CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN SAMBURU EDUCATION

BY

MELBOURNE EDWARD HOLSTEEN

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE COUNCIL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
1982
This research was designed to discover the effects of modern, Western-type education upon the traditional ways of life of the Samburu people of Kenya. Traditionally, the Samburu had adapted well to an arid habitat by nomadic pastoralism. Population growth, over-grazing, erosion and dessication of their environment have seriously threatened that adaptation. Modern schools among the Samburu were opened in 1935 and had increased in number to enroll about 20% of school age children by 1977. Thus, by this date the effects of these schools were clearly observable during my research visit (from January - August, 1977).

Initial interviews were conducted with Samburu youths, and middle-age and older adults of both sexes, to determine what cultural changes were disturbing to them. An interview schedule was formulated from these initial interviews, embracing the various aspects of their culture. The interview schedule was administered to a research sample of six groups, of 20-25 individuals each, controlled for age, years of school and sex.
Information from respondents was supplemented by observational data, written essays by secondary school students, and recorded life histories and oral literature. Questions in the interview schedule attempted to ascertain: (1) whether specific cultural items were considered traditional or modern by the respondents, (2) whether the respondents approved or disapproved of these items, and (3) from whom the respondent acquired his/her opinions.

In most aspects of culture respondents with more schooling registered more choices for modernizing ways of life. A majority still preferred traditional social values. A higher percentage of girls registered choices for change in questions of social relations and education than did boys. Traditionally males were more dominant than females, and more were permitted to attend school.

Parents, aunts and uncles, elders, and unschooled warriors were the chief transmission agents for traditional ways of life, whereas school teachers, students, civil servants and missionaries were the primary transmission agents for modernizing ways of life.

Schools are seen to be a very important but not the only source of profound cultural change occurring among the Samburu.