

THE UNCHANGED AND UNREPRESENTED CULTURE OF RESPECT IN MAASAI SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT The changes in Maasai livelihood and nomadic lifestyle have been the focus of scholars, with more recent attention on ways the Maasai manipulate the discourse and images about themselves. The objective of this study is to clarify how the Maasai think about change in their traditional culture, using the Maasai Olympics, a conservation programme launched by an NGO as ‘an innovative conservation strategy.’ So far the Maasai Olympics has succeeded in attracting global attention and funds. The sponsoring organisations and the various media have reported that the Maasai Olympics ‘innovate’ the traditional culture of the Maasai under the cooperation and agreement with the local community. However, the author has found that such a narrative is inaccurate, and disregards the Maasai thinking that they have been maintaining their cultural core, namely, the sense of respect (*enkanyit*). While the Maasai have become aware of the politics of representation, the author argues that the globally dominant discourse of the Maasai Olympics is one that has been appropriated by the outsiders, and a misrepresented version of the Maasai traditional culture is being disseminated.

Key Words: Maasai; Maasai Olympics; Respect; *enkanyit*; Amboseli.

INTRODUCTION

I. Change in Pastoral Societies

In the course of discussions on contemporary pastoral societies in Africa, the perspective of change is inevitable. For example, Bollig and Schnegg (2013: 1) wrote that, ‘[S]ince the 1990s, diversity, vulnerability and dynamic adaptive processes have been discussed as key elements in contemporary pastoral adaptations as well.’ In this discussion, the core question has been, ‘[H]ow did change and diversity within pastoral adaptations and transitions between pastoralism and other livelihood strategies develop and what caused these changes?’ (Bollig & Schnegg, 2013: 2). To answer this question, the authors discussed dimensions of labour, capital and worldview as well as the impact of states and globalisation (Bollig et al., 2013).

As a pastoral group in East Africa, the Maasai, who are the focus of this study, have also been studied from the viewpoint of changes in livelihood and nomadic lifestyle (e.g. Galaty, 2013; Homewood et al., 2009; Spear & Wright, 1993). Besides the degree to which Maasai custom have actually changed, whether they have the will to change their livelihood and society has been the question for discussion. Because the Maasai have been stereotypically regarded as a symbol of uncivilized and underdeveloped Africa since the colonial period (Bruner, 2004; Hughes, 2006b),

they strategically represent and promote themselves to outsiders, such as governments, donors, tourists, and the media, with certain intentions (Hodgson, 2011; Meguro, 2014; Wijngaarden, 2016). Accordingly, scholars have paid more attention to the Maasai politics of representation. This is to say that the Maasai can manipulate discourse and images about themselves, which usually correspond to outsiders expectation, at times even diverging from the way things are, so as to gain one sort of benefit or another.

The author chose Amboseli in southern Kenya, one of the most popular tourist destinations since colonisation, for this study. There have been many studies related to wildlife conservation and local communities in the area (e.g. Amati, 2013; BurnSilver, 2009; Goldman et al., 2013; Meguro, 2014; Meguro & Inoue, 2011; Van Wijk et al., 2015; Western, 1994). These studies cover a wide range of topics, but while there are some on the increasing media coverage concerning the traditional culture of the Maasai affected by the conservation programme called the Maasai Olympics, the local opinion on this topic has not been examined.

II. Innovative Change in the Maasai Society?

Since the 1960s, several community-based conservation (CBC) projects have been implemented in the Amboseli area (cf. Meguro, 2014; Western, 1994). The theories of CBC highlight participation, tangible benefits, formal rights and sustainable livelihood of local communities (Fabricius & Koch, 2004; Hulme & Murphree, 2001; Suich et al., 2009; Western & Wright, 1994). However, some studies have found that actual projects often deny or ignore daily livelihood, traditional culture, customary practices and legal rights of local communities (Büscher et al., 2012; Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016; Igoe & Brockington, 2007). Other studies have found that a number of conservation initiatives are arbitrarily ‘shaping human-environment relationships and expectations through mass production, distribution, and consumption of modern and replicable forms of representation’ so as to proclaim its success and raise funds through global digital media networks (Büscher et al., 2012: 16). The disregard of local communities often accompanies the misrepresentation of local landscape, which has been an ongoing phenomenon (Gardner, 2016).

Contrary to this tendency, a noticeable project began in the Amboseli area, so far succeeding in attracting global attention and funds, namely the Maasai Olympics. The following information is found on the official website of the Maasai Olympics.⁽¹⁾

In 2012, the first Maasai Olympics was launched by a conservation NGO, Big Life Foundation (BLF) upon consultation with the local elders. Prior to this event, the Maasai warriors traditionally hunted lion in order to prove their braveness and gain fame. However, as the warriors understood the importance of conserving wildlife, they resolved to abandon their hunting tradition, and instead, began to take part in the athletic competition called the Maasai Olympics. As an alternative in competing with each other and proving one’s superiority, the Maasai Olympics are embraced by the warriors, leading to progress in wildlife

conservation.

On the top page of the website, it is stated, THIS IS THE HUNT FOR MEDALS, NOT LIONS. Because the Maasai Olympics is promoted as ‘an innovative conservation strategy,’ the event is seen as proof of the ‘innovative’ change by the Maasai people. Some media coverage has told such a story: The Maasai are maintaining their tradition of warriors, but have decided on reflection to alter their outdated competitive ways so that they no longer cause environmental destruction and act in a way which is in keeping with modern concept of sustainability. This explanation differs from the usual conservation narratives in Africa (cf. Büscher et al., 2012; Igoe & Brockington, 2007) in that while it depicts lion hunting as an unforgivable tradition, the Maasai people are described as reflective, and capable of innovating their culture on the basis of today’s global standard (Meguro, 2017).

It has been already found that the official website and the media reporting do not fully reflect the reality in the area (Meguro, 2017). However, much of the preceding literature focused on the Maasai warrior opinions on prizes and self-representation regarding wildlife conservation, and the local understanding about change in their culture affected by the Maasai Olympics has been left unexamined.

SUBJECT AND METHOD

I. Subject

The objective of this study is to clarify the local understanding about the change in the Maasai traditional culture. According to reports by the sponsoring organisations and the various media, the Maasai Olympics innovate the traditional culture of the Maasai through cooperation and agreement with the local community. However, there is enough ground for controversy about the accuracy of the event’s self-explanation given the fact that the arbitrary misrepresentation of local situations by outsiders has been pointed out in several studies (Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016). The question arises as to what degree the globally circulating discourse of the Maasai Olympics represents the voice of the local people.

To answer this question, the author first states the methods of the study and general background information, and then examines the cultural statements made by the host NGO, the BLF. Next, the BLF statements are cross checked with the opinions of the local leaders in the area. The author will demonstrate that the leaders hold a sense of respect, called *enkanyit* in Maasai language, which is the cultural core of the Maasai.

The sense of respect, or *enkanyit*, has been mentioned as a culturally and socially important idea in many Maasai studies (Bruner, 2004; Hodgson, 2001; 2011; 2017; Homewood & Rodgers, 1991; Hughes, 2006a; Ole Sankan, 1971; Spear & Wright, 1993; Spencer, 2004; 2014; Woodhouse & McCabe, 2018). However, it is often left out of analyses on the changes in pastoralism, pastoral livelihood, or the impact

of globalisation.⁽²⁾ In this respect, the author's aim is to provide with this study an insight into the normative aspect of the contemporary Maasai society.

II. Method

The author has conducted field research in the Amboseli area since 2005. In this research, the author encountered an elder, A, and a youth leader, B. At that time, A worked as the chairperson on the advisory committee for the office of a local chief, who was sent in by the central government. The work of the advisory committee was to settle disputes among the local people in place of the chief. It was generally expected that the committee would make the appropriate decision from the local perspective. Therefore, only experienced and respected elders were appointed as members. A worked as the chairperson of this committee for several years, meaning that he was highly respected in the area. On the other hand, B was chosen as a traditional age-group leader (*olaiguenani*) in 2014. He was chosen due to the standing of his family, his personality and his experience of formal schooling. In 2016, from among the four traditional leaders of the same age-set in the Amboseli area, he was selected as the main leader representing all Maasai youths, counting around six thousand in the area, according to B.

Both A and B were regarded as leaders of their respective age peers. When the author asked their peers about Maasai tradition/culture, most of them referred me to A and B, because they said they possessed good knowledge and judgement. The opinions of A and B were elicited by the author on several occasions, including August 2016, August and September 2017, and February and September 2018. In addition, the author hosted a meeting in August 2018 following A's advice. In the meeting, four representatives of the elders, namely, A and three other seniors, and four representatives of the youths, namely, B and three other men, argued about the correctness of the BLF's explanation of the Maasai traditional culture, and discussed what was important culturally to the Maasai. During the meeting, participants agreed with A's opinion, only adding some views but nothing to the contrary. After the meeting, in September 2018, the author met all the participants individually and reconfirmed their opinions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF STUDY

I. Outline of the Maasai People

The Maasai are Eastern Nilotic people who speak the Maa language. Today, about 150,000 square kilometres of arid and semi-arid land from southern Kenya to northern Tanzania is recognised as Maasailand. The Maasai's major livelihood is semi-nomadic pastoralism with cattle, goats and sheep, where cattle hold the highest value in their culture and society.

Maasai society is divided into about twenty sections (*iloshon*). Each section autonomously and communally manages its territory, resources and rites of pas-

sage. At the same time, they share an age system based on age-grades and age-groups, and conduct rites of passage over approximately every fifteen-years. Each age-set (*olaji*) has a name, and the younger informant B in his twenties belonged to the most recently constituted Ilkibulu age-set, and the elder, A belonged to Iseuri. Between them, there were three age-sets, Ilkiponi, Ilkimnyak and Ilkishimu, from the youngest to the oldest.

Based on the age system, the Maasai men are broadly divided into three age-grades: boys (*ilayio*k, the uncircumcised male children yet to form an age-set), youths (*ilmurran*, usually translated as ‘warriors,’ the circumcised men who have their own age-set, regarded as adults, but not yet allowed to marry), and elders (*ilpayiani*, who graduated from the youth grade and are usually married). Formally, women neither had age-sets nor were divided by age-grades, but only regarded as either immature girls (*intoyie*) or adult mothers/wives (*isainot*), depending on whether they had gone through circumcision.

The Maasai people consider as special both lions (*ilowuarak kituaak*, literary meaning big and great carnivores) and its hunting (*olamayio*). Lion hunting is distinguished from the killing of other animals, a privilege of the youths. When a youth succeeds in hunting a lion, meaning he was the first to spear the prey, he gains a special name and fame in the community.

It must be noted that the Maasai youths shoulder the responsibility of protecting their communities. When there is an imminent danger of anyone or any livestock being attacked by wildlife, they must kill that harmful wildlife. Elders state that *olamayio* aside, killing such dangerous animals is necessary in order to keep them away and prevent damage. In other words, lion killing was not just wanton destruction of wildlife, but an important part of pastoral life in the savannah where people and wildlife share the same land and the daily risk of undesired and problematic encounters.

II. The Amboseli Area and the Maasai Olympics

Administratively, Amboseli corresponds to the Kajiado South Constituency (6356.3 km²) with a population in 2009 of about 137,000 in Kajiado County, formerly Kajiado District. The area is equal to the territory of the Maasai people of the Loitokitok sub-section, a sub-group of Kisongo section and the largest Maasai population mostly living in northern Tanzania. It is famous for Amboseli National Park (390 km²), one of the most popular tourist destinations in East Africa with large herds of elephants and rich fauna referred to as the ‘Big Five’ (lion, leopard, rhinoceros, elephant, and buffalo) and scenic views of Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Because of its status as a popular tourist destination, the area has been at the forefront of wildlife conservation. Since the end of the 19th century, the colonial and post-independence governments, international organisations, and scholars have implemented various conservation initiatives (Meguro, 2014; Western, 1994; Van Wijk et al., 2015). And since 2012, the Maasai Olympics have been hosted every other year by the BLF.

The BLF is a conservation NGO co-founded in 2010 by three Caucasian

people: a conservationist who ran a luxury eco-lodge and conservation NGO in the area, an internationally known photographer, and a US-based entrepreneur. The NGO works around the Amboseli National Park, and operations include employment and training of the local people as game rangers, anti-poaching activities, and mitigation of human-wildlife conflicts, while providing general and environmental education.

The Maasai Olympics is regarded as an organised Maasai sport competition based upon traditional warrior skills for Maasai youths in the Amboseli area. The contestants are divided into four teams according to the area where they come from. The youths of Loitokitok Maasai must customarily belong to one of four youth villages (*imanyat*), and the four teams based on these four traditional villages and are named after their area names: Imbirikani, Kuku, Olgulului and Rombo.

There are six competitive events: a 200-metre run, an 800-metre run, a 5000-metre run, a javelin throw, a club throw, and a high jump. In addition, a women's 100-metre run and a women's 1500-metre run take place as exhibitions. The top three players in each event receive a medal and a cash prize, and the winning team receives a trophy and an improved breed of cattle. In order to join the Maasai Olympics, the youths need to have performed well in the practice games.

The Maasai Olympics is held as a one-day event under numerous sponsorships of many conservation NGOs, private companies and individual contributors. Watching and taking pictures and movies are free. In past events, hundreds of people, both Maasai and non-Maasai, have come to enjoy the competitions. The events were reported by international media including Reuters, AP (Associate Press), CNN (Cable News Networks), BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), AFP (Agence France Presse), CCTV (China Central Television), and Al-Jazeera.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

I. BLF's Explanation of the Maasai Culture

The BLF opened an official website of the Maasai Olympics for dispatching information. The following descriptions of Maasai culture are excerpts from the website.⁽³⁾ After each citation, the author will explain the pertinent points.

1. 'For centuries the Maasai have practised a traditional rite of passage to manhood, hunting and killing lions.'

Here, the BLF interprets lion hunting as a traditional rite of passage. A rite of passage is an event which one must go through as a member of a society in order to move from one status to another. Thus, it conveys the message that young Maasai boys must kill lions in order to become adults. Similar inference is made when the dramatic decrease of the lion population in the area is emphasised on the same website, that the Maasai have threatened lions with extinction by hunting them.

2. 'The *Menye Layiok*, or "cultural fathers," and Big Life Foundation have

created a history-changing alternative to lion killing: an organised Maasai sports competition based upon traditional warrior skills.'

In this sentence, the focal keyword, change, appears in the form of 'history-changing,' suggesting that the Maasai Olympics brought about a change in Maasai tradition, and is an historical event. Furthermore, it explains that the Maasai Olympics were thought out by *menye layiok*, the cultural fathers and traditional authority in Maasai society, together with the BLF. The message is that the Maasai Olympics exist for the purpose of changing Maasai culture, and that this idea has come from traditional leaders of the local community. It is a game-changer based on the community and its tradition.

3. 'What we saw was the energy of our young warriors being channelled away from lion hunting towards trophy hunting. / This Maasai Olympics has been the greatest celebration of Maasai culture I have ever attended.'

This is a statement made by a Maasai elder, who is a member of parliament (MP) from Kajiado South Constituency. His speech is contained in the animation on the webpage entitled, ABOUT on the website. In the same animation, one Maasai youth says, 'In truth, this programme is very successful, and we are now doing something honourable. We used to celebrate lion hunting, but this programme has shown us a better celebration.' The points for discussion here are: When the Maasai Olympics are applauded by a local political leader, is he a true spokesperson of the community? And are the Maasai Olympics rooted in the Amboseli Maasai's culture?

4. 'In 2008, the cultural "fathers" of the new warrior generation asked Big Life Foundation to help them eliminate lion hunting from the Maasai culture. / In response, Big Life partnered with the Maasai of Amboseli/Tsavo to conceive and raise the funding for this first ever Maasai Olympics, part of the larger initiative to help to shift the attitudes of the Maasai towards a commitment to wildlife and habitat conservation as a preferred way of life in the 21st century.'

As in the second point, the first sentence and the first half of the second sentence states that the Maasai Olympics is a community initiative. A new argument appears, in the second half of the second sentence, that the Maasai Olympics promote conservation as a desirable lifestyle today. The last point is examined in the next citation.

5. 'Following its showing, discussion and teaching around the film's two major themes: lion killing is no longer culturally acceptable and must stop now, as must the killing of elephants and all wildlife species; and failure to follow the "path of conservation" and reap its economic benefits will result in an unsustainable future of the Maasai people. Their noble way of life, traditional land, and ancient culture will be lost.'

This is an explanation in the educational animation, 'There will always be lions?,' which the BLF shows to Maasai youths in connection with the Maasai Olympics. The interesting point is that this sentence conveys that if Maasai peo-

ple do not conserve wildlife, their society will inevitably lose its historical culture as well as its traditional lifestyle. Here, conservation is referred to not just as a choice but as an imperative way of life. As if the Maasai do not accept the Maasai Olympics as its culture, they will not exist as Maasai in the future. The question is whether this notion is shared with the local people or not.

The Maasai Olympics have been reported by several global media outlets. A typical coverage goes, '[a]t the Maasai Olympics, the hunt is for medals, not lions,'⁽⁴⁾ pitting the athletics and medals against the hunting and lions. On many occasions, the Maasai Olympics are described with the word, 'change.'⁽⁵⁾ Even if the word, 'innovative,' is not used, as a result of the Maasai Olympics, the information that the Maasai people are changing their traditional culture into a globally-welcomed form is circulated worldwide.

II. Local Leader Opinions on Maasai Culture

In the last section, from the above five statements by the BLF on the Maasai culture and the Maasai Olympics, the following four issues are identified for examination: (1) Is lion hunting a rite of passage? (2) Is the Maasai Olympics a project based on the community and its tradition? (3) Does the local community accept the Maasai Olympics as their culture? (4) Without conserving wildlife, is it impossible for the Maasai people to maintain their culture? The author asked the local leaders the above questions and their responses are examined below in that order.

1. Is lion hunting a rite of passage?

A, the elder, clearly denied the statement that a Maasai youth could not become an elder without hunting a lion. According to him, lion hunting is not an obligatory practice for the youths. Ceremonies called *enkpaata*, *eunoto* and *olngesher* are what a Maasai youth needs to go through as rites of passage, all of which are carried out to the present.⁽⁶⁾ He said that even if one goes lion hunting many times, he needs a lot of luck to thrust a spear into a lion, meaning that it is fanciful to think that all male Maasai could hunt lions during their period of youth. In the meeting of August 2018, all other participants agreed with his explanation.

2. Is the Maasai Olympics a project based on the community and its tradition?

A, the elder, thought that the process of launching the Maasai Olympics was neither traditional nor good. He admitted that the *menye layiok* were the authority responsible for educating youths, but because lions held a special space among all community members, the *menye layiok* should have discussed with the other members whether they must stop lion hunting or not. He concluded that an arbitrary decision on such an important issue was not viable, adding that the way they only talked to the BLF without consulting other elders disregarded the traditional procedures and such an approach was a change for the worse.

A, the elder, doubted whether the idea of the Maasai Olympics really originated

from the community. His understanding was that the government had ordered the *menye layiok* to stop lion hunting. In the meeting of August 2018, A insisted that youths must kill lions if livestock was attacked, and other participants agreed with him. This indicates that they were not in support of the conservation policy of the Maasai Olympics, that is, a total ban on killing wildlife. One youth, who attended the meeting, said that the young men never expressed disapproval of their elders' ideas. So, it is questionable if the BLF's view had been shared with the community in general.

3. Does the local community accept the Maasai Olympics as their culture?

As explained above, A, the elder, was doubtful whether the idea of the Maasai Olympics was genuinely community-based. In the meeting of August 2018, he did not think that the Maasai Olympics was an important part of Maasai culture. B held a similar opinion, saying that he did not think the Maasai Olympics had the same importance as *enkipaata*, *eunoto*, and *olngesher* because while these ceremonies had continued over many years, the Maasai Olympics was just a contemporary event. B even said that if the BLF did not listen to their input, they would not join the Maasai Olympics. To him, the Maasai Olympics was an event belonging to the BLF, and they took part in it because once they were asked to do so by the BLF and had answered yes.

There were opinions both for and against the statement by the area's MP that the Maasai Olympics was a celebration of Maasai culture. B, the younger, said that the MP was their leader and spokesman, but this speech was among what politicians frequently would say to attract public attention. Nonetheless, one youth, who was chosen by B as a representative of their age-group and attended the meeting of August 2018, approved of the Maasai Olympics as an opportunity for a better celebration than lion hunting. He had won three medals in the Maasai Olympics. At the same time, he killed a lion which ate a cow some years ago, after which he hid himself in the bush for more than a month to evade the man-hunt by the BLF. His opinion was that the Maasai Olympics brought him more celebrated fame than lion hunting, because whereas the success of lion hunting would be only known about in his village, the Maasai Olympics was a competition among villages and thus one's superiority was more visible to many more people. He approved of the Maasai Olympics more than B did. However, this did not mean that he fully supported the BLF, because he also agreed to A's opinion that hunting was inevitable once livestock was killed by wildlife.

4. Without conserving wildlife, is it impossible for the Maasai people to maintain their culture?

When A, the elder, heard the BLF's statement that if the Maasai people failed to conserve wildlife, they would lose their traditional culture and lifestyle, he succinctly said, 'It is wrong. We do not keep our culture for the sake of wildlife.' He also said, 'It is true that education and the Bible changed the Maasai people. It is also true that Maasai people have abandoned lion hunting as a result of civilisation. However, it does not mean that we have changed our culture.'

When the author posed the question, ‘What is unchanged in the culture of the Maasai?’ he listed: the Maasai’s dress code, their habit of keeping livestock, their age system, and the sense of respect. He continued, ‘Various people tried to change the Maasai culture, but the community did not respond to it.’ When the author visited B at his traditional youth village after the meeting of the representatives, he said that while living in a traditional village was good, it was important today to receive a school education and obtain a job, adding that the dress code and the sense of respect must be kept as an important part of the Maasai culture.

In the meeting of August 2018, all agreed that their culture and society had been changed by school education, the Christian church, and developments in areas such as agriculture and business. They thought that these changes made their life better. Also, they thought that they were conserving the age system, youth villages, livestock, dress code, language and sense of respect (*enkanyit*). Consequently, they stated that they did not think that Maasai culture had (been) changed, and all agreed in regarding *enkanyit* as the unchanging core of Maasai culture.

In the individual interviews, B criticised the BLF for not giving him an opportunity to communicate. He thought its misunderstanding of the Maasai culture was the result of the lack of communication. He also emphasised the importance of *enkanyit* by saying that when there is a meeting of local youths, he and other leaders often speak of it. B was not certain whether it was an intentional result or an outcome of carelessness, but at least, it was clear to him that the BLF’s explanation of the Maasai tradition and culture was inaccurate in various respects from the perspective of local leaders.

III. The Argument Concerning *Enkanyit*

If the sense of respect, or *enkanyit*, is thought to be the unchanged core of their culture by the local Maasai people, none of the reports on the Maasai Olympics mentioned it, while just stressing its innovativeness. The meaning of *enkanyit* is examined in this section.

1. The explanation of *enkanyit* as given by the local leaders

Among the examples of unchanged Maasai culture that B mentioned, dress code, livestock keeping, the age system, and *enkanyit*, B said that *enkanyit* was the most important. He explained that the reason why Maasai people adhered to the age system was to maintain *enkanyit*. If they ceased organising age-groups, the major part of *enkanyit* would be lost. According to him, the age system and *enkanyit* were two sides of the same coin, and that *enkanyit* was usually exhibited by children and youths towards the elders because the latter had experience and wisdom lacking in the former.

B gave two examples of *enkanyit*. Firstly, when an elder enters a village and the youths are sitting on stools, as a mark of *enkanyit*, they will stand up to greet him and offer him a seat. Secondly, when an elder comes to a village and asks for a cup of water or a seat, and these are not offered, the elder may curse that person who treated him that way for lack of *enkanyit*. B stated that it was generally believed that the elders had such powers.

On the other hand, A emphasised in his explanation of *enkanyit*, that its meaning was so encompassing that it was difficult to explain. To him, a typical example of *enkanyit* was demonstrated in ways of greeting the elders. When an elder approaches the youths, they must stand up and greet him. A woman must bow to him to convey a respectful greeting. One cannot walk past the elders without fully stopping to greet them.

A said that *enkanyit* was not necessarily one-way among the age-groups, but above all, it must be shown from the younger persons to the older persons, and then the seniors would reciprocate the respect to the juniors. According to him, parents and elders are the secondary-gods, and thus, if one does not show *enkanyit* to the elderly people, his children may die or go insane. A, the elder, also said that the elders must also have a sense of *enkanyit*. As examples, A explained that the elders need to use polite expressions without any insulting words, towards the younger generations and listen attentively to their opinions. In this context, *enkanyit* is evaluated in terms of verbal conversation, one of the most ordinary and usual ways of communication, as well as in the behaviour of greeting. In addition, A mentioned that *menye layiok* taught the youths how to behave in rites of passage such as *eunoto* and *olngesher*. So *enkanyit* extends to ritual circumstances. The dictionary would explain respect as a feeling as well as a behaviour and also synonymous to the noun, 'aspect,'⁽⁷⁾ but both A and B explained *enkanyit* basically as a behaviour based on the age-grades, the fundamental categories of their age system.

The author has made regular visits to the Amboseli area for more than 10 years. The local Maasai people greet each other in the above expressed *enkanyit* way, where the youths first offer a seat to an elder, even elderly women bow deeply to the male elders, and when children encounter senior persons, they bow. When the author stays at the home of his research assistant, the children of the assistant's family and in the neighborhood come to greet him and bow. According to the leaders' explanation, in doing so, they are actually practicing and keeping alive *enkanyit*.

2. The argument of *enkanyit* in literature

For a better understanding of *enkanyit* and to contextualise the explanation as described by the local leaders in the Amboseli area, the author will introduce here two classic Maasai studies (Hodgson, 2001; Spencer, 2004).

First, Spencer (2004) scrutinised the details of the age system and rites of passage of the Matapato section. Using many examples, he explained *enkanyit* and wrote that *enkanyit* was not only conducted for one's peers, leaders and older men in general, but also for women and girls (Spencer, 2004: 47, 82, 105, 130, 153). Spencer (2004) wrote of the difficulty in refusing an elder's requests, listing various cases involving *enkanyit*.

However, Spencer (2004) in marked difference from the Amboseli leaders attached more weight to a kind of groupism. For example, he wrote that, 'when an elder is formally approached on behalf of a group of peers, he would not be expected to dare to refuse' (underline by the author, Spencer, 2004: 210) and, 'young men

develop a sense of respect as an essential step towards their elderhood They learn to restrain their desires as individuals in response to the wishes of the group. This ethic of self-denial is a virtue that premature elders are assumed never to acquire' (underline by the author, Spencer, 2004: 82). Spencer considered *enkanyit* akin to an ethic or a virtue. It differs from the authors findings with the leaders of the Amboseli area, who explained *enkanyit* as behaviour and spoken words.

Hodgson (2001) researched various sections of Maasai people in Tanzania from the perspective of gender. She expressed *enkanyit* as 'a key principle of Maasai social relations' (Hodgson, 2001: 4), and wrote that, 'Relationships between men and women varied by their age, kinship, clan and age-set affiliations, but they were generally based on mutual respect (*enkanyit*) and relative autonomy' (Hodgson, 2001: 26). Hodgson (2001: 39) explained that, 'Mutual respect, or *enkanyit* was central to defining and monitoring appropriate behaviours between and among men and women of different ages, and it still serves...as the guiding principle for Maasai social protocols and ideals' (underline by the author).

Hodgson (2001) also pointed out the degeneration of the sense of respect among the Tanzanian Maasai. It was reported that many Maasai people in Tanzania thought the social transformations after colonisation and independence indicated 'an increasing lack of respect' lamenting that, 'There is no respect these days' and that, 'I want the old life where people respected each other' (Hodgson, 2001: 273). As the reasons, people mentioned alcohol, money, and greediness or selfishness. On the other hand, Hodgson wrote that, 'some are more hopeful' (Hodgson, 2001: 273), but these same people also admitted the increasing lack of respect, saying, 'Life has changed a great deal', 'The customs of the past were stupid' or, 'Everything has changed and we should just accept it' (Hodgson, 2001: 273).

Compared with Spencer (2004), Hodgson (2001) discussed *enkanyit* more from the perspective of behaviours rather than ideas. Another difference between the two studies is that research by Spencer (2004) was undertaken between July 1976 and September 1977 on the age system that encompassed *enkanyit* at that time, Hodgson (2001) studying the Maasai in the 1990s recorded the people's sense that the culture of *enkanyit* had fallen into decline.

3. Distinguishing features of *enkanyit* as understood by and on behalf of local leaders in the Amboseli area

Both the leaders in the Amboseli area and the previous literature regard *enkanyit* as a fundamentally important culture of Maasai society that guided the people's behaviours in the Maasai age system. The age system is intertwined with *enkanyit* and *vice versa*. In that sense, it can be said that *enkanyit* remains unchanged as a core of Maasai culture/society.

However, the author would like to point out that the explanation on *enkanyit* given by the Amboseli leaders was limited to the behavioural dimension. To them, before any ethic of self-restraint/selflessness for the sake of the community, behaving and communicating with other people properly was all important. This does not mean that they think psychological aspects are worthless. Nonetheless, it must be noted that, to them, the sure inheritance of some behavioural practices meant

the succession of *enkanyit*, suggesting to the author that even if the word of *enkanyit* is shared, its meaning can be different according to age and place.

There is a strong contrast between the Amboseli Maasai and the Tanzanian Maasai. The former proudly insist that they are maintaining *enkanyit*, and the latter acknowledge that they are losing it. This study cannot answer the question as to why there is this strong contrast about *enkanyit*. However, the results of Woodhouse and McCabe (2018) on the well-being of Maasai people in northern Tanzania, whose study sites overlapped with that of Hodgson (2001), may provide a clue. When all groups of youths, elders and women in the area had ‘a sense of [in]security about the future and being able to adapt to change,’ Woodhouse and McCabe concluded that ‘These feelings are very much based in historical and continuing instances of land and resource alienation’ (Woodhouse & McCabe, 2018). Here, ‘a sense of insecurity’ is connected to the instability and uncertainty about land issues.

What is contrasting is that a sense of insecurity about land is not felt as much in the Amboseli area. In Kenya, the modern landownership was introduced to the Maasailand in the 1950s (Mwangi, 2007), and the people in the Amboseli area are generally positive about obtaining private landownership because it enables them to embark on agriculture and other development initiatives (Meguro & Inoue, 2011). There are frictions about the demarcation and allotment of communal land in the area, but there is little anxiety as to land alienation. If ‘a sense of insecurity is shaping priorities for other aspects of well-being’ as Woodhouse and McCabe (2018) have argued, the contrasting assessment on *enkanyit* can be attributable, to some degree, to these different situations in landownership.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper is to clarify the local understanding about the change in the Maasai traditional culture, and to examine the accuracy of the globally circulating narrative of the Maasai Olympics touting innovation.

The author has found that the information disseminated about Maasai culture and society by the BLF may not be shared entirely by the Maasai community. Not only does the official website explain the culture and opinions of the Maasai inaccurately, but also the process of organising the Maasai Olympics was thought inappropriate by the respected leaders of the local community. The local leaders acknowledged that the traditional culture of the Maasai has been affected in terms of religion, livelihood, and education, they insisted that they have maintained a sense of respect and thus their culture core was unchanged. However, such local opinion and the popular discourse obscure the fact that while the globally dominant narrative of the Maasai Olympics has been appropriated by the outsiders, the misrepresentation of Maasai’s traditional culture is disseminated, even if the Maasai have come to be aware of the politics of representation as some studies demonstrate.

The sense of respect, *enkanyit*, has been a culturally and socially important term

in many Maasai studies, and therefore, it is not surprising that the Maasai people in the Amboseli area to this day proffer *enkanyit* as their cultural core. However, their understanding of its meaning is shifting from the prior studies, and the opinions on its continuity differ contrastingly according to place. This study cannot explain the exact reason for this, but the author will only suggest that there may be a possible relation to the difference in landownership. Still, it is at least clear that to simply write off the Maasai people or the African pastoralists as changing is to miss the reality.

NOTES

- (1) From here on, general information from the official website of the Maasai Olympics (<https://www.maasaiolympics.com/>) will be cited without reference. Information and insight gained in the field research will be written as such. See Meguro (2017) for details of the Maasai Olympics including the account of the second Maasai Olympics as well as opinions of the local youths who took part in the event.
- (2) An exception is a study by Woodhouse and McCabe (2018) on the ‘good life (*engishui siada*)’ in Maasai communities in northern Tanzania. They reviewed the recent discussion on well-being, and pointed out the three interacting dimensions, namely the objective material circumstances, subjective values and evaluation, and the relational components as subjects of investigation. Respect was mentioned as a critically important element for the Maasai society, but without any further explanation of that idea itself.
- (3) The URLs of each citation’s source are: 1) <https://www.maasaiolympics.com>, 2) and 3) <https://www.maasaiolympics.com/about-maasai-olympics-kenya>, 4) and 5) <https://www.maasaiolympics.com/maasai-olympics-kenya-history> (Accessed December 10, 2018).
- (4) <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/12/05/africa/gallery/maasai-olympics/index.html> (Accessed December 10, 2018).
- (5) For example, the BBC reported that, ‘Chester Zoo has helped organise a special sports tournament designed to discourage an African tribe’s culture of killing lions.... It is hoped the 2014 Maasai Olympics could help foster a culture-change’ (<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-30455141>), and one travel agency advertised the fourth Maasai Olympics as ‘a biennial event making strides to change the Maasai culture of lion hunting for status’ (<https://kerdowney.com/2017/02/maasai-olympics/>) (Accessed December 9, 2018).
- (6) *Enkipaata* is a boy’s dancing festival which precedes circumcision and initiation. *Eunoto* is a ritual festival where another special ritual leader (*olotuno*) is chosen and a new age-group of youths is officially ‘elected.’ *Olngesher* is a graduation ceremony from the age-grade of youths to that of elders. All are landmark events in the Maasai age system (Spencer, 2004), and registered as UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritages in 2018.
- (7) For example, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* explains the noun, ‘respect,’ has three meanings: a feeling of admiration for sb/sth because of their good qualities or achievements, polite behaviour towards or care for sb/sth that you think is important, and a particular aspect or detail of sth.

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