
“Mombasa Morans”: Embodiment, Sexual Morality, and Samburu Men in Kenya

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Résumé

Les années 1980 ont vu l'expansion de l'industrie touristique au Kenya et durant cette période, de nombreux jeunes Samburu ont fait des voyages saisonniers vers les stations balnéaires touristiques du littoral pour gagner de l'argent. Ces hommes ont établi des relations avec des touristes blanches et se sont fait une petite fortune. Ils ont ainsi formé un nouveau groupe social à l'intérieur de leurs communautés d'origine. Cet article s'applique à montrer que ces hommes, fréquemment nommés “morans de Mombasa” ont fini par incarner les effets des représentations (post) coloniales de leur identité et ceux de la critique morale des jeunes de la même génération. Leurs efforts pour représenter l'exemple corporel spécifique du “guerrier Masai” dans le contexte du tourisme sexuel féminin a mené à des conflits eux-mêmes générateurs de nouvelles dispositions concernant le corps. Ici, la critique morale ciblant la sexualité de ces hommes a constitué non seulement un moyen discursif de discréditer les inégalités matérielles croissantes mais aussi une ressource symbolique pour fabriquer de nouvelles masculinités tout en créant une nouvelle conception du corps.

Abstract

With the growth of the Kenyan tourism industry in the 1980s, numerous young Samburu men migrated seasonally to coastal tourist resorts seek-

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ing the niche of tourism for material gains. By developing relationships with white female tourists, many of these men have rapidly accumulated wealth, and came to form a new social group within their home communities. This article argues that these men, often referred to as "Mombasa morans," came to embody the effects of (post)colonial representations of their identity, and the effects of the moral criticism of their age-mates. Their attempt to perform a specific bodily paradigm of the "Maasai warrior" in the context of female sexual travel led to conflicts generative of new bodily dispositions. Here, the moral criticism targeting the sexuality of these men constituted not only a discursive means of discrediting rising material inequalities but also a symbolic resource for fashioning new masculinities while refiguring bodies.

Introduction

"See that guy with the dreadlocks," David points out, "him too, he has a *muzungu mama* [white woman] in Mombasa." David and I were having tea at the Jadana motel when this young man passed by. He was a tall, skinny twenty-year-old, dressed in red shorts and a gray Puma shirt, wearing a large gold chain around his neck, and carrying a cell-phone in his hand. David continues:

He fucks the old lady, and she sends him money and gold. She bought him a bicycle and some goats. She is taking care of him and then she is proud she has a Maasai. Yeah, Maasai she says. Even those dreadlocks, those aren't Samburu. Us, Samburu, we don't have that.

David went to talk to an elderly Samburu man sitting at the next table. They laughed. He explained to me afterwards:

You know even the *apayaa* [old man] was laughing at this guy. Some years ago, he used to work at this hotel. He was cleaning the toilets here. And now, every time he is in Maralal, he comes and takes a room here. His parents live close by in a *manyatta* [huts compound]. But him, he can no longer sleep there ... there're too many flies [laughing].

David's criticism of his age-mate speaks to the reconfiguration of Samburu masculinities in the late twentieth century. More specifically, it is an instance of moral discourse that resituates Samburu masculinities in relation to white women's sexual travel. This article examines some of the ways in which young Samburu men who migrated seasonally to coastal tourist resorts, mostly to Mombasa, and engaged in relationships with white female tourists

came to embody both the effects of a neo-imperial commodification of their bodies for tourist consumption, and the effects of a moral criticism phrased in terms of sexuality. Their seemingly miraculous accumulation of wealth attracted a vociferous criticism, repositioning them within the moral economies of their home community: they became the "Mombasa morans (warriors)." Herein, contrasts in sexual behavior constituted a moral issue supplementing a rationalization of economic inequalities.

This reconfiguration of gendered identities in relation to global processes is ultimately about the inculcation of different bodily dispositions. The re-situation of Samburu masculinities with regard to female sexual tourism constitutes an embodied political matter. It is about the ways in which colonial and postcolonial histories of bodily stereotyping are generative of bodily dispositions. The body, thus, is the very site of cultural hegemony, and its "tangible processes are eminently susceptible to the kind of ethnographic scrutiny that may divulge the hidden hand of history" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, 41).

Strangely enough, the theorization of "sex tourism," and more recently of "female sex tourism" does not include embodiment as one of its analytical concerns. Even when "the body" is present in these discussions, it is disembodied; that is, it is treated merely as an object of consumption, a consuming object, or a form of representation. It is conceptualized through what Judith Farquhar called "a naive faith in the existence of material natures that are, in theory and essence, untouched by human history" (2002, 8). In studies of "female sex tourism," as I will show, this tendency results from the fact that the tourist site — the place where hosts and guests meet — is taken as an apparently isolated unit of interaction upon which all analytical energies are focused, and which is, therefore, defined merely in terms of situated power statuses and "sexual-economic exchanges" (Kempadoo 1999, 2001). Accordingly, the recurring question of these studies is whether or not women can be in a dominating position as consumers of sex tourism. Whereas some scholars argue that traveling women engaging in sexual relations with local men are occupying the same exploitative position as their male counterparts (Albuquerque 1998; Kempadoo 2001; Sanchez Taylor 2001; Phillips 1999), others argue that, in fact, women are doing something else, less exploitative, often referred to as

“romance tourism” (Dahles and Bras 1999; Jeffreys 2003). I argue that this very question, however helpful for comparative studies of tourism, leads inevitably to the de-historicization of the “tourist site,” and the analytical objectification of bodies and sexualities. Consequently, local men, for example, tend to be dealt with in an essentialist manner, either as “embodied commodities” (Sanchez Taylor 2000) or as mere consumers of female tourists’ sexuality (Jeffreys 2003).

Meanwhile, in the recent studies of men and masculinity in Africa, the analytical implications of embodiment have not yet come to be fully recognized. Responding to Luise White’s (1990) early call to theorize men in Africa, an emerging literature on African masculinities (Lindsay and Miescher 2003; Miescher 2005; Ouagane and Morrell 2005; Silberschmidt 2004) underlines the role of the dynamic social and historical processes in the continuous reconfiguration of masculinities on the continent. Herein, education, religion, wealth, and sexuality are only a few of the social forces that shape masculinities, and that are — in their turn — (re)shaped in the gendering process. Nevertheless, the embodied effects of such dynamic gendering processes have yet to be explored.

Instead, this article offers the alternative of analyzing the effects of these relationships, and of thinking “how to conceptualize these delicate and dramatic figurations and refigurations of local embodiments, identities and imaginaries” (Povinelli and Chauncey 1999, 442). Based on my fieldwork in Kenya in 2005, this study is about the re-shaping of Samburu masculinities through the embodiment of the effects of multi-contextual social processes.¹

Context: “Moran Mania”

At the end of the twentieth century, on a global scale, transnational travel reached the unprecedented level of 625 million international arrivals (World Tourism Organization 1999). In 1999, the number of tourists visiting Kenya was estimated at 969 000. By 2004, it had increased as much as forty percent, reaching 1 361 000 (ECPAT). Since Kenya’s Independence in 1963, the profitability of the agricultural production has fluctuated, but the tourist market has grown, and more and more people, mostly from West European countries, turned to Kenya as a holiday destination.² As such, since 1987, tourism has represented Kenya’s leading foreign exchange

earner, and now employs eight percent of the country's wage earning labor force (Omondi 2003).

Early on, the Kenyan postcolonial state foresaw some of the great financial opportunities opening up on the international market. Besides wildlife safaris, it began commodifying a certain "cultural heritage" that drew intensively on colonial paradigms. Within discourses of Kenyan cultural diversity, fashioned at the interface of the state's nationalist politics and the demands of the global market, the Maasai "emerged as the epitome of Kenya's national heritage," as local journalists put it, while "[t]he western tourist's love of them has only boosted their image" (Obonyo and Nyassy 2004, 2). The same journalists observe:

Considered the main selling point of Kenya's tourism, the Maasai are, indeed, one of the most photographed, filmed and written-about indigenous communities on earth; and their culture probably the most commercialized and exploited world over (Obonyo and Nyassy 2004, 3).

In the 1980s, most safaris already included visits to Maasai settlements in their schedules, and hotel administrators were periodically hiring groups of ten to twenty Maasai or Samburu men to perform dances for their customers. Meanwhile, women from European countries (but also, to a lesser extent, from Australia, North America, and Japan) began visiting Kenya armed with a clear image of the tall, slim bodies of the "vanishing" Maasai *morans* (warriors), walking half-naked, covered only by their red *shukas* (body blankets) and proudly carrying their spears and clubs. In the early 1990s, Kenya emerged as yet another international sexual destination, and among other forms of sexualized entertainment (see Omondi 2003; Schoss 1995),³ its draw relied intensively on eroticized representations of the Maasai and Samburu.

In Kenya, the Maasai became, as Edward Bruner put it, "the quintessential pastoralists and the *moran* (junior warrior) [became] the quintessential Maasai" (2005, 35). In December 2004, the *Lifestyle* magazine of Nairobi's *Daily Nation* announced a global tourist "mania" for the Maasai *morans*.⁴ There is, as such, a great awareness evidenced in the Kenyan public discourse with regard to the almost mesmerizing qualities of the Maasai image in opening tourist wallets. In this sense, the same article observes how this "moran mania" quickly gave rise to a "lucrative business," and

how consequently “scores of morans — genuine and fake alike — are flooding the coastal beaches to make a living from the trade” (Obonyo and Nyassy 2004, 2).

Among the Samburu of northern-central Kenya, this context was generating new opportunities for earning cash while performing a long-standing (post)colonial paradigm that accentuated the relative “cultural relatedness” of the Samburu to the Maasai. The fact that Samburu people are identified in various circumstances with the better-known Maasai, Kasfir shows, plays out in “both historical reality and current cultural politics” (2002, 371).⁵ Like the Maasai, the Samburu are a Maa-speaking ethnic group of semi-nomadic pastoralists. And whereas the Maasai live mostly in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania, the Samburu inhabit predominantly the semi-arid lands of the north-central savannah of Kenya. Most of the Samburu people raise cattle, and to a lesser extent goats, sheep, and in some areas, camels (Spencer 1965, 1973). By the mid-twentieth century, many have also taken up agriculture, livestock trade, or migratory wage labor (Konaka 2001; Fumagalli 1977; Holtzman 2003).

Here, the relative freedom associated with the status of the *Imurrani* (morán) is important for understanding why migration is prominent mainly among this age-grade. The period during which a man is *Imurrani* (plural: *ilmurrán*) is a time interval of up to fifteen years, into which a boy is initiated with circumcision, and which ends with the initiation of a new age-set. During this period, the young men are forbidden to marry, and have to spend most of their time outside the domestic unit of their parents.⁶ Some *ilmurrán* herd the cattle of their fathers away from home. Others, especially those who went to school, orient this period of their lives towards earning cash. Some become soldiers, watchmen, or police officers all over Kenya; but others seek to profit from tourism and orient themselves towards the tourist niche that has developed on the coast (Holtzman 2003). Whether it is done through cattle raids, wage labor, or tourism, an *Imurrani* is expected by his father to have at least some cattle ready for a bride price once he becomes a junior elder.

When I began my fieldwork in 2005, David was a *Lmooli Imurrani* (member of the age-set initiated in 1990; now, in his late twenties). His family was living on some hills close to the town of

Maralal in the Samburu District (Northern Kenya). Since his father had died four years prior, David was living with his siblings and his mother in the compound of his father's brother and his two wives. He had finished secondary school a couple of years before, and ever since, had been coming daily to Maralal where he waited for tourists and travelers to hire him as a tour guide. The money he earned in these circumstances was spent mostly on food, cattle vaccines, and clothing for himself and his family. In August 2005, a new age-set (the *Lkishami*) was to be initiated, and David was preparing to become a junior elder. However, he had neither enough cattle for a bride price, nor any stable source of income. His years of being an *lmurrani* had not allowed for any accumulation of wealth. Becoming a junior elder would subject him to the social pressures surrounding marriage; and David's inability to respond financially to these demands would put him in a difficult position.

David's was not an atypical case. Numerous young men found themselves in similarly contradictory situations. 2005 had been a year of particular economic hardship for many Samburu. First, the initiation of the *Lkishami* age-set was making high economic demands on families who had sons to be circumcised. The *emuratare* (circumcision) ceremonies called for livestock to be sacrificed, for high amounts of sugar and rice to be bought, new clothing, and ritual fees. Many families had to move long distances to the *lorora* (ceremonial compound) of their clan. There, the elders in charge of the ceremonies would demand money and alcohol. Second, with the initiation of the *Lkishami* age-set, their predecessors, the *Lmooli*, would become junior elders and would have to marry. Preparing bride prices of eight to sixteen cattle for each *Lmooli* son, sometimes as many as three to six to a polygynous family, placed an additional demand on local domestic economies. Third, the summer of 2005 marked a time of general crisis on the national labor market. Numerous workers' strikes that took place across the country proved ineffectual. In a public speech broadcast in early June 2005 on a national radio station, President Mwai Kibaki threatened workers who would not return to work with immediate replacement. As such, for many young Samburu men, the lack of capital coming with the crises on the national labor market, and the demands for investment in the age-grade ceremonies framed a particular situation of economic hardship and social tension.

David's critique of his *murata* (age-mate), quoted in the beginning, should be understood within this context. It was meant to question the morality of wealth accumulated "overnight." Not unlike accusations of witchcraft, so well documented in the different postcolonies of Africa south of the Sahara (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999), the criticism of the sexual morality of local men engaging in sexual relationships with white female tourists has to be seen as responding to the production of new inequalities. Attacking the sexual morality of men enriched through their relationships with white women became a discursive genre of gossip and scandal widespread among the inhabitants of Maralal.

At the time that David was leveling his critique, others had already come to form a new local "elite" displaying the material advantages of such relationships. For the past ten years, men had built themselves large villa-type houses on the edge of Maralal, in an area known as belonging to the "Mombasa morans" (and probably some officials). Many of these men opened hotels and pubs in the heart of Maralal. They also opened stores, or built commercial spaces for rent. Furthermore, most of them owned TVs and VCRs, cell phones, cars, large cattle herds, and had at some point traveled to Europe. All these were symbolic markers of wealth and socio-economic prestige. This accumulation of wealth and economic prestige, in its turn, placed these men in an ambiguous position, sometimes attracting relatives and friends that could benefit from their wealth, at other times becoming the target of moral criticism directed primarily at their sexuality.

Representing Bodies, Embodying Representations

Up until now, I have drawn out some of the general characteristics of the context of "morán mania." Now, I turn to a more concrete discussion of the role of the body in certain neo-imperial representations, that is, specific visual idioms inherited from a colonial era and recoded in the postcolonial tourist industry. I will also address some embodied effects of such representations.

The moral criticism targeting men who enriched themselves through relationships with female tourists is a discourse generated by and generative of bodily dispositions. When David spoke of his age-mate, the tone of his voice trembled with disgust, the features of his face strained with resentment. He had guided many female

tourists around the district in the past, but never had sexual relationships with any of them. Ultimately, as he came to find out, he was "too short" and "too chunky," and thus could barely pass as a "Samburu warrior." The possibility or impossibility of participating in the enactment of neo-imperial fantasies within the "morania" phenomenon presupposed, as such, not only a mere performance of specific bodily representations, but also the embodiment of the effects of such a performance.

And it is these particular embodied effects that are omitted in discussions of (female) sexual tourism, when the body is treated merely in terms of its objectification (commodification). With the sexual travel of women to the Caribbean, it is argued, local men become exoticized objects of desire. Carefully performing the Rasta body style, they play out onto a "cultural" attraction (Albuquerque 1998, 91; Pruitt and LaFont 1995, 425) that turns them into "embodied commodities" (Sanchez Taylor 2000; see also Phillips 1999, 199-200). "Sellers of 'cultural experiences,'" Sanchez Taylor observes, "have to be the bearers of very specific racialized and gendered identities" (2000, 48). Nonetheless, one needs to ask: what are the effects of assuming these identities, of trying to embody these cultural images?

In these studies, the effects of the commodification of bodies remain under-theorized, whereas the representations of bodies are also dehistoricized. In Kenya, it was a specific political and historical context that required the representations of Maasai or Samburu bodies to be performed in certain ways, at the same time that this performance materialized its effects in embodied dispositions and moral criticisms.

First, it shall be noted that representations of bodies are not free-floating signifiers, but culturally and historically situated discursive productions. The aesthetics of the current representations of the Maasai or Samburu bodies has to be understood as being based on politically informed discourses, inheriting certain hegemonic paradigms from colonial representations. If, on one hand, this new aesthetics emerged in response to the dialogue between national politics and the demands of the global market, on the other hand, there was a certain historical continuity in the ways in which the Maasai or Samburu bodies were envisioned. The commodification of (post)colonial representations for tourist

consumption is a reinvention of old colonial paradigms, some of which go back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Early travel accounts and colonial ethnographies set the path for what was to become a metropolitan fascination with the "change-reluctant" Maasai / Samburu (Kasfir 1999, 2002; Hughes 2006). Furthermore, coffee table books, postcards, films, and movies concretized this image, inscribing it into a colorful visual archetype, with "nostalgia being voiced for physical perfection itself" (Kasfir 1999, 73). The imperative of physical perfection was continuously carved out in the social relations of this aesthetic phenomenon, and ultimately determined what bodies were eligible to partake in its benefits (Meiu 2008).

Second, these representations are actively challenged in different contexts, especially when the question of who is legitimized to perform the persona of the Maasai / Samburu *morán* is posed in terms of ethnicity and bodily aesthetics. With a general awareness in Kenyan public discourse of the ongoing "morán mania" came a certain sense of chaos associated with the unfolding of the phenomenon, along with a certain anxiety among Kenyan authorities.⁷ This anxiety was evidenced in relation to the diffuse image of those who stood to benefit from "the trade." Nairobi's *Daily Nation* (*Sunday Lifestyle*) observes:

As the *morán* mania grows, the fake ones have become a source of both envy and loth [sic].... Luckily for the fake operator, virtually all tourists polled by *Lifestyle* could not tell the bogus *morán* from the genuine ones although some admit having had intense interactions with the locals.... Mrs Brigit Wurth, a tourist from Germany, confesses her ignorance over the true identity of the *morán*. "I have interacted with a number of them, most of whom asked me to assist them to go to Europe. But I couldn't tell a fake from a genuine *morán*," says the 67-year-old woman (Obonyo and Nyassy 2004, 3)

Genuine *moráns*, fake *moráns*, and ignorant tourists. The concern with the "authenticity" of the men benefiting from this "morán mania" phenomenon emerged at a time when individuals crossed ethnic identity boundaries in order to take up this highly ethnified persona. The ones benefiting from this phenomenon would soon, the concern went, no longer be identifiable in terms of ethnicity. Therefore, the article also provides advice on "How to

tell a fake from a genuine Maasai moran" (2004, 3):

A true *moran* has a distinct look, facial appearance and dress that the fake *moran* must ape. The change to "moranism" involves braiding the hair and dying it red with ochre. The candidate adorns himself in a red-white *shuka*, multi-colored chokers, earrings and bracelets, with a club to match. For a rare perfectionist, knocking out the two front teeth on the lower jaw is a must (Obonyo and Nyassy 2004, 2).

Fake *morans* can appropriate bodily decorations, earrings and bracelets, they can even go as far as "knocking out the two front teeth" in order to "ape" *moran* identity for ignorant tourists. But, it seems to be implied that there is something deeper, something that they cannot appropriate, and that makes them "fake" to begin with. And that is an essential ethnicity. And if, for these Kenyan journalists, the signs through which the "true moran" could be both recognized and "aped" were more about bodily adornments, for many tourists these signs were also about the forms of the body itself. Thus, the Samburu whose bodies did not match the image of the tall, slim, and "light-colored" *moran* persona, were often thought not to be Maasai or Samburu. Participating in tourism and developing relationships with white women was not a choice equally available to everyone. The aesthetic paradigms that framed the image of the Maasai / Samburu male body within the "moran mania" discussed above determined decisively what bodies were eligible to compete for its material advantages. The (post)colonial visual archetype of the tall, slim Maasai / Samburu warrior as it materialized in the social relations surrounding this phenomenon, had created its abject others: namely, short bodies, fat bodies, or any bodies that did not fit the stereotypical vision. The issue of who gets to benefit from the tourist niche became an embodied matter: for only certain bodies will have been eligible to employ the aesthetics of this post-colonial persona. During my research, numerous Samburu men whose bodies did not match these paradigms complained to me that they could not "pick up" tourists on the coast. Others told me of how, when a German film company came to Maralal to shoot *The White Masai* in 2003, many were rejected at a pre-selection because they were "not tall enough," "not slim enough," or "not light-colored" to pass as "Samburu" (Meiu 2008, 18).

Finally, this essentialized body/ethnicity equation, playing out

onto neo-imperial fantasies, became itself a motif of the moral criticism directed at the "Mombasa morans" in their home communities. As the postcolonial imaginaries of the Samburu *morans* phrased their limits in terms of bodily aesthetics and excluded abject bodies from contexts of wealth accumulation, those men whose bodies were left out transposed this issue into their criticism of a morally weak form of neo-imperialism. They ridiculed thus their age-mates' participation at the enactment of a primitivist spectacle for sexual purposes. As David sarcastically put it:

The *muzungu* *mamas* want the morans that are dressed with *kangas* [body cloth] and have spears. They don't want the ones who have pants and shirts. They say that the ones with *kangas* walk freely and have big dicks.... They want the ones that have long hair dyed with ochre. The boy probably went here to school and used to wear pants, but there [in Mombasa] they put on the *kanga* and take the spear to find *wazungu* [white people].

The criticism of the immorality of a certain objectification of "tradition" revealed a particular cultural logic. According to Samburu men who did not participate in the sexual tourism of the coast, the objectification of "tradition" within nationalist propaganda (schools and district festivals) constituted a way of "dignifying" Samburu cultural identity, at the same time that in Mombasa it represented a "vulgar" way of performing primitivist fantasies for sexual purposes. Nevertheless, as was often the case, many young men would participate alternatively in both forms of objectification.

In short, the strategic performance of postcolonial imaginaries of Maasai / Samburu bodies by Samburu men is not a mere theatrical play enacted on the "stages" of tourist resorts but, foremost, a moralized process effecting in embodied dispositions. Moreover, the objects of representation — the representations of bodies — are historically and politically phrased paradigms that transpose their limits unto the actors' embodied dispositions, and reshape these as they announce which bodies are eligible to compete for the material advantages of tourist performances.

Embodying Movement

In order to better capture the embodied effects of these neo-imperial fantasies, one needs to look at the ways in which the performance of such imaginations is part of an alternating or switching of

contexts. Emphasizing the embodied effects of movement between the Kenyan coast and the home communities of the Kenyan north is a fundamental step in understanding the way in which the interplay between local, national, and global phenomena are subjectively mediated. The Samburu men migrating seasonally to coastal resorts participate to multiple social contexts and therefore also come to embody the effects of moving between these contexts.

Studies of sex tourism — although about movement — tend to focus mainly on the interaction of individuals within a clearly territorialized tourist site. The "liminal" space of sex tourism, the place where hosts and guests interact as two sets of "liminal" bodies (Ryan and Hall 2001), that is, outside the contexts of their respective everyday lives, is nevertheless conceptualized as a place. This place becomes the stage of interaction upon which the analyst focuses almost exclusively (see Pruitt and LaFont 1995; Dahles and Bras 1999; Albuquerque 1998; Phillips 1999; Sanchez Taylor 2000, 2001; Jeffreys 2003). For some analysts, this "stage" of tourist interaction (generally the tourist resort) is itself structured by narrative plots of interaction. Klaus de Albuquerque (1998), for example, classifies the interaction of female tourists with local men in Barbados and Jamaica into clear-cut story plots. Here, local men are "setting the stage," "sizing up potential clients," "approaching" and "priming the female client," "initiating sex," and eventually "maintaining contact." Interactions begin with the female tourist's arrival, reach their peak through the actual "sexual exchange," and end more or less with her departure. With few exceptions (Wagner and Yamba 1986), discussions of female sexual tourism fail to look at the actors as subjects in multiple contexts, and thus tend to decontextualize the "stages" of tourist interactions. Herein, power is conceptualized merely in terms of statuses, and interaction in terms of exchange. This reverberates with what Povinelli and Chauncey criticize as a more general "troubling aspect of the literature on globalization" tending "to read social life off external social forms — flows, circuits, circulations of people, capital, and culture — without any model of subjective mediation" (1999, 445). This subjective mediation, the mediating subject, is necessarily the product of multiple contexts, and hence the movement between these contexts is fundamental to its formation (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Before returning to issues of subjectivity and

embodiment, I will draw out briefly some of the dynamics of movement among the Samburu men of northern Kenya.

In the Samburu District, the history of labor migration is relatively short. Although, some forms of exchange and trade have always entailed travel throughout northern Kenya, the Samburu economy was largely self-sufficient and locally autonomous until the first half of the twentieth century when the British colonial government introduced taxes and grazing scheme fees (in 1930), thus generating a need for cash (Fumagalli 1977, 210; Konaka 2001, 64; Spencer 1973, 187). Among the *Lkimaniki* age-set, circumcised in 1948, only a few men worked for wages in the military or the police. Due to insufficient administrative resources, throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the colonial government designated the Samburu District a "special and closed district," exit or entry being granted only to a few individuals (Holtzman 2003, 228). After Kenya's independence in 1963, numerous employment opportunities emerged, especially in the urban areas. Thus, throughout the 1970s, the number of Samburu wage earners working as watchmen, policemen, soldiers, or teachers has increased significantly (Sperling 1987). Among the *Lkuroro* age-set initiated in 1976, for example, 81.8 percent of the Samburu *ilmurran* participated at one point or another in paid labor (Holtzman 2003, 229). Recurring serious droughts in 1979-80, 1983-84, and 1994, and cattle disease in 1970 and 1976 often reduced herds by half (Konaka 2001, 65). This led to a more rapid adoption of agricultural work in some areas (especially the Loroghi and Laikipiak plateau), a strategic engagement in cattle trade, and a more intensive search for employment, especially during the period of *ilmurran*-hood. It was then, with the *Lkuroro* age-set, and its successor, the *Lmooli* age-set initiated in 1990, that earning cash became a notably significant alternative to cattle husbandry. Even under these circumstances, the money earned in wage labor was often invested in the cattle herds back home.

The seasonal migration of young Samburu men to the tourist resorts of the coast, especially to the town of Mombasa (but also, to a lesser extent, to Malindi) began with the spectacular growth of the Kenyan tourist industry in the 1980s. This circular pattern of migration raised important moral questions among the Samburu. If on one hand, the coastal towns were understood to facilitate new

possibilities of earning cash, on the other hand, their association with the "degrading" and "corruptive" forces of modernity was seen to pose a certain threat to local "culture" (as an essentialized idiomatic concept). Elders feared that, with their return, young men would bring back home some of Mombasa's disruptive immoral forces. In the 1990s, the wealth of the Samburu men migrating to the coast and engaging in sexual relationships with white women started materializing in the landscape of the home community. New villa-type houses, hotels, and commercial spaces built and owned by these men (with the financial support of their white girlfriends) represented material proof of their long-standing engagement with the coast. The moral criticism of their age-mates, then, discursively imbued the materiality of these buildings with the apparent "immorality" of the sexual practices in which they "originated." "Whom does this beautiful house belong to?" I would ask one of my friends in Maralal. "It's of a Mombasa moran," he would reply. "This is [from] the money he got from his old *muzungu mama*."

Samburu men migrating to the coast were actively participating in and reshaping the moral geography of their home communities. Their month-long absence from their home community (not unlike the absence of wage laborers) distinguished them from the cattle-herding *ilmurran*, who were still very present in the social landscape of the district. And, as the seasonal absence of men traveling to Mombasa was socially perceptible back home, the growing wealth of some of these very same men became concrete proof of their engagement in "immoral" sexual relationships. Meanwhile, their age-mates' critique of their wealth as well as of their sexual behavior positioned them into a new moral category within this moral geography. They were now the "Mombasa morans."

In the Samburu District, Mombasa was seen as a place of disorder and conflict, and therefore the *ilmurran* traveling there for the first time were advised by the elders to approach the area with much caution (Kasfir 1999, 80-81). In Mombasa, conflicts often arose between Samburu men and Maasai or Giriama men who were all trying to gain or even monopolize access to tourist resorts. In June 2005, for example, five Samburu *ilmurran* were stabbed to death in Mombasa, in a fight with a group of Giriama men. Similar conflicts often led to men being arrested for short periods of time

(Hofmann 2005, 9-13). Access to beach resorts was sharply policed, and "beach boys" were allowed only at certain hours and with special permission (Kasfir 2004). Conflicts also emerged among the Samburu *ilmurran* themselves over their white girlfriends. Here, envy and competition often led to serious fights between age-mates. Some *ilmurran* — mostly from among those who were fluent in both English and Swahili — might also have engaged in marijuana trade, and therefore had to deal with conflicts emerging within the marijuana distribution network (Hofmann 2005, 292, 296-97). Finally, although customary law prohibits alcohol consumption during the period of *ilmurran*-hood, some Samburu men often drank alcohol in places where their age-mates could not see them. As such, migration to the coast thus involved changes in social relations, which needed to be managed carefully if they were not to lead to serious conflicts or even death.

The *ilmurran's* migration to the coast also represented an embodied experience of displacement. Migration presupposed, first, a movement from the semi-arid environment of Kenya's northern savannah to the equatorial tropics of the coast. This meant, for one thing, a high exposure to malaria. A second change was related to the general social and moral landscape. Whereas the northern Samburu District is populated mostly by Samburu, and only a few Turkana, Borana, Somali, and Kikuyu families (living mostly in Maralal), the coast towns are much more cosmopolitan. Here, Indians, Arabs, Swahili people, Giriama, and Kikuyu share the towns with tens of other ethnic groups from all over Kenya. For the fact that these people did not obey the same food and sexual taboos as the Samburu, they were often said to smell "foul," and suspected of spreading HIV/AIDS (see Kasfir 2004, 326). Third, while in the Samburu District one could get around well only speaking Maa, life on the Coast required basic knowledge of both Swahili and English. Faced with these challenges and differences, the *ilmurran* who went to the coast for the first time often experienced what they called "Mombasa madness": a form of depression expressed in intensive shaking fits. The devotion of some *ilmurran* to a circular pattern of migration became thus an embodied reality.

Sidney Kasfir carried out ethnographic research among Samburu men in Mombasa in the early 1990s. Her work on the aestheticization and commodification of Samburu male bodies

(Kasfir 2004) and of the "souvenirs" associated with them (Kasfir 1999) contains rich ethnographic data. The *Lukuroro* age-set, Kasfir shows, was the first to migrate seasonally to Mombasa in great numbers.

So beginning in about 1981, when most of them reached their early twenties, pairs or small groups of Lkuroro, mainly but not exclusively from blacksmith families, made the seasonal migration all the way to the coast, where they congregated up to a hundred at a time in one small enclave between Mtwapa and Kikambala, a few miles north from Mombasa, among the beach hotels that hold German, Italian, British and American tourists. On the beaches, they sell the spears they have carried on the long journey from upcountry Maralal to coastal Mombasa. Since about 1995, they have been supplanted by the Lmooli age-set, who entered the warrior age-grade beginning in 1990 (Kasfir 1999, 75-76).

Kasfir gives an insightful description of the actual trip to the coast. For the trip, the *ilmurran* dressed in blue jeans, T-shirts, jackets, and sneakers, and never in "traditional" attire. They tried to make themselves "indistinguishable from other Kenyan men in the overcrowded *matatus* [mini-buses]" (Kasfir 1999, 77), and to avoid being ridiculed in Nairobi where they were seen as "backward" and "primitive." Once in Mombasa, however, they dressed in their *shukas* (body blankets), and beads, for they knew that in jeans and shirts they stood far less chance of attracting tourists (Kasfir 1999, 77). These shifts in clothing types point to a strategic alternate distancing and reappropriating of an objectified "culture." As Kasfir (2004) suggests, the "warrior" became a living "theatre." And it is only with skilful management of this objectified identity, I argue, that these young men could become successful at attracting tourists. The return of a Samburu man to the coast the following year depended very much upon his skills interacting with tourists and others.

The strategic management of "tradition," as reflected, for instance, in the switching of the dress code, was also evident in the back-and-forth shifting of "sexual scripts" employed to strategically respond to the demands of tourism. What the white women desired, sexually or otherwise, constituted a genre of discussion on its own among Samburu men traveling to the coast. Kissing,

hugging, or holding hands with women were only some of the sexualized behaviors that an *Imurrani* would never adopt publicly back home, in Maralal, but would do so in Mombasa.

Samburu men traveling to the coast operated as mediating subjects within a moral geography synthesizing local, national, and global processes. Their movement herein, in its turn, inculcated particular bodily dispositions.

Masculinities, Moralities, and "Mombasa Morans"

The reconfiguration of Samburu masculinities in relation to white women's sexual travel was phrased, as such, within this particular moral geography, and was animated by the new embodied dispositions that it inculcated. The "Mombasa morans" came to form a different masculinity, one discursively set apart from other masculinities by moralized notions of wealth and sexuality. An emphasis on the moral criticism phrased in terms of their sexuality can help capture the complex circumstances under which masculinities are reshaped in relation to each other.

In Maralal, for example, one encounters a variety of "sexual scripts" (Gagnon and Simon 1973) or sets of socially prescribed sexual behaviors. Distinct sexual scripts correspond more or less to different masculinities. Thus, school-educated Samburu men aim for the embodiment of "modern" masculinities different from those of the men who spend their lives, herding cattle "in the bush." More specifically, the masculinities of the wage laborers, the teachers, the missionaries, the merchants, and so on involve not only slightly different patterns of dress and behavior, but also, and quite importantly, different sexual scripts, phrased in moral contrasts to each other. Among the Samburu, masculinities were reconfigured within a certain moral geography, and with particular reference to wealth and new sexual scripts.

At some general level, Samburu men distinguished themselves as either "traditional" or "modern" (idiomatic terms), and derogatorily called each other respectively "bush" *ilmurran* and "plastic" *ilmurran*. Unlike the former, the latter went to school, spoke more than one language, and had a quite different dress code. Dorothy Hodgson (2003) identifies a similar primary distinction of masculinities among the Maasai of Tanzania. Hodgson (2003, 119-21) shows, for example, how the Maa term *ormEEK* (modern),

initially designating non-Maasai men, had been derogatorily attached by Maasai elders to those Maasai men who attended school and worked for cash. Later on, the term *ormeek* acquired rather positive meanings, with elders blaming themselves for their ignorance when it came to bureaucracy and the state. "In contrast to earlier meanings of *ormeek*," Hodgson observes, "such differences are more external and not mutually exclusive: one can both speak Swahili and speak Maa, or one can wear red cloth in the morning, put on pants to go to town, then return in the evening to home and the red cloth again" (2003, 223). Similar usages can now be found among the Samburu.

In my interviews with Samburu men, these categories were often invoked when individuals constructed themselves in opposition to each other. Simon explained:

These people in the bush don't know how to have sex. Boom, boom, boom, and everything is finished. They don't even kiss. Now, I went to school and I kiss my wife. But them, if they come to Maralal and see on TV someone kissing, they turn around and spit: "The *wazungu* [white people] are not normal" they say.

During my research, Simon was a *Lmooli Imurrani*, awaiting the status of a junior elder. He had had several relationships, in Mombasa, with women from Europe, traveled several times to Germany, invited by these women, and recently settled down in Maralal with a Samburu wife.⁸ He owned a hotel and a large house there. Throughout our interview, Simon, not unlike the other school-educated men I interviewed, reinforced the distinction between "bush" *ilmurran* and "modern" *ilmurran* (like himself) in order to position his sexuality in a relationship of superiority to that of the "ignorant people in the bush." "Bush" *ilmurran*, Simon explained, get most of the stimulation through the tip of their palms and from having their loins touched. It is in this sense that one can often see an *Imurrani* rubbing his palms against his loins as he talks to a girl. Also, during the sexual act (*neciaman* or *nàrà*), the man would rub his palms against a special set of beads that a girl hangs around her loins to provide stimulation. "But us," he pointed out, "we went to school. We don't do that." "The morans in the bush, when they come, they make some loud growls," Mohammad (another school educated man) told me laughing, "and you can hear

them from the other hill." Meanwhile, however, these "modern" men would occasionally and nostalgically identify their sexuality with the "heroism" of being an *Imurrani* in the "bush." "They can reach up to seven or even ten orgasms in one night," Simon explained. "If you stay at the *lale* (cattle compounds in the forest) for a long time, and you take *seketet* or *surukoi* (wild plants), you can do that." In this way, the morality of different sexual scripts, of various bodily ways of pleasure, was an active discursive differentiator as these "modern" men both distinguished themselves from or occasionally identified with their relatives in the "bush." The sexual body acted in this discourses not only as a figure of discursive distinction, but also -- and most importantly -- as a figure generative of bodily dispositions (e.g. alternating contemptuous dissociation or nostalgic identification).

School education, herein, was invoked to mark the decisive break between these two general categories of masculinity. Simon added that "before you go to school, you look at people kissing, and you say: how stupid, how disgusting. When you come back, you can't believe how stupid your people are (because they don't kiss)." The boarding school played an important role in framing particular sexualities and notions of gender, yet the articulation of different forms of "modern" masculinity was determined by the various occupations men adopted after graduation, especially in the years of *ilmurran*-hood. As such, the various types of masculinity emerging from boarding schools, all known as "modern," were further differentiated in the process of making a living. The missionary Samburu men, for example, would distinguish themselves from wage laborers or "Mombasa morans," among others, through a moral discourse on sexuality. Moses, who had graduated from the Good Shepherd Seminary of Maralal (a Catholic school) spoke to me about the "ignorance" of the people in the bush, and about the "sinful degradation" of the "adulterous" wage laborers, and "Mombasa morans." Paradoxically or not, he would often look up at his cousin who had married a Norwegian woman and settled down with her, and would ask him for financial support.

Similarly, other Samburu men also distinguished themselves from the "Mombasa morans" through moral discourses on sexuality. Many would criticize the sexual immorality of men sleeping with white women in Mombasa, both in terms of age and in terms

of race transgressions. "In our culture," David argued, "you can't marry older women. It's like marrying your own mother. The Mombasa morans sometimes marry women that could be their grandmothers." Mohammad also explained:

Here if a woman is my mother's age, I call her *yieyo* [mother]. If she is my grandmother's age, I call her *ngoko* [grandmother]. One time when this one old, ugly British woman came to see her moran, I went over to her to say hi. I said politely "How are you grandma?" She got so furious. "Don't call me grandma ... I'm not your grandma" [laughing].

The generic use of the "old," "ugly," white woman in these moral critiques was not arbitrary. Both age and race were used to signify immoral transgressions. On the coast, Samburu men engaged most often, but not exclusively, in relationships with women older than themselves. And if some women were their seniors by only a few years, some indeed would be in their fifties or sixties. Moreover, their "whiteness" indexed perverted sexuality. Neville Hoad suggests that discursive attacks on Western sexualities, in Africa, "can be seen as responses to ... prior attributions of primitiveness [to Africans], and as a reversal of the racist charge of retardation and/or degeneration" (2007, 56):

These attacks consistently locate the origin of perversion (and, with greater political urgency, AIDS) in the West. While Christian dogma, with its rhetoric of universal brotherhood of man, can and has mitigated against some of the racism in these imperialist formations, and the sign of "marriage," Christian or not, can render the other grave threat to Christian sexual norms (polygamy) somewhat recuperable, imperial "civilized" sexual norms can remain in place and can paradoxically be defended as authentically African (2007, 56-57).

These attacks on Western sexuality constitute a response to the "register of sexual `perversion'" attributed to Africa in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic (see Comaroff 2007). White women then tended to be perceived through a similar prism of immorality rendering their sexuality un-Christian and un-African. When I once described my research to a man in Nairobi, he furiously pointed out:

You know, people say AIDS comes from Africa. It's not true. It is women like these that have money, and come and sleep with

these poor men who brought AIDS to Africa.

And whereas the origin of perversion (here, HIV/AIDS) was explicitly placed in the West, those men who engaged in sexual relationships with these women were nevertheless seen as participating in the same un-Christian, and un-African perversion.

This moral criticism of the sexuality of men sleeping with older white women was constitutive of a stigma that was contagiously transferred to the wealth they accumulated. "I better stay poor my whole life," David assured me, "rather than sleep with ugly women for money." At the same time, the same stigma became essential, along with the stigmatized wealth, in the differentiation of other masculinities from the "Mombasa morans."

Conclusion

For David, as for many of his age-mates, ridiculing those men who slept with "ugly," "old" white women "for money" was both a way of discrediting the morality of "Mombasa morans" and a way to express an embodied disposition produced in response to a particular moral geography and the late reconfiguration of Samburu masculinities.

For those Samburu men whose bodily forms had placed them at an advantage over their fellow age-mates, in the sense of allowing them to play out certain neo-imperial fantasies, relationships with white female tourists constituted an opportunity of upwards economic mobility. Migrating to the coast of the Indian Ocean, embodying the performance of postcolonial representations of their bodies, and committing to a pattern of circular migration, these Samburu men came to be repositioned within the moral imagination of their home communities. As their accumulated wealth became the object of envy, their "foul" sexuality became the object of public criticism. These types of moral discourses on sexuality, prevalent in the everyday life of Maralal, were orchestrated by specific bodily dispositions that shaped and distinguished different types of masculinity among the Samburu.

Notes

¹ This article is based on ethnographic research undertaken in 2005, both in the town of Maralal (Samburu District) and in the coastal town of Mombasa. The data was gathered through participation in and observation of the everyday life, and formal and informal interviews with Samburu men of different backgrounds.

² Immediately after Independence, the government of Kenya encouraged the development of the tourist industry, establishing for this purpose, in 1965, the Kenyan Tourist Development Corporation. And if, from 1972 to 1982, the number of visitors stagnated at 350 000 per annum, throughout the 1980s the number increased twofold, reaching in 1989 a total of 700 000 visitors per annum (Schoss 1995, 36-38).

³ Kenyan coastal towns constitute relatively heterogeneous sexual destinations. First, they appeal to female tourists not only through the primitivist spectacle of Maasai and Samburu men, but through a highly nuanced co-presence of various "beach-boys" and "gigolos" (Schoss 1995). Second, coastal towns are also known for male sexual tourists. Although it is very rare that Maasai or Samburu women engage in relations with male tourists, female sex work is generally widespread on the coast. Third, child sex tourism is part of the dynamics of the destination, and in spite of state struggles towards its abolition, it persists in underground networks (Omondi 2003).

⁴ The word *morán* was adopted in English and Swahili during the colonial era from the Maa *Imurrani* (plural: *ilmurran*), meaning "young man" or "warrior." The term is widely used in Kenya to refer to both Maasai and Samburu young men that have undergone circumcision, and became part of the "warrior" age-grade of their communities.

⁵ The occasional merging of Maasai and Samburu identities is a generalized phenomenon in postcolonial Kenya. Both the Samburu and the Maasai are Maa-speaking pastoralists. They share numerous similarities in terms of material culture, rituals, kinship, and age-grade system. Although initially part of the same group, since the relocation of the Maasai to the parts of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania, the Samburu Maa-speakers of Northern Kenya shaped their own distinct identity. Despite the current almost mythical antipathy of the Samburu towards the Maasai, the Samburu often continue to contextually identify as Maasai or as a "clan" thereof, in circumstances where such a link could prove beneficial (see Kasfir 2002).

⁶ Holtzman suggests that *lminong*, or the prohibition of *ilmurran* eating food seen by women, prescribes the removal of the young men from the domestic economy in order to reduce competition over the otherwise limited resources of food (2003, 234).

⁷ This concern has most probably to do with controlling tourist cash by maintaining the travelers in well-defined tourist networks (hotels, lodges, restaurants, and safari trails). In these discourses, beaches emerge as dangerous spaces of interference where tourists can interact with local "beach boys," and where tourist money can uncontrollably be extracted by individuals who are not officially members of the tourist industry. Being no longer able to pinpoint exactly where the *morans* frequenting these beaches come from generates a certain sense of anxiety. Moreover, the uncontrolled presence of locals on tourist beaches is seen as diminishing the tourists' sense of security. Further research needs to be undertaken in this direction.

⁸ Simon's case was one of the few instances where an *lmurrani* was permitted to marry before actually becoming a junior elder. Although the elders of some clans began allowing such early marriages, other elders, predominantly from the Lmasula clan, radically forbid marriages before the end of *ilmurran*-hood.