

**Shani, S. (2021). *Indigenous Elites in Africa: The Case of Kenya's Maasai*. New York, USA: Routledge. 216 pp. Rs. 12,012.**

Indigenous elites in Africa: the case of Kenya's Maasai is a detailed anthropological analysis conducted by Serah Shani, an Associate Professor at the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Mercy College, USA. The author herself belongs to the Maasai community which helped her in providing us with an in-depth understanding of the challenges and developments taking place in this indigenous ethnic group after the formation of modern nation-states. The book contains detailed anecdotes of various modern generation Maasai indigenous elites who fought for their way up towards success through their ethics of hard work and resilience. Unlike the general idea of Elites as middle class taken in various sociological studies, the author throws light on a rather less explored area of study, understanding of indigenous elites in an African society. Her study focuses on Maasai indigenous elites of Kenya who were left behind without any government support for development after the independence. But with the support from NGOs, Missionaries and Tourism they were able to access education and development through global capital inflows. This inflow of global resources paved the way for better opportunity, social mobility, and elite formation for the Maasai community. Through her observation and interview findings, her study of Maasai elites helps the reader to see the struggles and importance of little support in leading towards success not just for an individual but a whole community. The writer being a woman herself also shares how through education and opportunity women are equally becoming elites in the rather Patriarchal Maasai community who traditionally only favored male elites and their authority.

The author has taken the Narok Town of Kenya for her study where the Maasai people are the dominant population. According to the author, here the term 'Elite' means, "a group of political, professional, religious, and economic elites". She has divided her focus of Elites into four categorizations of elites namely; political elites, professional elites, religious elites, and economic elites. Her methodology of this study includes snowball and selection sampling methods with face-to-face structures and unstructured interviews. Through this, she has tried to

bring out their challenges, support system, and genealogical information for these elites. The book contains three anthropological approaches as a lens to understand the position of Maasai elites. These theories are human capital theory, globalization, and the social reproduction theory. In the human capital theory, she explains how when the human is equipped with skills and knowledge, they contribute to building Human capital. Under this view, western education to the Maasai community helped them in the economic development of their community and region. Through her reference to the United Nations Human development index (HDI), she explains how countries with high HDI are more developed in the world. While focusing on the role of Globalization the writer has taken the reference from Arjun Appadurai's five "scapes". On how the world is connected and how does it impact the developing countries. Following are those five scapes namely: mediascapes (flow of information); ethnoscapes (movement of people); technoscapes (advancement of technology); financescapes (international flow of money); and lastly, ideoscapes (flow of ideas). The author finds the presence of all these factors in the Maasai elites and uses them for understanding their growth and mobility. The global capital flows are a major factor in the development of the Maasai community which was isolated from the government but was home to many international NGOs and missionaries.

The third approach is the Social Reproduction Theory of Pierre Bourdieu. According to Pierre Bourdieu, there is an intergenerational trend of social reproduction of class status. The people who are rich dominate the language, culture, and resources of a community, and their next-generation benefit from that. In this phenomenon, the role of education is important as it perpetuates the dominance of children of privileged families over the 'have-nots'. This way the cycle continues to benefit a generational elite system. But, in the case of Maasai elites, the technological advancements, global capital flows, religious and secular development helped the poor in breaking this cycle. The formation of the indigenous Maasai elites challenges Bourdieu's theory of predictability of future elite formation. The writer mentions the study of Abner Cohen's study of African elites, Tijo Salverda's study of Franco-Mauritian Elites, and John Vincent's study of Gondo in Eastern Uganda. All these three works on African elites were focused on elites who were

elites because of their family wealth but Shera Shani's works focus on first-generation elites of indigenous Maasai group who did not have family wealth instead they used global resources to achieve this status.

In the first chapter on "Maasai Historicity", the author focuses on the development of the Maasai community taking into account the legacy of colonialism. Here the focus is on the colonial period which played a crucial part in elite formation. The geographical location, western education, and missionization all these factors were important to know which African region would be exploited or developed. The Maasai region saw the development later than other central African regions. The policy of sending only one child for education helped people of the Maasai community to get access to education who later paved the way for many more generations. This chapter explains how early missionary policies help in elite formation for today.

The second chapter named "Global Capital Flows" includes the importance of NGOs, Missionaries, Tourism as means of global capital flows which helped in elite formation in the Maasai community as opposed to the family wealth. This chapter takes into account the social capital theory of Bourdieu for the intergenerational elite formation and challenges it with the importance of Global capital flows. Being a minoritized community makes it difficult for the Maasai but it does not take agency away from them. In this chapter it structures and nature of NGOs present in the region are explained where they are religiously affiliated, internationally sponsored, and environmentally focused. These factors proved helpful for Maasai people as they live near many game sanctuaries and reserves surrounding the Kilimanjaro which puts them into proximity to these organizations. These NGOs work in many ways example not only educating the children of rural areas but the adults as well. They played a crucial role in the education of the community in spheres of both social, economic, and environmental development; and their trajectory is illustrated in detail.

Chapter 3, "Gender and Elite Formation" focuses on the role of gender in elite formation and how in the traditionally patriarchal Maasai community the modern female elites came up. In this chapter, the author focuses on the importance and influence of global capital flows and international trends in empowering the Maasai women to break the

conventional inequality to the level where they acquire an elite position. There have been studies on women's representation in powerful position but women belonging to indigenous communities also needs to be studied. The writer uses the reference of United Nations organizations like UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) and UNPFII (United Nations Permanent Forum for Indigenous Issues). Organizations like these help in creating a platform for voicing women's issues and creating a basic standard for all women. This chapter explains how funding, empowering, and informing the Maasai women contributed to their growth towards elite status. During the colonial period mostly, the men were able to get western education which left women stuck to traditional roles but with access to education and resources, modern Maasai women are operating at influential positions.

In the following chapter on “Religion as Elite Capital,” the writer tries to focus on the role of Religion in elite formation. She further explains how Christianity as a universalizing religion worked in elite formation. In Kenya majority of the population is Christian and it is important to look at the development of Christianity in culmination with traditional Maasai culture. The already established Maasai community has its own traditional gods, cultures, and rituals but the dominant culture has been Christianity in the region. Religion plays important role in what is legal or not and it affects the policy formation and representation of people. The spread of Christian missionaries in the Maasai region shows how religion can be a major catalyst in elite formation.

Chapter 5, “Education as Capital in Elite Construction: The Symbolism, Prestige, and Security of Higher Education” focuses on education as a major factor in elite formation. Formal schooling plays an important role in creating a basis for strong education but with the increasing access to education, it is not enough to get into important ranks of positions. Getting into higher studies is a crucial task. Earlier most of the universities were centered in major cities like Nairobi which made it difficult to access for children of rural backgrounds. This chapter explains how with the technological advancement in the education sector like online degrees and colleges, access to higher education is not limited to privileged people anymore. This technoscape is an important

development in the elite formation from the Maasai community and many more indigenous groups.

In the last chapter, “Elite Agencies and Challenges” the author talks about the individual factors including both acquired and inborn talents that aspired people to fight the challenges. The ethics of hard work and perseverance with the push from global resources helped them in elite formation. Here, the author explains how this elite status is not a result of westernization as there were pre-existing elites in the Maasai group. This chapter helps the reader in understanding what were the particular qualities from which a person belonging from the small town of Narok was able to gain elite status on a national level. This chapter focuses on those personality traits like networking, hard work, and perseverance which played a crucial role.

In her concluding chapter, the author points out the major summarization of her study. Factors like how the global capital flows problematize the social reproduction theory of intergenerational elite formation. The first-generation elites of Maasai challenge this theory. This study shows how global capital flows provided an alternate source of resources for the development of Maasai people. How it provides ways in which resource distribution can be provided to every section of society if their governments fail to reach them all. Another major contribution of this study is how it is not only economic gains that should be the standard for measuring the development of a nation and human capital should be the focus of development as it can be more useful in the inequitable development of all.

The book is a seminal work for providing a new dimension in understanding the elite formation in Africa. The study of Maasai development through this new lens helps in finding out the focal points of development which could prove helpful in the development of other indigenous communities. The author covered many dimensions like gender, religion, capital flows, personality traits, etcetera which provides us with valuable insights. The personal experience of the author combined with various anecdotes of many first-generation elites

provides one with an understanding of all the struggles and importance of persistence in achieving this status which in the end creates valuable precedence and hope for other people of the community.

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