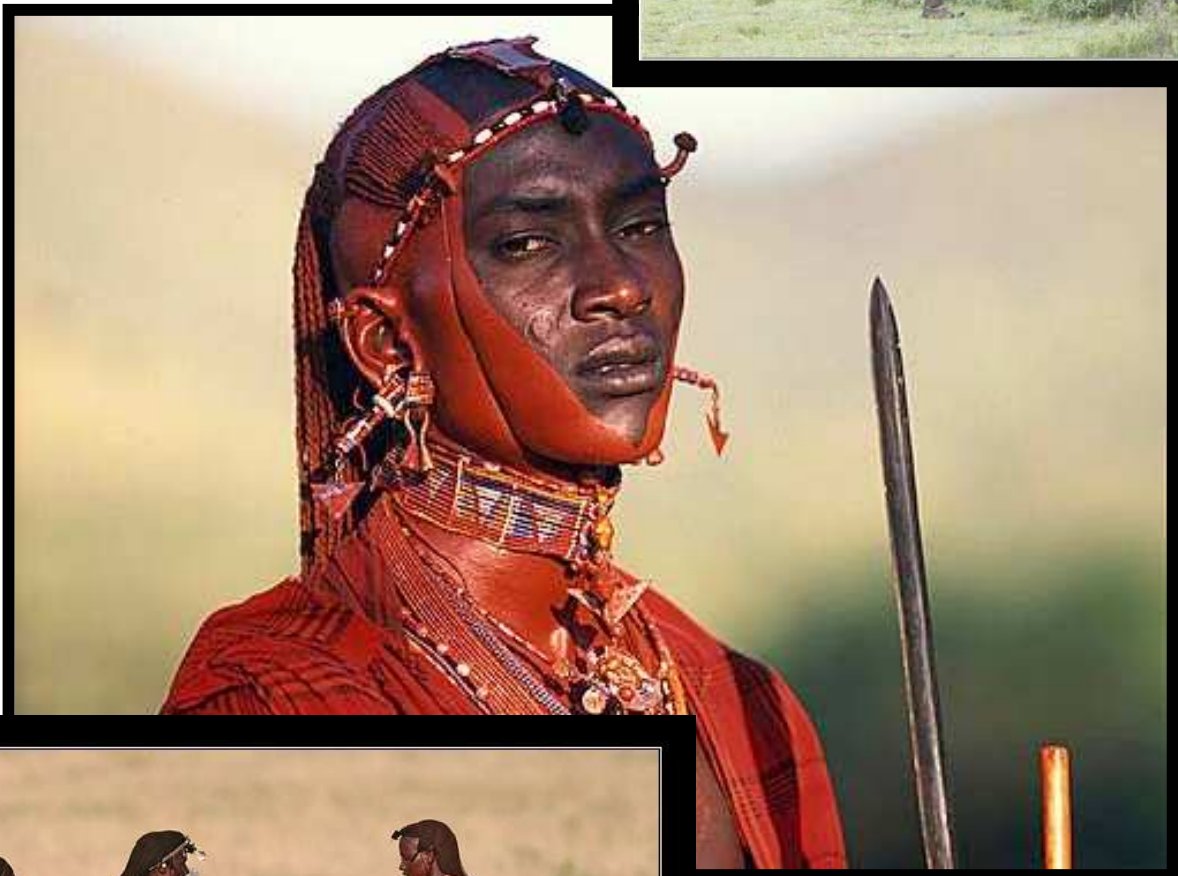


The Maasai Tribe



Gender superiority is the central figure of the Maasai culture as this way of life is what holds the culture together, preserving and preventing the tribe from becoming tainted. Maasai men and women are a semi-nomadic ethnic group whom which are located in Kenya and northern Tanzania. It has come to my attention, that there is a clear distinction between gender identity, based on the different roles that the Maasai men and women partake in their day-to-day lives. In fact, it is evident that men are given the more praised roles and duties in comparison to women. From a very early age, boys are sent out with the calves and lambs as soon as they can toddle. Cattle are the mainstay of the traditional Maasai way of life, and their importance is embedded deep into the hearts and minds of these peoples; it is with great honor that only the boys come in contact with the calves from an early age. In contrast, the girls are responsible for domestic tasks, such as cooking and constructing homes for the people within the tribe. A girl's childhood is dominated by a strict avoidance, even a fear of her father and other elders. Girls are socialized to accept her subservience to her future husband. Furthermore, the most honorary role in the Maasai tribe, is having the title of a warrior. Becoming a warrior is the big dream of every young Maasai boy. The warriors are in charge of the society's security by protecting their cattle and their grazing lands. Often standing over six feet the Maasai warrior with beaded hair, red checked blanket (shuka) and balled club, looks both fierce and beautiful. A Massai can only become a warrior in stages, marked by hard and dangerous initiation rites. Maasai boys go through a circumcision ceremony at the age of fourteen and then traditionally spend up to eight years looking after livestock far from their villages. They become warriors upon their return to the

village to get married. Finally, from the social point of view, the Maasai are in favor of the principle of male domination, and this can be shown in their practice of polygamy. This polygamy is mostly due to the high level of mortality in the case of infants and warriors. The fact is that women most often marry their entire age group and not only one man (her husband). As well, the Maasai practice inheritance, whereby a bride is allocated a herd of cattle from which all her sons will build up herds of their own, overseen by their father, who also makes gifts of cattle to his sons over the course of his life. When the parents die, the oldest son inherits the residue on his father's herd, and the youngest inherits the residue of his mother's allocated cattle; daughters inherit nothing at all. In conclusion, it is evident that women in the Maasai tribe are considered inferior when contrasted to men and have less authority.

Ground #1: Singing and Beauty

Singing for the Maasai has a greater meaning than just art alone; it is a part of their rich culture of beauty and semi-nomadic nature. One of the first instruments people picture when they think of African music are the drums. To the Maasai however, rhythm lies in the human voice. Maasai music traditionally consists of rhythms provided by vocalists and a song leader known as the *olaranyani* who sings the melody, while the others sing the harmonies. For people who move often, like the Maasai, the voice is the easiest instrument to carry, making the Maasai music so unique. Both males and females use singing as a way to compete; hence, these ceremonies of singing exist to uphold the Maasai's central figure of gender superiority. Females often sing about their beauty, while males sing of their cattle and bravery. Within each gendered group of singers, the Maasai praise one another

and this is when strong bonds are formed. Building confidence within each gendered group is considered an essential part of group singing. Another crucial factor in singing is that it helps to alter moods. Women sing while milking, to calm a cow. Familiar lullabies put children to sleep. Women unable to produce children will join in a prayer group called *alamal lookituak*, which gathers one day in every three to five years to sing prayers as a group. Child bearing is among the highest pressures upon a female. Each household within hundreds of miles must send female representatives to attend. One of the reasons for the fascination in regards to the Massai's appearance is due to their tall elegant muscular features or their fierce, brave, stubborn and arrogant reputation; or maybe because of their simple yet distinctive appearance with ochre covered warriors proudly holding their spear and wearing their bright colored beads around their neck. Gender equality can be found in the Massai tribe because both sexes wear earrings, and take pride in stretching large holes in their ear lobes. Despite the pain, it is a sign of beauty for women to have long stretched earlobes; one pulled front tooth and decorative cuts made on their faces for beauty. This lead me to raise the question of; How is the Maasai cultures strong emphasis on physical beauty, an example of the amount of impact physical appearance has on attraction and social behavior in this world today? It is evident from the sacrifices made, that women must go through pain and self torment to have any chance in being one of the Maasai warriors wives, on the contrary, what must the Maasai men do to please the Maasai women into a marriage? Furthermore, do the Maasai men have stretched earlobes for the same reason as the women?

Ground #2: Polygamy

The principal of male domination is clearly evident in the Maasai culture through the practice of polygamy. Maasai men and women, believe that it is appropriate for a man to have up to five wives at once, and Maasai women must leave their current husband and children to pursue another. The Maasai believe that they are the magic people of Africa and strongly differentiate themselves from the black Africans of Nigeria. Hence, they marry within their own lineage and permit polygamy to avert of a Maasai woman wandering off with a man of different heritage or race. The theory behind this is that if more marriages are allowed, Maasai women and men will not feel the need to marry a stranger from outside their culture. The Maasai has a lenient sex policy, which makes polygamy possible thus; a typical Maasai man has four or five wives. From birth, every Maasai child is trained to be a warrior or efficient housewife, until they are eligible to be married off to each other. All men must have wives that are in their age group, and women are not given the option to reject a mans offer in a one night stand or their hand in marriage. Once married, the wife stays with her husband until she is pregnant, at which point she moves into her mother's house and gives birth to the baby and stays there for the next 3-4 years. What might happen to the Maasai culture if the standard values of the modern world were combined with those of polygamy, as many African tribes continue to become more and more modernized? Seeing as how self- satisfied and confident the Maasai people are of not only their looks, but their liberal view on sex and marriage, would Maslow, were he to examine their lives, say these people have reached self-actualization? Would he say this way of expressing affection are forms of ordained or obliviously minded actions towards what real affection feels like?

Conclusion and Prediction:

There are some who believe that the Maasai will disappear in the not-so-near future. Mainly due to the influence from the modern world, government policies such as the preservation of parks and reserves, with the exclusion of the Maasai, along with increasing populations have made the traditional Maasai way of life increasingly difficult to maintain. Over the years, many projects have begun to help Maasai tribal leaders find ways to preserve tradition while make some compromises to maintain health and education throughout the tribe. Many Maasai have moved away from the nomadic life to responsible positions in commerce and government. It is only a matter of time until most the Maasai get swept away and lured into a society that may seem more reasonable due to changing conditions such as climate change. It is amazing how the slightest change can affect and potentially demolish ones culture into nothing. For example, our fluctuating mother nature is playing a big part in destroying the religious customs of this tribe. For instance, the earths changing atmosphere has put Africa into severe drought. Unfortunately this has lead to an extreme decrease in cattle population. As previously mentioned, cattle are everything for the Maasai: food, material, culture, ritual. With a usual 14-19 head of cattle per person, the Maasai are one of the wealthiest cattle-owning peoples in Africa. In monetary terms, they would easily be the richest tribe in Kenya if they ever sold all their stock. However, the cattle are becoming weak and dehydrated and are rapidly dyeing. This will result in the Maasai relying on their only other source of income, trading beaded jewelry on the international market. This means the Maasai men and women will become more exposed and dependent on the modern world

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and will not be able to stand-alone. This, in turn, will very slowly cause the loss of their independence and vanity, which currently is maintained by the gender superiority. This essentially means the figure that holds all the grounds of the Maasai culture together will crack, and the entire tribe will crumble. I can only hope that mother nature stays on our side and we won't have to witness such an interesting, beautiful, and magical tribe disappear from the face of this planet.

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