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# “Toliki taa ub’ookin.” “Tell Them Everything.” The Changing Sexual Practices of the Maasai Women of Engare Sero

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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“Toliki taa ub’ookin.”

*“Tell them everything.”*

The Changing Sexual Practices of the Maasai Women of  
Engare Sero

by Adrienne Rosenberg  
SIT Tanzania: Wildlife Ecology and Conservation  
Fall 2009

## Acknowledgements

First of all thank you to the community of Engare Sero for all of the generosity and welcoming shown to me and Nosim during our stay. Thank you to all the women who we spoke to for your honesty, openness and laughter; we had a lot of fun talking about sex with you all, *ashe naleng*. Especially thank you to my Maasai Mama Sinyati for being my Mama, for helping with many of our interviews and for all the chai. Thank you to my *enganashe* and translator, Nosim, for your warmth toward everyone we met which made our interviews successful. Thank you Rafael de Moono and Chief Olepello for sharing your insights and giving me my Maasai name, respectively. Thank you to my fellow students for a lot of laughter and not a lot of drama. Thank you to my family in Ng'iresi; I've loved being a guest in your home and I look forward to returning one day. Thank you to my friends on the trip for being curious, loving, affectionate, adventurous people and overall wonderful travel buddies. Thanks to my one and only for the spooning. Thank you to the gender studies department at Harvard for questioning institutions of power and giving me the framework to do this project. Thank you to my friends and family from home for your love and enthusiasm even from so far away. Lastly thank you Baba Jack for help framing and editing my paper, for great conversations and for having created this program with compassion, flexibility and wisdom.

## Abstract

In this study I spent 13 days between November 6-18, 2009 in the village of *Engare Sero*. My sample frame is the Maasai community of *Engare Sero*, specifically girls and women over the age of around six. I went from *boma* to *boma*, organizing informal “focal groups” with a total of approximately 100 women and girls. I spoke to them about the cultural rules governing sexual practice, how their sexual practices changed over the course of their lives, how sexual practices have changed over time, what changes they hope for or expect for their daughters and the roots of those changes. I analyzed my data using descriptive analysis, anthropological and gender theories.

Women described Christianity, development and western education as the primary sources of changes in sexual practice. Christianity has introduced both the value of monogamy and virginity into the community which sharply contrast with historical Maasai sexual practices. Development has encouraged money to be more highly valued, possibly affecting the way in which girls and women choose their lovers. Western education has brought with it certain western ideals including individuality and self-determination which has influenced many women to entrust their daughters with decisions about their own lives.

The women I spoke to exhibited uncertainty about the affects that changing sexual practices would have on the lives of their daughters and granddaughters and on their community at large. They also expressed the hope that these changes will enable their daughters to choose lives which will bring them happiness.

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## Introduction and Study Site

Since the white man's burden and before, there has been a long history of the western world trying to step in to "save" people in poorer parts of the world from their own cultures. A kind of "white women's burden" has also emerged as western women have fought for their own rights and then looked outward with the hope of extending those "rights" worldwide. Under the concept that all women, across ages, generations, cultures and communities share the essential bond of womanhood, western women practiced the same cultural imperialism which justified colonization all over the world. It was thought that sharing a common anatomy was enough to generalize all women into a consistent and universal category including certain inalienable rights.

Since the seventies, however, women worldwide have pushed back against this concept arguing that the essential "womanhood" spoken about and celebrated was really the construction of "womanhood" in the West that did not in fact universally apply to or unite all women. Women who didn't feel included within the western concept of "womanhood" and feminism joined together to "complain or explain to white feminist would-be allies that there are other ties and visions that bind, prior allegiances and priorities that supercede their invitations to coalesce on their terms" (Moraga 1983). "Third-world women", as they called themselves, cried out to have the space to both define themselves as well as free themselves from the protective watch of western women. They felt tired of compromising their own values and specificities for the good of a feminism that didn't apply to them. "Third-world women" asked, "*how can we – this time – not use our bodies to be thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap?*" (Moraga 1983). They wanted to speak amongst themselves without the burden of explaining themselves to the white feminist movement.

People have further criticized women of color in the West who use their position as underprivileged within the West to assume alliance with and ability to speak for third-world women. One critic of western attempts to eradicate female circumcision says of watching a video made by a circumcised, anti-circumcision activist, "her articulation of her pain seems so like our own, or like what we imagine our pain to be like, that we assume too much about our ties and connectedness with her... Now that we 'have' her, we could begin to think that we can speak for all women combating the surgeries and

ignore the more critical voices” (Gunning 1998). Those voices critical of western anti-circumcision campaigns do exist, but are often drowned out by the powerful noise of western values. In order to fight the trend of people claiming the right to speak for others, Adrienne Rich and others have laid out the idea of situated knowledge. Rich and others assert that despite the desire to feel a sense of sameness with all women in order to find a strength in numbers, one can’t actually legitimately speak of the experience of being a woman beyond her specific knowledge based on her history, community and cultural standpoint (Rich 1984).

Sex and sexuality, as subjects which cut to the core of our humanity and cultural difference, are often heated and contested topics; from culture to culture, people exhibit rigidity and fear surrounding both categories of gender and sexuality. Across cultures, sexual “deviants” are often the most feared and most violently punished. People have less tolerance for and stronger visceral reactions toward sexual practices which differ from their own, often expressing the fear that if sexual guidelines crumble, so too will the very fabric of society. What one culture might tolerate and even celebrate, might be completely taboo and punishable by death in another.

Among the 120 indigenous groups of Tanzania, sexual practices are widely varied. Perhaps the sexual practices most jarring to a Westerner are those of the Maasai. Maasai society is organized around age-sets which differ between men and women. Men are divided into five age-sets which move altogether to the next age set when the *laibon* or seer decides it is time, about every 15 years. They are divided into boys, warriors or *moran*, junior elders, senior elders, and elders. Females are divided into three age-sets. The passage from girl (*ndito*) to woman (*yeyo*) is characterized by a circumcision ceremony that occurs sometime after puberty when a girl prepares for marriage. The third age-set for women is that of the highly respected grandmother (*koko*). There are strict rules governing which age-sets can have sex with which and clearly defined “penalties” if these rules are broken. Married men may only have sex with circumcised women, and uncircumcised boys are not allowed to have sex at all. Within all the sexually active age sets, men, women and girls have many lovers. Girls have many *moran* boyfriends; men have many wives and are not limited to having sex only with their own wives.

The Maasai of *Engare Sero* live just south of the Kenyan border between the looming volcano, *Oldonyio Lengai* where their female God lives, the Rift Valley wall, and the southern shore of Lake Natron, the breeding site of 75% of the world's flamingos (See Appendix A). *Engare Sero* officially became a village in 2000; it lies in the ward of *Penyinyi*. In 1978 there were only five *boma*<sup>1</sup> but then the road was made which drew a larger population. In 1984, Stamico, a soda ash mining company came and built a few concrete buildings, before leaving in 1994, where civil servants currently live. The village has grown to an estimated three to five thousand people of varying wealth, although you'll never get a Maasai to tell you the true number of cows he owns. The community is split by the *Engare Sero* and *Endalalani* rivers which flow down from the Ngorongoro highlands through the Rift Valley wall and eventually into Lake Natron.

This year, 2009, has been characterized by a harsh drought across Tanzania. Although *Engare Sero* has a year round water source, this year's drought has left the area essentially barren of any grazeable land. The drought has taken a hard toll on the Maasai community, they have lost large numbers of their cattle and subsequently wealth (pers. obs. 2009). The Maasai are currently building *manyatta*, the temporary residences where men will come together to make the move into the next age-set. Male circumcisions and the graduation of the warriors to young elders will begin in the coming year.

Maasai culture has been incredibly cohesive over time considering both their displacement from national parks and the increased interconnection with outside communities in the past few decades due to strengthened Tanzanian infrastructure. But the outside world is swiftly entering into Maasailand; this moment might mark the beginning of an acceleration in the rate of cultural change. Christianity is a strong agent of change and is gaining popularity with an estimated 20% of the village currently practicing (pers. comm. Matthews). There is strong pressure from the Tanzanian Government, the church, as well as the international community, in the name of universal human rights, to end the practice of female circumcision; the practice is officially illegal in Tanzania. The Tanzanian government has made primary school attendance mandatory

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<sup>1</sup> A *boma* is the space enclosed by an acacia fence in which a husband and all of his wives, children and livestock live. Each wife has her own house within the *boma*.

as well as built a secondary school in the area. There are plans to build a soda ash plant at the shore of Lake Natron. There is increased interest in the flamingo population as well as a general push to increase tourism in the area by strengthening the infrastructure which would support visitors and possibly incorporating Natron into the Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority (NCAA). Possibly the largest approaching change would come from the paving of the road which connects *Engare Sero* with Mto Wa Mbu to the South and Wasso and the Serengeti to the West. The road would mean a leap in the number of tourists as well as a large increase in commercial traffic; the relatively isolated village will quickly become a convergence point of tourists heading to and from the national parks, goods coming from the coast to Lake Victoria, technology, communication and general levels of contact with the world beyond that the Maasai communities in Natron haven't seen before.

Although possibly now on the verge of more overwhelming change, Maasai culture has never been static. Like all cultures, Maasai culture has adapted over time. The Maasai word which encompasses this change is *enkisasai*. *Enkisasai* represents the ever-present “societal change through the revitalization and adaptation of tradition” (Winterbottom 2009). Views on sexuality differ between generations, varying amounts of contact with outside communities, levels of western education and practice of Christianity. In this study I explored general norms, thoughts and feelings surrounding sex and sexuality among the Maasai women of *Engare Sero*. Although practices such as female circumcision, sex between young girls and older men and polygamy are illegal in the United States and internationally contested, and visceral reactions to these practices are strong enough as to feel inherent, I do not have the intention of expressing or forming any kind of political stance on these issues.

## Methods

In this study I spent 13 days between November 6-18, 2009 in the village of *Engare Sero*. My sample frame is the Maasai community of *Engare Sero*, members of my sample population were specifically girls and women over the age of around six. I went from *boma* to *boma*, sampling randomly in approximately a 5 km radius of the village center organizing informal “focal groups” with women and girls (See Appendix B). Through a translator I conducted these “focal groups” with a total of about 85 mothers and grandmothers, usually in groups of 5-10, in a combination of Kimaasai and Kiswahili. I spoke to them about the cultural rules governing sexual practice, how their sexual practices changed over the course of their lives, how sexual practices have changed over time, what changes they hope for or expect for their daughters and the roots of those changes. I also interviewed around 15 girls and conducted informal interviews with both men and women while socializing around town. The questions I asked the women evolved over the course of the study as new themes for interesting questions arose in conversation (See Appendix C).

I will analyze my data using descriptive analysis, anthropological and gender theories. I hope that the anthropological and gender studies lens will help me to understand better the importance of the sexual practices of the *Engare Sero* Maasai in cultural transmission and maintenance as well as the broader implications that the changes in their sexual practices have for overall changes in a place-specific Maasai culture. Descriptive analysis will be used as a way of acknowledging my own presence within the study. Adrienne Rich explains that our “situated knowledge” predisposes us to have certain beliefs which feel natural enough to us as to be mistaken for innate and universal. I will locate myself within the study as an attempt to acknowledge that no matter what I say or how objective I try to be in my analysis, my own specific situated knowledge as a western feminist, upper-middle class, 22-year-old woman from the United States will inevitably serve as the primary (though possibly hidden) lens of analysis.

## Results

I have written my results as a narrative by piecing together the different thoughts, memories and stories of the 100 girls and women I spoke to. In order to preserve the anonymity of the women who so openly shared details of their intimate lives with me, I won't use their names in the paper. I spoke to *ndoye* (pl. form of *ndito*), *mamas* and *kokos*. Both *ndito* and *koko* are Kiswahili words meaning young girl and grandmother respectively, but *mama* is the Kiswahili word for a mother. Because of the wide influence of Kiswahili in *Engare Sero*, people use the Kimaasai word for mother, *yeyo*, and the word *mama* interchangeably. There is no plural form of either word so I will add an 's' to the end to denote many women or grandmothers, as I referred to them with my translator during our time there.

All of the quotes in the following section came from personal communication with women in a 5km radius from the town of *Engare Sero*, unless otherwise noted. Most of the quotations are my own memory of the words that my translator used to translate the words of someone else. These quotes that are pieced together from the words that my translator said will be in italics and I will specify when a new woman is talking. Any direct quotes will be in quotation marks. While I was in *Engare Sero* I had the good fortune of meeting Rafael De Moono a Maasai man from Handeni who has done work looking at sexuality in Dar Es Salaam with the Maasai community there. He helped me understand some of the conversations I had in *Engare Sero* and the meanings behind them. I will use the word "friend" to speak about what in the West we might construct as the "boyfriends" or "lovers" of the women I spoke to because the women used the Kimaasai word *onjore* which translates as "friend" and doesn't carry the many connotations and western constructions of the other two words.

### **"Toliki taa ub'ookin"<sup>2</sup>, or "Tell them everything"**

*Everything then was very good*, a *Koko* describes to me of her memories of the time in her life when she was an *ndito* and used to go dance at the *soto*<sup>3</sup> with *moran*. Most

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<sup>2</sup> The words of a woman to the other women of her *boma* as she left our conversation to do work.

women remember those times happily. Often while talking together, someone would start subtly bouncing her shoulders and humming the songs of the soto under her breath. When asked about how many friends they had, women would often laugh and reply *many*. One Koko remembered *I was a girl, my friend, I was a very beautiful girl*. Another explained in detail the elaborate metal jewelry, beaded necklace which reached the ground and cow hide clothes she wore to show she was going to soto. When current grandmothers and some mothers were children, they didn't have much else to do besides spend their days dancing with moran under the shade of trees and going to orpul<sup>4</sup> with them. Girls never went with goats or attended school. Many women describe the difficulty of coming back from orpul, after weeks or even months away from their families. Many mamas told me, *at orpul we were just singing and dancing all day*. Another asks *do you know? They don't wear any clothes at the orpul?* Both warriors and girls are said to come home after their time singing, dancing and eating meat looking fat, healthy and attractive. It was difficult to return to the responsibility and restrictiveness of family life.

A Koko tells me of her time as an ndito *everything that I have now is a product of that time*. Like most other women in and around Engare Sero, she had a friend called *olootoko kipor* or "the one who drank milk." Women had between one and three friends as girls; they might have only *olootoko kipor*, *olootoko kipor* and *okiloki* (the second), or all three *olootoko kipor*, *okiloki* and *embiget* (the third). Usually *olootoko kipor* is the first one, and he is always the one who the girl loves the most. One Koko laughed and remembered that when she was very young she had pointed at a man and said *he's the one who will drink my milk*, before realizing he was her brother. She eventually found a different man as her *olootoko kipor*.

It was shameful for a girl to have no friends. A girl was expected to have sex before marriage, in fact, if she went to her husband a virgin she would have to return to her father, have sex with a Moran, and bring cows back to her husband to be accepted as his wife. If a woman told us she only had one friend, others would sometimes make fun

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<sup>3</sup> *Soto* is the word to describe the times when the warriors and girls come together to dance and sing.

<sup>4</sup> *Orpul* is a place where warriors or those preparing to become warriors go. Girls often go as well and together they spend all day eating the animals they bring to sustain them, singing and dancing.

of her stating *that's because she was the woman of an uncircumcised boy*<sup>5</sup>. Another woman made fun of a Koko who didn't join in reminiscing with the others about her friend(s), stating, *you can say no [to the men,] she likes to say no*.

To show everyone which one was her *olootoko kipor*, a girl would have a celebration and bring a gourd, called an *engoti*, full of fresh milk and lay it in front of him. One mama told us that because a girl's father chooses her husband, he might tell her of her *olootoko kipor*: *please forget him, I don't know him at all, the one I know is another*. But until the time of her marriage, her relationships would be public, known by her parents as well as all the warriors and girls at the dances. A girl would continue her sexual relationship with her friend(s) up until the time of her circumcision and marriage.

The wife moves to her husband's home, so if a woman moved very far from her friend(s) to marry she would find new ones in her new home. If she stayed close enough to her old friend(s) she would continue meeting them once married unless her husband knew them. Despite their deep love for their friend(s), women didn't express sadness at the possible end of their relationship. In response to whether something like heartbreak exists for them, one woman explained, *even when your favorite clothes get old, you just leave them and move on*. After marriage, sexual relationships with new or old friends have to be done in complete secrecy. A woman would wait for her husband to leave to see her friend(s). The relationship has to be very secret because if the husband finds out he will beat both his wife and her friend and they will both have to bring him cows. Many women expressed fear of being caught with their friends. One woman laughed and said *huyii, if my husband catches me he will just slit my neck*. One Koko told how scary it was when her husband once found her with her friend and she had to go home to get cows from her father to give him. She said she also paid the cows as a way to ask for her husband's acceptance of her pregnancy from her friend.

Women would go far from their boma to meet their friend(s) to avoid being caught, maybe to a female friend's house. A woman also might get help from the other wives of her husband. The many wives of one man would work together in many ways. Very few women have heard of jealousy between wives although it is possible to occur

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<sup>5</sup> Uncircumcised boys are considered "dirty" and they are forbidden from having sex with anyone.

when some would become jealous of the perceived favorite. For the most part, however, women said that *our hearts are very clean and open to each other*. Another said, *we were all brought here by the same person, why shouldn't we love each other?* One woman gave the example of a husband going to one of his wives to ask if another has a friend, the wife would reply “no, of course not.” If he went to beat the wife anyway, the other wife would come and say “what are you doing? I told you she has no one else but you.” Wives share responsibility for all the children of the boma together, help each other collect firewood, cook and regain strength after they have given birth. They also can receive other wives' friends and let them know whether or not the husband is around.

A woman's relationship with her husband is very different from that of her friend, including in sexual practice. Most women said they love both but the kind of love between *the one my father chose for me* and *the one I chose for myself* differ greatly. In fact, after a few minutes, most women would express that despite loving both, the one they truly love or the one they feel deep love for is their friend(s). One group of women said that after marriage, historically the husband becomes authoritative and distant; he can't flirt, laugh, or even smile and he beats you when you do anything wrong. Whereas with a friend you can laugh and talk and he won't beat you, husband and wives don't have anything to say to each other. Another put it differently stating, *how can I live without him? with my husband I'm just playing, just laughing, but the one I really love is my friend*. Another joked, *who do you think I'll say [I really love,] my brother? No, of course it's my friend*.

When asked what makes a good husband, women mostly cited aspects of wealth: many cows and goats, a big boma, knowing how to care for the things he has, sending her children to school. They also often said a good husband would take care of a woman after she has given birth by slaughtering goats for her to eat. When asked what makes a good friend, some women listed specific things such as having cows and goats, a good singing voice, knowing how to take care of himself and how to take care of her, but mostly they said that it is just someone who they find their *hearts full of love* for. The love they feel is inexplicable, as one Koko said, *I love everything about him, just seeing him gives me pleasure, I don't know why, no one forced him on me*. One woman asked *do you know what we call sex with our friends? Mapenzi*. The Kiswahili word translates as “making

love.” When asked why they love their friends, one woman said *he has never hurt me, why shouldn't I love him?* Others spoke about loving their friend(s) for understanding their situation in life, never telling them to refuse sex with their husbands or being dependable and polite, but most reasons were less tangible: *I don't want to live without him, I chose him myself and my heart is full of love for him.*

When asked why they love their husbands, women had different responses. Some said *because my father gave him to me* or *because he's the owner of the boma, or I belong to him and everything he has can be mine.* Many responded *because he gives me children.* Some expressed that even though their husband was chosen for them, they went to marry him and found they really did love him. Others expressed the difficulty of loving their husbands because their husbands beat them often and *beating can take the love away.* Another joked that you can just barely finish having sex and be beaten. Women rarely said that they didn't love their husbands however. One woman explained why no one would deny loving her husband, *if I don't love my husband, what then? where will I eat?* Another said, *even if I don't love him, I have to show that I do.* Still another explained, *it isn't something well planned, sometimes your husband is chosen before you are born and it might be somebody bad but you have to go.*

For the most part, it seemed that whether or not a woman loves her husband isn't a valuable question for her to ask because as one woman said *what can I do if my father already gave him to me?* He is given to her by her father so that she might be taken care of, have a family of her own and continue the growth of the Maasai. As Rafael put it, “marriage is a duty, not a love act.”<sup>6</sup> It is both a duty to your family and your community, as it is the way in which you start a family to carry on your family's line and preserve your culture into the future. One group of girls explained *your Mama and Koko tell you: go to your husband, that's what I did too, I wasn't born here, so go make your family and listen to what your husband says.*

Sexually, the relationship with a husband differs greatly from the sexual relationship with a friend as well. Many women said that after circumcision they no longer feel sexual pleasure. Others fondly remembered the sex they had as girls as more pleasurable, but said that sex is still pleasurable, and still others cited no change in their

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<sup>6</sup> Personal Communication, Rafael De Moono

level of sexual pleasure. Some expressed that after circumcision it takes much longer to reach climax. Most expressed a definite change in their level of sexual desire. They don't feel sexual desire just come up in them randomly; they only feel it *maybe when I'm in the arms of a man*. Rafael explained that just the transition out of the carefree sexuality of childhood is a shock as a woman marries and takes on a whole new set of responsibilities and settles into the more restricted role of being a wife<sup>7</sup>.

Of those who still feel pleasure, most said that they feel more pleasure from sex with their friend(s). As one woman put it, *you want to know where my pleasure is? when I'm in the hands of my man I feel pleasure to my backbone*. A few women, however, said that they enjoy having sex with their husbands more and feel more pleasure with him. They explained that with a friend you are *stealing*, you feel anxious that you might get caught. With your husband however, you can be free because he belongs to you, and no one will ask what you are doing with him. They expressed feeling open to fully experience the pleasure of sex with a husband. Many said, however, they like the feeling of *stealing*, and feel more pleasure with their friend(s); many only ever reach climax with a friend. Although a few said they could spend the whole night with their husband, most said that it is much quicker and often the purpose of sex with a husband is to satisfy a physical need or become pregnant; after he ejaculates, he will leave. With their friends they stay up all night, talking, laughing, touching each other and having sex. A friend takes the time to touch her, whisper loving words to her and have sex with her so that she will feel more pleasure. One Koko chimed in *that's true, a friend can make you feel better, but I don't want one because I'm old*. One woman expressed the sadness she feels at the times when her husband is always around and she can't find time to meet with her friend. Another explained the effect of a night with her friend, *when the morning comes it's a very good day because last night I had something very nice*.

Most women said that kissing is not a part of Maasai tradition, and that you won't find a Maasai who kisses. One Koko however exclaimed that she always kissed people and grabbed the Mama next to her and laid a big kiss on her cheek to demonstrate. Those who do kiss say that they only kiss their friends and not their husband. One woman asked *how can I kiss someone who I'm staying with like an enemy?* Where kissing is an act of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

intimacy, one can have sex out of duty, the desire to become pregnant, or the need for physical release. Rafael explained that Maasai men living in the capital city often go to prostitutes exclaiming, “they’re selling what we want to buy. You eat when you’re hungry.”<sup>8</sup> Although consent is important in Maasai tradition<sup>9</sup>, most of the women we asked didn’t see the point in ever refusing sex with their husbands unless they are pregnant or have a small baby.

Children, also, can be a representation of the difference between a woman’s feelings toward her husband and friend(s). Most women have both children conceived by their husband and friend(s). Although all of them are considered her husband’s children, the ones conceived by her friend are “stolen.” By conceiving with another man, she has stolen her husband’s right to be the biological father of his children<sup>10</sup>; she can’t have too many of these stolen children or she’ll be beaten. One woman patted the baby suckling on her lap and said, laughing *this one is good, he’s from my friend*. Others stated that while they love all of their children, when they see the children of their friends they feel they are seeing their friends and they feel happy; the child is a lasting reminder of that relationship. As one Koko put it, *I love both, but my God, my friend’s child is more beautiful*. Some said they love their stolen children more. One explained that when her husband goes away, *I’m not just going to talk to my friend, we’ll have sex and maybe I’ll come up with another child!*

They often laugh while speaking about the difference between their children; one woman raised her arm to show how she might try to hit a child from her friend but then bring her arm down gently and instead just pat the child and say *just go*. She then demonstrated picking up a stick to beat a child from her husband if he’s done something wrong, yelling *you’re just like your father*. The father too might know the difference. Another group of women, laughing, demonstrated how he might speak to a child that is biologically his own, he’d say *what do you need, are you hungry?* whereas to a child of his wife’s friend he would pick up a stick and order the child around, *go here, take the*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

*cows here*. The children themselves, however, can't know if they are the child of her friend.

Within the generation of current mamas, Christianity has affected many of their relationships with their friend(s). Many women converted to Christianity since marriage and their views have changed on their sexual practices. As one woman explained, *after the church came, we learned what we were doing is very bad, the Bible only allows a woman to have one man, so we were going against the word of God, its bad to go against the word of God*. Some women who believed that the multiple friends of their childhood were something bad stopped seeing their friend(s) after marriage. One Mama explained that if she were caught with a friend, similarly to non-Christian women, she would be beaten and have to bring cows to her husband from her father to ask forgiveness and to be allowed to stay with her children. She further said, however, that a man caught with a friend would be reported to the priest. A few women we spoke to had given up their relationships with their friend(s) completely, but many Christian women still see their friend(s). As one group of women explained, *yes, we are Christian, but because of our humanity, you'll see us going to our friend(s)*. Another woman expressed, *with my friend I am just stealing, but I love him a lot so I don't know what to do*. Others, however, especially women who haven't converted to Christianity, maintain the sentiment that they have no desire to live without their friend(s).

Certain sexual practices of the West are unheard of in Maasailand. Oral sex is known only as a rumor and seen as scandalous and hilarious. So too, is the use of breasts in sexual activity. Breasts aren't seen as something private; women frequently suckle their babies in the company of many others and women's breasts are often visible<sup>11</sup>. One Mama exclaimed, wide-eyed, *you mean, a man can suck on a woman's breast?* She laughed hysterically when we responded that it was possible. Most women said that when their friend(s) touch them, they can touch them all over their bodies besides their breasts. One group of women had heard of having sex from behind and they told the story they'd heard, almost like folklore, of a woman who went out to milk a very far away cow and had someone call her friend to meet her. When her friend came she continued milking while he penetrated her from behind.

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<sup>11</sup> Personal Observation, November, 2009.

Maasai traditionally make no sound during sex. As one Koko wondered, *why should I make any sound? no need.* Others responded *you won't find a Maasai making any sounds.* One group of women, however, before the topic was even brought up, asked Nosim and I, *do you make sounds during sex like we do?* One woman, shocked that people actually do make sounds, kept repeating throughout the conversation, laughing *I just saw it once on a video.* She had seen a video in town about HIV/AIDS in which the people were moaning during sex. Very few thought it was possible for a Maasai to make sound during sex so when another woman exclaimed *with the pleasure I get, I could make his ears fall off,* the others hid their faces laughing. The same Mama who had seen the AIDS video was curious what sounds people make during sex and so a Koko threw her arms in the air and started to imitate moaning. One group of mamas suggested that only uncircumcised women make sounds during sex because it is more pleasurable for them.

Historically, Maasai were forbidden from having sex with any non-Maasai people<sup>12</sup>. With increased contact with non-Maasai communities, however, and with many moran coming to and from town, new sexual acts are making their way into Maasai sexual practice. The majority of women we spoke to, as well as many of the girls, said that for a woman to be on top during sex is “impossible.” Most times we asked, the answer was the same: “*Mei dimai,*” “It’s impossible,” or *it isn’t in Maasai tradition to do it like that.* Nosim told me a joke one day about a Maasai man who hires a prostitute. They get to the hotel room and she tells the man to lie down on the bed. As she is climbing on top of him, he asks, “Who is paying for this room?” She responds, “You are.” He asks again, “Who is paying who?” She responds, “You are.” He says “Who is the man here?” She replies “You are.” He then responds, “Then why are *you* fucking *me!*”<sup>13</sup> The way it was explained to us, the person on top is the one who is really doing the act. The woman or girl cannot be on top because that would be like her taking the sexual role of the man. As one Moran stated, laughing at the thought, *It would be like her fucking me.*

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<sup>12</sup> It’s for this reason that HIV was and is still seen by many as a non-issue for the Maasai.

<sup>13</sup> Personal Communication, Nosim Peter Mollel

When we asked a group of women why the woman is always on the bottom, they responded *we don't know, that's just our tradition. We don't know about our daughters and granddaughters, but for us it's a tradition and it's not done at all.* They then laughed as they said *but these days you do it different.* A few minutes later a younger Mama came over as we were talking and the others said, *here comes a young one, ask her.* She responded that it is possible for the girl or woman to be on top. A few others we spoke to had experienced that change, but the vast majority thought that it was impossible and that the others must be lying. We asked one woman what would happen if she tried, and she responded *he'll kill me.* Many laughed at even the thought of the woman being on top; a Koko asked *won't his sperm fall out?* When we replied, "No, they swim very fast," the woman responded *wow, that thing a man has is just like a machine!*

Just as the possibility of a woman to be on top during sex is changing, so too are the range of possibilities for other sexual acts. An ndito might moan during sex, although most said that they only laugh or talk. One Moran we spoke to says he kisses his friends all over their bodies including their breasts. Although many women said that certain sexual acts such as making sound or being on top are "impossible," many also expressed that they don't know the details of how sexual acts are changing among their daughters' and granddaughters' generation but they do know that things which have not traditionally been a part of Maasai culture are becoming possibilities. Mamas and kokos generally expressed that they don't really know what kids these days are doing. They guided us toward the *up to date girls* for questions about the changing times. Although some thought that the changes in sexual acts were negative because they aren't a part of Maasai tradition, others didn't seem to feel that the changes were necessarily bad. They even made fun of one Koko for not being up to date with the changing practices saying *this one is very old fashioned.*

Although they don't know the specifics of their daughters' and granddaughters' sexual acts themselves, mamas and kokos have many different hopes and expectations for their daughters regarding sexuality and marriage. Just as the practices of polyamory and polygamy are changing among Christian women, so too do they have different plans for their daughters and granddaughters. Some Christian families don't plan to circumcise their daughters before marriage. Historically in Maasai culture, a girl is not considered a

woman until she is circumcised (and an uncircumcised child isn't seen as fit to bear children of her own). Among Christians however, there are men who will accept an uncircumcised girl as a wife. In fact, Christian men will also accept marriage with girls who are virgins and some mamas stated their desire for their daughters to marry as virgins. We spoke to one young Mama who was not circumcised and she said, *at the time I didn't like it, but now it's ok. I have a child now and I still feel like a woman.* Women listed different reasons for not wanting to circumcise their girls. Some said they wanted them to be able to feel sexual pleasure, others talked about fears about the health risks of circumcision, others stated simply that they would stop the practice because it is illegal. One Mama explained that being circumcised makes your body age more quickly. By the time you have a few children your body becomes very tired. Other Christian women still do want to circumcise their daughters. One Koko explained she'd like to see her granddaughter(s) circumcised in keeping with Maasai tradition: *I was circumcised and I'm fine, I don't see anything wrong with it.*

The relationship of girls to their friend(s) is also changing. Mamas and kokos listed some of those changes. Some said that nowadays girls have a new friend every day, it isn't as steady and consistent as in their time. Others said that in their time they usually had more than one friend while now girls only have one. Another talked about a change that she sees as very sad, *because of development you find a difference from when we were growing up. Friends were more important but now you find people who don't know love at all. She might have many friends and a husband and not love any of them. At that time if a girl really loves a friend, it's really love, but now they just go for money. Because of development that's just how the world is. The need for money is very wide.* Others also expressed that in their time, the love for their friends was very deep compared to now.

Women who practice Maasai indigenous religion like their daughters to go to soto and orpul as they did, although girls go to orpul less frequently than in the past, depending on the number of goats and cattle that are brought to feed them. One Mama said of the orpul: *I like when my daughter is there. It's a very happy thing, and when they come back we sing and dance.* At the soto, which now only occurs at nighttime, both girls and moran look around for who they find cute. Once there is someone that they feel love

for, the girl will start to go to the moran's house to spend the night. It is shameful for a moran to take his own spear inside, so the girl takes it in for him. When she is very young they might only touch each other and sleep in the same bed, but once the moran thinks she is starting to develop and might be able to handle sexual intercourse, he will suggest it. During the daytime she will return to her family to help with work, but at night her mother will send her to soto. Although they like their daughters to go to soto, they become angry if their daughters don't come home to help with chores in the morning. Mamas said that their relationships with their daughters are very open; the daughter will come if she has questions about sex, and she will help teach her daughter how to care for her friend(s). She'll help her daughter buy her friend a gift, take care of him, love him and give milk to the one she loves. Some mamas explained why it's important for girls to have sex, stating *she won't grow up well if she doesn't have sex*.

Although most mamas themselves had multiple friends as girls, some want different for their daughters. Many Christian families don't allow their daughters to go to soto and hope that their daughters don't have friends at all so they'll remain virgins until marriage. When asked why they don't want their daughters to go to soto one woman answered, *because if they go to soto they will forget about school. We need our daughters now to know something about the world and be educated*. Another group of women explained that going to soto would mean a loss of respect for their daughters before circumcision and marriage.

When asked what else is changing, women listed many things: a husband and wife can sleep in the same bed now whereas historically they couldn't, girls are getting educated and leaving some traditions behind, some people are choosing not to continue circumcision, Maasai have relationships with and even might marry non-Maasai, husbands beat their wives for no reason where they used to only beat the favorite wife, people have fewer cows and are hungry. The main change that was listed however, was that children have no respect for their elders anymore. Women pointed at the girls trying to listen in to the conversation through the wall of the boma and said, *see? they have no respect*. These days some children are choosing their husbands for themselves. As one woman said, *it's a big change, the world isn't like that anymore. Before you couldn't say no to a father, now you can choose for yourself. Now there's no respect*. Another echoed

a similar sentiment explaining how now a girl might cry and refuse the man her father has chosen for her. Before, a girl might be claimed as a baby to be a wife but now a woman's family is afraid to accept a man's cows<sup>14</sup> because the girl might grow up and say *I don't want him*. Others said that now sometimes a girl hates her husband.

Ultimately, women are conflicted about the changes taking place. Some trust the changes because they come from the church and schools or because they trust their daughters to make the right decisions. Others fear the loss of their way of life. One Christian Mama expressed that because of diseases (presumably HIV) and Christianity, she wants her daughter to have only one friend. She went on to say, however, that her daughter knows best and should do what she wants. Another woman explained the reason that women entrust their daughters with the important decisions about their lives, *now a girl goes to school and learns about what's going on in another world, so let her decide*. Another similarly stated that she'd prefer her daughter to have only one friend until she's old enough to be married but ultimately just wants the best for her. Others echoed a similar trust in their daughters' ability to pick the best life for themselves; one Mama said *I want my daughter to have only one man but she gets to choose everything, so if she wants more than one, then let her choose*.

Ultimately, whether for good or bad, western ideals, Christianity and increased contact with the outside world will continue to shape the Maasai community. As one Koko put it, *because that's the way the world is going, it's good to accept those changes*. One group of mamas expressed well their conflicting feelings over the implications that the changes will have for their daughters' and granddaughters' lives. They explained that the lack of respect in the younger generation is not the way it is supposed to be, but it means that they have more freedom to make decisions for themselves. They are uncertain of what that freedom will bring. As they said, *what if they stay [with their husbands] only two days and come back to me? Only God knows*. They went on to express, however, the hope that: *it's a good change, they will live in happiness*.

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<sup>14</sup> A man pays a dowry of cows to the family of his wife.

## Analysis

No culture is static. People often refer to the shifting and altering of a culture as an “evolution.” As time goes on, new practices are picked up, others are abandoned. With increased globalization, between certain “nodes” or “hot-spots” with varying degrees of interconnection (Ferguson 2007), cultures might be changing at an increased rate. People have always come into contact with others and appropriated or fused new cultural practices with their own, a process which Ferguson refers to as “creolization” (Ferguson 2007). The term evolution, however, implies that the change occurring is random and opportunistic. Like capitalistic influence, change, often assumed to be synonymous with “progress,” is constructed as something that un-regulated will be picked up as it benefits a community. The reality, however, is that, like with capitalism, there are already structures of power in place which determine the objects of the discourse and what changes will be allowed (Foucault 1986). Certain discourses become dominant and exert a higher impact on societies.

As the modern West is the current dominant discourse and the primary source of the globalization of ideas, changes coming from the West more forcefully change other cultures. For this reason, cultural change is not, in praxis, an evolution. Agents of change carry different power differentials and communities have different levels of agency with which to respond to them; some changes come from the outside and are appropriated and fused with existing practices, others wipe out or turn existing cultural structures on their heads completely, while others might happen as an inner revitalization of a cultural practice, despite being initiated from the outside. The latter is the case with the Maasai word *enkisasai*, which is a change that might be sparked from outside of the Maasai community but revitalizes from within. The concept of *enkisasai* leaves room for a culture to be flexible and un-stagnant while still maintaining tradition and cultural transmission and cohesion from one generation to the next.

Over the course of my time in *Engare Sero*, women expressed the three strongest agents of change coming into their community and affecting sexual practices as Christianity, development (through increased contact with the world beyond Maasailand), and western education, all western constructs. Each exerts a different amount of power on

the community and each is responded to with varying levels of incorporation or “creolization.”

*If she doesn't want to go I'll circumcise her right here before her father gets home*<sup>15</sup>.

With the discourse of “progress” in the West, every generation strives to be different (and better) than the one before; we therefore dis-associate from history and community/place. Here enters both the value of individual universal human rights and our belief that we have the power to create our own identity and destiny. As our values are seen as inherent, they are also seen as being independent of place. The Maasai God, *Engai*, lives in a specific place within the Maasai community, *Oldonyio Lengai*. The Christian God, on the other hand, is seen as being the God of everyone, everywhere. In the West we do not have the concept of beliefs and practices being place-based; western concepts are constructed as being applicable everywhere as clearly illustrated in the history of the western conquest and colonization of 2/3 of the globe.

As practitioners of the current most powerful discourse, we never have to question that power. Western culture with its ahistorical, individualistic, reductionist logic and lack of dependence on place, usually fails to realize that cultural practices don't happen in isolation. Rather, each cultural practice carries layers of meaning about the social organization and worldview of a community. Cultural practices and specificities are woven throughout every layer of society down even to the language people use and jokes they make. In the western world's hurry to exert influence over the rest of the world, institutions overemphasize the urgency with which other cultures need or want to be changed or “saved” by the universal truth of western worldviews, and underestimate the extent to which seemingly small changes can have vast effects. Rarely does the thought occur that for those who are tied to their cultural traditions both through a communal identity, connection to place and continuity with past generations, “there are other ties and visions that bind, prior allegiances and priorities that supercede” the incitement to be changed by western discourses (Moraga 1983).

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<sup>15</sup> The threat of a Koko to an Ndito who didn't want to leave the conversation so that the women could speak with us freely.

Throughout my time in Tanzania and in *Engare Sero* I often witnessed the importance of those “other ties and visions that bind” in cultural maintenance and transmission. Many practices of the Maasai are explained through the importance of the passage of tradition from generation to generation. In a focal group discussion with residents of a rural community in Tanzania, one fellow student said that she doesn’t intend to get married. The response that people had was to ask her, *your mom and dad got married to have you, so why wouldn’t you get married to have children?* (focal group, Bangata). The confusing (or possibly disturbing) thing to them was a person being the dead-end of the family line: the end of the passage through generations. Similarly, the strongest arguments I’ve heard against homosexuality in Tanzania haven’t had to do with same-sex sexual acts themselves, but the lack of biological ability for two men or two women to have children. A group of Maasai elders asked, *why would two women want to live together and be married if they can’t have a family?* (focal group, Engare Sero). As Rafael put it, it’s seen as: *a dead end for society*.

That continuation of the Maasai community was frequently the answer to questions I asked in *Engare Sero*. Maasai culture is organized around age-sets, the flow through which is the key to the stabilization and continuity of the community (pers. comm. Moono). When asked why one Koko wants to have her granddaughters circumcised she responded, *I was circumcised and I’m fine, I don’t see anything wrong with it*. To her, no reason for changing the practice is stronger than the desire for her children and children’s children to pass through the same rite of passage as she herself did. When asked about marriage, a group of girls explained what would happen when the time came for them to marry, *your Mama and Koko tell you: go to your husband, that’s what I did too, I wasn’t born here, so go make your family and listen to what your husband says*. Just like their mamas, girls have the responsibility to be married and start their own families. They pick their own friend(s), an action that shows their friends are really for them, their husbands, however are picked by their fathers. Girls marry the men their fathers pick for them as a responsibility to him as well as to their community; it is in this way that they become mothers and birth the new generation of Maasai. When asked about why certain sexual acts such as moaning or a woman being on top are not possible for the Maasai, the response was often: *it’s not in our tradition*. When a researcher

investigating female circumcision asked about the reasons behind circumcision, circumcisers “often answered simply, ‘it is our culture,’ ‘we just found it,’ or ‘our grandmothers gave it to us’” (Burford 2009). That is reason enough; the reason for the continuation of certain cultural practices (or the non-existence of others) is the continuation itself, the preservation of Maasai tradition from the past and its maintenance into the future.

In the West, “because that’s the way it’s always been done” is not an acceptable justification for why things are done the way they are. The dominant discourse in the West is about progress and change. Things are always done with an eye on improving and advancing under the assumption that progress is always positive. The West, with its reductionist logic, has de-coupled the concepts of modernity and morality. This de-coupling, the assumption that each aspect of a culture or society could stand alone, brings with it the assumption that one (modernity) can always be attained without any effect on the other (morality) (Ferguson 2007). Although the West has plenty of value for the “traditional” within fantasy and exoticization of “others”, maintaining a traditional way of life doesn’t make much sense as a cultural tactic within the discourse of human progress toward “modernity”. Children are not meant to do what their parents did, but do better. Children aren’t taught to follow in tradition but to question the past, solve problems, to be entrepreneurial and individualistic. They are expected and conditioned to seek better ways to do things, not to maintain their community but to move it into a new and different future. For those of us raised under the world view that the purpose of going through life is to always look toward the future and strive to improve the present, the explanation “that’s what I did so that’s what my children will do too,” is hard to accept as a reason on which to base important decisions about the fate of one’s life and community let alone be a rational reason for not changing or progressing.

In the West, rather than seeing ourselves as a part of a web which includes both our present community and our community and actions of the past, we see ourselves as free-floating ahistorical individuals. We see our own ideas, values and thoughts as inherent to us, not shaped by the past but always already a part of us. In this way, western ideals have come to be constructed not as one set of cultural values, but rather universal, inherent, human values and as such pose a non-understandable, but powerful

signifier against “traditional” cultures. It is impossible to argue with a discourse which sees itself as both timeless, and placeless; in praxis, however, many cultures including the Maasai, through the process of “creolization,” have at times found ways, if not of rejecting western discourses altogether, at least adapting and fusing them with existing cultural structures. At other times, the discourses have been too contradictory and either must be adopted completely, radically altering the previous cultural structures, or completely disregarded.

The women of *Engare Sero* cited Christianity, development and western education as the biggest agents of change on their sexual practices. There is a long history of the three, each arriving in Tanzania just prior to independence (circa 1961), being used to teach the Maasai about their own “ignorant” ways (Yeager 1989). As Burford notes, “Colonial and post-independence governments have treated the semi nomadic pastoralism of the Maasai as a cultural pathology associated with a ‘backward’ way of life” (Burford 2007). The western judgment of the Maasai as “primitive” has extended to many other aspects of their culture beyond pastoralism. As one group of women was taught of their practice of polygamy, *after the church came, we learned what we were doing is very bad, the Bible only allows a woman to have one man, so we were going against the word of God, its bad to go against the word of God*. In the past, cultural practices weren’t seen as either good or bad, but were seen in the context of the continuity of Maasai culture through many generations and centuries. Christianity has been a powerful agent of western-directed change all over the world. The women in *Engare Sero* mentioned Christianity as a primary agent of change, therefore I would like to explore the Christian values of monogamy, virginity and dichotomy and their sharp contrast with historical Maasai sexual practices.

The Maasai have always had separate categories of sexual partners. Women have had a husband and additional friend(s), each with their own specific purposes. Where marriage is a duty, a relationship with a friend is an act of love and compassion. In this way, Maasai social structure is arguably more stable through arranged marriage and the understanding that as a woman your role is to *go make your family and listen to what your husband says* but that you will also have sexual relationships with friend(s), which you have obtained through your own agency. A girl is expected to accept the husband her

father chooses for her. However she chooses her friend(s) herself, exhibiting empowerment over that aspect of her sexual and emotional life. Christianity, which is practiced by an estimated 20% of the community at *Engare Sero* (pers. comm. Matthews), requires that the many roles typically fulfilled by husbands and friend(s) respectively, all come from the same, single husband. Many Christian families, however, still choose the husband for their daughters, eliminating the aspect of her own agency within any sexual and/or emotional relationship. Furthermore, through polygamy, Maasai women have always had the other wives of their husband to share work with. In this way they can collectively care for the children of the *boma*, care for each other, and share the space of the *boma* which houses all of a man's wives. One group of girls expressed the hope that they wouldn't be the only wife of their husband. They explained, *I want a big boma with many wives so that I won't be alone. In case my husband dies I won't be alone.* In Maasai culture where a woman's work mostly takes place in the home, monogamy might also mean daily solitude.

The Christian value of virginity and sexual purity is also in sharp contrast to "traditional" Maasai cultural practices. Non-Christian families believe that a girl won't grow or develop well unless she has sex as a child. It is shameful for a girl to have no friend(s). If a man marries a woman only to find that she is virgin he will send her back to her father complaining, "You have given me food which is uncooked" (pers. comm. Mikoro). She will have to go back to her family, have sex, and bring cows from her father to be accepted as the wife of her husband. Christianity has introduced the concept that virginity is something sacred and valuable. As one group of women put it, *because of church we're advised it's very good to stay without a man until God gives you a husband.* In historical Maasai practice, a woman is given a husband by her father; in the case of Christianity, however, her husband (and therefore her ability to fulfill her role as a woman in society, have children and ensure the continuation of her community), comes not from her family, but from God. The family as the entity which enables the continuity of the Maasai community, is strikingly replaced with the image of a white, male, God. The notion of continuity of the Maasai is cut off at the point that the continuation is dependent on the timeless, placeless entity of the Christian God, rather than on previous generations.

Another group of women expressed that they didn't want their daughters to go to *soto* and lose their respect before marriage. Sex is something that is very open and communal among the Maasai. It isn't secretive or private; as Rafael put it, the Maasai are very free about sex with each other. They are used to talking about the aspects of daily life, including sex, with the people of their own sex and age-set. He went on to say that he sees that openness as a privilege of the Maasai community (pers. comm. Moono). Christianity values sex as something that is more private and has the ability to taint or destroy a girl's respectability: something she should save for only one person.

Christianity often creates change through fear. Whereas the Maasai value of generational transmission rarely relies on the dichotomy of "good" and "bad" Christianity divides every practice into the two categories, promising the most horrendous punishments for "bad" behavior. A few Christian families expressed to us fear of circumcising their daughters. They stated that the practice is illegal (a law derived from the Christian ethos of the Tanzanian state) and they might go to jail for 30 years if they are caught practicing circumcision on their daughters. They also spoke about the damage that circumcision does to a girl's body, explaining that a girl loses so much blood during circumcision that she will age prematurely. The practice weakens her body so by the time she has had a few children, she will look and feel much older than she is. Non-Christian families had a counter-fear that if a girl was left uncircumcised her clitoris would grow indefinitely and become very big. A few women made fun of us saying, *you must have a very big clitoris!*

The sexual values of Christianity, due to their complete incompatibility with historical Maasai sexual practices, cannot be "creolized" or patch worked into Maasai practices. Rather they enter into the community by being completely accepted and adopted, or else must be completely ignored. It requires a complete shift for the families, which adopt its practice. For this reason, Christianity has had a powerful impact on the sexual lives of women in *Engare Sero*, and one that I was able to easily recognize. Western education and development, however, leave more space to be partially adopted or blended with Maasai historical practices. Both because I spoke less about those agents of change and because their effects are less striking so I was less able to observe them in my short time, I have less to say regarding them. It is also possible that they are more

deeply ingrained in my world view and therefore are, in praxis, hidden from my observation. I will analyze the few examples I have, however. One woman cited a change in the relationship between girls and their friends as *now you find people who don't know love at all. She might have many friends and a husband and not love any of them. At that time if a girl really loves a friend, it's really love, but now they just go for money. Because of development that's just how the world is. The need for money is very wide.* Although wealth has always been a factor in the way that a husband is chosen for a girl, very few women cited it as a factor in their choice of and love for their friend(s). As the need for money has spread to *Engare Sero*<sup>16</sup>, however, it has affected the way in which people choose their friend(s).

The most blatant effect of western education that I saw and heard about, had to do with the levels of free choice that women entrusted to their daughters due to their educations. While some studies done, especially regarding female circumcision, have cited instances of Maasai resistance to ideas imposed on them from the outside, during my study, making a value judgment on whether the changes were “good” or “bad” didn't seem all that relevant to the mamas and kokos I spoke to. Rather they expressed, as one Koko put it *that's the way the world is going, it's good to accept those changes.* There was a recognition that the changes are occurring, period. Western discourse champions free choice and resistance as it relates (and supports) to both individuality and non-systemic empowerment. The western construct is that a person has both the power to decide her own fate and to shape her own future as she sees fits. Only in this way can the younger generation progress beyond their parents' generation. The Maasai women I spoke to, however, exhibited a cultural resignation, a handing down of the changes taking place in their community; in their own lives, many had followed the path laid out for them, the same one that their mothers and mothers' mothers had passed through. They leave the decision as to what to do with those changes in the hands of their children and grandchildren.

Many expressed uncertainty in what the lives of their daughters would look like: whether they would be an only wife their husband, whether they would have friend(s), whether they would marry outside of the Maasai community altogether. As one Mama

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<sup>16</sup> Historically, Maasai wealth is dependent solely on their number of cattle.

put it, however, *the changes are good because they come from the church and the school.* Many of them trust the kind of empowerment that the school offers their daughters. They are willing to see their daughters break away from the way things have historically been done as a trade-off for the western value of free choice. They hope that as their daughters, learn about *what's going on in another world*, they will be able to make choices which will bring them the most happiness. As one group of mamas said of their daughters, *we want only the best for them.* Of course, many hope that their daughters can use the free choice to bring good to themselves and their community; that western values can be utilized to strengthen the Maasai. For many, western education might be a new tool incorporated to strengthen the passage of the Maasai through the generations, to fuel the process of *enkisasai*. Others, however expressed that even if their daughters want to marry outside of the Maasai community or move away, it would be up to her. In this way, some have embraced not only the western education of their daughters but also their individualization. Ultimately they expressed the sentiment that they want for their daughters whatever will bring them happiness, that *she gets to choose everything... let her choose.*

## Limitations

- My study was limited first of all by the necessity of using a translator. I am sure that a lot of the nuance and connotation of what the women said were lost in translation.
- My study was also presumably limited due to the fact that Nosim and I come from very different cultural backgrounds than the women we spoke to and are also outside of many of their age-sets.
- My study was probably further limited by the history of “outsiders” trying to infringe upon the cultural self-determination of the Maasai. We heard from one fellow visitor that a woman had pointed us out and mentioned we were in town to tell people they shouldn’t have more than one sexual partner. Probably (hopefully) she wasn’t one of the women we actually spoke to.

## Recommendations

I recommend that someone do a follow-up study looking at the men’s views on sexuality, sexual practices and the changes that they see occurring. I think it would be really fascinating, even standing alone, and especially in comparison to this study. It would also be fascinating to look at western education in *Engare Sero* and its effects on cultural practices/cohesion.

## Conclusion

In this study I spoke to women in *Engare Sero* about the cultural rules governing sexual practice, how their sexual practices changed over the course of their lives, how sexual practices have changed over time, what changes they hope for or expect for their daughters and the roots of those changes. Women described Christianity, development and western education as the primary sources of changes in sexual practice.

Christianity has introduced both the value of monogamy and virginity into the community which sharply contrast with historical Maasai sexual practices. Due to Christianity, some women have stopped having sexual and or emotional relationships with friend(s) beyond their husbands; many are also the only wife of their husband. Development has increased the value of money as a form of wealth, possibly affecting the way in which girls and women choose their friend(s). Western education has brought with it certain western ideals including individuality and free choice; many mamas trust their daughters to make decisions about their own lives even if it means possibly breaking away from historical Maasai practice.

Western culture, with its ahistorical, individualistic, reductionist logic and lack of dependence on place, is a forceful agent of change in *Engare Sero* through the discourses of Christianity, development and western education. Each exerts a different amount of influence on the community. The families which adopt Christianity must completely shift their sexual values as those of Christianity are completely incompatible with historical Maasai sexual values. Development and western education are more easily adapted and “creolized.” Through this “creolization” the process of *enkisasai* or, the inner revitalization of Maasai culture can occur.

This study exhibits the enormous diversity of sexual practices, experiences and opinions even within such a cohesive community as that of the Maasai. It also illustrates the way in which sexual practices must be viewed with “a politics of location” or understanding that each of us are strongly conditioned by our upbringing, culture and communit(ies) (Rich 1984). Therefore we cannot speak for the cultural practices of others, but rather can only try to understand them, acknowledging that our view is necessarily affected by our own unique and situated perspective.

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## Appendix A: Map of the Greater Serengeti and Lake Natron Area

Not included in electronic copy

## Appendix B: Author's Map of Study Site

Not included in the electronic copy

## Appendix C: Focal Group Questions for Mamas, Kokos and Ndoye

Questions for mamas and kokos as they evolved and became a part of my interviews:

As an ndito, did you go to *soto*?  
What do you remember about those times?  
How many friend(s) did you have?  
How did sexual pleasure change after circumcision?  
Will your daughters and granddaughters be circumcised?  
Do your daughters and granddaughters go to *soto*? why/why not?  
Do you love your husband?  
Do you love your friend(s)?  
How do you pick your friend(s)?  
Do you think sexual practices are changing? how? Where does the change come from?  
How do you feel about the changes occurring?  
What do you hope for your daughters' and granddaughters' relationships with both their husbands and friend(s)?

What makes a good husband? What do you love about him?  
What makes a good friend? What do you love about him/them?  
Who do you love more?  
Is there a difference between the children of your husband and friend(s)?  
How is sex different with your husband than with your friend(s)?  
How often do you have sex with your husband and how often with your friend(s)?

Are breasts sexual?  
Can a woman ever be on top during sex?  
What makes for sexual satisfaction?  
Do you make sounds during sex?  
Have you ever experienced anything like "heartbreak"?  
Is there jealousy in any of your sexual relationships?  
Do you kiss your husband? your friend(s)? on what parts of the body?

Questions for ndoye (only the ones of which the answers are relevant to my report):

Do you go to *soto*?  
How many friend(s) do you have?  
Do you love your friend(s)? why?  
What do you hope your husband/marriage will be like?  
Who will pick your husband, yourself or your father?  
Is it possible for you to be on top during sex?  
Do you make sounds during sex?

