/individuals, justified because it spreads Development to previously "backward" areas—irrespective of the effects on other users of these areas. In a different sense, within what I term "quantum development" new centers of development emerge far from previous ones (e.g. driven by NGO funding), only to disappear and emerge elsewhere when the rhetorical value of a particular area is spent. I, thus, suggest, that ideologies inhering in these spatial-temporal models become the currency within an economy of appearances — where what something seems to be, rather than what it is, creates value — for there is frequently a slip of hand: While the premise for access to resources which allow for the spatial spread of Progress is its unidirectional nature, in practice Progress may last only so long as interested actors can successfully gain resources by employing the discourse that they are bringing inevitable and lasting progress.

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