

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL CULTURAL CONUNDRUMS WHICH MAKE WOMEN PRONE TO HIV/ AIDS INFECTIONS: A CASE OF THE MAASAI OF KENYA

Dr. Stephen I. Akaranga: Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

Email: drifedha@yahoo.com Tel: 0723716790

Prof. Jude J. Ongong'a: Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Kenyatta University, Kenya.

Email: jude.ongonga@yahoo.com Tel: 0726569561

Abstract

The term conundrum may mean a tricky problem that is difficult to solve (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 2000: 251). It describes the problems of the African patriarchal society in which the sex-based assignment of roles projects a spectre of inferiority and unworthiness over women while casting the characteristics of superiority on to men (cf. Lumumba et al, 2011:99). Traditionally, most Africans tend to assume the position of women, and the Maasai of Kenya are not an exception.

Among the Maasai like most Africans, gender inequality and inequity are fundamental structures of social hierarchy believed to shape how people are related within the society. Being based on social relations, gender conundrums are part and parcel of the Maasai daily life and seem to be more pronounced in sexual relations. The argument of this paper is: HIV/AIDS is transmitted through; sexual contact, and exposure to infected blood or blood components and prenatally from the mother to the neonate (Dennis et al, 1989:31).

The paper attempts to answer the following questions: What are the patriarchal practices that lead to sexual oppression of women such as; female genital mutilation, widow remarriage, polygamy; what is the negative impact of marriage arrangements between young girls and elderly men among the Maasai? Is the practice of sharing women among age mates still practiced among the Maasai? And if so, isn't it a common path of HIV infections?

To actualize our investigation, the paper analyzes the cultural education system for socializing girls and suggests ways of ameliorating such patriarchal and cultural tendencies. This was done through field research involving administration of questionnaires to various groups apart from oral discussions with some elders from the Maasai community.

Key words: Conundrum, culture, patriarchal, matrifocal, human rights, HIV/ AIDS, religion, gender equity and equality.

Introduction

One of the important precursors at the global level of the recognition of women's human rights was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) in 1979. CEDAW provided a broad framework for women's rights that has been used in a number of countries to advance action at the national level (Gita Sen et al. 2007:23). This resonates with our discussion of cultural conundrums which place Maasai women at risk to HIV/AIDS infections. Maasai women, like women in other patriarchal societies are, as it were the "shock absorbers" of families and social systems in both regular and hard times. Furthermore, they bear these burdens with inadequate and unequal access to resources, to opportunities and possibilities for developing their own capabilities, and often in the face of inequitable restrictions, social controls and violence (Gita Sen et al. 2007:22-23). Such processes of inequality and inequity are believed to be perpetuated by cultural norms, regulations and religious beliefs and practices. These are some of the common conundrums that patriarchal male societies have used to oppress and subjugate women.

Meaning and Characteristics of a Patriarchal Community

Commonly, rulers use religion to legitimate their authority. Such a religious ritual affirms that the authority of the Ruler has been given divine sanctions. This explains the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings in the Middle Ages which maintained that the King held his position on the authority of God. In the Middle East, the Muslim Caliph was the vice-gerent of God on earth. In Iran, the Shah was the shadow of God, whereas in Japan, the emperor was himself considered a descendant of the gods and was the chief priest of Shinto (vide Moojan Momen 1999:408-409). Here in Kenya, the President and his Cabinet Secretaries (Ministers) take the oath of office using either a Bible or Quran. And, at the beginning of a life of parliamentary group, religious leaders have to be invited to pray, bless and spiritually sanction the occasion. Political authority therefore, be it at a national, local, lineage or familial level is commonly confirmed, sanctioned and perpetuated by religious belief and ritual.

At the beginning of feminist awareness and view of religion, attempts were made to explain the evolution of patriarchal societies and their characteristics. Such explanations though may sound academically logical, nevertheless beg factual historical veracity and remain mythological attempts intended to hypothetically justify a social practice and or problem. They suggest that societies in prehistory gave greater predominance to female deities than male ones. The agricultural-based civilizations of the Middle East for example, saw the sprouting of the crops from the soil as analogous to the female giving birth. Since the former underpinned the whole society, the latter became the symbol of the creation myths centred on female deities (Moojan, 1999:432-433). The continuity of belief in this mythological argument was terminated by the influx of nomadic herding tribes who were not dependent on agriculture, such as the Indo-European in Europe and the Israelites in the Middle East (Moojan, 1999:432-433). The male warrior deities then gradually replaced the female agricultural based ones. According to some archaeological evidence, the change seemed to have taken place in the 4th millennium BCE (vide Moojan, 1999: 433).

Joseph Campbell (1974) in his book *The Masks of God, 3 Vols ; Creative mythology; occidental mythology; oriental mythology* summarizes the process of change from female to male deities to have taken four stages in evolution of the creation myth in Europe and the Middle East as follows:

- The world born of a goddess alone;
- The world born of a goddess fecundated by a male consort;
- The world fashioned from the body of a goddess by a male warrior god;

- The world created by unaided power of a male god.

Some social anthropologists today tend to argue for prehistoric societies of matrifocal and matrilineal rather than true matriarchal societies (vide Moojan, 1999: 433). But, such matrifocal and matrilineal societies may have been viable only within relatively small groups, but as people began to live in larger communities “and in closer proximity, power relationships developed both within and between groups. Warfare led to male-dominated warrior culture and the emergence of the patriarchy (rule by the father or the man in the society) that exists as the social norm today” (vide Moojan, 1999: 435).

The early feminists, however were not only concerned with finding and explaining the origin and meaning of patriarchy, they also attempted to describe, compare and contrast the patriarchal characteristics with those of a matrifocal society. This is what immediately links us with the practices experienced by both young and old women in the Maasai community. Like in all patriarchal societies, power is the supreme value among the Maasai of Kenya. Those who have such power are important and are easily noticed and listened to by the rest around them. The men there give the greatest value to power, authority, control, ownership regulation, courage and strength. If one does not have power or is denied it by cultural tenets, s/he can hardly count. They rarely have a chance to significantly play a role in the social structure, because they do not account.

Among the Maasai as a patriarchal society, women are culturally viewed as children who cannot contribute when “adults” are taking a decision. They may be seen but not necessarily heard! The tradition upon which the patriarchy bases its power does not allow for matriarchal open participation without explicit sanction by the male folk! This is contrary to matrifocal society where the highest values include nurturing, life giving, compassion, sensitivity, spontaneity, creativity and giving support to others (Moojan, 1999: 435). Women are indeed very conscious of mutual interactions and cooperation. Have you ever met a real traditional Maasai lady from the rural area travelling alone?

As we mentioned already, the patriarchal authority is perpetuated by religious beliefs and practices. The same religion is used as an instrument of oppression. In the same way that the female deity was subjugated by the male warrior god, so women have been socially subjugated by men in most societies, the Maasai men not excluded. For the Maasai, African Traditional religion is responsible for social norms and androcentric conceptual and social frameworks for the perpetuation of patriarchy. An example of the Maasai men using religion as an instrument of oppression is seen in the control of sexuality of women in their society. This is because; generally it seems that indiscriminate sexual activity tends to threaten men in their social order. First, as (Moojan, 1999) points out, only the mother of a child is obvious in the biology of the procreative process. This threatens and undermines the ability of the male to identify his offspring. And in the absence of such identification of a legal offspring, a father may find it hard to assume the process of inheritance of social position, property, and wealth and associated paraphernalia of power as the highest value of the patriarchal society. Accordingly, the only way to control female sexuality to be certain of paternity of every offspring is to control and supervise vigorously the social activities of the female folk. All her social interactions must be guided and guarded. Among the Maasai, these measures as we shall soon see have to be enforced right from social puberty rite to old age.

The Female Genital Cut (FGC): Where do we come from and where are we going?

The Maasai of Kenya are among the African communities which take seriously the initiation rites of both boys and girls. This ritual of social transformation is taken as one of these people's cultural heritage through which every adolescent has to go through. In this part of the paper, we we briefly examine and discuss its traditional meaning and significance before finding out its present interpretation against the backdrop of gender mainstreaming.

The initiation rites are also known as rites of separation from the asexual world commonly followed by rites of incorporation into the world of sexuality and into a group confined to persons of one sex or the other (vide Van Gennep 1960:67). These rites involve both symbolic ceremonies and ethical instruction. The patterns of ethical obligation that previously characterised the initiate as a child are suddenly replaced by a new pattern and new ethical expectation and behaviour come into play. That is, the initiation rituals introduce the initiate to new obligations, new ethical responsibilities and new opportunities so as to respond creatively to the adult challenges presented by the life shaping situations. To the Maasai therefore, such an individual has passed through a process of maturation into the adult community.

Maasai, girls who have reached the age of twelve up to fourteen are accordingly deemed suitable candidates for the rites of social transformation. Such girls unlike their boy counterparts, who would go into the forest for seclusion, are instead adopted by an elderly lady under whose tutelage they are placed. The community expects the lady to train these girls on the tenets and customs of the Maasai people, the role of women, their relationship with men, hygiene, and domestic chores. It is difficult for outsiders to conclude that such an elderly lady would be aware of negative complex socio-cultural arrangements that accompany the process of women's rites of initiation. After all, it is such elderly ladies themselves who are in fact the strongest advocates for the preservation of patriarchally designed practices that may enhance and perpetuate women's subordination. It is they who carry out the operations of circumcision.

Initiation rites do indeed have social and religious significance. Their features include: instruction as we have pointed out. They are exclusive, to underscore the division of labour and responsibility in a society; they are authoritative, to give the newly initiated persons power to participate in adulthood decisions and responsibilities. The source of complaints about women's rites of initiation is linked to its feature of being physical; That is, the ordeal of the ritual includes the shedding of blood where part of the body is cut. This, for traditional African Religious heritage, is viewed as a sacrificial act because the candidate is believed to pour out his / her blood freely to be united with the ancestors and founders of the society.

Unfortunately, the rite which is variously described as women's circumcision, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and or Female Genital Cut (FGC) has not come down well in the contemporary gender conscious world. It is seen as one of the most dehumanizing ritual performed on other human beings. It is said that both sexually and medically, it does not only deny a candidate sexual excitement, but may also endanger a young woman's life at the moment of giving birth. Yet religiously and perhaps socially, it is this "mutilation" that proves that the individual has graduated from childhood to adulthood, and has been automatically incorporated into a defined group since the operation leaves ineradicable traces, the incorporation is permanent (cf Van Gennep 1960:72). Against the denial of sexual excitement, this same author argues that it is not women that are disadvantaged but rather both male and female that get the cut do suffer the same denial! He says: circumcision or the cut tends to hinder coitus, since desire is reduced by lesser sensitivity of the glans penis. Similarly excision of an erogenous centre, section of the perineum, and sub-incision of

the penis also diminish sexual excitability. Unfortunately, this general statement can hardly go without reaction.

Owing to time expenditure, we shall not go into the history and types of women cut that have provoked the wrath of feminists all over the world. What is important to remember is that for traditional and culturally bound societies, male circumcision and female clitoridectomy and labia removal are needed for one to become fully a man or fully a woman (Asaad, Marie B. 1980:4). And, among the Maasai, before a girl goes for this ritual, she may have been betrothed to a potential suitor, who in most cases is an elderly person already having his own family. The point of concern is that the girl has no say in the arrangement and decision which is made on her behalf by the father or brothers. Mainly because the potential husband must have been paying dowry as he waits for the ritual to be performed. Does this indicate a violation of the human right of a young girl in question? Our answer is a definite yes, without even attempting to formulate precise answer and justification for our position. This therefore brings us to the discussion that the Maasai patriarchal society inflicts psychological torture upon women through arranged and or polygamous marriages.

The Sexual Violence of Arranged and Polygamous Marriages

Sexual violence means any sexual action intended against the will of a person. It may cover rape, but it does not necessarily mean a rape case. Even when someone consents a sexual activity, the brutality a partner shows might make this consent pleasure turned into coercion. It is a behaviour adapted during a consented or non consent sexual activity and it therefore occurs even with regular partner outside of rape situation (vide B. Clarence Loosli 2004:12). Rape on the other hand is the offence of forcing a person to submit to sexual intercourse against that person's will. As such, a woman, girl, a man, or a boy can be raped by any unknown or known person including regular partner. This is why today, it is generally pointed out that sexual violence is an important element of women's HIV/AIDS risk. Among the Maasai, when a girl has gone through the initiation rite and is living with the adopted mother, she is not allowed to heal completely from the cut. She has to go to her intended husband when the wound has not healed and unless the mother of the husband hides her in her hut, the intended husband has to consummate the marriage despite the relatively fresh wound. This is sexual violence combined with violation of one's own human right.

The poor girl has nowhere to take refuge. She cannot go back to her parents. No. She is socially an adult and must take the responsibility of an adult. She may have no idea whether the said husband has been infected with any disease. She has to take the risk especially when the new husband has several wives. Yayori Matsui (1994:124-133) has given accounts of chilling stories of sexual violence inflicted upon women in the third world in the name of patriarchal culture and religion. Examples of which include the maiming of the female body, that is, genital mutilation or female circumcision as practiced among the Kenyan Maasai, and Sati, the burning of a widow alive alongside the dead husband as practised in parts of India. She points out how four Filipino women in Nagoya Japan were forced into prostitution and when they attempted to escape, "the owner placed iron bars over the window to prevent escape, and when one of the women made an attempt to do so, the owner ordered that she be raped by male employees. She was confined in a room called the 'monkey box' (migrant Asian women are sometimes called 'monkeys') and raped repeatedly by two men while other men watched "Yayori Matsui (1994:126). We have included this account here to dispel preconceived assumption that sexual violence against women is worse among Africans than in other countries. Observe the level of humiliation these particular women went through. One may wonder what men can do to women in the name of patriarchy! It is difficult to believe that the said men were normal. But are we here in Kenya any different? When a young Maasai girl is pulled

out of school to go and be forced to marry someone older without being given a chance to make her own choice let alone going on with her school, how better are we than others!

Among the Maasai, girls are commonly booked for marriage before the rite of initiation and as we have pointed out above, the age of the groom to be is never considered. Once the girl's parents make the decision, it is final and binding. The traditional practice of social age mates' sharing of wives is not completely gone as yet. Even though for the educated, the practice is gradually being unpopular. But the practice of polygyny where one man has several wives living in their separate homesteads does not seem to help in disregarding the practice. When a husband is spending days in another homestead, the chances are that the woman or the said age mate may take the opportunity and hide under the cultural assumption and have a relationship. In the process the woman would be risking her life for HIV/AIDS infection. Why? Because the said husband's friend might be having sexual relationship with other women under the same pretext. To end this part of the paper, we need to underline the fact that young girls and women in general are sexually oppressed when they are given in a forced marriage, when they are forced by patriarchal culture to sleep with their husband's friends and when they are pulled out of school to be married in polygamous set up. This brings us to the discussion of the danger of various multiple sexual partners as common paths to HIV/AIDS among women in a patriarchal dominated society.

The Risk of Multiple Sexual Partnerships

We already made reference to the danger of multiple sexual partnerships in the practice of sharing wives among the Maasai as a part of cultural tenets. But, polygamy which is a marriage of one man with more than one wife is equally dangerous in the age of HIV/AIDS. Polygamy among the Maasai is widely practiced because, as a patriarchal community, they fear dying without children and again in their social group, power is demonstrated by having many wives and children. In fact, traditionally, in polygamy, men may find the advantages of variety to access sex during taboo periods of menstruation, pregnancy and lactation. Apart from such subjective benefits, the Maasai like other African Societies practice polygamy because of the cheap labour supplied by several wives and their children. Polygamy however, is not only an African form of Marriage; it is also found among the interlocutors of monotheistic religions as can be seen both in the Hebrews' Old Testament and the Muslim Holy Quran. Whatever the traditional advantages of this pattern of marriage, today it places Maasai women and other African women in a dangerous situation of being prone to HIV infection.

In a polygamous marriage, the moment one of the partners is infected, be it the husband or one of the wives the whole group is endangered. This is why the practice of arranged marriages among the Maasai people places the young women intended for such marriages in dangerous position. Once more, the African tradition favours men's decision and or authority over their wives' sexuality. The women are not expected to discuss or negotiate their sexual options. They cannot suggest the use of condoms even when they suspect that their partner may not be safe. Even if they had knowledge that one of their co-wives is having an affair outside the marriage, they can hardly persuade their husband to take precaution. Apart from the health hazard posed by plurality of spouses, the Maasai's tradition of widow inheritance is equally unsafe.

Widow inheritance or widow re-marriage is commonly practised by both the Maasai and other Kenyan communities. In the western part of Kenya, it has been cited as one of the outstanding paths to HIV infections. Traditionally widows were "inherited" by men who were already married. This pattern of marriage is somewhat oppressive in that more often the widow may not have total

freedom to select the potential husband. And the wives of the said man may not have much say in the arrangement.

In the past, widow re-marriage was somewhat a useful cultural practice. It meant that a community was responsible for taking care of the widow and her children. Her husband's family took the responsibility for her welfare. Today, however some immediate family members, due to economic hardships of supporting a widow and her children and being influenced by Western education and religions, and of course fear of HIV infection, may not be ready and willing to take the responsibility. This in a way leaves the widow with no alternative but to be "inherited" by any person who may himself already have been infected. If such a person takes her, since culturally she is not allowed to go away with her children, she will definitely be infected. On the other hand, if the original husband of the widow died of HIV infection, it is the widow who will infect the man who in turn will infect his wife or wives. And when this man eventually dies, his wife/ wives who are already infected will be equally inherited. They too, will infect the inheritor who also will inherit his wives. And so, the chain continues. This is why widow inheritance, irrespective of which community practices it, is indeed a dangerous cultural path that places women in dangerous health status. It must be pointed out as indicated above that, not every Maasai is willing to encourage widow inheritance. But, it is still a part of the custom to which women are subjected to.

Among the Maasai, like other African patriarchal communities, men and women are not considered equal. Accordingly, in mutual relationships equality in respect and communication is almost nonexistent, making the discussion about serious issues such as sexual relationships and sexual diseases very difficult (Nayree L. Sheldon, 2009). But even though, the Maasai women may seem tolerant owing to some apparently intimidating cultural practices, and harsh economic and social conditions; some are prone to transactional sex. This is because many a times, a husband may be constantly away with other co-wives in different homesteads and may pay less attention to her personal needs. Transactional sex is a common situation where one partner has intercourse in exchange for money, material gifts or favours. Such a transaction can be initiated by any of the party, the woman or the man (Clavence Loosli, 2004:28). It is nevertheless our argument that whatever may be the explanation; a woman would be driven to such arrangement because of the initial unfairness created by a mindless society which coerces young women to enter into marriages without putting into consideration their human right and dignity. Accordingly, the risk still stands since transactional sex is open to multiplicity of sexual partners.

Perhaps one of the common ways by which Maasai women can be protected against such nefarious action like transactional sexuality is to empower them. A real change in status of women within their communities can evidently increase women's self-confidence and self respect, but if these women are not receiving the same support and respect from their partners at home the process will be counterproductive (Nayree L. Sheldon, 2009). Sincere partnership within relationship and communities are a must in Maasai community where there is need for women to freely express their views without any fear of cultural intimidation. For example, the parental practice of arranging for their daughter's marriage or even pulling them away from schools to go for initiation rites to be married and start a family at a tender age should not be encouraged. And, it is not only for women even young men may be prevented from marrying a woman of their choice if parents do not approve the choice. Let alone a common violation of women right, where a husband may batter the wife and the later is not allowed to go back to her parents, but to the mediator or match maker's homestead. Indeed cultural situations and problems which perpetuate gender disparity and increase chances for HIV infections must be seriously discussed and disregarded altogether.

An intergenerational sex is another form of multiple sexual practices. This in the Kenyan context is known as “sugar daddies” relationships! It is mainly common between young women and rich elderly men. Kenyans tend to have a naughty and negative attitude towards this practice. Unfortunately it is very much part of the society. It is occasioned by economic hardship and lack of economic viability that most women be they young or old, Maasai or otherwise, find themselves in. Among the Maasai, women have less land if any, wealth and property, granted “they have higher burdens of work in the economy of care-ensuring the survival, reproduction and security of people, including young and old” (Elson, 1993, quoted by Gita Sen et al 2007:12). These women like any other women in Africa are the “backbone” of Maasai society because they are the core of their families. They are the ones who take care of the “manyattas”- huts, sell milk, cook and look after their children to ensure that they are strong and healthy. Unfortunately they are not economically empowered. In this community, girls are educated less as per cultural tenets and more physically restricted, and those who may be employed tend to be segregated in lower paid, less secure and informal occupations.

Indeed, like in other parts of Kenya, gender hierarchy as we have pointed out governs and determines how people are supposed to live, believe and behave. That is, what means to be a girl and a boy; a woman or man is all guided and guarded by cultural belief systems. In such a background of too much emphasis on hierarchical and cultural determinants, women may be viewed as repositories of male folk. Otherwise how do we explain the arranged marriages of young girls to elderly men, if not because the girls have no choice. And that decisions must be made on their behalf.

Garcia-Moreno et al (2006a) adds that “restrictions on women’s physical mobility, sexuality, and reproductive capacity are perceived to be natural, and in many instances accepted codes of social conduct and legal systems condone and even reward violence against them” (quoted by Gita Sen et al 2007:13). They are therefore, seen as objects rather than subjects or (agents) in their own home and communities, and this is reflected in norms of behaviour codes of conduct and lack of economic viability, but we can hardly ignore the psychological aspect, namely that in an oppressive environment, when one notices a window for some sort of recognition and love as deceptively offered by the so called senior or “sugar daddies”, they will certainly fall for it.

Unfortunately, such short lived love and recognition in this part of the century is associated with health hazard-the possibility of HIV infection. This is because intergenerational relationship is one of the major factors in the feminization of HIV/AIDS not only in Kenya but in Africa (Vide UNAIDS, 2004:95). A report by the Secretary General’s task force on women did identify three factors which are highly responsible for contribution to women’s vulnerability of HIV in Africa to include: silence that surrounds sexuality, transactional and intergenerational sex and of course violence against women within relationships. Among these, intergenerational sex is suspected to lead to high rates of infection among African girls (vide UNAIDS 2004).

Among the Maasai, as pointed out above, young girls are forced to marry potential husbands who are older than them. And, as per cultural rule in a patriarchal set up, young women and women in general can hardly negotiate safe sex even if they wanted to use a condom(s). This is made more difficult when almost under age like some Maasai girls are forced to polygamous pattern of marriage. Old men tend to be violent against any advice related to sexuality. A young girl before an elder spouse therefore has no chance for requesting for the use of a condom both in intergenerational relationship and in a polygamous marriage. Otherwise how do we explain the common physique of fairly thin and relatively short Maasai women, though with generally white

teeth and shining face. Some of it is because they were relatively young when they were married to men older than themselves and made to take care of a family at a very tender age.

In an intergenerational sex, the girl may be reminded by the elder partner if they (girls) do not succumb to a relationship without precaution or condom, then they can as well choose between remaining poor or being rich! This is a common oppressive form of expression against women in Africa. It is common to hear a family member encouraging their young female to bow to a relationship or marriage solely to improve their social welfare. Unfortunately, in Africa and more so among the Maasai in particular most rich men are also liable to multiple sexual relationships because, they have money to lure the poor females! But as the saying goes, poverty makes people undergo or disregard their dignity. We once heard a young Kenyan woman argue that it would not matter, to have a suspicious relationship provided the potential partner is ready to buy her a car. Because she would eventually die, but after having driven a personal car! With this apparently emotional remark, we can now turn to the final part of this paper, discussion and conclusion.

Discussion of findings

Our data was derived from questionnaires and oral interviews among the Maasai of Kenya. Initially we had intended to interview two hundred (200) respondents from Kajiado County. Unfortunately due to our semester schedules especially examinations we were only able to interview one hundred and eighty (180) respondents. We employed the stratified random sampling method and distributed our questionnaires to male and female students at the two Universities-Nairobi and Kenyatta apart from men and women in the County. Both open and closed ended questionnaires were distributed to the said respondents, while the oral interviews were held with twenty informants. The questions were structured in such a way as to provide freedom and opportunity for respondents. In this way, they were able to express their own opinions and understand how culturally held values lead and open path to HIV infections. The total number of the category of our respondents is listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1- CATEGORY OF RESPONDENTS

Persons Interviewed	No. of respondents	Percentage %
Men	70	38.8
Women	30	16.7
Male students and Boys	50	27.8
Female students and Girls	30	16.7
Total	180	100

From both the completed questionnaires and oral interviews it seemed apparent that the younger group are not ready to blindly entertain the traditionally held values and customs.

This information is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2-FACTORS FOR THE SPREAD OF HIV/ AIDS AMONG THE MAASAI

Indicators	No. of respondents	Percentage
Transactional sexuality	90	50
Male circumcision	70	38.8
Female Genital Mutilation/Cut	65	36
Widow remarriage	130	72
Sharing of women by age mates	160	88.9
Polygamy	160	88.9
Transgenerational sexuality	110	61

These reactions were obvious from the way they responded to our questionnaires. For example, to the question: Can an adult Maasai engage in sexual relationships with any woman married to a man of his age-set? Only four people out of eight youth supported the idea. Adults were divided, but even then, twenty of them did not support the idea saying that the practice is no longer popular and this has been precipitated by the reality of HIV infections. Again, both educated men and women are not fully open to the practice.

Female students and girls were all opposed to pre-arranged marriages and the fact that some of them have to be removed from school to be taken away for clitoridectomy in preparation for marriage. We spoke to one young girl, who had run away from her parents when she realized their intention to discontinue her education and offer her in marriage. She was bitter and did not want the practice of female genital cut to be continued, let alone being married to some polygamous elderly men. Another example of cultural change among the Maasai is widow inheritance or widow remarriage. In the paper, we have attempted to justify why patriarchal communities tend to popularize plurality of spouses. That is, even those who may have more than one wife would still opt to take their dead kin's wife or wives. It seems this practice is dying out due to both present economic hardship that may prevent a man from supporting his wife/ wives and a widow's family. Unlike the Luo of Nyanza who tend to ignore the reality of HIV / AIDS when it comes to inheriting a kin's wife, the Maasai seem to be more cautious. Seventy two (72%) of those interviewed argued against widow remarriage citing infection. The reasons which traditionally supported polygamy are no longer accepted by the majority of the Maasai people, 88.9% rejected the practice of sharing wives between age-mates as we have indicated above and the same percentage questioned the simultaneous plurality of spouses.

Among the factors cited for spreading HIV infection, transgenerational sexuality apart from widow remarriage and polygamy was cited by one hundred and ten people who represent 61% of those who were interviewed. It is however more prevalent among the educated and the rich. From our discussion, the impression given is that from the outside, the Maasai customs attest that they are very ethical people. However, whether this is due to patriarchal authority, it is difficult to judge. Our third Table deals with the decision making by various categories of people in the community.

TABLE 3-RESPONSIBILITY AND OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY

Indicators	No. of respondents	Percentage
Maasai men are powerful in their community	180	100
The Maasai value boys than girls	140	77.7
Girls have no opportunity to own property	110	61
Women should participate in decision making	130	72
Bride wealth should continue to be paid	145	80.6
Wife battering is necessary among the Maasai	155	86.1

The view that the adult Maasai men are powerful was never doubted. The question was: Maasai men are powerful in their traditional households. Agreed or Disagree? The total number population of our interviewees agreed that this is true! We could not expect otherwise after discussing the characteristic of patriarchy at the beginning of this paper. Within this context of father figure authority we asked whether the payment of dowry/ bride wealth should continue or not and whether the Maasai married men beat their wives. One hundred and forty five respondents (145) conceded that bride wealth should not be paid because more often it is linked to the battering of women by their husbands who may mistakenly believe that because they paid dowry for their wives, they (men) have every right to do what they please with them. Since 86% of those interviewed agreed that wife battering is necessary among the Maasai, we felt that this is an attitude created by patriarchal power of oppression which starts at an early age of bringing up boys where they are given the impression of authority over female folk. But, the majority of girls including a few men who are educated feel that it is one of those traditions that should be disregarded.

TABLE 4- DECISION MAKING AMONG THE MAASAI

Indicators	No. of respondents	Percentage
A girl who has undergone Female genital mutilation is ready to get married	160	88.9
Girls and boys should have the opportunity to choose their future spouses	155	86.1
Widows should choose to be remarried	145	80.1

At the beginning of our field research, we did not know that boys too may be prevented by their parents from marrying women of their choice. This is why a total of 86% agreed that both boys and girls be allowed to select their marital partners, just as 72% felt that women should not only be seen but should be allowed to significantly participate in decision making.

Finally, different reactions and or answers to our questions is an encouraging proof that like all cultures, the Maasai culture is not stagnant. Parts of their culture are destined to ebb as new and more embracing global practices continue to influence the society and more people take the advantages of Western formal education systems. From our discussion of patriarchal authority, over the Maasai women and complexity of multiple sexual relationships apart from the reality of HIV/AIDS, in the society, it can be concluded that the Maasai socio-cultural practices are paths to HIV infections.

Conclusion

Our paper set out to pursue open dialogue between cultural beliefs and practices and HIV infections. In the course of our discussion, traditional surgery, that is, clitoridectomy, multiple sexual partnerships, and some forms of patriarchal oppressive practices have been identified as liable means and facilitators of HIV infections and transmission.

Commonly customs form the core of human culture and tend to be stronger and more persistent in pre-industrial societies especially in rural than in urban centres. When they are formalized in the social or religious spheres they lead to ethics, and when enforced in the sphere of rights and duties, custom leads to law (E.B. Taylor: 1871). Among the Maasai however, custom is a significant element of the social fabric. It is another word for tradition, a story that is memorized and passed down from generation to generation (vide Clarence Loosli 2004:5). In African tradition, in fact, custom is believed to link a people to their ancestors; this is probably why the younger members of the group are constantly reminded never to divorce themselves from their tradition. Fortunately, or unfortunately, any custom as a part of culture is subject to change. Its survival depends on the practitioners. It can easily vanish from the people when its utility is no longer evident. This is why we are arguing that all the Maasai patriarchal traditions which are inimical to the welfare of women should be dispensed with as irrelevant beliefs and practices. The rejection is even more urgent when these beliefs and practices are linked to the women's health.

Indeed, customs and traditions are not easy to change. More so, when they are used to justify and perpetuate inequality among people. But owing to contemporary challenges and influence of Western civilization and religions, the Maasai socio-cultural beliefs and practices will eventually ebb away as evidenced by the reactions we received from our field work. A number of researches have been conducted with regard to Female Genital Mutilation. In addition the Republic of Kenya ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, and in 2001 the country adopted its own legislation to fulfil those obligations. This is evident in the Kenyan Children Act of 2001 which is elaborated in *Section 14: Protection from Harmful Cultural Rites* and the law prohibiting Female genital Mutilation which was enacted on 30th September, 2011 through an Act No. 32 of 2011. In addition, alternative rituals have been devised to replace the FGM in communities that used to practice them.

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