

Good example of cultural anthropology: maasai moranism research paper

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



A tall, lean man wrapped in a bright red cloth around his waist or slung on his shoulders holding a spear and with one leg off the ground hooked behind the other. In most cases, the man will be shown sporting long hair that has been tightly braided in an intricate style and which appears reddish! That is the image that comes to the minds of many people when the word Maasai is mentioned. Maasai is a nomadic community found in grasslands of Kenya and Tanzania. The community is famous for its retention of a strong culture that is built around nomadism (Saitoti, 1986). The image depicted above captures a crucial institution among the Maasai- Moranism. Moranism is an important institution among the Maasai because it symbolizes and offers actual security as well as continuity of the Maasai people.

Morans are the physical guardians of the Maasai society. Traditionally, their work was to protect the people and the cattle from tribes and predators (Saitoti, 1986). The young Maasai men imitate several things from their fathers as they get prepared for Moranism. They for instance learn to use a stick to control cattle when grazing. The young boys are allowed to run around some few cows and calves that are left in the nomadic villages (Manyattas). The young boys also learn to protect the cattle at night using thorn bushes which they make into a fence around the animals (Saitoti, 1986). They also learn some songs that they sing to keep themselves busy when herding cattle in the quiet fields. They use sticks as spears in preparation to use actual spears during moranism.

At the age of 10 years, many young Maasai boys (laiyok) can herd, herds of cattle numbering close to a 1000 cattle! After some three years, the young men spend most of the time around the homestead. They learn the place of

cattle in their culture. In addition, they are prepared for real moranism roles of taking care of their family and the society (Saitoti, 1986). Entry into real moranism is marked by circumcision which occurs mostly at the age of 15 years (Saitoti, 1986). Sometimes young men get to be circumcised at the age of 18. The circumcision ceremonies are set by elders who decide when a new group of warriors (morans) is needed. On average there is an initiation ceremony (Emorata) every 6-10 years which may be spread out over a couple of years (Saitoti, 1986).

Young men are chosen for initiation mostly based on their age. The circumcision is usually carried out in the early morning hours. The initiates immerse themselves in selected rivers to make their bodies numb for the operation that is carried out by a specialist elder. The initiates (oloibartani) get their heads shaved clean to show entry to a new status (Saitoti, 1986). During the healing period, the initiates are kept in the bush. They make and wear head dresses of birds' feathers. The eagle feathers and ostrich plumes are reserved for those initiates who did not finch during the cut

In order to be commissioned as morans, a big ceremony is held presided over by the elders and there is plenty of feasting. The morans engage in merrymaking and competitions such as spear throwing, wrestling and jumping are held. According to Saitoti (1986) old men take sips of cow milk and splash it on the morans to bless them as they speak words to usher in the warriors into their protective and provision roles. In ancient days newly circumcised young men had to kill a lion in order to get commissioned as full morans. However, the dwindling numbers of lions in Kenya and Tanzania compelled elders to drop this cultural aspect.

The morans are easily recognizable by the red ochre which they apply on their hair. They also braid their hair into intricate styles. In addition, the morans begin to sport brightly beaded ornaments with some being placed on the head, waist and hands. The morans are given spears and instructed on their tasks as protectors of their societies. The morans are then allowed to marry. Junior morans are known as Ol Murrani Barnot or Ilbarnot (Saitoti, 1986). They learn the traditions, cultures and secrets of their people such as how to relate with different tribes in their lands. They are also taught warfare and arts (Eng Kipaata) and raiding. They are not permitted to drink milk or eat meat in their mother's huts (Manyattas) (Saitoti, 1986). The morans slaughter oxen and eat away from the parents. It was during this state that the morans were required to kill a lion in order to prove their bravery. This act was also a way to eliminate the predators (lions) that presented a big danger to herding cattle (Saitoti, 1986). The Ilbarnots herd cattle and are allowed to start families. Morans serve as junior warriors for 5-7 years although, in some instances, they can serve up to 12 years.

After the elders have agreed that the junior warriors have served their society properly, they are promoted to senior warriors (Ol Murrani Botor).

The ceremony in which the junior warriors are promoted is called Eunoto and it is almost mirrors that of commissioning initiates into moranhood (Saitoti, 1986). The Senior Morans act as home guards. They are permitted to stay at home with their wives and children. This period usually lasts for fifteen years until the men age and awaits promotion into being elders.

References

Saitoti, T. O. (1986). *The worlds of a Maasai warrior: an autobiography*. New York: Random House.