

The Effects of Trade on Traditional Subsistence Patterns in Eastern Tanzania: The Case of the Masaai

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the many questions about the nature of the indigenous Masaai tribes, specifically of subsistence practices today, because only scattered accounts remain from colonial explorers from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. The Masaai are groups of people that reside in villages scattered throughout eastern Tanzania. The following interview questions are the research focus questions of this study: What ways are the Masaai obtaining their food today? What are traditional ways of obtaining food in the past? What ways are Tanzanians living on the Zanzibar Islands obtaining their food today? What are traditional ways of obtaining food and other goods for the people of the Zanzibar Islands in the past? What government policies today impact the ways you are allowed to process, to gather, or to trade food and goods? The responses will be processed, interpreted, and analyzed as well as the field notes and tape recordings taken during my observations and interviews conducted with the program's Swahili/English translator Samson Kiware. The following list of steps were used to process and interpret information obtained during my research: fieldnotes, interviews of Masaai villagers, coding from focused and selective, analyzing and interpreting of coding themes, and a final analysis. My direct observation of the Masaai subsistence patterns will allow for comparisons with metropolitan subsistence patterns of Zanzibar to show how development impacts, or does not impact, once traditional ways of life for Tanzanians. The goal of this project is to research the effects that development and trade have upon indigenous tribes in eastern Tanzania, so that anthropologists can use the results of this research to understand how culture contact around the world increasingly impacts traditional ways of life.

INTRODUCTION

The country of Tanzania is located on the central-eastern side of the continent of Africa, bordered by the countries of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, and Mozambique, and finally by the Indian Ocean on its eastern side, as seen in Figure 1. The population of Tanzania is around 18 million, with an average density of six people per square kilometer. About ten percent of the population of Tanzania lives in urban centers¹. Many questions exist about the nature of the indigenous Masaai tribes living within Tanzania, because only scattered accounts of their culture by German, French, and British explorers from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries exist today.

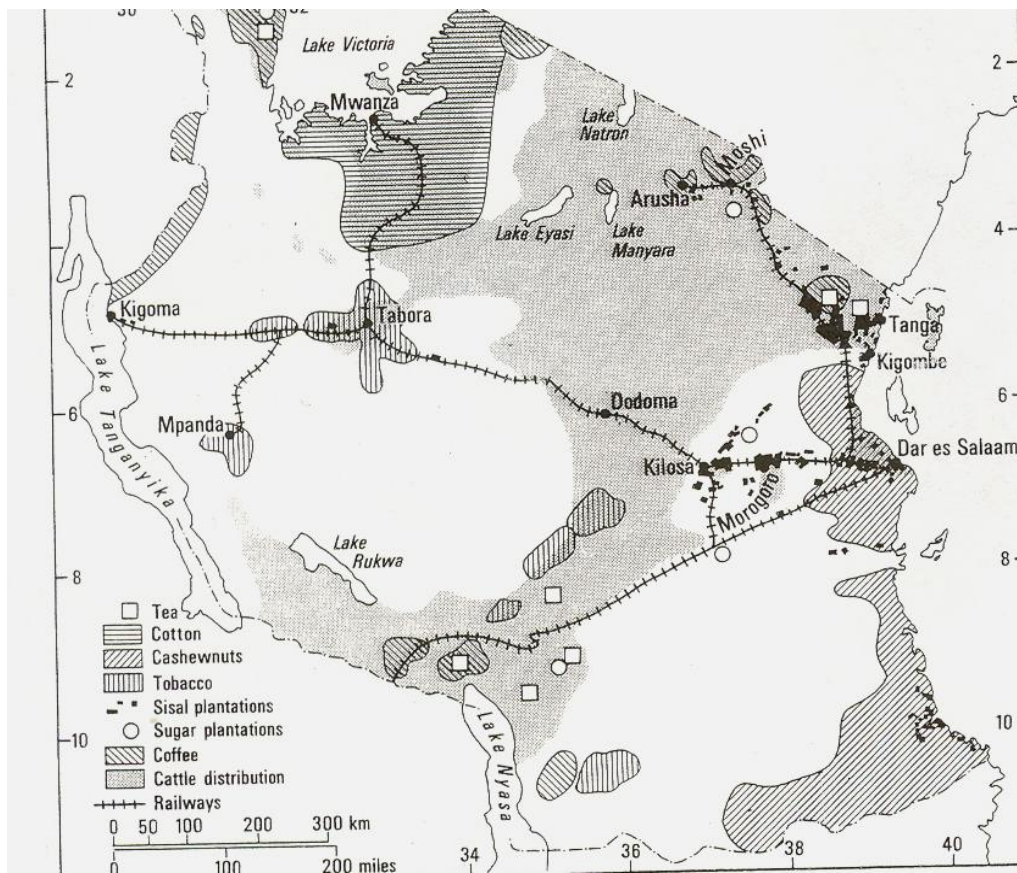


Figure 1. Map of the distribution of cattle and principle export crops in Tanzania.

Figure 1 is an important portrayal of how far trade from the port city of Dar es-Salaam can travel within the country of Tanzania, and how easily small villages can communicate with various other ethnicities. Culture contact is a predominant factor in the changing of traditional indigenous peoples, namely the Masaai and other pastoral groups in Tanzania.

The accounts of the Masaai mainly describe them as a violent people who raided neighboring tribes such as the Shambaa, the Hehe, the Iraqw, and the Kaguru. These accounts of warfare among the tribes of eastern Tanzania were not given in any systematic format that has been created and followed by anthropologists and ethnologists today. The Masaai tribes mainly speak Swahili, though in countless other regions of Tanzania, English is the main language spoken. The overall goal of this research is to better understand the impact of trade upon traditional ways of subsistence among the Masaai so that anthropologists can use the results of this research to understand how culture contact around the world increasingly impacts and changes traditional ways of life. A critical analysis after completion of direct observation of the Masaai subsistence patterns will allow for analysis of comparisons of metropolitan subsistence patterns to show how development impacts, or does not impact, once traditional ways of life for Tanzanians throughout time.

The purpose of this paper is to use direct observations of subsistence patterns of the indigenous Masaai tribes near Arusha, Tanzania in comparison to more modernized subsistence patterns of Tanzanians living on Zanzibar Island, and the metropolitan city of Dar el-Salaam, Tanzania to delineate the impact of trade upon once traditional and dominate ways of life in Tanzanian culture. These direct observations were obtained by traveling to Tanzania during the month of January 2009 with the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Reality Tour Program. While in Tanzania, I observed the actions involved in processing, gathering, and trading of food and goods within the Masaai village and the Zanzibar Islands, and I was assisted by the program's Swahili translator to help me conduct interviews with Tanzanian men and women. I asked three adult men and three adult women of the Masaai tribe and three adult men and three adult women from Dar es-Salaam about their subsistence patterns through a series of questions listed in the methods category.

HISTORY AND ENVIRONMENT

Tanzania's economic history can be divided into roughly five periods: pre-capitalist centuries (before A.D. 1500), mercantile capitalism (A.D. 1500-1800), early industrialism (A.D. 1800-1870), maturing capitalism (A.D. 1870-1945), and the present capitalism with the world capitalist economy. Before A.D. 1500 for the last two thousand years the east African coast was in contact with civilizations in the Persian Gulf, India, and even China using the Indian Ocean for sea trade². The cultivation of bananas was associated with the introduction of iron tools. Bananas were introduced by India around two thousand years ago³. The introduction of tools such as iron hoes allowed for cultivation of new crops such as maize, rice, and helped with crop rotation and irrigation⁴.

By the mid-1800's, eastern Tanzania began developing by expanding trade with British and German explorers with market settings in large clusters of villages. The exchange of ivory and game increased between the Masaai and other nearby tribes with foreign traders at the coast of Tanzania, largely due to the introduction of the gunpowder trade. Increasing demand by traders on the coast and the Zanzibar Islands for goods such as ivory and food convinced the Masaai to raid more and hunt bigger game such elephants with modern weapons, such as guns to kill more effectively⁵. According to historical accounts from the late 1700's through the early 1900's on Zanzibar, primarily Arabs owned most of the fertile arable land where the clove and coconut plantation were established. Africans were believed to be the descendents of slaves by the Arabs and worked on the plantations as the Arabs were the land lords⁶. These plantations provided high numbers of export goods from Zanzibar.

Table 1. Imports and exports at port on Zanzibar Island

The value of the imports and exports at the port of Zanzibar from and to each country in 1900 and subsequent years was as follows :—

From or to	Imports.				Exports.			
	1900.	1901.	1902.	1903.	1900.	1901.	1902.	1903.
United Kingdom ...	106,400	107,205	156,503	114,088	106,165	83,095	90,852	88,777
British India ...	405,902	401,528	301,806	379,924	123,123	131,311	120,238	159,563
British East Africa ...	72,507	82,469	78,423	73,327	101,520	129,748	153,367	82,567
Other British Possessions ...	25,494	39,998	30,388	20,792	18,727	16,979	13,918	16,138
Germany ...	67,331	62,974	75,158	57,891	35,592	45,200	63,672	56,879
German East Africa ...	180,628	223,878	202,797	176,796	437,811	406,398	295,516	332,929
Holland ...	4,944	58,096	59,617	39,023	37,673	31,513	33,168	10,450
Belgium ...	51,066	11,368	2,700	—	—	—	—	—
France ...	23,560	17,016	17,724	15,050	55,907	124,521	132,929	117,446
Benadir Coast ...	44,115	34,894	39,513	36,725	38,508	38,514	46,869	37,758
Southern Ports of Africa ...	32,995	30,239	21,673	16,286	113,503	63,564	53,586	54,108
United States ...	60,781	67,126	80,480	48,993	81,477	76,765	59,680	67,643
Austria-Hungary ...	—	3,438	6,704	5,240	—	1,802	700	5,631
Italy ...	—	5,095	3,130	—	—	—	—	—
Norway ...	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Arabia ...	40,318	6,690	4,288	—	117,788	19,108	—	—
Other Foreign Countries ...	—	44,817	17,959	18,168	—	—	9,079	2,162
			7,384	30,832			6,073	23,795
Total ...	£ 1,116,041	1,196,831	1,106,247	1,033,135	1,167,794	1,168,518	1,080,277	1,054,846

* Included in "Other Foreign Countries."

Table 1 depicts accounts of imports and exports from the late 1890's to the early 1900's out of Zanzibar Island to showcase the amounts of goods traded, and which countries the goods were being exported to⁷. The number of European and Middle Eastern countries confirms the vast involvement they had with Tanzanians through trade and communication while the economy was becoming quickly dependent upon exotic commodities within Tanzania.

The Masaai are groups of people that reside in villages with average populations of 50-200 people, and usually live within about 1 or 2 miles of another tribe of Masaai. The Masaai live upon what is called the Masaai Steppe in northeastern and eastern Tanzania, about 150 miles northwest of Dar es-Salaam. The Masaai are said to have migrated beyond the Masaai Steppe in search of more land for their cattle to graze by the eighteenth century, which caused clashes with the Bantu-speaking peoples who lived near the Pangani River⁸.

This region of land contains hills, plateaus, lowlands, and mountains⁹. The Masaai of this area live amongst a dry season (June to November) and a wet season (December), which has a significant impact upon a farming lifestyle. The majority of Masaai live upon the plateau in round, circular shaped huts made out of mud, cattle

manure and wattle sticks with thatch roofs¹⁰. Past settlements around the hilly landscape were usually built large in size to help protect the inhabitants from raiding parties, however, modern villages have around 10+ huts to accommodate a husband, wife (wives), and their children. Groups of Masaai often live in one particular area, unless they are married to another clan, because nearly all the descendents of one ancestor would live together within a village.

METHODS AND RESULTS

Historical accounts by explorers or historians have recorded events witnessed of subsistence patterns and trade in the 19th and 20th centuries though there has been little evidence of the reasons why these events or customs are conducted. The responses of these questions were analyzed from the set of field notes taken while the interviews commenced through a method that ethnologists call coding. Field notes are defined as accounts describing experiences and observations the researcher has made while participating in an intense and involved manner¹¹. Interviews were conducted as direct observations, and were recorded while in the field.

The following interview questions were asked on January 15, 2009 by the program's Swahili translator Sampson Kiware to three adult men named Johanas Makytina, Sadera Sekuang, and Melaui Shaaka and three adult women named Dan Muteh, Matasia Nengoyo, and Makuteh Dhaagen from a Masaai tribe, and were recorded with the following responses:

What ways are the Masaai obtaining their food today? Food comes from the cows and cattle, because they provide milk, meat, and corn flour through selling milk. The Masaai also buy corn from selling cows. Masaai women are responsible to teach their children traditions of their families. Each family is represented by the head women who make crafts to sell to visitors and locals. Money that is made from these sales goes to the woman's family for them to purchase more cattle, beads, clothing, corn/corn flour, and iron from mostly Arusha. Masaai girls learn how to produce and make crafts from their mothers. Some bracelets and crafts can take up to two weeks to make, and as little as two hours to finish. Masaai women utilize plants around them to put on their necklaces in order for Masaai men to put water or tobacco into.

Are the Masaai trading goods with their neighbors for food or other goods? The Masaai trade their cattle with other people to get more cattle, or to get supplies they need. Some of the supplies they purchase with money are clothing and weapons. Some milking cattle sold through bartering are to purchase sheep or goats. The Masaai trade milking cattle as far as Arusha, Tanzania which is about 100 miles away from their home or even as far as Nairobi, Kenya which is about 240 miles away from their home. Weapons that the Masaai trade for animals are spears and cane clubs.

Only Masaai men are allowed to travel from the tribal land to trade in Kenya or Arusha. The Masaai men say that it is not difficult to trade cattle in Arusha or Kenya, because there is no limit to how many cattle can be traded. The benefit behind high numbers of trading cattle is if the Masaai men are trading near by to their home, then both trading parties do not have to trade again for many months because of the higher volume of gained supplies. If there are no trading parties nearby, the Masaai men do not often take many cattle long distances in frequent amounts, and therefore must bring home fewer supplies less often which can impact severely the livelihood of the village families depending upon the season.

What are traditional ways of obtaining food in the past? The Masaai traditionally are pastoralists. The Masaai tribe interviewed has around 130 cattle to split between around the 10-15 families living within the village. For Masaai women, during the dry season, not enough milk is produced by their cattle, so they make porridge in their huts to serve to their families. Porridge is made in a large pot out of salt, corn flour, and boiling water. Masaai women are responsible for building the huts within the village. These huts are made out of cow dung, wood sticks, and grasses to make the structure waterproof. Masaai women also fetch water from nearby rivers, and also collect firewood from around villages.

The following interview questions were asked on January 21, 2009 by Samson Kiware to two adult men in Dar es-Salaam, and three adult women off of Zanzibar Island on January 20, 2009. The first interview conducted was with Sudi A. Sudi in a fast-food restaurant called City Fast Food, and the second interview was with William James in a sit down restaurant called City Garden Restaurant. The interview questions and responses to the men in Dar es-Salaam, Tanzania on January 21, 2009 and with Samson Kiware on January 31, 2009 are as follows:

How long have you worked in this restaurant? Sudi has worked at City Fast Food for one year. William James has worked at the City Garden Restaurant for two years.

What kinds of foods are sold in the restaurant? The City Fast Food restaurant sells such foods like rice, meat including chicken, and goat, pizza, salad, and drinks. The City Garden Restaurant sells rice, pastas, soups, pizza, burgers, fish, chicken, curry, salad, tea, milk, water, and liquor.

How does the restaurant get the food it sells? The food sold from the City Fast Food restaurant is obtained from other market grocery stores from Dar es-Salaam. The City Garden Restaurant has suppliers that deliver the food to them that the restaurant has ordered. The restaurant pays the suppliers a check for the amount of food delivered. This exchange happens to the restaurant each month at the end.

How much does the restaurant pay for food? The amounts that the City Fast Food restaurant pays to get new supplies vary depending upon the slow or busy traveling seasons. The City Garden Restaurant is a chain with five others, so it totals to around 30 million shillings a month.

Do you buy the foods for the restaurant with money from customer sales? The fast food restaurant buys all supplies with cash made from sales from customers. This fast food restaurant is one of five total in a chain of stores. When the supplies are purchased, Sudi says that they are distributed between all five restaurants in the chain. The City Garden Restaurants' customers' money from sales is responsible to be used to buy supplies every month.

Is the food the restaurant receives from suppliers imported from other countries? The majority of food provided by the suppliers is coming from local farms outside of Dar es-Salaam. Some products, such as macaroni, come from Nairobi, Kenya. William James believes that some of the foods sold are imported from other countries, but 90% of the food is grown in Tanzania. Most of the past is grown in Italy. William said that he believes that the suppliers get vegetables, fruit, and rice from local farms outside of Dar es-Salaam, Tanzania. The restaurant favors buying foods from local farmers versus imports from the suppliers, because this helps to give families money and the restaurant is also able to check the quality of the food to get the best.

What various food outlets are available for citizens of Dar es-Salaam to go to? Sudi believes that not many people in Dar es-Salaam cultivate, but many small cities around do. Sudi says that many people in Dar es-Salaam go to buy their food from grocery stores called Karikoo.

The following interview questions were directed to Samson Kiware on January 31, 2009:

What kinds of foods are in grocery stores in Tanzania? In a Tanzanian grocery store you will find canned goods, bottled goods, beverages, snacks, meat, bread, juices, spices, vegetables, cereal, candy etc. Ground provisions are normally found at the local markets but typically Tanzanian grocery stores, like those found in Western countries sell a range of products.

What kinds of foods are sold in street/farmers markets in Tanzania? Street vendors mainly sell fruits and small vegetables. They might sell avocados, mangoes, pineapples, ripe bananas, peppers and roasted maize. In the farmers' markets you will find a larger variety of the foods sold by street vendors in addition to host of ground provisions. There are oranges, plantains, green bananas, potatoes, spices, and other such products.

How do grocery stores and street vendors get the food they sell to customers? Do farmers bring their foods they sell to town markets to be sold? Yes, farmers will bring their foods to be sold in the town markets. Grocery stores import some of the foods that they sell but others are obtained from local manufacturers. For instance, certain bottled water and other beverages are manufactured locally (ex. Kilimanjaro water, Tangawize) making them easily accessible to the grocery stores.

Do you know different ways Tanzanians in Dar es-Salaam obtain their food today? Tanzanians in Dar es-Salaam purchase their food from supermarkets. Occasionally, there may be some who choose to maintain small food gardens but Dar es-Salaam is not suitable for farming because it is the main city, it is a coastal area without much farm land. Thus, the primary way that food is obtained in Dar es-Salaam is through supermarket shopping. The food sold in supermarkets in Dar es-Salaam is mainly coming from other towns in Tanzania. It is coming from other countries in Africa especially in South Africa.

Do you know any different ways Tanzanians in Arusha obtain their food today vs. Dar es-Salaam? Much like Tanzanians living in Dar es-Salaam, those living in Arusha obtain their food by supermarket shopping. There are probably more local markets in Arusha since the area and climate are adapted for farming so in that regard the means by which Tanzanians living in these two cities obtain food may differ. Another thing to note is that Tanzanians living in Arusha receive their fish from Dar es-Salaam, which lies along the coast. They also get fish from Lake Victoria in located in Mwanza.

Do you know if grocery stores in Dar es-Salaam import the majority of their food goods? Some foods are imported but I am not certain that the majority of the products are. Many of the foods sold in the supermarkets are manufactured in other African countries. Many are transported to Dar es-Salaam from other towns in Tanzania.

Do street/farmers markets import any of the food they sell? Most likely they do not because of the capital required to do so. Usually, street vendors and farmers' markets do not sell products that are expensive but those that are convenient to sell and easily available to them.

Do you know if the Masaai buy food from street/farmers markets or from mainly grocery stores? One of the distinct features of the Masaai tribe is that they herd cattle and maintain own farms. Their diet consists mainly of meat and milk so rarely do the Masaai venture into grocery stores to buy food. In towns like Arusha where there are modernized Masaai groups, there are Masaai markets set up where they can obtain provisions. However, traditional Masaai groups will stick to their farms and cattle as their main source of food.

When you are in Tanzania, where do you typically go to buy foods? Where does your family go to buy their food? My family obtains food from local markets and sometimes from supermarkets. For example, they shop at supermarkets in the town that is close to where we live or even purchase animals such as goats and cows for celebrated occasions. There are times when they may go to a major supermarket such as Shop Rite to purchase grocery. They buy vegetables, onions, tomatoes, and such products from local markets.

What kinds of foods do Tanzanians typically grow in their gardens? What kinds of foods do Tanzanians typically buy from grocery stores? Foods grown in the Tanzanian gardens include tomatoes, lettuce, peppers, and carrots. Foods purchased in grocery stores are flour, sugar, beverages, snacks, and so forth.

The following are interview questions to three adult women named Fatma Juma Mohammad, Pili Juma Mohammad, and Kay Salum Juma from Zanzibar Island on January 20, 2009:

How long have you been selling scarves? Fatma Juma Mohammad has been selling scarves for two years on Zanzibar Island. Fatma prefers to sell scarves instead of selling food, because it is very hard without resources to pack up all merchandise everyday. Having light clothing also stays better to preserve in heat.

Do you make the scarves you sell yourself? Fatma buys cloth from Stone Town on Zanzibar Island with money that she makes from sales of merchandise. A woman friend of Fatma makes the scarves that she sells in Stone Town.

Have sales of scarves dropped over the last two years? Pili believes that sales of scarves has gone down over the last year, because she believes there are less travelers.

How do lesser sales of scarves impact your income? Pili believes that with less sales of the scarves, and with many economies struggling, sometimes she gets fake money from customers. When Pili does not make many sales from the scarves, it directly impacts how much money she can take home to buy food and more supplies for her family in Stone Town.

Why do you sell scarves instead of food? Kay prefers to sell her scarves with Fatma and Pili off of the main island of Stone Town, because there is less competition on the edge of the island.

Do food markets do better selling of products than commercial markets do? Pili believes that selling scarves are better than trying to sell foods on a street, because in Stone Town and in towns that most people and travelers go to eat at nicer establishments instead of buying food from vendors. Off of the main island, tourists and visitors are likely to have already eaten and therefore are more likely to buy souvenirs.

Before selling scarves, how did you make money? Kay said that other options for jobs in Stone Town or at its edge are to maintain a shop, restaurant, to sell flowers, rice, sugar, and to ship supplies to various places. Kay believes that many shops in Stone Town buy their supplies from Dar es-Salaam on the eastern coast of Tanzania.

CONCLUSION

Little is known about the traditional subsistence patterns among the Masaai tribes, or for how long they have been in practice. Masaai men and women participate in labor of maintaining usually 3-4 acre plots of land per family unit within a village¹². Each family helps to clear land before the rainy season during December, and also helps to complete weeding and cultivation until June. Arable land is used to grow crops such as vegetables, tobacco, bananas, grain, beans, and pumpkins. Males of the tribe clear and burn the land to make holes for sowing, while women place seeds within the holes in the ground¹³.

One task specialized to women of the Masaai Steppe is beer brewing, which is sold to neighboring villages. Any profits obtained from this sale goes directly to the women's immediate family. Another task that is exclusive to women is preparation of food, gathering water and firewood, and preparing flour and porridge from cattle milk. Tasks performed by men include curing and preparing tobacco, and traditionally hunting with poisoned arrows and spears, though today hunting typically involves the uses of guns. Historical accounts of this region by German soldiers during the 1800's claim that tribes living in the region of the Rufiji River were exchanging such goods as clay, ivory, and salt¹⁴.

The German East Africa was established January 1, 1891. The German occupation of Tanzania encountered widespread resistance from 1888-1898 by the people largely located on the east coast. The Germans constructed the Central Railway in 1904, and it was largely used to ship cash-crops. Sisal, rubber, and coffee were grown on European-owned estates for export via the Central Railway, as seen in Table 2¹⁵. Around 1964 in Tanzania, many factories began to open for production of imported goods from other countries, which has left long standing impacts on the economy by making businesses dependent upon foreign culture. Many companies were set up as chain stores branching out from ones originally set up in Kenya. The interview conducted on Zanzibar illustrates how inhabitants of the island adapt to the ever-changing economy reliant upon trade with foreign countries, and no longer retreat to past traditional ways of obtaining commodities locally. This continuous culture contact is portrayed by the interviews conducted on Zanzibar, in Dar es-Salaam, and with Samson Kiware. I believe the Masaai tribe's evolutionary change from the past is directly caused by culture contact and economic dependency.

The three adult women interviewed on Zanzibar provided insight as to how some people believe selling and growing food on Zanzibar would not be sufficient in providing adequate means of money, because the demand for being a food vendor is high and competitive. I believe that many inhabitants of Zanzibar no longer grow their own food in large quantities, because their economy is dependent upon foreign trade which has exponentially exposed foreign culture into not only coastal Tanzania, but throughout the country. Selling off of the main island is a crucial change in a way of life for the three women interviewed, because they would cease to survive if they do not adapt their actions to fit the supply and demand of the economy of Zanzibar. This direct response to having to meet the needs of capitalist economy on Zanzibar has forever changed the culture of Tanzanians living there.

Continuous culture contact in Tanzania by foreign nations has ultimately not only impacted the Masaai tribe who has evolved in order to capitalize their pastoral life, but it has also exponentially changed and dictated subsistence patterns of Tanzanians living on Zanzibar Island. It cannot be accurately concluded if the impact of the last two hundred years of culture contact has in fact negatively forever changed Masaai traditions, however, it can be concluded that the Masaai tribes may one day cease to exist in the manner that they are described in historical accounts. Culture contact is not a means to an end for native tribes located around the world; however, in under developed countries often-traditional ways of life are ultimately erased and forgotten by society when it has become dependent upon foreign contact and integration.

Anthropologists must use this example of the modern culture contact as a model for understanding the implications of foreign dependency in under developed countries that still contain indigenous cultures, because as seen in the case of the Masaai located near Arusha, Tanzania, traditional ways of life are being erased and replaced with patterns and skills that allow them no longer need their traditional culture in order to participate in the world capitalist economy and foreign affairs. More systematic participant observation by ethnographers or cultural anthropologists needs to be done to increase our understanding of the ever-changing modern Masaai.

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³ Coulson, 15.

⁴ Coulson, 18.

⁵ Redmayne, Alison. *The Hehe: Tanzania Before 1900*. (Eastern African Publishing House: Nairobi, Kenya, 1968), 38.

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