



KENYA

**LAKE TURKANA  
MELTING POT**

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El Molo fishermen from Layeni at the end of a fishing trip.

## Ethnic groups in the spectacular environments at the centre of the Rift Valley

The Great Rift Valley is the largest, longest and most conspicuous fissure in the Earth's crust. It spans over 5,500km from Ethiopia to Mozambique and includes extraordinary landscapes that range from the salt pans of Danalia to the Rwenzori Mountains, which reach heights of over 5000 metres. Lake Turkana in northern Kenya is one of the Rift's most inhospitable yet spectacular environments.

Here, the lives of various nomadic tribes are entwined: the Turkana, the Samburu, the Rendille and the El Molo, an ethnic group of fishermen once considered Africa's smallest tribe. Its population was so small, in fact, that it could be fit in a single photograph, which was exactly what occurred in 1959 with a group portrait that appeared in *The Sunday Times*. Since then, the El Molo have grown in number thanks to a series of mixed marriages that have saved the culture from extinction but have been to the detriment of some of its features, including the language, which has almost totally disappeared.

The Turkana, on the other hand, in spite of being the last to arrive on the shores of the lake that gave them their name, have assumed a dominant role. Nomadic herders by necessity, their territory is an expanse of jagged volcanic black rock covered partly by ash and sand where temperatures often exceed 50° and annual rainfall is less than 200mm. In order to survive, they are continuously on the move to seek out grass and water for their livestock with which they live in symbiosis. "In the Turkana language the highest number is 999 yet they have 700 different ways to say cow" explains anthropologist Alberto Salza who lived amongst them for a long time. The droughts of recent decades have pushed the Turkana ever closer to the shores of the lake, where they come into close contact with populations with whom they traditionally had hostile relations.



The small lake surrounded by lava flows, at the southern point of Lake Turkana.



Two hunters are going on the lakeshore in search of crocodiles to catch.



Preparation with red ochre for a young El Molo bride.



An El Molo man is writing some notes about the fishing net dimensions in the notebook of the anthropologist Alberto Salza.



Details of fashion contaminations of young morani (warriors) of the El Molo ethnic group.



A sacrificed goat is cooked for a thanksgiving ceremony in the place sacred for the El Molo of Moite, a site north of the current villages where El Molo claim to come from.



The El Molo village of Layeni.



A procession of El Molo women, turned Christian, move a statue of Holy Mary to the church of Loyangalani.



Two El Molo men show how crocodiles were hunted using harpoons, before it was forbidden by the authorities who included crocodiles as a protected species.



Leokulo, an old El Molo baptized with the catholic name Egidio. The earring made from hippopotamus tusks proves that the hunter has, at least, killed one hippopotamus in his life.



Wide shot of the small lake surrounded by lava flows at the southern point of Lake Turkana.



A Turkana girl in her village on the shores of Lake Turkana.



Young morani (warriors) of the Turkana ethnic group at the Loyangalani village.



Dances during an El Molo wedding in the village of Komote.



An El Molo girl prepared for wedding.



Hands stained with red ochre after having embellished a girl who is getting married.



At dawn, an El Molo family is sifting out the nets in search of caught fish.



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