

Another minor, though telling, aspect of the male/female contrast is expressed by the different ways in which men and women roast meat. While men roast their meat on sticks or racks over the fire, women put theirs directly in the ashes. The common saying that "it is soiled like the meat of women" – referring to something dirty or polluted – derives its meaning from this practice of women of roasting their meat directly in the ashes. The symbolic implication of the saying is evident: men and women are opposed as high to low, pure to polluted.

This observation reveals a cosmological aspect of the relationship between men and women which is elaborated in various myths. According to one myth (related in several versions; cf. Merker 1910: 270; Galaty 1977: 471), men were created from the clouds of the sky, while women were created from the soil of the earth. Another myth lets a woman break the divine proscription against killing livestock for food, thereby evoking God's wrath and separating men from God (Galaty 1977: 172). The myth associates women with unrestrained killing of livestock, the inhuman quality of gluttony, and the pollution ensuing from shedding blood – all attributes of the wild in Maasai thought.

These various contrastive connotations of the relationship between men and women, which associate men with purity, society, and the sky, and women with pollution, individuality, and the ground, are subsumed under the fundamental opposition between nature and culture. Men, in Maasai ideology, are to women as culture to nature. The symbolic association between women and the wild is finally confirmed by another widespread myth. The myth tells how men and women long ago lived in different kraals. Men had cattle and women wild animals as livestock. One day a woman slaughtered one of her animals and requested her son to drive the herd to pasture. But the child did not obey and first wanted to have some meat. While he was eating, the animals ran away into the bush and never came back (Merker 1904: 227; recounted in Galaty 1977: 180).<sup>17</sup> Thus there is a say-

ing that "a long time ago all wild animals of today were the livestock of women."

The contrast between men and women, and the symbolic connotations it carries – the association of women with the wild and the identification of men with cattle –, go a long way to explain why the dietary ideals apply with greater strictness to men than to women and children.

#### d) Pastoralists, Hunters, and Cultivators

This whole classificatory matrix, of which the dietary code forms a part, also serves to differentiate the Maasai as a people from other peoples. At the highest level of social classification, the Maasai divide the social world into pastoralists, hunters, and cultivators. These eminently cultural categories do, however, take on the appearance and function of ethnic labels, since they are made to apply to concrete groupings of people. Hence, to the pastoral Maasai, neighbouring groups of hunters and cultivators are not only different peoples, they are fundamentally distinct – and differentially evaluated – *kinds* of people. Thus, in the context of Maasai ideology and social classification, hunters and cultivators are inferior people.

The Maasai see themselves as exemplary pastoralists, ideally subsisting exclusively on the produce of their livestock. We have seen that the Maasai notion of man and the distinctive values of Maasai culture are modelled on the behavioural attributes of cattle, and that the Maasai, in a profound symbolic sense, are identified with cattle.

Hunters (*ildorobo*) and cultivators (*ilmeek*) are culturally defined in opposition to pastoralists. They are, in different ways, non-pastoralists, in every respect negating the normative values and behavioural codes which characterize the pastoral mode of life. Hence the terms *ildorobo* and *ilmeek* carry a derogatory connotation to the pastoral Maasai.

*Ildorobo* stands for people who lack domestic stock and subsist on the meat of wild animals. To the Maasai they epitomize misery and utter poverty. They kill for food and eat meat as ordinary food. Hence they are considered gluttons, polluted and inferior. A Maasai who is excessively fond of meat, or who is considered selfish or unable to feed his family, is derisively called *oldoroboni*. Hunters also are symbolically associated with the earth, the soil, and the underground; the Maasai say that they originated from holes in the ground and that they bury their dead. As a cultural category the *ildorobo* are associated with nature and the wild.

17 In another version of what appears to be the same myth, men and women had their separate kraals of cattle. One day a woman slaughtered an animal and her son wanted some meat before taking the cattle to pasture. Meanwhile the cattle escaped into the bush and turned into wild animals (Marari 1980: 36). Both versions are obviously related to the myth of the origin of slaughter alluded to above. The association between women and wild animals is further substantiated in Galaty (1977).