



# Miracles and Extraordinary Experience in Northern Kenya (Contemporary Ethnography)

*Bilinda Straight*

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The Samburu of northern Kenya struggle to maintain their pastoral way of life as drought and the side effects of globalization threaten both their livestock and their livelihood. Mirroring this divide between survival and ruin are the lines between the self and the other, the living and the dead, "this side" and *inia bata*, "that side." Cultural anthropologist Bilinda Straight, who has lived with the Samburu for extended periods since the 1990s, bears witness to Samburu life and death in *Miracles and Extraordinary Experience in Northern Kenya*.

Written mostly in the field, *Miracles and Extraordinary Experience in Northern Kenya* is the first book-length ethnography completely devoted to Samburu divinity and belief. Here, child prophets recount their travels to heaven and back. Others report transformations between persons and inanimate objects. Spirit turns into action and back again. The miraculous is interwoven with the mundane as the Samburu continue their day-to-day twenty-first-century existence. Straight describes these fantastic movements inside the cultural logic that makes them possible; thus she calls into question how we experience, how we feel, and how anthropologists and their readers can best engage with the improbable.

In her detailed and precise accounts, Straight writes beyond traditional ethnography, exploring the limits of science and her own limits as a human being, to convey the significance of her time with the Samburu as they recount their fantastic yet authentic experiences in the physical and metaphysical spaces of their culture.

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