Land, Credit and Crop Transitions in Kenya:
The Luo Response to Directed Development
in Nyanza Province

A dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of Cambridge

Parker MacDonald Shipton
St. John's College
April, 1985
A New Scramble?

Historians of Africa refer to the late nineteenth century as the time of the Scramble. The European imperial powers sent their "explorers" into the savannahs and rain forests of Africa to claim lands that they had not before known, but that they were wrong to call unknown. With straight-edges on maps, they etched the borders that today seem to make so little sense geographically, ethnically, linguistically. Twentieth-century Africa is stuck with these borders, inventions from another continent and another time.

Africanist social science today is witnessing a similar scramble in the field of development as scholars from outside the continent and from within vie for grounds on which to plant the flags of their mother disciplines. There are political scientists who defend power and presidencies as their protectorate. Economists cling to growth and equity, or supply and demand, as subjects of what some of them have called the queen of the social sciences. Anthropologists hold kinship and custom, bridewealth and beliefs to be an important part of the study of humankind. The geographers, whose learned society in Britain spearheaded that empire's thrust in the first scramble, are running with the pack in the second.

If social scientists go about their studies of Africa with the same possessiveness and insensitivity as their Victorian forebears, the marks
they leave on African studies will one day look as ridiculous as the straight line that now divides capitalist Kenya from socialist Tanzania, dividing Luo from Luo, Maasai from Maasai. A lender will be the province of one discipline, a borrower that of a second, the loan between them that of a third. In development, if boundaries must be drawn at all, they must be drawn in ways that recognize overlapping claims and the complexities of local human relations. Disciplines that study the same problem in the same place must borrow and lend among themselves.

Anthropology has as much to contribute as any other single discipline to the study of land rights and lending in Africa. But no single discipline, as disciplines are defined today, will adequately describe or explain the thought and behaviour that these subjects offer for study. This study touches on the "micro" and the "macro", the indigenous and the superimposed, the spontaneous and the directed. It is about a specific theory, and about specific development projects; but more broadly, it is about how rural people have adjusted, and failed to adjust, to life at the edges of a state and of an international agricultural order. Like a growing number of development studies, it poaches in many fields: agronomy, agricultural economics, history, geography. I hope this trespassing may at least open some questions for common study.

Though cutting the thesis for a length limit has required editing some citations from the text, references to some of the most useful sources have been left in the bibliography.
Where Credit is Due

The people who have shared their lives with me in Kenya with such endless care and cheer deserve my deep and lasting thanks. My wife Polly Steele Shipton has made large sacrifices for this study, and she has enriched it with her insightful contributions in the field, her skilled editorial advice, and her strong moral support throughout. It is impossible to mention all the many Kenyans who have been, at the same time, my hosts, friends, and informants; and the nature of my topic unfortunately makes it unwise to use full names. But special thanks are due to Messrs. Athiambo, Obura, Ochieng, Okumu, Omondi, Owino, and Shijenje for their assistance and companionship in their home neighbourhoods, and to their families, who touchingly bent their genealogies to fit me in. These people made my years in Kenya uniquely enjoyable and instructive; the study is theirs as much as mine.

I am grateful to the Director and staff of the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi, where I was a Research Associate throughout my stay in Kenya, and to the Office of the President for research clearance. Many officers of the World Bank, USAID, the Kenyan Ministries of Agriculture and Co-operative Development, the local administrations, the British-American Tobacco Company, the National Museums of Kenya and the Institute of Development Studies in the University of Nairobi generously lent their help.

In England too I have benefited from the help of many people. Dr. R.G. Abrahams, my Supervisor at Cambridge, has given me balanced advice and much needed practical support always. My understanding of family
farming, in particular, owes much to my discussions with him. Dr. John Beattie, Professor Davydd Greenwood, and Professor Thomas Gregor, who taught me before I began at Cambridge, have provided tireless encouragement ever since. The substance of the study has been improved also by the advice of Professor John Barnes, Dr. Eyal Ben-Ari, Dr. Roger Blench, Dr. Keith Hart, Dr. John Lonsdale, Dr. Henry Okoth-Ogendo, Professor David Parkin, Dr. Malcolm Ruel, Dr. A.F. Robertson, Dr. Michel Verdon, and Dr. Henry West. Among countless others who have contributed in their various ways are Mrs. Barbara Alloway, Mrs. Margaret Carr, Ms. Kathleen Chamberlain, Dr. Peter Clarke, Mr. John and Mrs. Jennie Coope, Miss Geraldine Cully, Dr. Frank Fitch, Fr. Joseph Fitzsimons, Mr. Abraham Goldman, Ms. Eva Greger, Ms. Kathleen Hanson, Mr. Mark Harris, Dr. M. Jean Hay, Drs. Roger Kirkby and Anne Stroud, Ms. Antonia Lovelace, the Rev. Andrew Macintosh, Dr. David Nyamwaya, Dr. Joyce Olenja, Ms. Clancy Pegg, Dr. Richard Waller, and the staff and students of Kagogo Primary School. My colleagues at the Harvard Institute for International Development and the Department of Anthropology there have given me kind support during the final editing.

It remains to acknowledge those who made the study possible to begin with. The main funding was provided, in generous measure, by St. John's College, Cambridge, and its Warmington Bequest; and by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. The Smuts Fund of Cambridge University and the Radcliffe-Brown Memorial Fund of the Royal Anthropological Institute contributed helpful supplementary grants. The text refers occasionally to information gathered in the course of a previous research project funded by the Marshall Aid Commemoration
Commission of the United Kingdom. My sincere thanks to all these sources.

The thesis is dedicated to my parents, James and Elizabeth Shipton, in gratitude for their long commitment to my education.