

SOCIAL CHANGES IN THE MORANHOOD OF THE SAMBURU AGE SYSTEM: INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMCISION AND IRREGULAR MARRIAGE

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This study describes the changing process of the Samburu age system in north–central Kenya, focusing on the moranhood, a time in a man’s life that begins with circumcision and ends with marriage. In the Samburu age system, an age-set is formed once every 12–16 years with the mass circumcision, which involved the induction of boys into the age-set. In the past, one or two additional group circumcisions were also performed during this period, and those who were circumcised together formed a sub-age-set. Today, however, circumcisions are performed as many as ten times during this period, which has led to the disappearance of the sub-age-sets. At the same time, many moran have begun to ignore the rule that prohibits them from marrying. Consequently, today one can be inaugurated as a moran any time through individual circumcision and retire from moranhood at any time via sporadic marriage, thereby weakening the unity of the age-set and collectiveness of the moranhood. Moreover, considerable regional differences in how people view and behave toward the moranhood are growing. That is, the new trends in circumcision and marriage occur mostly among people in the highland, while many of those in the lowland still behave as people in the past.

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