

Fatherhood among the Maasai

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To Jesus, Mary and Joseph; may I always be with the Three.

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ABSTRACT

Papa and *yiyeo* are Maasai words for father and mother respectively. A father is the family head, protector, provider, main decision maker among the Maasai. The Maasai, a traditionally nomadic pastoral tribe in Kenya and Tanzania, have continued to fascinate many, given their preserving of their traditions intact to this day. The study of fatherhood among the Maasai aims to establish how traditional society among the Maasai groomed fathers, and how different this narrative is in a more modern society. Males were initiated into varied age-groups first fourteen or fifteen into the warrior age-group, and then later, as elders. These enabled Maasai males to fit into societal roles of protecting and providing for their families. Knowing that everything is related, the women are vital in the life of the Maasai, as they primarily take care of the home, and nurture girls into future honourable wives for Maasai society. Maasai living in more urban spaces, do not follow their traditions to the dot, yet maintain close links to their Maasai heritage. Fathers ensure that their boys are appropriately initiated into manhood at circumcision ceremonies, and continue to groom the children. Religion has impacted practices like polygyny, to the extent that Christianity encouraging monogamous marriages. In rural areas, the practice of female genital mutilation, though outlawed in Kenya and Tanzania, continues to take place. With education, the Maasai society will make significant advance into contributing uniquely to progress in our world. Efforts at educating girls and boys are in force, to the good of the Maasai.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ii
List of Figures.....	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Problem	1
1.3 Justification	1
1.4 Objectives	2
1.5 Scope:	2
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	3
2.1 Maasailand	3
2.2 FATHERHOOD.....	4
2.3 History.....	5

2.4	Men and Women	6
2.5	Customs and Religion	10
2.6	Organisation	11
2.7	Levels of Authority	13
2.8	Marriage.....	14
2.9	Cattle.....	14
2.10	Lifestyle.....	15
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY		17
3.1	Methodology.....	17
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION		17
4.1	“Modern” Maasai.....	20
CONCLUSIONS		22
REFERENCES		24
APPENDIX		25

List of Figures

Figure 1: Maasailand	3
Figure 2: Maasai in Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania	4
Figure 3: Maasai Woman, adorned, courtesy, <i>Pax on Both Houses</i>	7
Figure 4: Kenyan Murrans at Inauguration Ceremony, courtesy <i>Zuru Kenya</i>	8
Figure 5: Young Murrans, at competitive dancing	9
Figure 6: Maasai Girls in typical embroidery	9
Figure 7: The Gerontocratic Model: Distribution of Status by Age and Sex, among the Maasai	12
Figure 8: Maasai Girl, in Maasai Homestead.....	13

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Maasai¹ are a pastoral community, living mostly in Kenya and Tanzania. Today, they live in a largely multi-cultural environment, with many of them studying in formal schools with a mix of cultures, or moving to urban spaces to work. This presents a complexity in how the Maasai live their traditions, away from Maasailand. How the boys are groomed into fathers is an interesting study, given traditionally, these were on the move always, either visiting friends or relatives to catch up on events in Maasailand and beyond, or on the fields grazing, or at war raiding cattle.

A Maasai friend pointed out that the Maasai are mentioned in the Old Testament, suggesting that the Maasai could be a lost tribe of the Israelites as is noted in 1 Chronicles 9: 12, "...and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah, and Maasai the son of Adiel, the son of Jahzerah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Meshillemith, the son of Immer."

1.2 Problem

The Maasai, traditionally being a nomadic pastoral tribe, mostly living in Kenya and Tanzania, are constantly on the move, in search of water and pasture for their animals. This presents a curious case of study to understand how the model of fatherhood plays in Maasai culture with the "absentee" father out of the home for several days, and how boys are educated to take on the responsibility of father in Maasai culture.

1.3 Justification

Johan and Esben (1993) suggest that the Maasai male carries nothing; his life is simple, living on livestock, loving his women, while getting help from the children. In a sense, he is free, free to break camp and walk off to wherever he wants. This presents a case for study into how the father remains present even while away from home, for extended periods. With a study of fatherhood among the Maasai, it is possible to understand how modern man can improve in his balance of an increasing duty to work, that often overrides the duty to find time for family. Understanding traditional Maasai ways of mentoring fathers will help understand how even with busy workloads in modern society, it is possible to have that necessary fine balance in living the duty to the employer, and the paramount duty to family.

¹ Maasai is correctly pronounced Maasae

² Obtained from: <http://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/tracking-east-african-cattle-herders->

1.4 Objectives

The study is generally aimed at understanding Maasai traditions, in relation to detailing the ways in which the Maasai, a nomadic pastoral tribe, maintained the responsibility of providing and protecting their families.

The specific aims of the study are to:

1. Briefly detail Maasai culture and way of being, in relation to the role of father,
2. Understand the grooming of “father” in Maasai culture,
3. Understand the existing challenges to “fatherhood” among the Maasai, in a multi cultural environment.

1.5 Scope:

This research focuses on the Maasai as a community, not looking at the distinct differences that exist in Maasai clans, or that have evolved over interactions with other cultures and modern society through Maasailand in both Kenya and Tanzania. It is also a general study based on literature review.



Figure 2: Maasai in Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania³

By focusing a study on fatherhood, it is not intended to glorify fathers over mothers. It is not to attempt to remain conservative, and anti-feminist. Rather, it is attempts to understand even better how man and woman particularly complement each other, through the lens of focusing on the grooming of fathers. Good fathers, will be good to their wives, recognizing their unique and irreplaceable contribution to life in society beginning with life in the family, and will bring about bright and cheerful homes - or better still, a bright and cheerful world.

2.2 FATHERHOOD

Blankenhorn (1995), in *Fatherless America*, details the existing challenge of American culture, with a significant proof of troubles in American society being a result of fatherlessness, and particularly emphasises that the lost idea is that of the need for good fathers, to be able to counter the existing social challenges. He suggests that:

The United States is becoming an increasingly fatherless society. A generation ago, an American child could reasonably expect to grow up with his or her father. Today, an American child can reasonably expect not to. Fatherlessness is now approaching a rough parity with fatherhood as a defining feature of American childhood.

Here, I do not intend to write about American society. Rather, in borrowing from the case of the United States of America, a far advanced society; it is possible to see ahead the evident dangers of a society that does not celebrate the truths of life, fatherhood being one among these. Fatherhood is universal. To the Maasai, like for Blankenhorn's America, the good father provides, protects, nurtures and sponsors. Furthermore, at the outset, Blankenhorn (1995) states:

³ Courtesy, Anna Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lince/414417416/>, (accessed 6th September 2015)

Fatherhood is a social role that obligates men to their biological offspring. For two reasons, it is society's most important role for men. First fatherhood, more than any other male activity, helps men to become good men; more likely to obey the law, to be good citizens, and to think about the needs of others...Second, fatherhood privileges children.

In the attempt to emphasize the complementary role of man and woman, in society, and especially in the family, Elton and Pauline (1953) suggest that:

One of the greatest blessings which can come to any normal child is the existence of two parents. There are, of course, numerous persons who grow to splendid maturity without this advantage, but they are forced to overcome a serious handicap in the process. The mother and the father are both helpful to the child and to the home as a whole, partly because they are different, psychologically as well as physically. The importance of the father in the home does not rest upon the absurd belief that men and women ought to play the same role, but rather on the recognition that their roles are different, complementary and equally necessary.

Together, man and woman wonderfully enable an environment that will guarantee integral growth of the children, seemingly, much to the surprise and awe of modern society.

2.3 History

The Maasai are a Nilotic ethnic group, living in Southern Kenya and Northern Tanzania, in East Africa. Global Sojourns⁴ in *The Maasai, East Africa's Most Celebrated Indigenous Peoples* describes Maasai as "tall, slender, dark, fearless, proud, and freedom loving people who have remained contemptuous of modern lifestyle." Johan and Esben (1993) suggest that it is easy to be struck by "Maasaiitis", a "disease" that comes from being fascinated by the Maasai in the Kenyan and Tanzanian savannah. Elias, (2011) suggests that "*Maasai* is an English expression from the word *Ilmaasai* from one of the ethnic groups living in Kenya and Tanzania which means the people who speak *Maa* language."

Johan and Esben (1993) further relay a legend of the Maasai origins:

Maasai legends hold that they came from the north, where they lived on a wide and fertile plain - a sort of Land of Canaan - surrounded by tall mountains. After a long drought, they decided to emigrate to find better grazing for their livestock. To this end, they built a ladder up the mountain and started to climb. But when half of them had reached the top, the ladder broke. Those who remained in the valley became the ancestors of today's Samburu people. Those who succeeded went south and called themselves the Maasai.

Wanguhu (2006), details the origins of the Maasai, including tracing their economic activity.

Maasai are Southern Plain Nilotes, who by the middle of the first millennium had established themselves in the plains around Lake Turkana, migrating from south eastern Sudan.... The Maasai are

⁴ <http://globalsojourns.com/>

pastoral people who herd cattle and goats and few of them practice agriculture. The majority of them remain attached to their old tradition of animal husbandry. Cattle were herded for milk, blood hides, skin and meat. They also kept sheep and goats for meat. Donkeys were kept for transport. Agricultural products were obtained from neighbours. Maasai did not eat fish, as it was a taboo.

When the boundaries for colonies in Africa were drawn, the Maasai did not know they could end up in two countries, Tanzania (at that time a German colony) and Kenya (then a British colony). In the eastern part of Maasailand is Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the highest mountain in Africa (Hetfield and Johnstone, 1996).

2.4 Men and Women

For fifteen to twenty years following circumcision at puberty, all young Maasai males served a compulsory tribal service: protecting their tribe against enemies and predators, raiding cattle and women from other tribes, and finding good grazing for cattle.

In Maasai society, men and women have different roles. In the old days, men took care of everything connected with cattle and war or raiding tribes, while women took care of the *manyatta* (home), including building the huts and taking care of the children, collecting firewood, fetching water, milking the cows, preparing food. This division of labour is reflected in the training of the children. Young girls help their mothers with chores around the *manyatta*. At the age of four or five, the boys are given responsibility for lambs and goat kids which remain in the *manyatta* by day. Later on, the boys would follow older boys as cattle go out to graze, with responsibility over bigger herds as the years go by. This distribution of roles formed a vital training for roles proper to men and women. Dorothy (1999) mentions that “in the nineteenth century, Maasai women were therefore crucial intermediaries in the extensive and active trade networks that enabled Maasai to sustain their specialized production strategy by linking them to the commodities of regional and global commerce.” This further shows the extent to which women were important in the life of Maasai culture.

Polygyny is common among Maasai. Sharing a wife is even possible, since this is not considered adulterous, but rather, marrying the “age-set”. Children in Maasai tradition are not so keen to obtain formal education because they are required to look after the cattle for the boys, and the household for the girls.



Figure 3: Maasai Woman, adorned, courtesy, *Pax on Both Houses*⁵

Traditionally, from the age of four, boys are introduced to herding, with the stock under their care increasing with the years. Boys remain in their mother's homes until they are circumcised. From the onset of puberty, at fourteen or fifteen, boys are circumcised and they become junior warriors (*murrans*). *Murrans* protect Maasai society, and are prohibited from marrying, though they are expected to remain sexually active. Through this period till they are senior warriors, they acquire cattle and property as payment, reward or through raids. Ole Sankan (1970) emphasizes that boys are not circumcised until they are mature. The elders would wait until there were enough boys (who were judged to be efficient, sufficient and capable to guard their country) upon which circumcision took place, to make them warriors. Only after circumcision is a young man allowed to call oneself "son of so-and-so", like in the case "*Ole Sangale*" meaning "son of Sangale".

⁵ Obtained from: <http://paxonbothhouses.blogspot.co.ke/2015/01/maasai-cricket-warrior.html> (accessed 6th Sept 2015)



Figure 4: Kenyan Murrans at Inauguration Ceremony, courtesy Zuru Kenya⁶

Coast (2001) notes that men cease to be *murrans* when a subsequent age-set is created, thereby making a transition to being junior elders, forming the decision making authority for Maasai society. With this status, they are ideally expected to marry. *Murrans* are forbidden from having sexual relations with circumcised females, but not with uncircumcised girls, who usually have not reached puberty, and therefore cannot become pregnant. This was also to protect the interests of the elders who usually picked from the young circumcised girls as wives, to prevent undue competition from the *murrans*.

In the past, a boy became a warrior at the age of fourteen, and would, as a test of manhood, go out with friends to kill a lion. The one who hit the lion first would then wear its mane, a very prestigious feat, in turn being rewarded with wives, and revered in the community. Today, both the governments of Kenya and Tanzania have outlawed the practice of lion killing, so as to protect wildlife, a vital source of tourism for both countries, in addition to protecting the biodiversity of the land.

Given that Maasai society is gerontocratic and patriarchal, women gain the age-set of their husbands. The women's rite of initiation is not public but rather a private ceremony. Once girls reach puberty, they are circumcised and thereafter ready for marriage, usually with much older elders. The women are fully responsible for home chores, and educate their daughters toward becoming wives and mothers.

⁶ Obtained from: <http://zurukenya.com/2013/07/26/kenyas-cultural-symbol-the-maasai/kilo-kenya-morans-young-maasai-warriors-dance-during-an-inauguration-ceremony/> (accessed 6th Sept 2015)



Figure 5: Young Murrans, at competitive dancing⁷

Once puberty set in, the girls were initiated through female genital mutilation (female circumcision), which made them women. In 2011, Kenya prohibited female genital mutilation, in the *Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act*. The practice of circumcising women is still deep among the Maasai, especially in rural areas.



Figure 6: Maasai Girls in typical embroidery⁸

⁷ Courtesy, John Willis, Flickr, available, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/johnadwillis/14287595989/> (accessed 6th Sept 2015)

⁸ Courtesy, National Geographic, available, <http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/files/2013/10/10Maasai1-596x390.jpg>, (accessed 6th Sept 2015)

Cases exist where a man will not marry a woman who has not been circumcised, or will have his wife still under go circumcision, lest he divorce her, if discovered not to be circumcised. Traditionally, it was normal for girls to be married within one year of circumcision.

The relationships between men and women varied by their age, kinship, clan and age-set affiliations, but were generally based on mutual respect (*enkanyit*) and relative autonomy (Dorothy, 1999). Dorothy (1999) further states that while men frequently travelled to neighbouring homesteads, to visit members of the same age-sets, clan elders and partners, to discuss clan matters, share information and arrange grazing regimes, women travelled to markets and trading settlements or to visit friends and relatives at neighbouring homesteads.

Women, in Maasai culture were perceived to be less in dignity to men, and were somewhat part of a man's property after marriage. Practices like female genital mutilation, which are contrary to the dignity of woman, have rightly been outlawed, and more Maasai women are today acquiring formal education, that contributes significantly to a life in Maasai society that will ably compete with the modern times, without brushing aside the particular character of Maasai culture, thereby elevating Maasai culture to an even more authentic affirmation of the truths about who we are as persons - persons in search of truth, good and beauty.

2.5 Customs and Religion

The Maasai traditional customs and taboos have been preserved from one generation to another through oral tradition (Elias, 2011). Elias (2011) further mentions that “*Maasai* believe in the existence of one God (*Enkai*), who is holy, infallible, the provider of rain and cattle, the sustainer, the ultimate controller who is the first and the last and the universal creator.” Maasai offer their prayers to *Enkai*, through the religious leaders *Laiboni*. For the Maasai, the most sacred place of worship is *Oldoinyo Lengai* (Maasai for “Mountain of God”) located in Northern Tanzania, where Maasai go to the mountain to pray and offer sacrifices to God.

During the times of slave trade, Maasai slaves, when captured, fetched a relatively high price at the coast, suggests Ole Sankan (1970). He further notes that “since Independence in Kenya, the Maasai have undergone unprecedented change, to accept the fact that they need to settle down permanently in definite areas.” This required a change of traditional nomadic ways, to adapt to changing times.

When an old man realised he was about to die, he bequeathed his property amongst his sons. In the event of sudden death, the eldest son took charge of the property and

distributed it amongst his brothers and step-brothers (Ole Sankan, 1970). It is important to note that women did not form part of possible heirs to property, in traditional Maasai culture.

2.6 Organisation

Paul (1992) suggests that the Maasai are organised in age-grades and age-sets. He further defines the two as:

Age grades are the successive statuses to which individuals are ascribed in the course of their lives. An age-set comprises all those within a broad range of ages who are formed into a group of peers with their own separate identity.

Coast, (2001), suggests that Maasai have strong division of responsibilities, roles and labour between age-groups and sexes with an age-set being composed of groups of contemporaries, united by their communal circumcision. It is important to note that Maasai women do not belong to any age-sets, but at marriage they are promoted to a higher age grade (Paul, 1992). All Maasai men belong to an age-set following their initiation, and with their peers they pass as a body from one age-grade to the next.

Shahack-Gross *et al.* (2004) in writing about the Maasai organisation suggest that:

Their society is relatively egalitarian with a clan based social organization and an age set system. It is however, sometimes termed a gerontocracy with more power going to elders and to men. Adult men are in charge of management of herds, family labour, and care of livestock. Until recently, warrior age sets were responsible for defence of livestock and settlements. Herding is primarily carried out by boys and young men. Women are responsible for the household. They milk livestock, open gates in the morning to let the family herds out for grazing, collect firewood and water, build and maintain houses, clean, cook, sew, and care for children.

Wangugu (2006) in a similar vein relays that:

Initiation into an age-set was through circumcision at the age of 14-16 for boys. Upon initiation, the boys entered the grade of junior-warriors, who served in the age-grade for duration of twelve to fifteen years, when they provided the fighting force in times of strife and cattle raiding. They also formed corps of able bodied men to serve the community in domestic need. When junior warriors were promoted to the rank of senior warriors, the senior warriors who also would serve for a similar period (twelve to fifteen years) in that rank, became junior elders, and married gradually becoming absorbed into reserve army or home-guard. Junior elders on promotion took charge of the cattle previously helped in trust for them. Both elder, the junior and senior age-grades constituted the traditional administrative bodies of the Maasai.

The Maasai have maintained a gerontocratic model, with elders wielding significant control over life of Maasai society. A clear case is presented by Spear and Waller (1993):

The Maasai warrior (*murrān*) is suspended between boyhood and full adulthood. This creates an excess number of marriageable girls, who are often taken by the elders. Elders decide when warriors can marry. Women are regarded as dependants throughout their lives, but seniority of status among women, also associated with age, is rigidly acknowledged within the domestic domain and again demands respect.

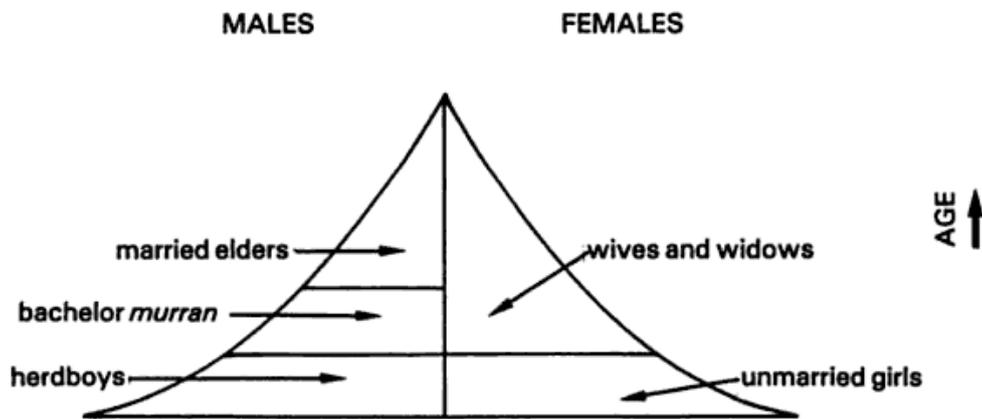


Figure 7: The Gerontocratic Model: Distribution of Status by Age and Sex, among the Maasai (Spear and Waller, 1993, page 142)

Wanguhu (2006) further details that:

The Maasai had no system of centralised, coercive authority. Popular public opinion based on custom placed an obligation on the people to carry out social duties, but not the authority exercised by a particular individual. There were however, leaders in the age-grouping system that were selected by the age-sets to speak for them but not to rule over them. The only individual who ever nearly achieved countrywide pan-Maasai influence was the famous *Oloiboni Mbatiany*. Elders who usually imposed a fine of cattle on convicted criminals decided court cases.

This shows an organisation that allowed the Maasai societies to flourish, often to be revered and feared by neighbouring tribes. Maasai society functioned in a different way to what is more famous and thought to be the best model today - the democratic society.



Figure 8: Maasai Girl, in Maasai Homestead⁹

When a man married, his first wife constructed her house on the right hand side of the entrance to the home-enclosure, while the second wife on the left hand side, suggests Ole Sankan (1970). He further states that “once upon a time, the Maasai were one strong tribe, and this is no longer so, with continued changes and intermingling of cultures”.

2.7 Levels of Authority

The first level of authority started from the age-group. Before boys were circumcised, a Chief Councillor (*Olaiguenani*) is selected from them and given, as a staff of office, a club known as *Okiuka*. Further, a brave warrior is marked on the thigh to distinguish him, and develop an authority from other boys for his strength. This authority continued beyond his age-group to the community in old age.

Maasai culture is predominantly patriarchal, with all levels of authority attributed to men. For the Maasai, a sense of superiority over cultures and people is seen in the fact that a conception of guilt of murder among the Maasai does not extend beyond Maasailand borders. One was not guilty of murder if he murdered a man from another tribe, relates Ole Sankan (1970). Fines for murder were forty-nine cattle. It is interesting to note that there was no fixed fine for murder of women, since Maasai traditionally never murdered women in warfare or elsewhere. It was believed that ill -luck befell one who murdered a woman.

⁹ Courtesy, Aino Maria V. Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/seathroughair/8575190798/>, (last accessed 6th Sept 2015)

2.8 Marriage

The *Kenya Marriage Act, (2014)* allows for polygamy, detailing marriage as “the voluntary union of a man and a woman whether in a monogamous or polygamous union” and further recognises customary marriage, which is practised by the Maasai and other cultures in Kenya. The *Tanzania Law of Marriage Act, 1971* in part II on *Marriage*, stipulates marriage to either be monogamous or polygamous, again, reflecting the cultural practice in Tanzania, and a part of Maasai culture.

Ole Sankan (1970) details the process of marriage, in traditional Maasai culture as:

The process of obtaining a wife is as follows: A man meets a girl whom he grows to like, and after this he gives her a chain. News about this spreads quickly and the parents await the arrival of the man to declare his intention openly. The man brings honey which he gives to his clanswomen. The women take this honey and milk to the home of the girl’s parents. Honey acts as a declaration of intent to marry. The honey is not brewed into beer but is eaten by women. After this a greater quantity of honey is supplied and carried to the girl’s parents’ home together with milk. This honey is brewed and drunk by elders. The father invites his relatives and other elders of the same age-grade as himself. When the beer was brewed, the man who had declared his interest in the girl is summoned and told whether his proposal is acceptable. If the parents are agreeable, a life-long friendship is cemented there and then but if, on the other hand, the proposal has been rejected, he is informed about it. Everything is thereafter forgotten and he does not attempt to recover the cost of his honey or any other expenses he might have incurred. If they accept his proposal, he gives them presents according to his ability to do so, and nobody else may interfere or try to marry the girl.

2.9 Cattle

Maasai are known as “people of cattle”. Maasai are cattle keepers, and often have goats, sheep, and donkeys. Maasai primarily subsist on their animals, obtaining milk, meat, blood for nourishment. Nothing is more important to Maasai than their children and cattle, and when they pray to Enkai, they ask for cattle and children. *Maasai Association* suggests that the Maasai pray “*Meishoo iyiook enkai inkishu o-nkera*”- [The English translation of this prayer is: “May Creator give us cattle and children.”]¹⁰. This shows how central cattle and children are to the Maasai.

Spear and Waller (1993) suggest that in as much as the Maasai are traditionally cattle keepers, the roots of Maasai agriculture are older than Maasai themselves, going back more than two millennia to their Eastern Nilotic forbearers in the Sudan. According to Maasai legend, “all cattle in the world were given to them by God (Enkai)”. When cattle raids took place, it was not stealing; rather, it was in accord with the will of *Enkai*.

Shahack-Gross *et al.* (2004) suggest that although animals are herded together, each household is economically independent, with the size of domestic settlements varying greatly, depending upon the number of families living in a household and the size of their

¹⁰ Maasai Association, available, <http://www.maasai-association.org/maasai.html>, last accessed 5th September 2015.

herds. As has already been seen, herding was the task of the boys. Women milked the cows.

2.10 Lifestyle

The Maasai are usually portrayed as though they are impervious to socio-economic and political changes taking place around them (Holland, 1996). Holland (1996) further argues that “this view of the Maasai can no longer be held as valid, since the Maasai are experiencing modern day changes and are in fact active participants, not merely passive observers.” The Maasai have become a very complex, differentiated society exhibiting ambivalent responses to social changes. Kituyi, 1990 (as cited by Hollan, 1996) suggests that “the Maasai are under pressure from the Kenya Government to change their lifestyle, and become more integrated into the national economy”. This presents a threat to the way of life of the Maasai, especially if the Maasai are not actively involved to come up with solutions in harmony with their way.

Maasai economic and social life revolves around cattle, on which they depend for subsistence, (Århem, 1985). They supplement this with agricultural food from neighbours. Århem, (1985) further notes that for the Maasai, cattle give meaning to life, and mean life itself. Traditionally, the Maasai are nomadic pastoralists. Over the years, with increasing urbanisation and contemporary realities of population growth, increased market integration, and the need to produce agricultural crops as well as livestock, there is a shift toward an integral adaptation of both love for cattle, and expansion of subsistence (Elliot, 2001). Elliot (2001) further notes that Maasai, as pastoralists, have their diet consisting of milk, meat, and blood obtained from their animals, and cereals either grown or obtained from trading their animals.

Rodriguez (2007) states that “British colonizers, who ruled East Africa until the early 1960’s, attempted to modernize the Maasai economy by transforming land tenure arrangements and encouraging the education of Maasai children and a reduction of livestock numbers, in addition to working to control nomadic movements of the Maasai.” Over time, the Kenya and Tanzania governments have worked to intervene in the Maasai pastoral lifestyle, encouraging them to settle more, by for example encouraging group ranches. Rodriguez (2007) further maintains that the purpose for which Maasai group ranches were created has not been totally successful since most Maasai remain, to some degree, nomadic. This shows how deep their lifestyle with nomadic pastoralism goes, it is a way of life for the Maasai.

In article three of the 2008 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was recognition that “indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” *The International Work Group*

*for Indigenous Affairs*¹¹ lists the Maasai as an indigenous group in Kenya and Tanzania. In light and in a bid to foster an authentic care for our common home, Pope Francis (2015) has re-affirmed that:

In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture.

The State needs to propose interventions of progress keeping closely in mind the way of life of her people, and respecting the subsequent traditions and customs.

On 10 August 1904, a treaty, to become known as the Anglo-Maasai treaty, was signed between the Chief Lybon Lenana, on behalf of the Maasai community, and Sir Donald Stewart, on behalf of the British Crown. Significant sections of the treaty were breached by the British, who further evicted Maasai from their traditional lands (Barume, 2010). Barume (2010), in writing about the Maasai in Tanzania, further identifies that “in 1988, Government officials ordered a forcible remove of all Maasai out of the Game Reserve, (by now upgraded into a National Park), so as to provide more security to wildlife.” On 28 July 2013, the Maasai peoples residing in the geothermal-rich Narasha locality in Narok County, Rift Valley, were forcibly evicted from their village by armed police officers and hired thugs who maimed scores of Maasai, 11 destroyed their property and torched their houses over a 3,000 acre land dispute (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2014). This briefly shows a lack of regard for the Maasai community as developments are considered. Dialogue should be at the forefront, to enable the continued livelihood of all people, so as to protect the heritage even of minority groups. All the stakeholders; the Maasai, tourism community, conservation community, agriculturalists, and government have to work closely together to ascertain means that will authentically enable flourishing of the common good.

¹¹ International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs website: <http://www.iwgia.org/>

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology

The materials and methods used to obtain necessary information to write this paper were based on literature review and a questionnaire that was filled out by a father living in Nairobi, Kenya

The relevant texts detailing Maasai culture, customs and traditions were consulted, with material obtained from libraries in Nairobi, Kenya, and online information. These were used to understand Maasai as a people.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and conclusions stated here are observed from the literature review of texts concerning the Maasai, and as identified through the feedback from the questionnaire to a family man living in Nairobi. The questionnaire is appended, with the feedback from Mr. Amos Simpano.

The Maasai word for father is *papa* and for mother is *yiayo*. The father is head of the household and family, holding the family unit together. The father loves and respects his daughters, bringing them up to be worthy wives, when they are ready for marriage. Fathers do not speak about sex with their daughters, or even sex education. Towards the sons, a father brings them up to be responsible men, capable of inheriting property, in addition to giving advice on how to take care of a home.

According to Mr. Amos Simpano, a father is; head of the household or his family, main decision maker, provider, breadwinner, protector against aggressors for the family. Toward his daughters, a father is responsible for:

- Ensuring the daughter grows in a responsible way to become a dependable future person of the society.
- Choosing a husband for the daughter
- Providing the basic needs for his daughters

Toward his sons, a father is responsible for:

- Ensuring the son (s) grow (s) up to be responsible and dependable for society.
- Taking part in finding a wife for the son (s)
- Providing the basic needs for his son (s)

Maasai groom boys to be fathers through Taught informally by socialization by the elders as they grow up, observing and participating in relevant community activities that prepare them to become fathers. Furthermore, Maasai culture prepares males for fatherhood by ensuring that they:

- Learn through traditions passed on from one generation to another, usually orally.
- Learn through informal education passed on by elders to young persons in society through discussions and practices

The marked differences in roles of father and mother are: the father is the head of household and family, while the mother follows instructions of the father. The father plays masculinity roles such as protector of family, decision maker; while the mother plays more feminine roles such as looking after children and domestic chores.

Mr. Amos Simpano further stated that the main values that are aimed at being transferred to boys, in preparation for fatherhood are: responsibility as head of household; a sense of belonging to the community and subsequently living in solidarity; care for the children and family; and a high degree of respect to elders. In regard to the discipline of children in Maasai culture as a responsibility of the father are:

- To cane any errant child, both one's own and those of neighbours (since it takes a village to raise a child). This cane is just for correction and nothing else.
- Continuously coach the children and advise them on what is wrong and right to do.
- Set a good example and become a role model, to be followed by children

The particular challenges experienced by the Maasai, and that threaten their lifestyles and customs are: erosion of cultural values due to globalization/westernization; abuse of Maasai culture by foreigners coming into Maasai habitats; a disregard for fundamental human rights with a push for un-African ideologies like gay rights, which are not part of Maasai customs and values. The rights and way of life of the Maasai have to be respected.

Maasai effectively groom the boys to become men through the initiation ceremonies and the clear roles that they assign the boys as they grow up. As boys, after they are about four, they begin to take care of sheep and goats. The herd entrusted to them grows bigger as they grow older. This enables the boys to learn the art of cattle keeping, which is vital to Maasai culture that largely survives on cattle. The males in traditional Maasai culture have defined roles, mostly of ruling and being major stakeholder in the decision making process while elders and fathers.

With a large family and many wives and children, it is often not possible to find intimate time with all the children and wives, as occurs in a monogamous family. Even in some monogamous families, husbands may not "find" enough time to spend with wife and children, with an impressive and flawed work culture that does not allow enough rest from work, and hence does not recognize the need for "family time". Nevertheless, in the traditional Maasai culture, the father's presence was always felt. Children knew about their father, and this enabled them to grow up proud of their paternity. Sometimes, with sexual relations allowed with people of the same age-set, children borne were not biologically those of a given father (husband to a wife) but were still considered children of the customary husband to a given woman. This guaranteed support and care for all children in a man's household.

In the case of death of a father, a brother to the father would possess the wife together with responsibility to support the children. This guaranteed continued support and social protection for the wife and children.

In our modern times today, there is a marked changing culture for the Maasai. The Maasai father, who lives in the urban space, with his children enrolled in formal educational institutions, enables the children to learn from many cultures, and help them to live in harmony with other cultures. Today, the modern Maasai, will not raid cattle, because there is in force a better understating of justice, apart from the fact that raiding is a criminal offence. Many have adjusted to diversify their income.

The challenges of the modern world we live in, that of balancing work and family, do apply in Maasai families that live especially in urban spaces. In the more rural places, the Maasai have maintained their traditions. Male circumcision is still an important initiation into maturity, including female circumcision. Governments are doing the best they can to end female genital mutilation, closely working with local authorities, though success and enforcement of the law is minimal. With education, the practice will dwindle, being replaced by a simple cultural practice of initiation without actual mutilation. This way, girls are able to learn to be women, without practices that do not recognise their dignity.

In the days of old, fathers interacted with their daughters at a more passive level, compared to their wives who closely mentored the girls. It was also the mothers who ensured that their daughters were properly initiated from girls to women. The fathers were distant from the day to day life of their daughters, and mostly vividly appeared at marriage ceremonies.

Sons, when approaching adolescence, and particularly at being initiated into an age-set, then became more involved in the life of their fathers. It was the responsibility of the father to see to it that his sons were initiated at the appropriate time, into manhood, from boyhood. The boys also had to prove to be fearless at the circumcision ceremonies, without anaesthetics, otherwise, disgrace and fines would follow his household. Fathers, ensured preparation for this, and were proud of their sons for being brave men before the knife, and ably welcomed them into the world of *murrans* (warriors). *Murrans* ceased to relate much with their mothers after circumcision, and instead become more tough and rough, taking on feats like killing lions, and raiding cattle. The Maasai father today, is still responsible for ensuring that his sons are initiated appropriately into the traditions of the Maasai, including circumcision. This spans a continuing education in manhood, which prepares for being brave in tough times of life.

This way, boys learned to protect and provide for their families. As *murrans*, the men are assigned the duty to protect society. This in turn developed in them the capacity to rule over and protect their families, when they transitioned to elders.

Today, there is a growing involvement of Maasai in education for both boys and girls, looking at the equal dignity of both males and females. This has a marked improvement and diversification of the Maasai culture, with strides to even more progress, and adopting of best practices from many other traditions and cultures.

In fact, it is relayed that “Sabore, a Maasai warrior, elder, and chief, described the challenges facing the Maasai in the 21st century as their traditional culture, especially regarding girls and women, clashes with modernization”.¹² This suggests a continued clashing of traditional Maasai culture with the modern times, and a multi-cultural environment. It also shows progress in practices that are not in harmony with an authentic anthropology, like the case of female genital mutilation. In addition, practices like polygamy are much more reduced, with adoption of practices borrowed from Christianity.

Today, in urban areas, the idea of the *murrans*, and accompanying practices (such as being sexually active without the need of being committed in marriage, as of old) and roles (raiding, and ensuring peace and security in society) is non-existent. Sexually Transmitted Infections were also common in traditional Maasai community.

Sometimes, children are borne out of this activity and yet the *murrans* are not ready to settle at this stage, culturally. This means children are born without a real father figure. In the days of old, girls who became pregnant without being married were quickly married off. Local herbs also existed in Maasai traditions which ended the life in the womb, after sexual encounters.

In addition, women are not entirely married to a man, but to an age-set. It is frequent for a woman to sleep with her husband’s friends, as long as his friends belong to the same age-set as her actual husband. All children who are borne by the woman are always considered as those of her husband’s, regardless of the fact that they could biologically be for another man. For a man, the important thing is to have many children.

4.1 “Modern” Maasai

Like is usual, Maasai who take on a more religious practices, take on the traditions of the religions they are converted into. Many Maasai today are Christian and Muslim, and

¹² As related on <http://castinet.castilleja.org/users/pmckee/africaweb/zones.html>, last accessed 9th September 2015

therefore will strive to live up to the dictates of their religion. Christians will tend to be monogamous, a tough feat for some.

In addition, the pastoral life of the Maasai, encouraged sexual activity, and in fact possibly was necessary to enable the survival of the Maasai. Today, Maasai culture is more settled, with permanent housing, and there then exists a trend of adopting ways from other cultures.

Maasai traditions are changing, with growing intermingling with other cultures to obtain a hybrid that is complicated and different from traditional ways. In Maasai families, it is frequent today to find children not being able to communicate in *Maa* language, especially in urban spaces.

In times past, Maasai groomed boys for very specific roles: to protect, and rule, and in turn to be good fathers. The women took on roles of child bearing, nurturing and providing for the family. Today, there is a mix of some roles. In urban dwellings, one frequently finds both husband and wife having corporate jobs, and so the running of the home is left to a maid at home. This has its challenges, beyond the scope of this study. Men traditionally provide and rule, while the women nurture and care for the home. This continues in many parts of Maasailand, and in many cultures in East Africa and around the world.

CONCLUSIONS

Everything is related. Good fathers cannot be without good mothers. Each one needs to do their irreplaceable part, including broader society, so as to authentically educate in the values of a given society. The Maasai are one more of the numerous cultures in our world. Their existence provides a rich diversity, fascination, and provides “texture” to the world. Maasai culture is undergoing changes, from existing in a multicultural environment, and growing pressures to have them settle more, instead of continued cattle raiding (with a deep conviction that all cattle in the world belong to the Maasai).

Maasai fathers are proud to have many children, and many wives. The more children a wife bears, the more society respects her. A woman who does not bear children often will suffer socially, with the possibility of being divorced, and forever remain socially looked-down upon.

Religion has impacted on certain practices, like polygyny, which presents a clearer anthropology on the dignity of persons borrowed from an understanding that marriage is unitive and therefore between one man and one woman.

Maasai quickly enabled their men to defend their societies, a great good. Today, they need to learn to peacefully live and co-exist, understanding that solidarity and the common good are intrinsic to living in society. The practice of cattle raiding needs to be ended, in consultation with the elders, who wield significant power and decision making in the life of communities of the Maasai.

Even in a multi-cultural society, the Maasai have maintained their unique culture; in dress, language, practice of initiation of men (with female circumcision reduced - but the ceremony with songs still present as a symbolic initiation). These help to develop the roles proper to men and women, so as to enable society to progress with the guiding light of tradition.

Nelson Mandela stated that “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” In the context of the Maasai, with education, is significant understanding of better ways to progress, while keeping the heritage of their traditions and understanding the need for each one to make a unique contribution to the common good, in a multi-cultural environment.

Traditional Maasai education was oral. Elders told stories and legends, to teach life lessons. Knowledge then was handed over to the next generation by word of mouth. Today, more children enrolling in formal education, presents advances in learning, and more complex trends in gender roles, with a rising intermingling of cultures from far beyond in our little global village today.

The Maasai ably educated their sons in fatherhood, according to the roles expected of the men. Today, there is a marked changing of traditions, borrowing from neighbouring tribes, and cultures that are far beyond. The Maasai have nevertheless maintained their traditional ways of initiation, and continue to be very proud of their Maasai heritage.

Today, polygamy is very much still a part of Maasai culture. A continuing conversation, with clear anthropological underpinnings will be able to guide toward affirming that marriage is between one man and one woman, recognizing the equal dignity of both man and woman.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

The following were the questions prepared for this research.

1. What is the word for “father” and “mother” in Maasai?
2. What does “fatherhood” or “father” mean in Maasai culture?
3. Describe generally how a father relates/interacts with his daughter(s) in the Maasai tradition.
4. Describe generally how a father relates/interacts with his son (s) in the Maasai tradition
5. What are the roles of “father” among the Maasai?
6. What particular role has a father towards the raising of his daughter (s) in Maasai culture?
7. What particular role has a father towards the raising of his son (s) in Maasai culture?
8. How does Maasai culture/society educate in “fatherhood”, or how does Maasai society prepare fathers?
9. What distinct roles exist between a father and a mother in Maasai tradition?
10. How does Maasai culture groom boys to be fathers?
11. What three fundamental values are aimed at being transferred to boys when educating them for fatherhood?
12. What particular challenges exist for the Maasai father in the modern multicultural society?
13. What is the typical Maasai father involvement in the discipline of children?