

F. SOCIAL STRUCTURE: AGE ORGANIZATION

Interaction within Parakuyo society is regulated by two pervasive systemic principles: the kinship system and the less commonly distributed age-set structure. The significance of these two crosscutting systems cannot be overestimated, because all important material transactions, modes of social exchange, organization of production etc. are facilitated by social relations regulated by these two systems. I shall analyse the complexities of the age-set system first. Although a number of studies have been made on age systems (Bernardi 1952, 1955; Baxter and Almagor 1978; Eisenstadt 1956; Stewart 1977), there is not yet full understanding of how those systems function.

In the historical section it was stated that the Eastern Nilotes (including the Parakuyo) adopted the age-set system from the Cushitic or Southern Nilotic people (Ehret 1971:36-38). Whatever the initial reasons for the early adoption of this system may have been, it has had the advantage of making possible the maintenance of an effective defensive force. Although the formation of an efficient warrior class is probably the most important function of the age-set system¹, it has also several other functions, as we shall see in due course. The notion of the other functions is important in estimating the significance of the age-set system in the present situation, where the need of an effective defensive force has decreased, although not disappeared.

One possible way to illustrate the idea of the age-set structure is to sketch out the main features in recruiting and promoting the age-sets.² The recruitment of a new age-set starts when it is felt that there is an adequate number of mature young men in the society to form a new warrior class. This is the case when about 10 years has passed since the closure of the recruitment of the previous age-set. The actual opening of the recruitment period is a public affair, and it is officially performed by the ritual leader (oloiboni kitok) with appropriate rituals.

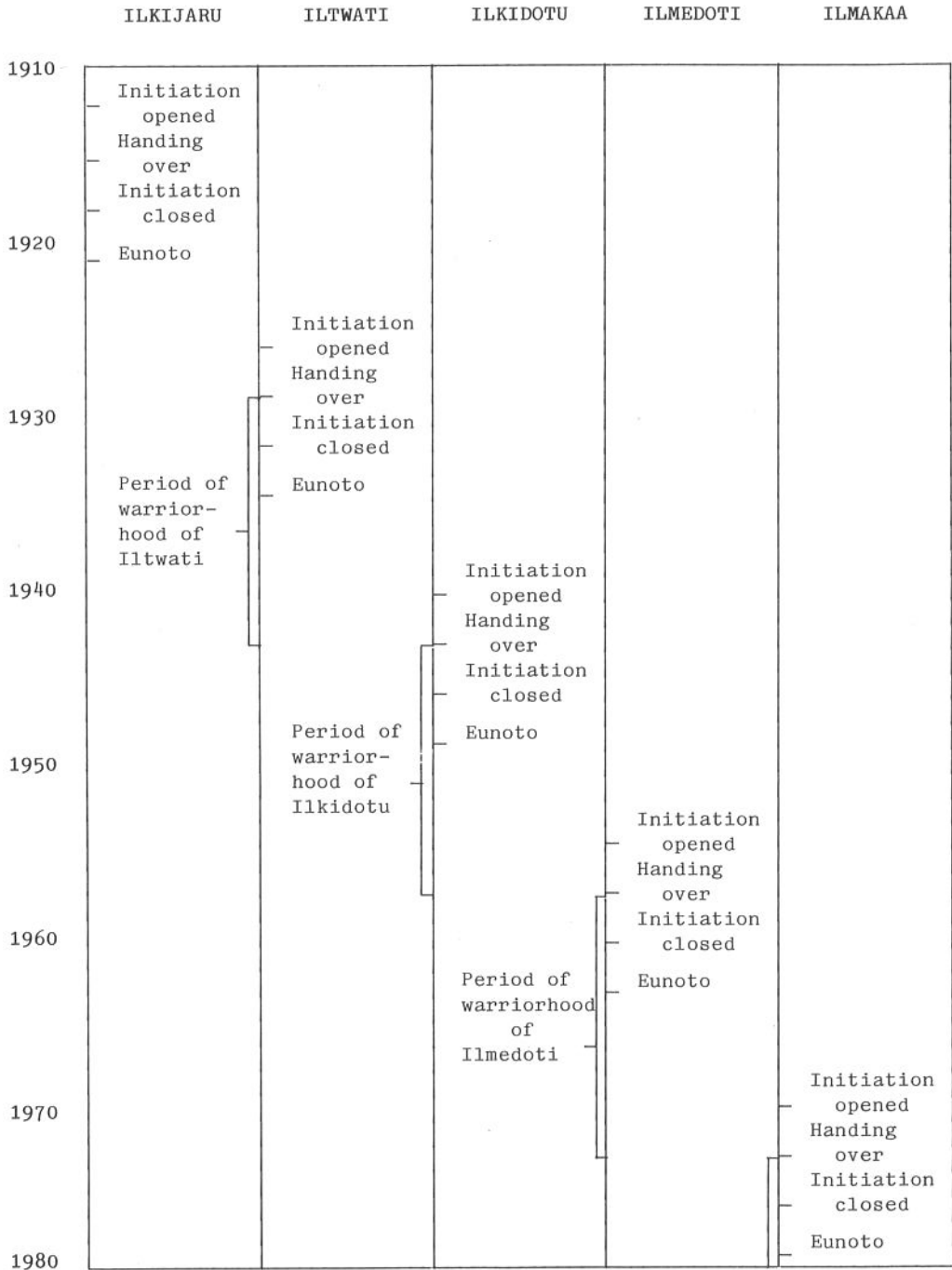
Before this, however, a series of events has taken place in various local sections. The primary initiators pushing things forward are the 'left-over' group (*endung'ori*, from *adung'* = to cut off), the members of which were too young to be circumcised at the closure of the previous open period. The eldest ones may approach the age of 25 years, still having no acknowledged status in society. The boldest ones may let themselves be circumcised even without official permission.³ Although such acts may be regarded as offences, they are a sign of a new recruitment period. The sequences of recruitment periods in the Parakuyo society are illustrated in Fig. 5, p. 130.

29. OPENING THE CIRCUMCISION PERIOD

The opening of a circumcision period is one of the most important events, where the integrative function of the age-set system presents itself. Both sections (northeastern and southwestern) of the Parakuyo society as well as the main body of the Pastoral Maasai and Arusha have a coordinated timing of recruitment periods.⁴ The preparations of the new circumcision period bring various scattered Parakuyo sections together, because each area (*oloho*) has to send a delegation (*olamal*, pl. *ilamali*) to the headquarters of *oloiboni kitok*, whose residence during the time of research was the Kambala village, south of Mvomero in the Morogoro District. The delegations of the southwestern Parakuyo section together with the northeastern section participate the opening rituals, although in minor matters the former section conducts its affairs independently under the leadership of its own *oloiboni kitok*, whose residence was in the Mkata village close to Kilosa town in 1976.⁵

Although the initiators of the process leading to the opening of a new circumcision period are the uncircumcised youth, their actual superiors who control the procedures are the male members of the alternate age-set above them. The life-long relationship between these alternate age-sets starts from the preparations of the initiation period. The delegations to be sent to *oloiboni kitok* for the preparations consist of members of that age-set, which functions as patron elders in initiation. In fact, the

Fig. 5. Recruitment of the Parakuyo age-sets. On the left vertically is shown the year, and the time of initiation, handing over of warriorship and promotion (eunoto) of each age-set can be seen in corresponding pillars.



the overall supervision and arrangements connected with the recruitment of the entire age-set during the subsequent 6-7 years is the first major duty of this patron age-set.

When agreement between the delegations and oloiboni kitok has been reached and the rituals performed, the delegations return home with medicine prepared by oloiboni kitok for the new initiates. This medicine is distributed to all uncircumcised youth past the age of puberty to signify the official opening of the circumcision period. This is an intensified period of circumcision, since the young men are anxious to become warriors after long waiting.

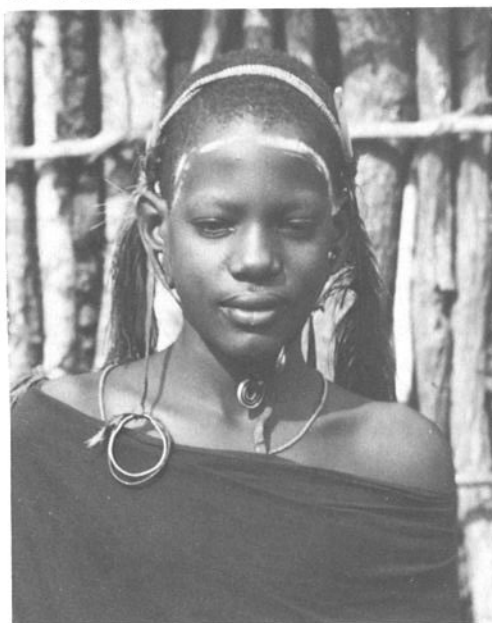
30. FORMING AGE-SETS AND AGE-GROUPS

It is very important to note, however, that although there is a considerable number of youth to be circumcised at the beginning of the initiation period, the actual circumcisions with accompanying rituals are performed individually or in very small groups.⁶ It would, of course, be practical to arrange one big communal ritual and circumcise all initiates together. There are, however, a number of reasons for not doing this. The father's kraal and the mother's house are considered to be the loci where the boys have been reared and where their emotional sensations get strong expression. The fatherly kraal entrance (enkishomi) as a place of operation and the mother's house as a secure place of recovery during the seclusion period after operation lend themselves as natural places of initiation.

Probably a still more important reason for private circumcision is an economical one. Private circumcision with communal participation allows consumption of valued food, meat, in a rational manner. Such circumcision feasts evenly spaced over a long time period allow a meat-feast for the community members at more or less regular intervals, without the risk of meat getting spoiled.

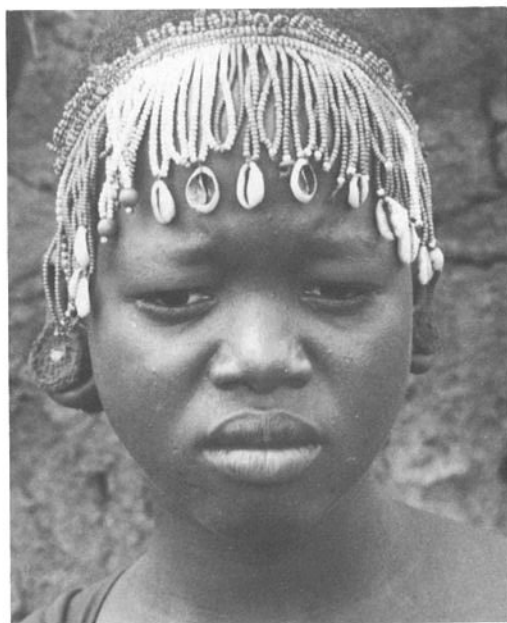


Picture 14. During seclusion and recovery, the male initiate may have white colour on the forehead and around the eyes as a symbol of a marginal state.



Picture 13. Circumcised young boys after operation in front of the mother's house. They wear a number of symbolically important items, such as a black cloak, leather sandals, brass coils in their ear lobes, and bows and arrows.

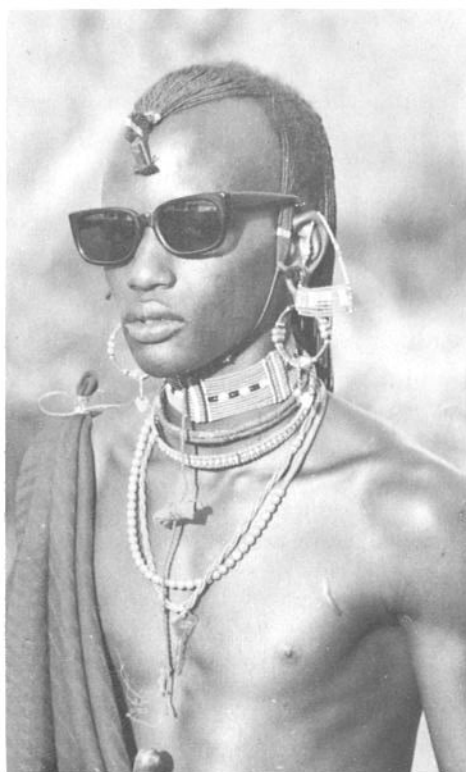
Picture 15. After clitoridectomy, a female initiate wears a head decoration made of beads and cowry shells. The shells are a symbol of fertility.





Picture 16. Uninitiated girls are normally the company of warriors, because the girls marry soon after clitoridectomy. The girls wear rich decorations even before initiation, whereas uninitiated boys are not allowed to decorate themselves. Male and female roles are clearly differentiated, and socialization to these requires a long training.

Picture 17. Warriors' bead decorations are made by their mothers and girl-friends. The basic appearance of the decorations does not change much over the years. However, each age-set may have some individuality in decorations.



The initiation rituals⁷ have a duration of 3-4 months, most of which is a time of seclusion, during which the initiate is closed into his mother's house awaiting recovery. After having participated in his first olupul ritual with his circumcised age-mates in a remote place, the youth is allowed to wear the regalia of a warrior as a sign of his new status (Picture 17, p. 133).

It is clear that the time span between individual circumcisions is small in the beginning of the open period, because all youth between 15-25 want to be operated as soon as possible. The first initiated group in each age-set is numerically stronger and more influential than the other two groups which are recruited later. After the initiation of the first group (Iljangenopir) there is a rest period of a year or so until the initiation of the middle-group (Ilparing'otua) of the age-set starts. Between this and the last group (Ilkerimbuot) there is also a short rest period, but these periods are apparently of little significance. When the members of these three age-groups are circumcised within the course of 6-7 years, the recruitment period is ritually closed by oloiboni kitok after having negotiated with the representatives of elders.

During the first few years after the opening of a circumcision period there are two warrior age-sets simultaneously operative. This is a source of friction, since the junior warriors are anxious to prove their strength and take over the responsibilities of guardianship, but the senior warrior age-set regards them immature and inexperienced.⁸ This period of intensified friction and hostility between proximate warrior age-sets leads to the resignation of the senior age-set. This happens during a time when the recruitment of the junior set is still continuing. The resignation of the senior set should be accompanied by the communal olnq'eher ritual, but the position of this seems to be ambiguous.⁹ What actually happened to the Ilmedoti age-set was the resignation two years late without official ritual.

The initiated warriors participate about once a year in communal olupul rituals to acquire strength and courage and to learn the highly valued virtue of sharing. These are important steps in the maturing process, and although the advisors and supervisors in these rituals are the patron

elders, their role in *olpul* is quite different from the role of patron elders in Samburu *ilmugit* ceremonies (Spencer 1970:138-41).

Soon after closing the initiation period there is a communal age-set ritual, *eunoto*, which signifies the promotion of the warriors to a senior stage. In contrast to *olng'eher*, *eunoto* has been performed regularly in due time. The *eunoto* of *Ilmedoti* was in 1964 and of *Ilmakaa* in October 1979¹⁰, thus leaving the normal period of 15 years between age-sets. *Eunoto* does not mean retiring to elderhood, although this is sometimes erroneously claimed (Ole Sankan 1973:28-29). It means reaching a certain degree of maturity. A sign of this is the permanent age-set name given by *oloiboni kitok*. The *Ilmakaa* age-set was given the authentic name of *Itareto* in *eunoto*, October 1979. Cutting the long warrior's hair is allowed after *eunoto* but it is not ritually performed in connection with *eunoto*, as is the case with the Pastoral Maasai.

Perhaps the most significant consequence of *eunoto* is the increasing custom of marrying soon after it. Particularly the eldest age-set members, who are over 30, start to feel that time has come to settle down and leave the business of warriorship to the two younger age-groups of the same set. But although they marry, they are still warriors until the time of handing-over years ahead. The changing role of warriorship has led i.a. to lowering the age of first male marriages, and this again has accelerated the competition for eligible girls and the rise of the amount of the bride wealth.

About seven years after *eunoto* a new initiation period is opened, and three years thereafter the previous warrior set resigns and hands over the duties of warriorship to the newcomers. Thus the cycle goes on.

The time after *eunoto*, which is still warrior time, and the time after the resignation (or *olng'eher*) is occupied by duties connected with establishing one's own family and later one's own *kraal*. A point of significance here is, that a man marrying after *eunoto* will eventually have his own sons old enough for circumcision when the initiation period is opened about 23 years after his own *eunoto*. He probably will have several sons ready for circumcision simulataneously, because there is a 9-10 years

closed period prior to it. This point is important, because it in fact means, that fathers are the *olpiron* elders of their own sons. The important *olpiron* link between two alternate age-sets is simultaneously a link between two proximate generations. It has to be emphasized, however, that although the *olpiron* link is typically between fathers and sons, it is not ultimately a kin relationship. It is a relationship belonging to a different structural system. The sponsors and officiators in age-set rituals are not necessarily the fathers themselves; they are members of the father's age-set. Communal orientation on the age-set basis is strongly emphasized. Structurally the age-set and kinship systems belong to two different orders, but in practice they partially converge, reinforcing one another.

The *olpiron* relationship in Samburu society seems to be quite different, at least on the ideal level. Spencer has emphasized that the firestick (*olpiron*) patrons of warriors should not be their fathers, but younger than these. While firestick elders are members of the age-set two above the initiates, their fathers should belong to an age-set three above them. The roles of father and of firestick elder are said to be incompatible (Spencer 1976:156-57).

The age-set system of the Samburu emphasizes the gerontocratic domination exerted by senior sets over juniors. The separation of the firestick relationship from the father-son relationship is significant in order to make the control of warriors effective. The prohibition that a father should not initiate his mature sons to the alternate age-set below him, but postpone it to the next initiation, also postpones the marriage of his first sons. This gerontocratic control over youth is connected with the common polygynous family pattern and the very low bride-wealth rate of the Samburu (Spencer 1976:155-56).

It must be remembered, however, that although the structural differences exist on the ideal level, in practice the relationships are less clear. Although the first sons are commonly recruited to the next-but-one set below the fathers in Parakuyo society, and to the third one below in Samburu society, quite a number of sons in the former are recruited also to the third age-set below. Similarly I would suspect that if the first male marriage is at the age of 30 with the Samburu (Spencer 1976:155), there will

be excessive strain towards circumcising the first sons, not to the third but to the second age-set below, lest their initiation age would in some cases be over 30 years. The ideal structure is, however, significant, because it reveals the basic structural principles, of which the practice is an approximation. On the ideal level these two societies are structurally different.

The control of the society rests at large in the hands of the post-warrior age-grades, the elders (olmoruo, pl. ilmoruak). The function as *olpiron* elders in various age-set rituals is one form of control, but also most public affairs are in their hands. Ultimately, a man is regarded mature only after having passed through all age-set rituals and having retired to elderhood.

31. DUAL PRINCIPLE IN ORDERING AGE-SETS

As a functioning system the age-set structure is complicated and there are a number of realizations of the dualistic ordering principle. Although my primary material is largely from one Parakuyo society only, its close relatedness to other Maa-speakers allows me to make some comparisons with the systems of those societies. Among the Maa-speakers there is a tendency to conceptualize the groupings within age-sets in dualistic terms. There are two different realizations of this tendency, both of which are talked about using the terms *emurata etatene* (right-hand circumcision) and *emurata ekedyenye* (left-hand circumcision).

First, there is the type found presently among the Parakuyo and Kisongo Maasai, where only one initiation period is in use. The three initiation groups are conceptualized also as two groups, *Iljangenopir* constituting the *emurata etatene* and *Ilparing'otua* and *Ilkerimbuot* the *emurata ekedyenye* group. This grouping into dual divisions and its conceptual symbolic representation is clearly exemplified in the *eunoto* ritual where each group has been given its 'bed' (*eruat*) in the *osingira* house, *Iljangenopir* on the right side and others on the left.¹¹ *Iljangenopir* is the group which pushes things forward, clears the way towards promotion and graduation, and *Ilkerimbuot*, the juniors, are in the way

of the succeeding age-set demanding promotion. *Iparing'otua*, the middle group, is a mediator between the other two, and eventually has little trouble with the adjacent age-sets.

Second, a more clear type of dual divisions within age-sets is found among some sections of the Pastoral Maasai, although less commonly in these days. In this system the set is composed of two clearly defined sub-sets which are recruited at intervals of about 8 years. What is different in this system compared with that found among the Parakuyo is the even spacing of recruitment. The age structure of warriors in both systems is the same; the age differences within an age-set are up to 15 years. This system with true right and left hand sub-sets was in use among the Kisongo Maasai reportedly still during the initiation of the *Iltareto* (equivalent with *Ilkijaru* of the Parakuyo, see Fig. 8) age-set but has not been in use ever since.¹²

There is also a third type of dualism within the age-set structure. The division into right and left sections is applied sometimes to relations between age-sets, as is indicated by some Kisongo Maasai informants and Ole Sankan (1973). The remembered age-sets are grouped in pairs so, that the senior in each pair represents the right-hand circumcision and the junior the left one respectively. The explanation of Ole Sankan is informative of the difficulty in distinguishing different usages of the right-left principle in age-set classification. He refers to right-left division in two meanings without himself apparently recognizing it (Ole Sankan 1973:31-35).

The right-left classification of age-groups within an age-set on one hand and of proximate age-sets on the other hand is in itself a derivative of the basic dual classification. It is probably linked with the right and left divisions of the kraal; the first sons of the first wife (on the right gate post) are normally, as the model suggests, the core of the first initiation group in each age-set, hence the right-hand group.¹³ Those initiated later are predominantly sons of the second wife, whose house is located on the left side; therefore the left-hand group.

Dualism is found also in the classification of age-grades, i.e. the successive hierarchically ordered social statuses, through which each age-set passes as a group. The customary classification of foreign analysts has been: junior warriors/senior warriors and junior elders/senior elders, and perhaps retired elders.¹⁴ This classification, however, simplifies the reality excessively and hides the fact that the two first 'grades' do not constitute each a 15-16 years long period as the latter ones do.¹⁵ During the first three years of the initiation period (Fig. 5, p. 130) until the handing over of the responsibilities of warriorship to the newcomers there are two age-sets simultaneously in the warrior grade. From handing over until *eunoto* there is only one warrior class. It must also be noted that the wholesale move upwards in age-grades takes place at the time of handing over, not in the beginning of the initiation period, nor in *eunoto*.¹⁶ Therefore there is no such age-grade as 'senior warriors'. What has been called 'senior warriors' is in fact the junior class of elders (*olmoruo*, pl. *ilmoruak*). Spencer has called this first grade of elders, who are not yet occupied with *olpiron* duties in initiation, 'probationary elders', distinct from the senior grade of the 'firestick patron elders', who are occupied with initiation and *ilmugit* ceremonies (Spencer 1976:155).

We may summarize the discussion on the Parakuyo age-set system with the following tables, which show the positions of the age-sets operative during the time of research.

Table 12. Age-sets occupying different age-grades in 1971, the time of opening the initiation period.

Name of age-grade	WARRIORS	PROBATIONARY ELDERS	FIRESTICK ELDERS	RETIRING ELDERS	RETIRED ELDERS
Name of age-set	Ilmedoti	Ilkidotu	Iltwati	Ilkijaru	EXTINCT
Age in years	23 - 39	38 - 54	53 - 69	68 - 84	

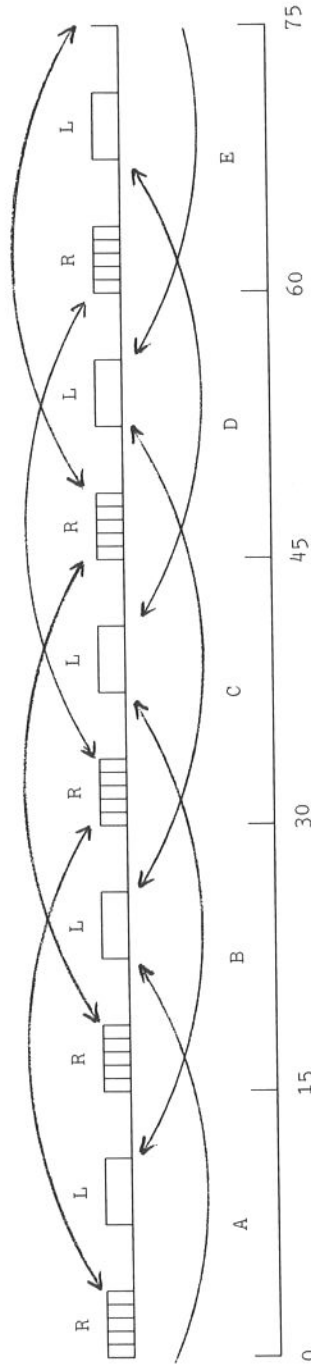
Table 13. Age-sets occupying different age-grades in 1978, the time of closing initiation.

Name of age-grade	WARRIORS	PROBATIONARY ELDERS	FIRESTICK ELDERS	RETIRING ELDERS	RETIRED ELDERS
Name of age-set	Ilmakaä	Ilmedoti	Ilkidotu	Iltwati	Ilkijaru
Age in years	15 - 31	30 - 46	45 - 61	60 - 76	75 - 91

The traditions recorded by Ole Sankan carry the dichotomy between age-sets still further. They indicate that the age-sets are not grouped in pairs only formally, but also their internal properties are different. They maintain that the right-hand group of age-sets (Ilmanki division) starting from the imagined proto-age-set are arrogant, warlike, ready to spill the blood of enemies and of other Maasai. In contrast to this, the left-hand group (Ilmaina division) of age-sets, i.e. the age-sets between each two right-hand age-sets, are peacemakers, serene, and associated with prosperity and plenty.¹⁷ Also the firesticks (olpiron, pl. ilpironito) used to kindle the ritual fire to open the initiation period of these two kinds of age-sets were different. The Ilmaina kindled the fire with a very hard oloirien (*Olea chrysophylla*) stick,¹⁸ and the fire was fed with osepeperua branches, and the ochre for body-painting was mined with a very hard cattle-brand implement. All these are symbols of warrior-like qualities. In kindling fire for the Ilmanki section, in addition to the ordinary implements also an esosian (*Phoenix reclinata*) reed was used.¹⁹ This tradition communicates the message that the Ilmanki-type age-sets are peacemakers and thoughtful.

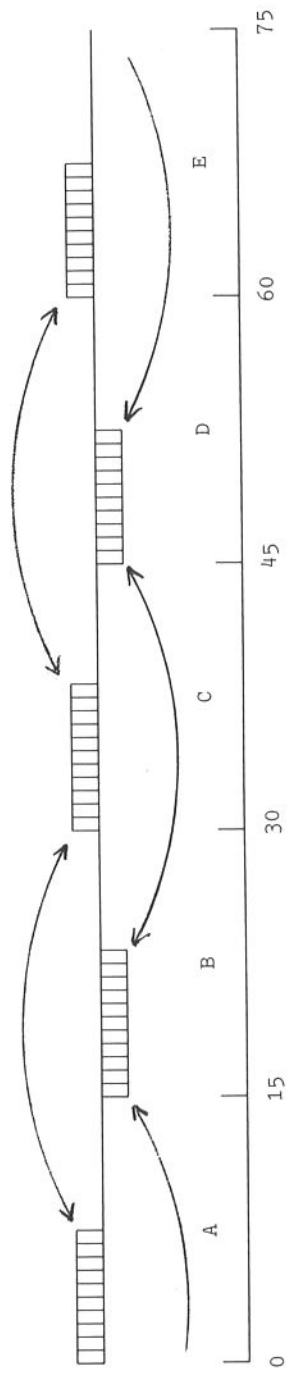
Figures 6 and 7 (p. 141) illustrate the discussion on dualism within and between age-sets. Figure 6 illustrates the ancient Pastoral Maasai type, where recruitment into age-set took place in two periods with intervals of 8 years. Each open period lasted four years, as well as the closed period. This arrangement created a rhythm of subsequent initiation periods which could readily be conceptualized in terms of

Fig. 6. Dualism within age-sets. Each age-set is subdivided into right/left groups.



Key:
 □□□□ - period of open initiation, right-hand group
 □ - period of open initiation, left-hand group
 ↔ - arrow indicates the olpiron relation between corresponding initiation groups of alternate age-sets

Fig. 7. Dualism between age-sets. Alternate sets are linked by the olpiron relation, and consequently two set-lines are formed.



right and left. In the Parakuyo system as well as in the present Pastoral Maasai system in the southern Maasai area the left-hand group has fallen off, and all the young men of the age-set are recruited during the right-hand initiation period. The time of open initiation is extended from the ideal four years to 7-8 years in practice (Fig. 7).

Dualism between age-sets is illustrated in Figure 7. The age-sets A, C, E ... N form a stream of age-sets which are linked with the *olpiron* relationship. The Parakuyo say that they are men of 'one fire-stick' (*olpiron obo*) and therefore friends with close cooperation. The age-sets B, D, F ... N+1 form another stream of age-sets, similarly linked together. Giving attributes such as male and female qualities (*Ilmanki* and *Ilmaina* in the above discussion) to the groups thus formed, indicates the propensity to comprehend totalities as composed of pairs of opposites. While both qualities exist in reality haphazardly, on the conceptual level they are placed in an alternating order. The conceptual model is symmetrical, perfect, but the practice renders it only partial realization.

32. AGE VIS-À-VIS GENERATION

It is appropriate to pose at least, if not answer, the question of the relation of the Parakuyo age-system with similar systems in Southern Ethiopia, Northern Kenya, Eastern Uganda and even Southern Sudan.²⁰ To propose such a connection is not out of question, taking into account the probable origin of the former in the Lake Turkana valley. It is most natural to assume that the similarities of age-systems between Eastern Nilotes, such as the Maasai and Itunga peoples, and Southern Nilotes, of whom the Kalenjin-speakers are most numerous, and even the Cushitic Oromo-speakers, derive rather from cultural borrowing than from independent development.²¹ Compared with some Oromo-speakers, who have retained the strong generation system along with age-sets, the Parakuyo system is quite different. It can be assumed, though it is impossible to prove, that the Maasai once had also an operative generation system. In societies where a well-developed generation system including age-sets is operative, such as the gada of Oromo, the age-sets tend to be of lesser significance and subservient to it (Baxter and Almagor 1978:21). The extensive literature on generation-sets and age-sets illuminates the internal contradictions inherent in these systems when they function together. Ideally these two systems should complement each other.

Among the Boran, for example, the males are grouped into sets with intervals of eight years between each proximate set, and each set rules or holds power in society for a period of eight years, after which the responsibilities are transferred to the subsequent set. The marriages of the set members should be so spaced that their sons are ready to receive the responsibilities about 32 years after the resignation of the older generation. This means, that there have to be four different sets in office between these two generations.

The difficulties in the operation of the system derive from the fact that while age-sets follow a strict time scale, the generations do not. This has been clearly demonstrated e.g. by Spencer, when he analysed the function, or malfunction, of these systems in Jie and Karamojong societies

by using a simulation based on Samburu data, which are quantitatively adequate (Spencer 1978:137-42). In a polygynous family, the sons of a man may be born within a period of over 50 years. If all the siblings have to be included into the same generation-set, it will be impossible to squeeze all the male descendants of a man into an age period of eight years, as the age-set system would require. With the subsequent generations the difficulties in fitting age and generation are compounded. The discrepancy can be solved only by laxing the rules which require exact matching of genealogical generation-sets with age. The strict timing of births is obviously not a viable solution (Baxter 1978:169-70).

The *gada*²² system with five genealogical lines is only one way of combining generation-sets and age-sets. An entirely different type of combination of these two principles is that found, in different forms, among the Labwor, Jie, and Turkana, where only one genealogical line is found, and this is subdivided into generation-groups according to male descent. Only two named generation-groups, those of fathers and sons, alternate (Abrahams 1978:39-40). Within such a dual generation system, age-groups can be recruited from both generation-groups and only one series of age-groups will emerge (Labwor type). Alternately age-groups are recruited for each generation-set (Turkana type). The rule that the initiation of a junior generation-group can be opened only after all the members of the senior group have been initiated, leads to a situation, where the eldest members of a junior group will have died before the birth of the youngest members of the senior group. According to Abrahams (1978:55-56), this contradiction was solved by the Jie so that dominance was given to generation over age, and vice versa by the Labwor and Turkana. It is selfevident that a society which gives priority to generation cannot base its defensive forces on the age-set organization.²³ Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the significance of age organizations such as *gada* as political institutions has diminished and has been left with its ritual significance (Baxter 1978:152 ff; Hinnant 1978:220-23, 241), or that it has been reduced to a local ritual institution, as among the Shoa Galla (Blackhurst 1978:245, 266). Legesse (1973) has demonstrated this even more convincingly.

If generation-sets and age-sets cannot operate effectively in the same society, a choice has to be made according to priorities. It can be argued

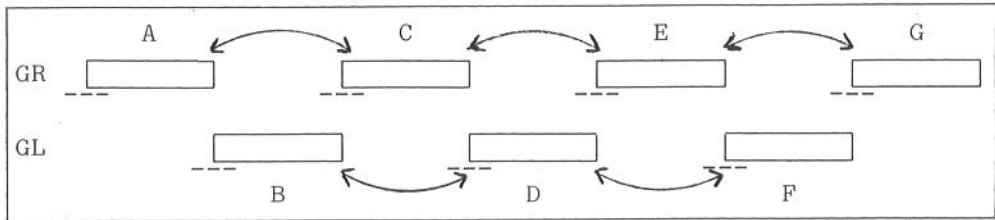
that because a pastoral society needs a relatively strong warrior class to defend its means of production, livestock, it has to place preference on age-based systems. The Pastoral Maasai, Parakuyo and Samburu for example, have chosen the age-set system and abandoned the system of genealogical generations.

The relative numerical force compared with population varies considerably in societies with age organization. Among the Oromo only one fifth of the population at a time is responsible for providing a warrior class for the whole population during a period of eight years. Among the Labwor one half of the society is responsible for this. Among the Maa-speakers it is the responsibility of the whole society and the spacing of age-sets is 16 years in stead of eight. This gives a vast numerical advantage compared to other groups referred to above. The effectiveness of the system is reinforced by leaving a closed period of almost 10 years between the recruitment periods of adjacent age-sets. When the initiation of the new set will be opened, there is already a fairly strong group of youths ready to be circumcised and after a few years to receive the responsibilities of guardianship from the seniors. An average period of 16 years of one's life in defensive forces creates a good base indeed for success in warfare.

The apparent related nature of the Parakuyo and Oromo systems is seen in the spacing of age-sets. Sixteen is eight doubled, and this fits comfortably to the ideal spacing of generations. Although the Parakuyo do not have formal generation-sets, the recognition of relations between generations is significant. The *olpiron* relationship between alternate generations is, as already noted, factually a relation between two proximate generations. But this is only an ideal and applies generally to the fathers and their first sons only. The sons born to the father at a later age will be recruited into younger age-sets. It is necessary to do so if the age-set recruitment is made effective. There is a recognition of relation between social generations, but no sets based on genealogical generations are found. On the ideal level, two parallel lines of generations can be identified²⁴, as illustrated in Figure 8.

The generation lines (GR and GL) in Figure 8 are at the same time streams of alternate age-sets, as is shown in Figure 7, p. 141. Both of these

Fig. 8 . The relation of the 'right-hand' and 'left-hand' generation lines (GR and GL) to the age-sets in Parakuyo society.



- Key:** A,B,C... A code for the named age-set whose members belong simultaneously to the same 'generation'.
- - Period of open initiation
- - Period of 'being in power'.
- ↔ - Olpiron relationship between alternate age-sets and proximate generations.
- GR - 'Right-hand' generation line
- GL - 'Left-hand' generation line.

figures illustrate the same reality, one from the viewpoint of the age-set system, and the other from the perspective of the father-son relationship. The consecutive age-sets are (Fig. 7, p. 141) seen in terms of their mutual relations, alternately grouped to form right and left divisions. The olpiron relationship links the parts of a stream together. Each of these streams comprises a coherent group with maximum cooperation and mutual friendship and understanding. These age-set streams are in fact also generation lines (Fig. 8), not in a purely genealogical but sociological sense. There is no institutionalized system, such as in the Karamojong, Turkana, Jie and Oromo societies²⁵, to recruit the sets on the genealogical basis. The generation lines in the Parakuyo society, and also in sections of the Pastoral Maasai (Ole Sankan 1973:31-35), are there as a direct outcome of the age-set system.

33. THE AGE-SET SYSTEM IN CHANGE

Strong warrior classes have been a necessity for pastoralists in conditions, where the threat of attack has been constant, as the history of the Parakuyo shows. During the past century they have been among those who have successfully fought against other Maasai groups and raided in order to acquire cattle. Those were times of glory and esteem for warriors. The age-set system showed its superiority, and just the success of the pastoralists in fighting has made many ethnic groups (e.g. Kikuyu, Taveta and Chagga) to adopt an age-set system.

In peaceful conditions the chances to prove one's courage and use warrior skills are limited, and this again has caused frustration and strain on the system. The warriors start to take liberties which they were not allowed to earlier. Smoking and occasional drinking of beer are not serious offences, but a tendency to early marriages causes strain on the system. The competition for eligible girls has increased and raised the amount of bridewealth considerably. This issue will be discussed in connection with the material transfers. Another effect of the lowered male marriage age has been, that there are fathers whose first sons have been initiated into the proximate succeeding age-set. It was reported that earlier this would not have been acceptable. Such a trend is likely to lead to more equal first marriage ages of males and females. On the other hand, it will increase competition for eligible girls. Also age differences between half-siblings are likely to increase, if polygyny continues to be the preferred form of marriage.

From the viewpoint of structural reciprocity, the present development is detrimental. This became manifest in the eunoto ritual of Itareto in 1979, where the fathers of some of the initiates were Ilmedoti, members of the proximate preceding generation. Ideally, the fathers who want to participate in this ritual and see how their sons are treated should be related to these according to the principle *olpiron obo* (lit. 'one firestick'), i.e. being members of alternate age-sets.²⁶ This principle has never fully realized, because the fathers of the initiates belong to

all three of the oldest age-sets, and they should be allowed to participate. What was new in the previous *eunoto* was the presence of *Ilmedoti*, who structurally should be, and in fact are, antagonistic to *Iltareto*.

There are two factors contributing to this adverse situation. First, the lowered male marriage age has made it possible to have children in a younger age than before. Second, the widening of the open initiation period from the ideal four years to seven or more has given time for the first sons to grow old enough to be circumcised into the succeeding age-set.

Although the dilemma where the participants of the *eunoto* ritual found themselves in 1979 seems insignificant, it is nevertheless an indication of a process of change, where several factors are involved. In addition to what already has been said, it is an indication of the incompatibility of age and generation systems. In *eunoto*, the significance of the father-son relationship is recognized. The fathers should witness various phases of the ritual and ideally also function as officiators in them. In reality this is possible only for a part of the fathers, those who happen to be two age-sets above their sons. Other fathers are, from the viewpoint of the age-set structure, outsiders and they are tolerated rather than invited. The presence of those, who do not have their sons among the initiates, is traditionally sanctioned by claiming that they would curse (*alak*) the youth for the benefit of their own sons and their age-set.²⁷ Also this conforms to what has been said of tense relations between proximate age-sets.

The above can be summarized by stating that in Parakuyo society the age-set principle dominates the institutionalized ties between generations. Wherever those two are incompatible the latter gives way. The generations function in this system as corporate sets only in a sociological sense. There is a tendency to conceptualize generations, age-sets and their sub-groups in terms of dual categorization and thus create differences where there otherwise would be a continuum. Therefore, each group finds its identity in being different from other groups and by having a definite place in the system.