

The concept of heroism in Samburu moran ethos

Peter Wasamba_

University of Nairobi, Kenya

The tenacity of the Samburu to tradition has interested anthropologists and missionaries for decades. One of the enduring aspects of the Samburu tradition is the institution of moran – young Samburu men admitted into warrior-hood upon circumcision. In this paper, I argue that the title of moran is a metaphor for heroism due to the military and aesthetic exploits morans are famed for. Basing my analysis on the data gathered during fieldwork in the community between 2004 and 2008, I interrogate the concept of heroism in the Samburu moran ethos. I contend that though threatened with modernity, moranism is still a coveted institution among the Samburu that promotes comradeship, self-esteem, courage, strength, perseverance, self sacrifice and adventurism in young men. Finally, I argue that, in spite of the challenges it is facing, moranism still remains the foundation on which the pride of the Samburu community is grounded. Young boys are looking forward to the day they will join the prestigious club of morans. Though traditional moranism celebrates war-like activities, the roles are changing because of modernization. The future of moranism among the Samburu, therefore, lies in maintaining a delicate balance between cultural pragmatism and nostalgic attachment to the heroic past. Herein lies the changing concept of heroism in Samburu folklore.