larly clearly during the male circumcision ceremony, when boys are socially reborn as men, *ilmuran*, and the *olpiron* bond – the important relationship between alternate age-sets – is established. Immediately after the act of circumcision, the sponsoring *olpiron* elders make a ritual fire at the spot of circumcision, usually at the centre of the homestead. As one of the elders breathes life into the smoldering embers and the fire breaks into flame he calls forth the ritual bond of *olpiron* which now unites the initiate with the elders of his alternate age-set. The bond is then ceremonially forged and the firestick elders formally claim the new initiates as their "sons." Through the firemaking ceremony the elders symbolically and socially give birth to the new generation of warriors and become their social "fathers" (Jacobs 1965: 289).

Fire, then, symbolizes rebirth. It has the capacity to transcend death, transform death into new life. The ritual roasting of meat turns raw meat into human food, brings about a transition from natural to cultural. Through the transformative and creative powers of fire, meat becomes social and sacred food. It comes to stand, not for death, but for rebirth. While milk, like women, sustains life in a natural sense, roasted meat creates life in a spiritual sense. This is why roasted meat is sacred food and plays such an important role in Maasai ritual life; the ritual consumption of meat both expresses and accomplishes the transition from death to life implied by all their major life cycle rituals.

Seen from within the pastoral food system itself, milk is to meat as female to male, individual to society, ordinary to sacred, and nature to culture. But in relation to non-pastoral foods both milk and meat are cultural foods since they both derive from the domestic livestock. At the level of the contrast between pastoral and non-pastoral foods, the consumption of both milk and meat identifies men with cattle. Indeed, the daily drinking of milk and the ritual feasting on beef can in this light be seen as acts of communion with God since cattle embody God on earth.

But the symbolic imagery of the pastoral diet is richer than that. Milk is metonymically related to grass. The Maasai recognize that milk is grass transformed by cattle. Thus milk, in a symbolic sense, is grass. This identity between grass and milk comes out in ritual. In almost all rituals milk and grass go together; women may, for example, sprinkle milk over men and cattle from a calabash covered with a bundle of grass as an act of blessing. And when women pray to God at dawn and dusk they hold grass in one hand and sprinkle milk on the ground.[20]

If, thus, the Maasai recognize the metonymical link between grass and milk in their ritual, they also symbolically articulate the obvious association between grass and cattle. The common saying: "What God has created men cannot separate" refers to this unity of cattle and grass. Grass and milk are both symbols of cattle. By way of these symbolic associations, then, drinking milk is not only like eating grass; by drinking milk men symbolically become cattle. Just as cattle feed on grass, true pastoralists live on milk. This is yet another way of saying, in the dietary idiom, that human behaviour is modelled on the behaviour of cattle. Cattle serves as the supreme model for people because they embody God on earth.

But if milk in this way establishes an identity between people and cattle, the ritual consumption of meat accomplishes the conceptual separation of people from cattle. The singular importance of meat in the Maasai dietary code derives, I suggest, from the fact that the ritual slaughter and consumption of roasted meat ultimately distinguish people from cattle, and hence symbolically create human beings as a distinct category of beings. The consumption of roasted meat not only turns boys into warriors and warriors into elders in the course of the major age-set rituals, but it is through the social and ritual consumption of meat that men become truly human, reborn as spiritual beings separate from all other living beings.

b) The Ambivalence of Blood

The symbolic connotations of blood in the Maasai food matrix are ambivalent. Blood mediates the opposition between milk and meat in the sense that it is drawn from live animals as well as from ritually slaughtered ones. It has the connotations of both life and death. Hence it may be both ordinary and sacred food. Blood from live animals may be mixed with milk and is drunk as a substitute for milk, while blood from a slaughtered animal is taken together with meat, either fresh – usually mixed with honey wine – or in the form of soup, mixed with fat, meat, and plant "medicine" (*olchani*).

Drunk as a substitute for milk it is regarded as ordinary food and bears the connotations of life, growth, and strength. Drunk from the ritually slaughtered animal it is sacred food and symbolically associated with death and rebirth. The Maasai

20 There is a sense, I think, in which the women's sprinkling of milk as an offering and act of blessing can be seen as a counterpart to the men's ritual slaughter of livestock.