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"Dust people": Samburu perspectives on disaster, identity, and landscape

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a Samburu pastoralist landscape idiom, *ntoror*, that encapsulates ideas about agentive pastoralist landscapes that inherently attract conflict; and passionate, place-based identities forged out of environmental and human-wrought disaster. The paper grows out of a project that experimentally integrated ethnographic self-scrutiny with a bio-archaeological excavation involving human remains, with the aim of encouraging reciprocal knowledge production. The inspiration for exploring *ntoror* and expanding its metaphorical reach came from our Samburu co-author, Musa Letua, who responded to the challenges the excavation posed by drawing upon the idiom of *ntoror*, which made sense to him. The overlapping stories of *ntoror* we narrate follow closely the ways in which Letua explored them in interviews associated with the excavation, and in other interview settings in earlier years. As such, this paper represents the fruits of cross-cultural collaboration and shared knowledge production.

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> (Musa: Why is there a place called *Ntoror*?) You see *ntoror* is a flat place in the Maasai language, do you hear? It is a flat place, and you see, *ntoror* can bring people problems. The Maasai used to say that there are no people who can circumcise more than nine generations. They just circumcise the eighth (yes, there isn't) you see the ninth must have people to fight with. Then they get finished. They are chased away and they do what? (They go.) *Ntoror* … troubles people, troubles people, and it's a flat place, a flat place where the two [peoples] meet.[1]

In this paper, we describe a symbolically dense pastoralist Samburu landscape idiom – "*ntoror*" – through which landscape, collective identity, and ethnogenesis are imagined by way of one another. *Ntoror* illustrates pastoralist landscapes as agentive: inspiring inter-community encounter, conflict, and the creation of new identities in the aftermath of environmental and human-made disaster. The idiom of *ntoror* emerged during collaborative cultural and bio-archaeological fieldwork with Samburu pastoralists in northern Kenya, and as such, provides the occasion for the overlapping narratives of *ntoror* that we will tell in this paper. Our project experimentally integrated ethnographic self-scrutiny

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with a bio-archaeological excavation involving human remains with the aim of encouraging reciprocal knowledge production, which we discuss in detail in a parallel paper.[2] Here, following the ethnographic lead of our Samburu collaborator, Musa Letua,[3] we discuss *ntoror* as one of that project's shared intellectual fruits.

Letua approached the excavation and the landscape dilemmas it raised by way of the Kenyan Maa-speaking pastoralist landscape idiom of *ntoror* because this immediately made sense to him based on a lifetime of listening to Samburu ways of framing their historical narratives. *Ntoror*[4] is an open space that attracts conflict because of the sweet pastures and water points it offers in an environment that is simultaneously generative and destructive. Particularly during prolonged drought, rich pasture lands inspire passionate commitments that some perceive as worth killing for. Thus, when two or more communities meet in these sweet spaces, one often powerfully overtakes the other. Negotiation is possible, but loss of life – sometimes to the point of changing an existing mosaic of collective identities – is inevitable. Indeed, *ntoror* evokes the transitory status of any community that both coheres and settles in place, and for contemporary Samburu, *ntoror*'s meaning extends beyond violent conflict, encapsulating the emotional force of being collective survivors of "*mutai*" – disaster, broadly understood.[5] By way of *ntoror*, Samburu perceive themselves as among those who have endured – bodily, painfully – the successive waves of conquest, dispersal, absorption, and assimilation that scholars of East African foragers and pastoralists have long noted. Moreover, for Letua and his Samburu elder interlocutors, *ntoror* likewise speaks to surviving European incursions – colonialism, postcoloniality, and the intrusions of globalization – including those initiated by anthropologists.

Ntoror, which encapsulates ideas of ethnicity, difference, disruption, and transformation,[6] thus entails both making and unmaking, appearance and absorption. We take *ntoror*, that is, as a provocation: as a concept it uncomfortably reminds us that place-based encounters are disruptive, risky, and transformative. The result may be that flexible, even ephemeral – but nevertheless passionate – forms of identity politics become a basis for staking claims to land, resources, and heritage. This bears some resonance for a long-standing scholarly literature on East African pastoralists that describes context-dependent ethnic identities operating within and mutually creating a political system of social differentiation and assimilation.[7] As it concerns identity- and belonging-based landscape claims, *ntoror* also connects meaningfully to Peter Geschiere's recent explication of autochthony.[8] Geschiere theorizes autochthony as a strategic – and strategically emotional – tool for land-based, claims-making through narratives that link body to soil. However, as a concept created by pastoralists who alternately orient through movement *across*, while creating lasting emotional, embodied, and metaphysical connections *to* landscape, *ntoror* is not about claims-making in any simple sense. Rather, it is about the *very nature of landscape as both generative and destructive, inevitably inspiring conflict* – particularly when environments are degraded to the point of uncertainty or "disaster" (*mutai*). Ethnicity, religion, and autochthony may become either inclusionary or exclusionary narrative "hooks" for claims-making to life-sustaining resources; *ntoror* in contrast, accords landscapes – not just people – an inclusive and open-ended, though potentially destructive, agency.[9]

In what follows and in keeping with Letua's far-reaching application of *ntoror*, we tell overlapping stories about landscape, collective identity, and ethnogenesis that illustrate

this pastoralist idiom in the ethnographic present, the past as Samburu narrate it, and the potential future.

Landscape transformed: story of an excavation

The Samburu are pastoralists inhabiting semi-arid lands in north-central Kenya's Samburu County, with Samburu also living in adjacent Laikipia and Marsabit as well as in urban centres like Nairobi and Nakuru. The majority continue to follow a pastoralist livelihood strategy of cattle, goat, sheep, and camel herding, increasingly diversified with wage labor, petty hawking, and livestock marketing. Samburu are politically marginalized with respect to Kenya as a whole, with the result that infrastructure ranges from inadequate to non-existent. There are no paved roads in the district[10]; one poorly equipped district hospital serves a population exceeding 150,000 people; the most basic health services are typically between an hour and a full day's walk away; because there are so few schools, education above kindergarten requires boarding for many children in rural areas.[11]

The excavation that created the intellectual foundation for this paper came about by way of a landscape story. In early 2005, as community members in Baawa Group Ranch (near Maralal, Kenya) gathered stones for the construction of a school building, a literate, Samburu man decided to collect stones from large stone cairns located on a hill known as Naakedi (see Figures 1 and 2). In the process, he and his companions unearthed human skeletal remains. Considering himself to be a Samburu "modern," he made the discovery public, hoping to attract interested individuals to investigate. The incident drew a small amount of attention, but nothing further happened. In an unusual move for Samburu sensibilities toward human remains however, he collected a number of skeletal specimens from the site and stored them at his home.

Later that year, Samburu friends and acquaintances of several cultural anthropologists[12] shared the story with them and the speculations that were circulating about what the cairns represented. The number of deceased individuals was estimated to be in the hundreds, and Samburu friends shared two local Samburu hypotheses concerning the cairns. The more sensational one, for which there was no documentary evidence, was that this could be a mass grave following a massacre perpetrated by the British colonial government. The alternative explanation was that the skeletons represented the results of a *mutai*.

As conversations with Samburu living near and adjacent to the site continued, educated members of the community and local political authorities encouraged the anthropologists to consider inviting scholarly study. The authors of this paper initiated an integrated anthropological and archaeological project in 2006 (with a second field season in 2008) after obtaining research clearance from the relevant Kenyan authorities and participating in community meetings that shaped the project's process as it proceeded.[13] As we describe elsewhere, over the course of numerous discussions between the transcultural, transnational members of the team (Kenyan from several self-identified ethnicities, Malagasy, British, and North American), these skeletons and Naakedi hill itself were enthusiastically discussed and debated. Samburu community members likewise engaged with team members in animated conversations about the project and burials that eventually revealed differences in attitudes towards the excavation based especially on age, generation, and

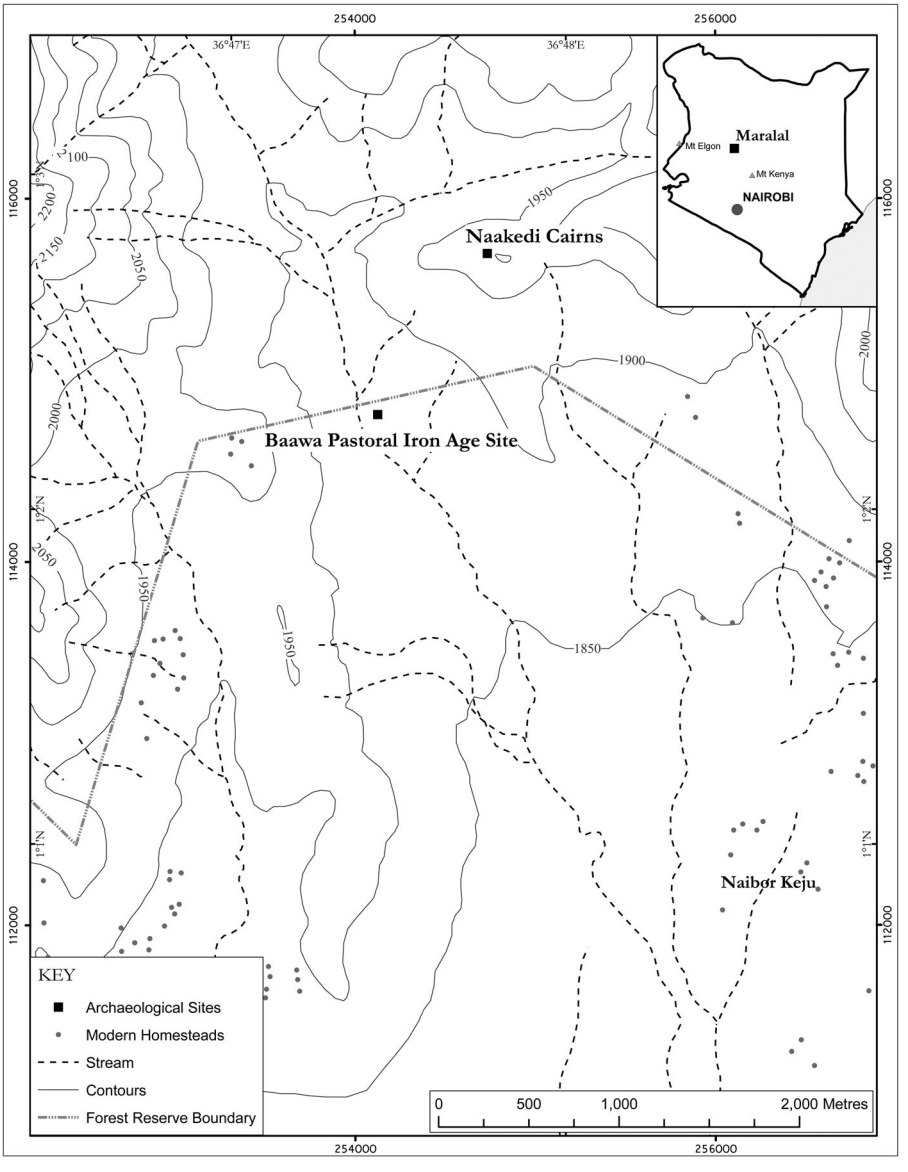

Figure 1. Location of Baawa and other places in Samburu District mentioned in the text.

educational levels.[14] That is, the excavation itself created an open space of *ntoror*, with many community members in favor of investigating the site while a minority of elders quietly expressed concern.[15] According to some community elders, the effects of these movements and contacts would only be known in time, as the landscape itself – as person – responded. More specifically, the elders referred in this case to the agency associated with burial sites. Ontologically, Samburu consider that the substance of the dead persists in that place and may have an impact on the living.

By way of *ntoror*, we explore here literal and metaphoric open landscapes as inevitable sites of conflict that pre-date European outsiders and then flexibly encompass them. In

Figure 2. Excavation of a stone cairn at Baawa in progress, July 2008. Photograph by Paul Lane.

this way, *ntoror* as transformative inevitability invited the encounters between people of different background that occurred over the course of the excavation and also demanded an outcome, however unfinished it might be. Thus we reconsider landscape as it inherently encapsulates encounter, difference, and a consuming form of transformation that may or may not lend itself to optimistic interpretations. Reciprocal understanding, in this case, may require yielding. This is a lesson East African pastoralists have learned all too well, as they have been in turns, assimilators, assimilated, and more recently, colonized.

Sweet pastures invite conflict: *ntoror* and ideological claims-making

Samburu were forced to engage early on during the British colonial presence in northern Kenya with claims to belonging staked ideologically rather than militarily. Samburu were moved south for their own protection from neighboring Boran and Turkana early in the twentieth century[16]; Maa-speaking populations were moved from Laikipia and the Leroghi Plateaus to open up areas for white settlement in the first decades of the twentieth century[17]; and subsequent changes to the southern Samburu boundary were imposed by Kittermaster in 1921, Coryndon in 1925, and the Kenya Land Commission in 1933.[18] Samburu successfully defended their historical claim to Leroghi Plateau in spite of these challenges.

There may be some irony in the fact that anthropologists and historians have argued that Samburu occupation of Leroghi Plateau may not be of great antiquity after all. For instance, Fumagalli suggests that at the turn of the twentieth century, the western border of Samburu territory lay on the opposite (i.e. eastern) side of the Kirisia Hills from Naakedi,[19] while Sobania's research on Samburu oral histories seems to indicate that a Samburu identity was only forged out of pre-existing Maa sections with the coming of the Lkipiku age-set (c. 1837–1851).[20] The difficulty is an interpretative one, however. So long as European discourses of "tribe" and "tribal territory" are the basis for adjudicating ancestral claims, the fact that "Samburu" is an ethnicity of recent genesis matters. For Samburu and many of their neighbors on the other hand, the persistence of lineages and clans that cross-cut and outlive ethnicity is more resonant.[21] Indeed,

many Samburu comfortably recall generational names that would date to the seventeenth century, with little concern for what broader self-designation their ancestors might have had at the time. Each lineage has its own history that descriptively weaves through the tangle of categorical transformations.[22]

This more flexible understanding of collective identity is reflected well in Samburu accounts of what transpired in the 1920s and 1930s, which diverge notably from colonial reports. The colonial documentary evidence suggests that the Carter Land Commission's decision in 1933 to formally award Leroghi Plateau to Samburu had largely to do with humanitarian outrage in London in the aftermath of the forced Maasai moves in 1904 and 1911, and especially with the overwhelming logistical problem of where to displace over six thousand Samburu (and a small population of Turkana) for the sake of approximately 20 white settler sheep farms.[23] In contrast, contemporary Samburu assert that during their meetings with colonial representatives, elders pointed to the names on the landscape itself as evidence for their claims to Leroghi.

> Samburu elders asked, "Do you usually have a family called Lekisima [of Kisima Spring] in the government?" They [District Commissioner and other British gathered] said, "We don't." "You don't have but we do have the family of Lekisima. And what about a family called Lekirisia [of Kirisia Hills]?" And they said, "We don't." "And what about a family called Lekelele [Of Kelele Cave]?" "We don't have it." … The land has come to belong to the Samburu! Ours, yes, of Samburu, because we have families of Kelele, Kirisia and Kisima.[24]

The question of time depth associated with the lineages named does not arise in this intellectual conflict between Europeans and Samburu. Instead, the Samburu assertion of victory seems to imply autochthony – even the hills are named for us. Yet the context surrounding this narrative *belies* timelessness, inherently (for Samburu) encapsulating two aspects of *ntoror*: this land will inevitably attract another people who will displace, annihilate, or absorb us just as we have both displaced and absorbed those who lived here before; and meanwhile, the land belongs to those of us who occupy it.

Ntoror at the moment of disaster: survival and ethnogenesis

> This land is the one called *ntoror*. There are no ethnic groups [*lorere*] that circumcise ten generations. *Larinkon* was chased – Have your heard of "Larinkon, take what you want?" They were killed right here. The Maasai entered and were chased, the *Lpus* entered and were annihilated [laughter]. You'll just be annihilated. [Musa: And isn't *Lkishami* [the present Samburu generation] the ninth? Bilinda: Yes].[25]

Ntoror brings conflict, particularly during the droughts, epidemics, and famines that Samburu call *mutai* – disaster. *Mutai*, warfare, and migration are the three essential, often overlapping elements of any Samburu historian's tale.[26] One way or another, all three demand movement and all too frequently losses – whether of livestock, human life or both. Yet the same events that destroy populations lead to the creation of new ones, and thus it is no accident that Letua's count of Samburu generations would place Samburu ethnogenesis at the beginning of the Lterito age-set, the warrior generation circumcised following the epizootics of the late 1880s and 1890s. *Nterito* is the noun for dust, and thus Lterito were the dust people, springing up from the ashes that had sent people scattering, destroying previous alliances in the process. "It is said that when we were

reviving they named us the dust people who can't lack cattle. We were Lterito, dust [laughter]."[27]

Yet, a closer examination of Samburu understandings of pastoralist history reveals that Samburu do not have a single ethnogenesis, or moment of coming into being, but rather Samburu have come into being over and over again. As one elder put it, Samburu are people who survived disaster (*mutai*)[28] – in a history replete with them, each with its own name and characteristics. Indeed, as ethnonym, Samburu is metonymic for a *mutai*, whose characteristics are still remembered even if it is not known precisely when it occurred. Moreover, as ethnonym, Samburu is a name outsiders use, while self-referentially, Samburu use the term *Lokop*.[29]

> Let us say that we take family settlements, are we not like this as people? We have separated like this because we are called by this name, Lokop. Before that, we are all Maasai and as we are all Maasai, the name separated like this and we named clans. There were Laikipiak, and they are Maasai. There were Larinkon, and they are Maasai, but we are all Maasai, and we just came and these *Sampur* [Samburu] were found. And as for the people called Sampur, they have just come from within the other. They have come from Maasai, but all of them were Laikipiak, all of them, they were one. *Mutai* used to come, droughts, so it was a *mutai* and the drought dispersed them, drought separated people, and somebody went and recovered somewhere.
>
> As we are Lokop now, we belong to Maasai, and as for this name, Sampur, there was a time we went somewhere like a river and there was no other food, only wild food. So it was bees, some such thing, and it happened that everyone has to make a bag for themselves, so that when you come across something like a gazelle, you remember to take that skin and you sew it to make a big handbag, and you should put a leather strap on it, just like a handbag, so you have this leather strap across you and you carry all of your food with that bag – *sampur*, to carry anything edible you come across. That is where our name Sampur comes from. [It was during a certain *mutai* when people made those bags and it was called sampur?] Yes, it was during that *mutai* when they scattered and when you went to get some food, it is better because you have your bag to put it in.[30]

The precise timing of the *sampur* story is less important than its illustrative qualities, of one clan or a group of clans separating from another during a period of conflict that typically (but not invariably) features a natural disaster as its ultimate cause. Nevertheless, Samburu elders known for their expertise as historians assert that three Maa clan clusters – Loiborkineji, Maasai, and Laikipiak – came out together (somewhat mythically) from the (baobab) Tree of Tangasa.

We know from diverse historical sources that the Laikipiak were Maa-speakers that contemporary Maasai and scholars of the Maasai claim the Maasai decimated in the 1870s,[31] while their northern defeat by Samburu happened as much as two decades later. Although not all details are entirely accurate, J.R.L. MacDonald's 1899 account of the 1897–1899 Juba Expedition has a detailed account of the Maasai and Samburu migration, including the defeat of the Laikipiak.[32] Most contemporary Samburu clans have lineages tracing their ancestry to Laikipia clans.[33] The defeat is near enough in time that many living Samburu remember their grandparents telling first hand stories of the Laikipiak defeat, and about the captured Laikipiak in their families. One lineage in Baawa claim to have been entirely spared through negotiation, and one Samburu elder in Baawa whom Straight interviewed asserted that he did not know the meaning of his lineage name (extremely unusual) because it was a Laikipiak name. While some respondents attribute stone wells in the region to Laikipiak, several Samburu historians

attribute the wells to Logol Lala or Sirikwa. Sirikwa is the oldest group Samburu identify as ancestral, claiming them as Lmaa. Based on work in western Kenya, John Sutton suggested a Kalenjin origin for Sirikwa,[34] whereas both John Lamphear and John Galaty propose a mixed Kalenjin-Maasai origin.[35] Sutton subsequently argued that while Sirikwa pre-date the emergence of a Maasai identity and have Kalenjin origins, in their later history some sections were "Maasai-ized," while others contributed to the formation of other ethnic identities including Kuria, or were assimilated into the Pokot and Karimojong, among others.[36] Given that Samburu oral history does not generally pre-date the seventeenth century compared to the early dates for some archaeological features associated with "Sirikwa," we are not in favor of according definite ethnic or clan identities to pre-seventeenth or even pre-eighteen century features.

Returning to the Samburu version of events, after Loiborkineji, Maasai, and Laikipiak came out from the Tree of Tangasa, Loiborkineji settled near Mount Elgon, Laikipiak went around Mount Kenya and northward, and Maasai took the Magadi lowlands (south of Nairobi). In the wake of the 1830s *mutai*, when the *Lkipiku* generation was initiated, "Samburi" Loiborkineji divided from other Maa-speakers (possibly Lchamus) in Baringo.[37] The overall migration path these Samburu historians offer for Loiborkineji includes movement to Mombasa, then to Mount Elgon, Baringo, southern Ethiopia, Marsabit, and onto Leroghi, the Matthews Range, and the contemporary Samburu lowlands. During each of these movements, some clans remained behind, and some clans or clusters of clans were decimated and absorbed.[38]

Documentary evidence also permits us to at least partially confirm the Samburu timeline for Loiborkineji/Samburu as a distinct group and their divergence from other Maa-speaking clans. During Count Teleki's 1888 journey through northern Kenya, Teleki and his companions encountered people they refer to as Burkineji.[39] Before this, based on his 1873 account, missionary Charles New reported on both Burkineji and Samburu living due north of Mount Kenya, noting that Samburu live near Marsabit and keep both cattle and horses.[40] New also mentions Uasin Gishu, Njemps, and Wakuavi in addition to Maasai, reporting fairly precisely, and plausibly, the area each occupies. With respect to horses, Krapf also mentions them.[41] This could represent confusion or conflation with the Boran, who did keep horses.[42] Since Samburu report that the Loiborkineji alternately allied and fought with the Boran, conflation is not entirely unreasonable. Also noteworthy is the fact that Urs Herren's Mukugodo historians claimed that the Laikipiak had kept camels and horses.[43] Based on work in the early 1850s, especially with an enslaved Maa-speaker but also with Swahili caravan traders, Johann Ludwig Krapf mentions a number of "tribes" within Maa-speaking territories.[44] Some of these might be Pokot (Sukku), Laikipiak (Lekipia), Uasin Gishu (Guasingishu), Lchamus (Njamossi), Loiborkineji (Elburgineji), and Lngwesi (Nganassa).[45] A variant that might be Samburu independent of Loiborkineji is not listed, although this is not, of course conclusive evidence that it did not yet exist. What it does suggest is that Loiborkineji and Samburu were both used to refer to a cluster of Maa clans no later than 1873, definitely prior to the epizootics and smallpox epidemics that characterized the *mutai* of the 1880s and 1890s, and thus the Samburu timeline of 1830s *mutai* is possible.

As told by Samburu historians then, the ethnonym "Sampur" was created directly out of a *mutai* – probably in the 1830s – and as such it memorializes the opportunistic ingenuity necessary to survive disaster. Then further, the generational name, Lterito reminds

Samburu that they are "dust" people, promised a recovery to the point of thriving. Similarly, descendants of the adopted survivors of extinct clan clusters, such as Laikipiak, Lpus, and Logol Lala refer to themselves as "children of nothingness."

Ntoror and yearning: the emotional entailments of landscape and belonging

What can be lost in these broad stroked historical accountings is the emotional force of these events. To be dust people, survivors of disaster, and children of nothingness is at once a reason for Samburu storytellers to laugh – it was too terrible not to – and a reason for passionate, animated narrations. The story of the Laikipiak warrior/survivor Mewari is a case in point. Mewari was a Laikipiak of Samburu Ltarigirig generation (c. 1865–1880) who fled south during the Laikipiak Wars and took refuge with a Maasai woman, Nosupuko, who became his lover. Later, during Samburu Lmarikon generation (c. 1880–1893), when the series of smallpox epidemic and livestock epizootics reached Samburu, a young Samburu named Lenanketai fled south also, and Nosupuko adopted him as a son:

> She cared for him. Later on though, Samburu of the Lpisikishu section said, *Let's go bring back Lenanketai because his entire family/lineage was wiped out.* He was the only one left. Lokop used to count survivors. *Whom do we still have? Whom do we still have?* They went and looked for them [survivors]. When people went to look for him in Maasailand, Lenanketai was found at Nosupuko's house. He was brought back [to Samburu] and later after that, Maasai had another devastation. [After that one of Lmarikon?] It was after that one of Lmarikon, because Lokop had recovered. So Nosupuko got news that the Lokop side was alive. Then she told her friend, Mewari, *Let's go to Lokop because there's a boy there I assisted during the Lokop devastation. He was from the Lenanketai family. Let's go to that boy.* Then they came … [46]

Fast forward to Mewari's old age – a former Laikipiak warrior but now an old Samburu with his own livestock. One day he visits a settlement where – unbeknownst to him – another former Laikipiak refugee (married to a Samburu elder named Lekisanyal) is singing to her granddaughter.

> Then this old [Laikipiak] woman sang and she was singing the song of her land to this child. It just happened that Mewari was walking around the homestead and he wasn't aware that there was anyone in that settlement who knew him. But originally this old woman had been from Mewari's settlement. She had been very young then, do you hear? Mewari heard her singing Laikipiak songs and he kept listening. Then she sang [these Laikipiak praise lyrics]: *Mewari jumped at Lengei and he dropped to Lpusi, and that's one feather we put on him. And he jumped and attacked a settlement at Makaat next. It was at the animals' water point I passed by. Mewari jumped at Lengei and dropped to Lpusi – those Lpusi of Mpasion, he has raided this land. He dropped to Lare Odo of Losikiria, and that's one feather we put on him. And he jumped and it was at the animals' water point I passed by. And he attacked a settlement at Makaat next. And at the animals' water point I passed by.*
> Do you hear? He heard himself being praised, and he went into the house and he said, calling her,
> *Woman*!
> She answered,
> *Yes. What song are you singing?*
> She said, *Isn't it a song of our land?*

You said it's of your place? Where are you from?
She answered, *Don't you know me, Mewari? Am I not from your settlement?*
I don't know the other one he told her to praise, maybe – *Praise my age-mate of a Big Finger, so that I can know you were there.*
Those heroes who had been killed back then. She praised him, and when she praised, he cried.
And he ran to get a strap to hang himself with.
[laughter] [The one called Mewari?] Yes, it was Mewari, do you hear?
And Mewari was caught to prevent him from killing himself, do you hear?[47]

Decades after surviving war, devastating hunger, and the decimation of his people, Mewari is said to have been so moved by meeting someone from his original Laikipiak settlement and hearing her sing the praise songs of his clan and generation, that he nearly committed suicide. His former identity was re-enlivened through her voice and naming. His story, and the fact of his tears, are remembered in stories like this one, and sung during *ntotoi* games,[48] together with stories and songs commemorating other warriors who both won and lost, the features of the landscapes they traveled, and the beauty of girls they danced with – and abducted – stolen from one clan group to give birth to another. From her perspective, that of a girl raised as a Laikipiak and taken as a Samburu wife during a period of war and famine, she continued to sing the songs of her childhood – teaching them to her children and grandchildren. *Isn't it a song of our place* [nkop]*? Don't you know me, Mewari?*

The convergent story of Mewari and Lekisanyal's Laikipiak wife describes the emotionally dynamic process by which group identities are formed, sometimes absorbed, and yet remembered. The descendants of Mewari and Lekisanyal's wife are Samburu, while their Laikipiak lineage histories preserve passionate attachment to place, and emotional survival after devastating suffering and loss. This illustrates the destructive and generative aspects of *ntoror* as an idiom that reminds Samburu that eventually, sweet landscapes will invite the conflicts by which one collective identity yields to another.

Lekelele came first, just here now – he was found at Kelele, nowhere else.
He was found by Lemiruni family and he was asked,
Where are you from?
He said, I am from Laikipiak.
So where are you going?
I'm coming to where Lmaa were.
You know what – these people's nature is tough. I am coming to where Lmaa were … And he brought how many women? [Three] … [Were they his wives or just his relatives?] Relatives. His people were decimated. It was the time that Laikipiak were decimated. They came to Lemiruni family – They were moving in with some sort of luggage.[49]

Where did Lekelele come from? Given that the Laikipiak were on Laikipia and Leroghi Plateaus and many battles were fought there, didn't he in all likelihood come from near Kelele to begin with? How coincidental was it that Mewari met a Laikipiak woman on Leroghi? Is the coincidence perhaps that two people of one settlement had managed to survive to old age fairly close to their places of birth? In many Samburu lineage stories, surviving children are found wandering in the bush where they ran to escape the attacks on their own settlements.

What happened again, sometimes they dispersed and later on, they would return and reclaim [their land] – when others returned after being attacked by others. [Yes, they are caught or

> what?] All of those children we are telling you about of nothingness. It was those people who were finished, and a few can be left, and they go into another clan.[50]

For mobile peoples decimated and absorbed, the probability is good that survivors live out their lives moving across parts of the landscape they memorized as children of another name.[51]

Ntoror and stone monuments: back to claims-making

In the preceding section, *ntoror*'s destructive and generative entailments remind Samburu that, as survivors, their collective identity contains both winners and losers whose attachment to place is emotionally palpable. In the interviews surrounding the excavation (Figure 2), the principle of absorption was evoked for claims-making rather than for poignant ends. Here, as with stories of proving their belonging to British colonial officials, sweet spaces are sites of ideological struggle rather than war. Whereas for the British, it was the naming of the landscape that mattered, in discussing stone monuments that included the burial cairns at the centre of the excavation, Samburu respondents told memorializing stories that demonstrated their connection to every stone found on contemporary Samburu-inhabited landscapes. For example, referring to a pair of stone cairn monuments near their home, two elders in the lowlands explained,

> We don't know the people who put them [the Naakedi cairns] there. But where the Lokop [Samburu] were putting stones, the reason Lokop put stones in places like that [referring to a nearby cairn field], they used to fight with some other people called Resiat [Dassanetch]. And so they fought and the cattle were stopped [from being stolen by Dassanetch]. And those people who stopped the cows – they fought and defeated the Resiat – those Lokop gathered the stones there, showing that the cattle were recovered and returned at that cairn field.[52]

Neal Sobania places the final withering of peaceful relations between Dassanetch and Samburu clans at the arrival of the British near the turn of the twentieth century.[53] For the particular battle between Samburu and Dassanetch clans they were discussing, however, these elders suggested that it might have been the Lkurukua generation (initiated late eighteenth century) that was responsible for it, which could make sense, as it coincides with a period of widespread famine.[54] Keeping our points in the preceding section in view, if a battle in the contemporary Samburu lowlands did occur at the close of the eighteenth century between clans now belonging to Dassanetch and Samburu, contemporary descendants of those "Samburu" clans may trace their lineages to Rendille, Laikipiak, or even Borana or Gabra ethnic ancestors. Indeed, the elders narrating the Samburu–Dassanetch battles have Rendille and Borana lineage traditions, while lineages claiming Laikipiak ancestry live nearby also.

What this means with respect to monuments on the landscape is that contemporary Samburu can identify some monuments with precision while presuming others to be ancestral through stories of lineage or clan interpenetration and amalgamation. Pointing to another nearby landscape feature – what Samburu claim to be a human-made mountain pass, or saddle – these elders attributed it to Laikipiak Maasai while simultaneously noting that Samburu eventually assimilated the Laikipiak. First, they explained that Laikipiak wanted to minimize their visibility when taking the usual route through the Matthews Range to raid Samburu cattle.

> So they dug through the mountain to create a passage … and then they went over it [the "saddle" they created] to fight with them, to attack the Lokop [Samburu] behind it. So those days as we heard people talking about them it was those people known as Lkurra [Laikipiak clans], those ones there. Then those people dug and once they had dug and went to where the [Samburu] cattle were, when they had gone there, they were killed *themselves* [by Samburu] and then they were defeated. They just fought and were defeated. They had to pass that saddle of Lgwe when they brought the [stolen Samburu] cattle through that saddle, the owners of the cattle ambushed them at that saddle as they had also known where the pass was … And so then with that saddle they [Samburu] had taken back the cattle of theirs and up to date those stones are still there, those same stones of that time are still there. And as you pass that passage you put some little green leaves upon the places with those stones, do you hear, to honour, to honour.[55]

Thus, there are several kinds of stone monuments and anthropogenic features on the landscape by which Samburu understand their relationship to ancestors both victorious and assimilated. Specifically in this story, two features – a human-made mountain pass and a large cairn field – converge to mark one of the battles by which Samburu understand themselves as victors and assimilators of previous peoples. Additionally, Samburu attribute extensive stone wells in the lowlands to peoples the Laikipiak defeated and absorbed, like the Larinkon and Logol Lala. Finally, single burial cairns similar in construction to those found clustered so uniquely on Naakedi represent a well-known feature of the landscape by which Samburu understand their own history as a group that has endured. These features of the landscape are understood, not as belonging to wholly alien peoples, but rather remind contemporary Samburu of their path to the present.

> And when the Laikipiak were finished [wiped out] they went to other subclans and other ethnic groups made them their own. So the Laikipiak did not finish, they are still among many people … And they are also among us Lmasula [a Samburu section].[56]

Similarly, an elder who commented that he didn't know the full meaning of his lineage name because it was only known by his Laikipiak ancestors asked rhetorically, "Is there anywhere that there aren't Laikipiak?" (No) "They *splashed*."[57]

Another elder, whom the Samburu community had selected for camp security, explained his own Laikipiak origins in terms that emphasized simultaneously how recently Laikipiak were assimilated, and the connection of contemporary Samburu to the burial cairns under excavation:

> You see even now the old man who sired my father survived (Straight: I heard that) … Isn't it recent that my grandfather sired Lmirisho [warrior age-set generation c. 1912]? And that one [his grandfather] was Lmarikon [c. 1880]. And you see when that one died he was still a Laikipiak … And so don't you see that those are recent? (Yes, recent.) Recent, yes, because he was called "Rock of a Long Shield." And it is said that these skulls [of the excavation] resemble our fathers and so you see all those people that we are mentioning to you just originate with Maasai or those who are called Laikipiak because they are all one ethnic group. Those people who are called Logol Lala, I also think they are Maasai (Yes, they are also Maasai). And aren't those called Ltorrobo [foragers living with Maa groups]? … Even the Ltorrobo are also Samburu. Yes just one place. It is only the way of life that goes and becomes different.[58]

Samburu tell history by individual stories like that of Samburi and "Rock of a Long Shield" just as one of Straight's Samburu neighbors signified the importance of the Naakedi cairns by giving a single set of female remains a personal story and a name as

he held her skull in his hands – his emotional connection to her palpable.[59] She may have been Laikipiak, Logol Lala, or of an earlier decimated group but, according to Samburu, she was certainly ancestral to Samburu and a singer in a region in which singing is crucially important and can be emotionally charged.[60] By this move, this elder simultaneously situated the excavation within a dynamic tradition of movements across, meetings upon, and naming of the landscape, and signaled his claim to a former community that the landscape as agent and the Samburu as people, have absorbed.

Ntoror: sweet, consuming, landscapes

> Here where you are now, up to Mount Lereko, it's called *Ntoror* … Those who have been living here have perished. [Were they all Lmaa people?] They were Lmaa. All of them were Lmaa. [What was finishing all of those people?] Only the spear. They fight with themselves.[61]

As we have suggested throughout this paper, landscape and "chaotic situations" occur in juxtaposition as environmental pressures and the needs of livestock force people to "meet" in the flat spaces of rich pasture and water points (see also McCabe 2004).[62] In the twenty-first century, the logic of *ntoror* likewise encompasses the chaotic situations that occur when political constituencies, elections, and lucrative conservation programs transform the nature and value of a landscape.[63]

As noted in an earlier section of this paper, Samburu, like other East African pastoralists, are politically and economically marginalized with respect to Kenya nationally. Successive governments have so far failed to curb chronic intercommunity violence that creates feelings of widespread insecurity in the present, reflect a persisting colonial legacy of land alienation, and may even play a role in inciting or exacerbating local- and international-scale violence.[64] Conflicts in Laikipia District have been complicated by recent lobbying and ranch invasions there following the end in 2004 of an apparent 99-year lease of land to the former colonial government and its successors by its Maa-speaking inhabitants.[65]

Most recently troubling for Samburu however, in 2006 Pokot began launching offensives against Samburu in Laikipia and on Leroghi Plateau in response to immanent disenfranchisement by Samburu as a result of a newly forming conservancy.[66] Pokot cited land rights based on historical Samburu-Pokot alliances and long-term occupation of the land in question. In navigating their claims to Leroghi and their competing claims to Laikipia, both Samburu and Pokot frequently rely on contemporary land tenure systems, legal jurisprudence, and the maps that visually mark legislated belonging. Thus, Pokot, Samburu, and their political elites negotiate in public meetings by way of official political discourses.

Yet even in the twenty-first century, in unofficial contexts such as bars, homes, and cattle camps, the language of historical alliances, covenants made or broken, and the sweetness of resources – whether cash, cattle, or land in the form of pasture and water points – remain crucial. Thus, Samburu and Pokot can be heard to assert the meaningless of maps: Land belongs to those who live there, and boundaries can be peacefully or violently altered whether through governmental intervention or neglect.[67] Histories of encounter, and historical agreements as to the terms for negotiation, still matter. On the issue of long-term alliances at least, Samburu are in agreement with Pokot:

> You see when they were living in that land [Baringo and possibly west to Mt. Elgon], they were living with the Pokot. They were living together with Pokot. You see why we don't kill a Pokot and Pokot don't kill us is that they ate an oath at a place called Nkinyang. You see the Pokot plastered their heads like the Turkana and the Samburu were also plastering like Pokot. So they were living together at that time … They moved there and they settled here, and they fought the Laikipiak. They went and invaded the Borana, and they moved to Ethiopia … and Ltarigirig were circumcised (c. 1865–1880).[68]
>
> [Do we have a bond with the Pokot?] It's not a bond we have. The way it is, is that during the wars, people called one another so as to stop the war. Let's look for peace and stop fighting. Let's look for peace and stop fighting. People were in the same place. I heard that the first – the second just came – I heard that a stone was buried. A hole was dug and a stone buried just next to that tree. Just there a white stone was buried of this size and one side uncovered. Then a curse was said and the uncovered side was left to see what people did … Recently when people fought, didn't you hear when Pokot killed Samburu in Baragoi? Just the beginning of the first one. One old man told me that the stone that was buried has a crack. That's why Pokot have killed Samburu. They needed to find another stone to bury. I heard they buried it again and then the fighting stopped.[69]

The covenant between Pokot and Samburu created an alliance equivalent to shared clan belonging – thus preventing sanctioned marriages between them. This engenders an uneasy alliance, of agreed belonging without benefit of shared language, ritual practices, or, in short, the typical bases for shared investments. Pokot and Samburu have agreed not to fight at the threat of a curse that will lead to the deaths of those who break that covenant. And yet according to some Samburu elders, the landscape itself – acting on a stone buried in the soil – has both literally and metaphorically broken the covenant, demanding a renewal.[70]

It may be time for yet a third stone, as the inevitability that *ntoror* evokes is undeniable, a fact that had already troubled Letua when he was a young warrior in the early 1990s, asking a well-known prophetess about his generation's future. She promised difficulty. By the time of the excavation in 2006, Letua wondered how many more generations the Samburu could endure. Would they not encounter another people and be displaced or absorbed? What about the Pokot? Might they be the people who would displace and absorb the Samburu?

> Leave that alone because the Pokot can't chase us, if it weren't for the government. [Musa: We could be fought by combined forces.] Others invade, others invade – the Somali, Turkana, and didn't the Somali invade? And aren't they all chased away? [Musa: They were chased.] So that's why we say there isn't an ethnic group forever. [Musa: There isn't.] Even the years of the Europeans were about seventy.[71]

As powerful as statements about the limits of historical European intervention and, more telling, the limits of ethnicity are, the discomfort of *ntoror* remains. As Samburu put it, certain landscapes are sweet, and in the open places that make it visible, negotiation will be necessary.

Conclusion

The excavation inspired Letua to pursue an issue that had long troubled him and which he saw operating in the histories of landscape surrounding the excavation and in the ideological discussions in which Samburu sometimes interpreted the archaeological site differently

than did the Europeans or even other African members of the team. Guided by the insights gained from our collaborative archaeology project and its reflexive ethnographic component, future work and additional meetings are planned to shape the future of the hill in ways as consistent as possible with the communities' diverse sensibilities. These conversations will hinge on the topic of how knowledge is produced, and the relationship between landscape and knowledge that is at the heart of the debate between some Samburu elders (men and women) and various "moderns" (Samburu, non-Samburu Kenyan, and foreign). While some elders view the landscape as a form of evolving person whose will can be interpreted through the human, natural, and divine events that transpire there, the view of anthropologists and many Samburu "moderns" is challenged by the task of reconciling the value they place on the scientific method and its associated technologies, with a respect for, or even a belief in, the elders' view. This is consistent with the far-reaching potential Letua saw for *ntoror*.

As a pastoralist concept, *ntoror* encapsulates contact between different groups, with two aspects that have concerned us in this paper. One aspect is about the emotional force of belonging to an agentive landscape whose sweetness in the midst of disaster destroys, saves, and renews itself and its human, animal, and plant inhabitants. This aspect makes *ntoror* a concept by which agentive landscapes themselves *create* identities. Survival on the pastoralist landscape engenders mobility, struggle, and new identities that demand naming: Sampur for the satchel required to store life-saving foods as they are found, Lterito/dust people who are reduced to nothing but will resurrect to the point of thriving.

Second, the other aspect of *ntoror* is that it speaks to forced dialogue and transformation either through open conflict (ideological, legal, violent) or through negotiation. The path to the present for the Samburu has been one of migration, war, suffering, and survival: Samburu are self-conscious that they are simultaneously survivors of disaster and the descendants of decimated peoples, victors and vanquished, counting as heroes those who fought on every side. At the same time, the conflict of *ntoror* has sometimes offered another option, of negotiation and covenant. This was the case for an entire Laikipiak family whose descendants live near Baawa – they negotiated peace and were allowed to be adopted tout corps. On different terms, it is also the basis for peace between Pokot and Samburu, a positive history that continues to be evoked as a reminder that peace between Pokot and Samburu is possible even after terrible casualties.

We offer *ntoror* in order to shift the terms of discussion about landscape and resources *away* from claims-making and entitlement – whether religious, ethnic, or autochthonous – and towards the pragmatic implications of conflict's inevitability. Landscapes invite encounter and potential conflict. The question then becomes not one of inclusion and exclusion but rather of method: by what methods will we meet and negotiate? By what agreements will we transform in order to endure?

Notes

1. Interview, M13-2006. In order to conform to the United States' federally mandated human subjects protections (approved for this research by Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board) no respondent names are used in this paper. Respondents have each been assigned a code, which identifies gender, respondent number, and year

without other individually identifying information. Interviews were conducted in the Samburu highlands, unless otherwise noted in the text.

2. Straight et al., "'It Was *Maendeleo*.'"
3. As we note, the framing of our project in terms of this indigenous concept was encouraged by the late Musa Letua.
4. *Ntoror* is a Maa term (meaning a place that attracts division and fighting), used by contemporary and past Maa speakers, including Samburu, Maasai, and Il Chamu. Hughes, *Moving the Maasai*, 115–8, comments that some Maasai respondents refer to *entorror* to describe the 'sweet' landscape (Laikipia) from which they were forcibly removed, in comparison to the resource-poor landscape in which they were settled. However, Hughes' respondents do not use *amelok* (to taste sweet) or *arropil* (to smell sweet) but rather, they use *sidai*, which means beautiful and also ostrich. Beauty, goodness, and sweetness can be metaphorically entangled but the linguistic distinctions are important. We are grateful to the participants of the workshop that led to this edited collection for pointing out that the concept of sweetness as applied to these areas of the landscape also resonates for neighbouring pastoralist groups. In pursuing the possible commonalities, it will be important to distinguish between precise meanings and metaphoric extensions.
5. Waller, "*Emutai*," provides a detailed and elegant account of the series of disasters that impacted the Maasai during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The Samburu would have been similarly impacted, and collective memory of these events most likely informs contemporary Samburu understanding of disaster, but their conceptualization of *mutai* cannot be reduced to these particulars.
6. On identity, ethnicity, and belonging, see for example Broch-Due, "Violence and Belonging"; Fukui and Markakis, *Ethnicity and Conflict*; Galaty "Being 'Maasai'"; Schlee, *Identities on the Move*, "Ethnicity Emblems" and *How Enemies Are Made*; Turton, "Mursi Political Identity." Our concern here is about the production and control of knowledge.
7. Galaty, "Pastoral Orbits"; Schlee, *Identities on the Move*; Sobania, "Historical Tradition"; Turton, "Mursi Political Identity"; Waller "Kidongoi's Kin."
8. Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging*.
9. Following Mannheim and Carreño, "Wak'as: Entifications," and Lane, "Places and Paths," we suggest that East African pastoralist landscape agencies warrant rigorous problematisation consistent with pastoralist rather than Eurocentric sensibilities. In what follows, we briefly specify each type of landscape agency to which we refer.
10. In 2012, the Nairobi-Marsabit tarmac road was extended from Archers Post northward in the wake of oil discovered in Turkana, to within an hour from Wamba town.
11. Straight, "Altered Landscapes"; see also Pike et al., "Documenting." We thank an anonymous reviewer for noting that the popularity of motorcycles has enhanced access to medical services. Nevertheless, the cost is as high as 1000/KES in remote areas, and not every case can be safely transported by motorcycle.
12. Carolyn Lesorogol, Bilinda Straight, and Jon Holtzman.
13. Lane et al., "Excavations at Naakedi."
14. Straight et al., "'It Was *Maendeleo*.'"
15. As described in Straight et al., "'It Was *Maendeleo*,'" these elders' concerns were revealed in 2008 in the course of interviews the team conducted as part of the team's ethnographic self-scrutiny of the archaeological project. One issue was whether or not trees growing from graves were cut – a practice the team had avoided.
16. Spencer, *Samburu*.
17. Hughes, *Moving the Maasai*.
18. Fumugalli, "Diachronic Study," 171–3; Duder and Simpson, "Land and Murder."
19. Fumagalli, "Diachronic Study," 165–6.
20. Sobania, "Historical Tradition," 78–83. We corroborate Sobania below with respect to the Samburu ethnonym, but we note that living Samburu trace their path to the present further, self-conscious that they were previously known by other ethnonyms – other names for various clan clusters.

21. Galaty, "Pastoral Orbits"; Kassam, "The People of the Five 'Drums'"; Little, "Maasai Identity"; Schlee, *Identities on the Move*; Sobania, "Historical Tradition," "Herders"; Waller "Lords of East Africa," "Kidongoi's Kin."
22. This observation is based on oral histories Straight has collected since 2001.
23. Duder and Simpson, "Land and Murder."
24. Interview, M23-2002.
25. Interview, M11-2006.
26. See Bollig, "Adaptive Cycles," this volume, for similar themes in Pokot.
27. Interview, M4-2002. Like other generations, Lterito were named for features or historical conditions specific to them. In the aftermath of late nineteenth century disaster, Lterito were deliberately given a name that described disaster and predicted hope. Ltarigarig, remembered as a 'haughty' generation, were named onomatopoeically for the decorations their girlfriends wore, which tinkled as they walked – garigarig, garigarig.
28. Interview, M11-2006.
29. See Jennings, "Scatterlings," for a well-researched discussion of the Lokop ethnonym. Whether or not Lokop as all-encompassing ethnonym predates Maasai or the reverse does not concern us here. Rather, we are concerned with contemporary Samburu understandings of the past by which they are survivors of disaster who have successfully amalgamated and consumed earlier clan groups. We note, though, Krapf's (*Vocabulary*) etymology for Lokop as related to *nkop* – place, and thus the people of the place. This corroborates Straight's conclusions based on interviews with Samburu. The argument of *lokop*/*nkop* versus *loikop*/killer may never be resolved.
30. Interview, M8-2003.
31. Galaty, "Pastoral Orbits"; Sobania, "Historical Tradition"; see also Berntsen, "Pastoralism"; Jennings "Scatterlings"; Lamphear "People of the Grey Bull"; Waller "Lords of East Africa," "Kidongoi's Kin."
32. MacDonald, "Notes on the Ethnology," 240–1.
33. See also Little, "Maasai Identity," on the implications of historical Maa identities and traditions for contemporary land issues.
34. Sutton, "Sirikwa Holes."
35. Lamphere, "People of the Grey Bull"; Galaty, "Pastoral Orbits."
36. Sutton, "Becoming Maasai," 42–8.
37. See Little, "Maasai Identity," whose Il Chamus history corroborates this approximate time period for the divergence at Baringo.
38. This timeline bears comparison to Pokot history: Bollig "Adaptive Cycles," noting that Pokot describe their ancestors of this period as dressing like Maasai. Correspondingly, Samburu historians mention their ancestors as wearing their hair like Pokot.
39. Von Hohnel, *Discovery*.
40. New, *Life*.
41. Krapf, *Vocabulary*.
42. Baxter, "Boran Age-Sets."
43. Herren, "Socioeconomic Strategies."
44. Krapf, *Vocabulary*.
45. Ibid., 30–1.
46. Interview, M6-2003.
47. Ibid.
48. On the symbolic dimensions of the *ntotoi* board game, see Straight, "In the Belly of History."
49. Interview, M6-2003.
50. Ibid.
51. Girls are the most mobile – abducted, sometimes reclaimed and sometimes not, but often visited by the natal kin who lost them.
52. Interview, M16-2006.
53. Sobania, "Feasts."
54. On the famine of the 1780–1790s, see Herring, "Views from Mount Otuke."
55. Interview, M16-2006.

56. Interview, M15-2006.
57. Interview, M24-2006.
58. Interview, M15-2006.
59. Straight et al., "'It Was *Maendeleo*.'"
60. Straight, "Cutting Time," "In the Belly of History."
61. Interview, M6-2003.
62. McCabe, "*Cattle Bring Us*," emphasizes the needs of cattle whereas the concept of *ntoror* emphasizes landscapes as agentive spaces, which, in providing these needs, invite conflict.
63. Greiner, "Unexpected Consequences," "Guns, Land, and Votes"; Straight, "Violence in the Shadows," "Making Sense of Violence."
64. For examples: Anderson, "Stock Theft"; Bollig, *Risk Management*; Bollig and Österle, "'We Turned Our Enemies'"; Boye and Kaarhus, "Competing Claims"; Broch-Due, *Violence and Belonging*; Greiner, "Guns, Land, and Votes"; Lesorogol, *Contesting the Commons*; McCabe, "*Cattle Bring Us*"; Pike et al., "Documenting"; Straight, "Violence in the Shadows," "Making Sense of Violence."
65. Hughes, "Malice," *Moving the Maasai*.
66. Greiner, "Unexpected Consequences."
67. Bollig, "Adaptive Cycles," on implications for Pokot of colonial imposition of maps.
68. Interview, M1-2001.
69. Interview, M3-2001. Greiner, "Unexpected Consequences," cites the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding & Conflict Management, *Pokot/Samburu Naivasha Peace Accord*, as providing dates of 1913 and 2001 for the Pokot–Samburu covenant.
70. For Samburu ontology, this suggests the invocation of a divine agency associated with the site where the stone was buried. A more rigorous exegesis would require interviews with both Pokot and Samburu. For Samburu, ancestral agency is associated with burial sites, unique divine agencies are associated with certain sacred sites (multiple aspects of an otherwise unitary divinity), and divine agency can be ritually invoked. Care must be taken to avoid ascribing a general, inchoate agency to pastoralist landscapes.
71. Interview, M11-2006.

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