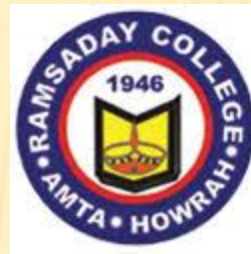


GEO-A-CC-2-03-TH-HUMAN GEOGRAPHY
UNIT II: SOCIETY, DEMOGRAPHY AND EKISTICS



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CASE STUDY OF MASAI



INTRODUCTION

The **Maasai** are a Nilotic ethnic group inhabiting northern, central and southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. They are among the best known local populations internationally due to their residence near the many game parks of the African Great Lakes, and their distinctive customs and dress. The Maasai speak the Maa language a member of the Nilotic language family that is related to the Dinka, Kalenjin and Nuer languages. Except for some elders living in rural areas, most Maasai people speak the official languages of Kenya and Tanzania, Swahili and English. The Maasai population has been reported as numbering 1,189,522 in Kenya in the 2019 census, compared to 377,089 in the 1989 census



HISTORY

The Maasai inhabit the African Great Lakes region and arrived via the South Sudan. Most Nilotic speakers in the area, including the Maasai, the Turkana and the Kalenjin, are pastoralists, and are famous for their fearsome reputations as warriors and cattle-rustlers. The Maasai and other groups in East Africa have adopted customs and practices from neighboring Cushitic-speaking groups, including the age set system of social organization, circumcision, and vocabulary terms.



ORIGIN, MIGRATION AND ASSIMILATION

According to their oral history, the Maasai originated from the lower Nile valley north of Lake Turkana (Northwest Kenya) and began migrating south around the 15th century, arriving in a long trunk of land stretching from what is now northern Kenya to what is now central Tanzania between the 17th and late 18th century.



SETTLEMENT IN EAST AFRICA

The Maasai territory reached its largest size in the mid-19th century, and covered almost all of the Great Rift Valley and adjacent lands from Mount Marsabit in the north to Dodoma in the south. At this time the Maasai, as well as the larger Nilotic group they were part of, raised cattle as far east as the Tanga coast in Tanganyika (now mainland Tanzania). Raiders used spears and shields, but were most feared for throwing clubs (orinka) which could be accurately thrown from up to 70 paces. In 1852, there was a report of a concentration of 800 Maasai warriors on the move in what is now Kenya. In 1857, after having depopulated the "Wakuafi wilderness" in what is now southeastern Kenya, Maasai warriors threatened Mombasa on the Kenyan coast.



CULTURE

Maasai society is strongly patriarchal in nature, with elder men, sometimes joined by retired elders, deciding most major matters for each Maasai group. A full body of oral law covers many aspects of behavior. Formal capital punishment is unknown, and normally payment in cattle will settle matters. An out-of-court process is also practiced called *amitu*, 'to make peace', or *arop*, which involves a substantial apology. The monotheistic Maasai worship a single deity called *Enkai* or *Engai*. Engai has a dual nature: Engai Narok (Black God) is benevolent, and Engai Na-nyokie (Red God) is vengeful.



CULTURE

Traditional Maasai lifestyle centres around their cattle which constitute their primary source of food. The measure of a man's wealth is in terms of cattle and children. A herd of 50 cattle is respectable, and the more children the better. A man who has plenty of one but not the other is considered to be poor



INFLUENCES FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Due to an increase in Maasai population, loss of cattle populations to disease, and lack of available rangelands because of new park boundaries and the incursion of settlements and farms by other tribes (this is also the chief reason for the decline in wildlife-habitat loss, with the second being poaching), the Maasai were forced to develop new ways of sustaining themselves. Many Maasai began to cultivate maize and other crops to get by, a practice that was culturally viewed negatively.



SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The central unit of Maasai society is the age-set. Young boys are sent out with the calves and lambs as soon as they can toddle, but childhood for boys is mostly playtime, with the exception of ritual beatings to test courage and endurance. Girls are responsible for chores such as cooking and milking, skills which they learn from their mothers at an early age. Every 15 years or so, a new and individually named generation of Morans or Il-murran (warriors) will be initiated.



FOOD HABIT

Traditionally, the Maasai diet consisted of raw meat, raw milk, and raw blood from cattle. Note that the Maasai cattle are of the Zebu variety.

The mixing of cattle blood, obtained by nicking the jugular vein, and milk is done to prepare a ritual drink for special celebrations and as nourishment for the sick.^[94] However, the inclusion of blood in the traditional diet is waning due to the reduction of livestock numbers. More recently, the Maasai have grown dependent on food produced in other areas such as maize meal, rice, potatoes, cabbage (known to the Maasai as goat leaves) etc. The Maasai who live near crop farmers have engaged in cultivation as their primary mode of subsistence. In these areas, plot sizes are generally not large enough to accommodate herds of animals; thus the Maasai are forced to farm.¹



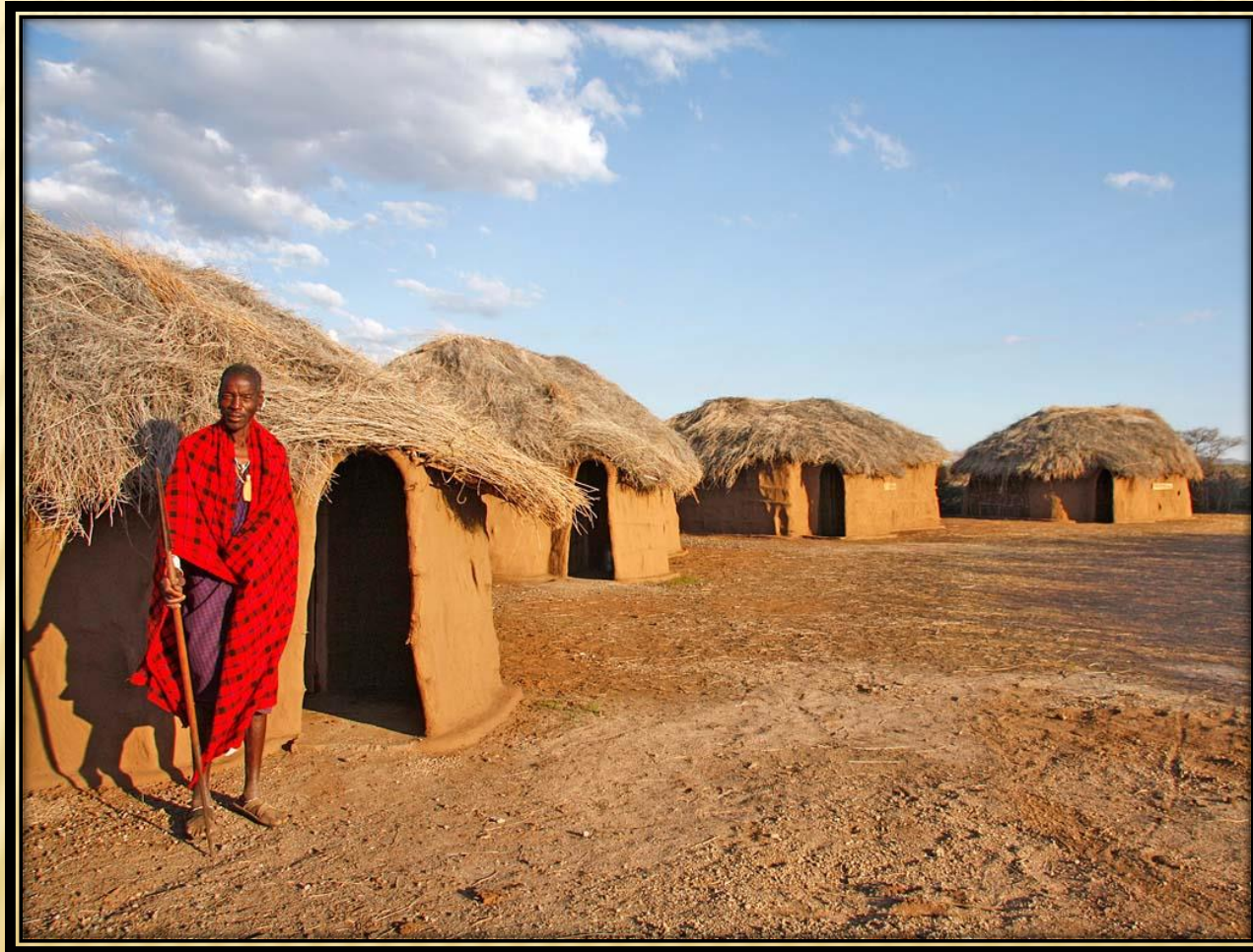


MUSIC AND DANCE

Maasai music traditionally consists of rhythms provided by a chorus of vocalists singing harmonies while a song leader, or *olaranyani*, sings the melody.

Women chant lullabies, humming songs, and songs praising their sons.

One exception to the vocal nature of Maasai music is the use of the horn of the Greater Kudu to summon morans for the Eunoto ceremony.





SHELTER

As a historically nomadic and then semi-nomadic people, the Maasai have traditionally relied on local, readily available materials and indigenous technology to construct their housing. The traditional Maasai house was in the first instance designed for people on the move and was thus very impermanent in nature.



CLOTHING

Clothing changes by age and location. Young men, for instance, wear black for several months following their circumcision. However, red is a favored colour. Blue, black, striped, and checkered cloth are also worn, as are multicolored African designs. The Maasai began to replace animal skin, calf hides and sheep skin, with commercial cotton cloth in the 1960s