

Maasai Tribe- Kenya

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Introduction to This Culture

- The Maasai tribe can be found mainly in Kenya, but some groups live in northern Tanzania
- The groups values have changed over time, especially with the influence of modern technology from the countries and societies around them
- Kenya is becoming more developed with time, but the Maasai tribe tries to maintain its traditions without conforming to the outside influences



Fashion/ Clothing

- The clothing changes a little depending on age, gender and location.
- In the 1960's they switched from animal skin to cotton cloth for their clothing.
- The wraps used are called Shuka which is an african blanket that is wrapped around the body and over the shoulders.
- One piece clothing is called Kanga.
- Those who live near the coast typically wear Kikoi. A Kikoi is a loose fitting piece of material that is wrapped around the lower body that comes in different colours and patterns.



Fashion /Clothing



- Red is a very prominent colour that is used for clothing as it represents power. They also use black, blue, checkered and multicoloured designs.
- Young men wear black for a short period of time after their circumcision.
- Some people still dye their own cloth.
- Beads are also very important as the women make jewelry with them and it creates work for the women.
- Different coloured beads have different meanings.
 - Blue means water.
 - White means peace.
- The beads used to be made out of clay but they currently use glass beads.
- Jewelry is very important in courtship.





Maasai People vs. Fashion Companies

- Companies have been known to exploit the Maasai's Culture.
- Specifically the fashion industry.
- An example of this is Louis Vuitton in 2012.
- Louis Vuitton used inspiration from the shuka to design hats, shirts, scarves.
- The main problem is that the Maasai people get nothing from what is sold.
- As a result of this they made a group called the Maasai Intellectual Property Initiative (MIPI)
- It is used to fight companies that exploit the Maasai's culture.
- Research shows that the Maasai's people should be given money from 80 companies.



Gender Roles- Women

- Lately, women have been given a bigger role dealing with livestock.
- To make more money women are taking on more roles.
- Women are seen as not having power and not being important.
- Young women are taught to build houses, make jewellery, cook and clean.
- They are taught these things by their mothers.
- Women are typically very close with their children, especially with their sons.



Gender Role- Men

- Warriors are very important in their culture.
- Young boys are taught from a very young age how to be a man and warrior.
- The main role of a warrior is to protect animals and their families.
- Young boys must learn customs/ traditions, laws that he will need as an elder.
- The Maasai society is still largely male dominated.
- Men make the decisions for his family.
- Older men are responsible for making community decisions.



Ceremonies/Traditions

Male

Enkipaata (senior boy ceremony)

- A boy's first initiation (14-16)
- The night before initiation, the boys must sleep outside
- At dawn boys run to the homestead and dress themselves in loose clothing
- They must dance for the remainder of the day



Emuratta (circumcision)

- This ceremony is performed shortly after puberty
- Boys are pressured into being circumcised
- Family members are known to threaten the boy so he feels more compelled to go through with it
- No anesthesia is used, the boys are forbidden from showing pain

Eunoto Ceremony (senior's warrior initiation)

- Undergoing this initiation allows the men to marry
- Every graduate is required to have his ochre dyed hair cut by their mothers
- 3 leaders are chosen to represent the age set (Olotuno, Olaiguanani Lenkashe, Oloboru Enkeene)
- The 1st must take responsibility for the good and the bad deeds of his age set
- The 2nd is honoured with a specially chosen female cow
- The 3rd is honoured with a knotted leather strap
- He will untie the strap to release the warriors from their isolation



Female

Enkang oo-nkin (meat ceremony)

- This is a ceremony specifically for the warrior's wives
- This ceremony is conducted to prove that the wives have not engaged in an illegal sexual affair with someone from a younger age set
- If a woman is found guilty, she will be disrespected by her entire age set

Female Circumcision

- Until circumcision, girls have sexual freedom
- The circumcision is performed when the girl is 15 by a female elder
- The women try to marry immediately after their circumcision (even that day)



Family Traditions

- The Massai tribe is divided into two groups: “Orok Kiteng” and “Oodo Mongi”
- Smaller families and clans broken up in these two groups followed by patrilineal descent
- The father has absolute control over a family except for the interference of elders
- The children join the fathers subclan and the women is still apart of her subclan
- Members of the same clan often occupy neighbouring houses
- The close relationship is because every descendent has a common tribal ancestor



Marriage Traditions

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg_cptHuTQ
- Marriage is arranged by the father without consulting the mother or daughter
- Male elders arrange marriage based on profitable cattle
- Most marriages are polygynous - the men have several wives
- Can have as many wives as he can afford - ideally has about 6 wives
- Husbands want lots of kids to carry on his lineage
- Women are given cattle in exchange for children
- Women are not allowed to divorce husbands
- Women are not allowed to remarry
- https://wn.com/maasai_tribe_arranged_marriage_views_tribal_wives_hbc



Music and Dance



- Dances are simple, structured and performed for special occasions
- Generally don't use musical instruments
- The beads they wear make a jingling sound when they jump and women sometimes wear bells for added accompaniment
- Often call and response songs
- The Maasai will perform their dances for tourists/foreigners to educate them
- Their songs often consist of rhythms provided by a group of vocalists, while the song leader (olarynyani) will sing the melody
- The call and response songs (Nambas) are often made up of nonsense phrases
- Sometimes the dances occur around the houses and involve flirting
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0aRutHqv8wQ>

Food

Meat

- Cattle is very important in the lives of the Maasai
- After the cow is eaten their bones will be used as utensils
- Boiled beef and goat are their main sources of meat
- Raw beef may also be consumed
- Men cannot eat meat that has been touched by a woman or an uncircumcised boy



Drinks

- Animal blood is drunk on special occasions (circumcision, after giving birth etc.)
- Honey is used to make mead, but only the elders are permitted to drink it
- Milk is a part of every meal
- People drink both fresh and curdled milk
- The maasai people will also occasionally mix blood and milk to drink

The Importance of Blood

- It is considered cruel to kill a cow only for its blood
- A cow's jugular artery is nicked which allows the blood to be drawn instead
- Since salt is forbidden, blood is their primary source of sodium
- Drinking blood can also be tried by tourists



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