Of girls and men: Maasai girlhood in Kenya and Tanzania

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Maasai

"Everyone "knows" the Maasai"

(Spear, 1993:1)

Heterogeneity

Nation states
Rapidly changing livelihoods

– Tourism
– Transhumance
– Diversification
– Formal education
– Land tenure
Lifecycle approach

Patriarchal

“women are regarded as social minors”

(Talle, 1987:51)

Gerontocratic

No female age set system
Entito

• Pre-circumcised girl
  – Ages 8-16

• Herding and household tasks

• Sex partners of the warriors (murrani)
Sexual debut

• Entitos and warriors
  – Gerontocracy
  – Milk ceremony
  – Irmerepili
  – Isinoni

• Acquisition of “social” fertility
  – Avoidance of conception

• Housing
Circumcised girls

- Clitoridectomy
  - At puberty
  - Beliefs
- Universal
- Sanctions childbearing
Married women

• Marriage after circumcision

• Prestige through children

• Domestic autonomy
Education
“You give away your children”

• Supply
  – Poor education infrastructure
  – Reluctant teachers

• Demand
  – Lack of demonstrable benefits
  – Herding requirements
  – High and rising school costs
Percentage of individuals by sex and country with completed primary school education

Five year age group

- Kenya: Males (n=954)
- Kenya: Females (n=1152)
- TZ: Males (n=1160)
- TZ: Females (n=1628)
## Enrolment levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kenya</th>
<th>Tanzania</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Education

• And pregnancy
  – Case study

• Prized children

• School “ownership”
Marriage

• Pre-arranged during childhood

  – Allegiances, power and influence

  – Age sets “quasi incest”

  – Forced sex and marriage

  – Extra wife acquisition
Distribution of reported age at first marriage, by sex.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
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<td>24.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percentage of women never married, by five year age group and education

Five year age group

% never married

Less than primary (n=2,683)
Completed primary (n=100)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kenya</th>
<th>Tanzania</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of men in polygynous marriages</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of wives per polygynist</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Spousal age difference

- Increases with low ranking wives
- Highest reported difference of 63 years
- Age-set alliance ideals
- Is it increasing? Why?
- Implications for
  - Sex
  - Widowhood
Fertility

- High
- Status
  - Consolidation of patriline
- Little contraception
- Resource
  - Access to livestock milk
  - Care in widowhood
STDs

• Evidence
• No social stigma
• Gender and STDs
  – Heightened risks at younger ages
• STDs and HIV/AIDS
Gender and HIV

• Women more at risk from heterosexual transmission
  – infected male semen contains higher concentrations of the virus
  – the surface area of the female genitalia is larger
  – semen is in contact with female genitals for longer

• Higher risks for girls + young women
  – Immature cervix with thinner mucous membrane
  – Higher risks of STD and other infections
  – Rapid intercourse increases risk of injury of mucous membranes
HIV/AIDS

It is difficult to separate the social and physiological causes, especially in a context where young girls and women have little control over the context in why they have sex.

The future?
ABC?

• Abstinence
• Be faithful
• Condoms
Community responses?

• Separate *entitos* and *murrani*?

• Housing changes?

• Condom use?