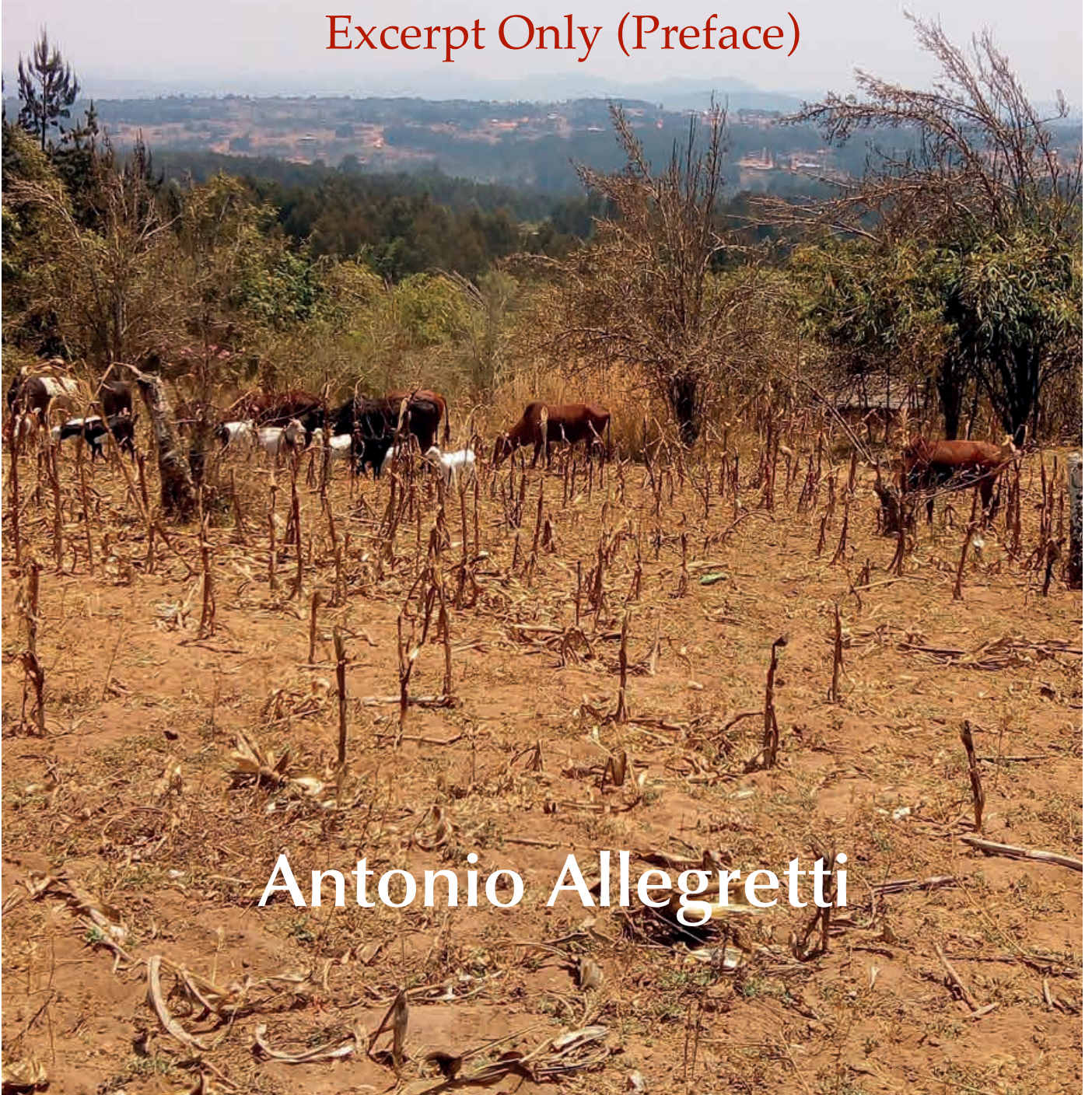


Policy and Practice in Rural Tanzania

Grazing, Fishing and Farming at the Local-
Global Interface

Excerpt Only (Preface)

Antonio Allegretti



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Published by The White Horse Press,
The Old Vicarage, Winwick, Cambridgeshire, PE28 5PN, UK

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library
ISBN 978-1-912186-26-6 (HB)

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In the field.

PREFACE

This book is the culmination of more than ten years of life, work and research in Tanzania. I arrived in Tanzania in 2008 in my early twenties for a gap year, and ended up settling, living and working in the country, only leaving around fourteen years later. I did so with a Ph.D. in anthropology, having worked on several development projects, done ethnographic fieldwork in several regions, taught in university and travelled widely, marvelling at the cultural diversity between the coast and the countryside, urban and rural lifestyles and habits, the pastoralist way of life and the farming communities, to name but a few of the contrasts the country manifests. The years spent in Tanzania doing the research on which this book is based not only contributed to shaping my intellectual and academic mindset or research and professional approach, but also gave me a bank of sensory experience. I will always recollect fondly the images, scents, sounds (and silences) that I have experienced in the countryside – sitting on a rock at dusk in a Maasai village, writing fieldnotes while observing the return of the herds to the *boma* (the traditional pastoralist compound made of several huts and households) from grazing; or the silences immediately before the cows started mooing to call their calves; spotting the silhouettes of herds on the plains while walking from one *boma* to another to visit people's homes for interviews; appreciating the natural beauty of Lake Victoria's lush and green landscape animated by the hordes of kids that gather on the lake shore to dive and catch small fish with homemade fishing rods.

One memory, or collection of memories, I hold dear above all others is the long nights spent in people's homes in the countryside, being welcomed into people's families, sharing anecdotes and stories, answering questions about life in *Ulaya* (Europe) or comparing it with life in Africa, over one (or two) cups of strong tasting local banana-, maize- or wheat-based brews, depending on the region where I found myself doing fieldwork, sitting on and sharing a handmade cosy couch in somebody's living room, or on nothing but a little tuft of straw in somebody's barn, turned into a local tavern, by candlelight or the light of a kerosene lamp with its unique and strong odour – outside, a grandly starry sky and a delightful silence surrounding the views of the fields, plains or waters. All the years spent in rural Tanzania, welcomed into people's homes, fields, *boma*, feeling part of their families, even if just for a few days or weeks, were filled with endless moments of joy and laughter, even during the harshest times of scarcity because of drought or simply a bad year for the harvests.

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The years and experiences that have shaped this book have been years of intellectual but also of personal growth. The academic ideas presented here cannot be separated from the very personal and intimate transformations that every individual goes through in life, especially during the apex years of intellectual flowering, when a young adult sees their core values and ideas, personal and academic, take shape and establish roots. During these years, not only have I learned about a different lifestyle, habits, ways of thinking, but, in learning about them, my own views about what development, self-improvement, even happiness, are or could be to me have matured. The sort of sensory and material experiences that I shared with people through the practices of walking the fields and clumsy attempts at grazing and milking cows, or fishing, are part and parcel of the person I have become, as well as the objects of my intellectual investigations.

In Tanzania, perhaps in the whole continent of Africa, more than other regions of the world, material experiences (and possessions) mediate social relations and mark the different paths that people undertake or attempt to undertake in their life courses to achieve life goals, including the conflicting views that exist around 'development'. A lot of the work that has made it into this book revolves around ideas and materiality (or materialities) of development in Tanzania. My first personal encounter with 'development' dates back to my very first job in Tanzania in 2008 when, for the first time, I experienced the life of the pastoralist Maasai in Northern Tanzania. I was working for an NGO based in the city of Arusha in Northern Tanzania on a project of economic development in a small Maasai community of not more than a few hundred people. The project in question focused on income generation, above all tourism, to bring about 'development' for pastoralists through a series of activities (e.g. guiding guests, serving in the camp) carried out by community members.

Working on a development project, I was professionally involved with colleagues, both Tanzanian and foreign, and also close contact with the beneficiaries of the project, namely, the villagers who were mostly of Maasai ethnicity. I experienced divergences on a daily basis when it came to the distribution and management of income, and the underlying short- and long-term ambitions and plans. This reflected the differing values and opinions people had as to the kind of development to be achieved through the project's activities. This divergence of opinions and management practices eventually prompted my desire and impulse to investigate the topics that inform this book, among pastoralists as rural communities at large.

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On the part of my Tanzanian colleagues, most of them university graduates, I could often perceive a condescending attitude towards rural folks' views on development and practices (or what they *thought* these views and practices were) rooted in the history of the ideas, efforts and trajectories for development in the country. This history is represented by an uninterrupted succession of development interventions aimed at 'educating' and accompanying rural folks in the difficult move from traditional practices of livestock raising or 'subsistence' agriculture and an idea of wealth based on 'traditional' material possessions (livestock, land), to economic prosperity based on entrepreneurial mentality, commercial and business-oriented pursuits. One of my Tanzanian colleagues, a graduate from University of Dar es Salaam in environmental sciences, was often eager to associate the (supposed) underdevelopment of the Maasai with a (supposed) lack of business-like principles in the management of herds. Another colleague, an environmental sciences Ph.D. graduate from Italy, used to refer to her feelings of uneasiness in witnessing what she referred to as the 'disgrace' afflicting her Tanzanian brothers and sisters of living in poverty-stricken mud huts, but also being unable to lift themselves out of a situation of poverty despite owning many heads of cattle. According to these colleagues' judgment, pretty much in line with that of the foreign staff, the attitude of the project beneficiaries was not driven enough by the principles of entrepreneurship and *development*, but rather was focused and channelled towards conservatism when, for instance, they used the income gained from cattle, to purchase feed or water, rather than investing in 'modern' business ventures; to them this attitude fed on an underlying irrational affection for 'tradition' and distaste for 'progress'.

The more time I spent with the community development recipients, the more I dealt with an incessant search for individual betterment and *development* of the kind envisioned by the project staff, especially among Maasai youth who were constantly striving for pecuniary opportunities through wage labour and trade. The relationship they had with the project was based on an individual engagement in search of earnings, while they simultaneously continued with the practices of herd management founded on values that they recognised as traditional, such as collaboration and participation. With time, entrepreneurial skills and business ventures became visually discernible in the actual physical environment, which increasingly began to resemble that of a Tanzanian peri-urban settlement with cement buildings along a main road hosting retail shops, local bars and restaurants, against a landscape of rural rangeland and herds on the move. To my amazement, these small-scale business initiatives and entrepreneurial acts remained invisible to the eyes of my colleagues who dismissed

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them simply as a way to acquire more cattle and not a change of mindset that embraced *true* development – the two realms that they recognised as ‘progress’ and ‘tradition’ remained to their eyes mutually exclusive, while, in fact they were proceeding hand-in-hand without apparent conflict for the villagers who diversified their wealth portfolio with investments in more traditional assets such as livestock and farms, but also in houses and ‘people’, for instance through marriage or education for the children.

I later was to find out that these complexities and (apparent?) contradictions in Tanzania are not unique to the Maasai group, although they may be more pronounced there, given the peculiar history of pastoralism and the approaches to ‘development’ taken by the state towards the ‘modernisation’ of the livestock sector. I also was to find out that conflicting views do not simply exist between so-called elites and rural folks; there are myriad micro-conflicts at different levels, starting at the level of the family and households, when it comes to development, practices, investments. Through my years of research and living in the country I progressively came to the realisation that ‘development’ in rural Tanzania (and rural Africa at large) is, more than in other (rural) regions of the world, inherently multifaceted, and determined by more than one register or set of values; and material experiences, practices and possessions embody these values in complex ways. This complexity makes the lens of ‘development’ appropriate to understand not only major economic and political transformations, or individual paths to success, but the underlying complex, sometimes ambivalent, social dimensions or spheres in which individuals in Africa exercise their right to self-determination and develop a sense of belonging as members of multiple communities.

This book reaffirms that development in Africa continues to be people-centred, with social relationships mediated by the materiality of practices, experiences and possessions. The concept of wealth-in-people, quite familiar to anthropologists and Africanists (but fallen into disuse), continues to hold true in Africa, even in the era of financialisation and technological development. Development, intended as the search for self-determination, in Africa still rests on ties, affiliations, membership and belonging (i.e. wealth-in-people), and the capacity to manoeuvre these (in a positive sense). The hustle and dynamism of social life that ‘development’ rests on in Tanzania can be baffling, at times unsettling, but also life-affirming – peeling off the different layers of people’s energy and zeal for life through ethnographic enquiry also made my life and research in the country fulfilling (and fun); and I hope this book will offer its readers a glimpse into the fascinating social and material landscape of rural Tanzania.