

with transformative power, the power of transcending death and creating new life in a symbolic and social sense.

### c) The Warriors' Diet

The warriors occupy a very special position in the Maasai food system. They are subject to a series of specific restrictions, *enturuj*, which are unique to the warriors and regulate their sexual behaviour and food intake.<sup>11</sup> The rules which restrict food consumptions are the following: (1) a warrior should not drink milk from his own, or his father's herd; (2) he must never drink milk alone; (3) he must never eat meat which has been seen or handled by (circumcised) women; and (4) he must never drink honey mead, nor chew tobacco. The general Maasai proscription against vegetable food applies particularly strictly to warriors.

The special status of the warriors in Maasai society is further reflected in the fact that junior warriors traditionally lived (until the *eunoto* ritual) in particular warrior villages, *emanyata*, separated from the ordinary homesteads of the elders. This separation of the warriors from elders and circumcised women is directly linked to the *enturuj* rules which exclude them from the ordinary dietary regime of elders and women, and which prohibit warriors from having sexual relations with circumcised women.

If the warriors are thus subject to a number of food proscriptions which separate them from the elders, they are also subject to prescriptions which underscore their liminal status. As distinct from elders, warriors are supposed to consume vast amounts of meat. They are thus exempted from the rule against slaughtering cattle for food. Indeed, meat, blood, and fat, which are supposed to make them strong and healthy, for long periods constitute their main, and sometimes only, food.

This extraordinary consumption of meat on the part of the warriors is surrounded with specific restrictions, some of which are reflected in the *enturuj* rules. The meat must be consumed collectively by groups of warriors at particular sites away from the homesteads of elders and women. At these sites, caves or small enclosures in the bush, the warriors gather periodically to feast on meat brought from their various family herds. No circumcised women are allowed to participate in

these feasts, nor even to come near such a site. The meat eating feasts, which may last for several weeks, as well as the sites where they take place, are called *olpul*.

The *enturuj* rules become operative immediately after circumcision, when a man enters the age-set proclaimed by the preceding *enkipaata* ritual. The *eunoto* ritual, some four years after the proclamation ritual, when junior warriors become senior warriors, releases the warriors from the prohibition on sexual intercourse with circumcised women and signals the gradual removal – through a series of family rituals – of the food restrictions imposed upon circumcision. The *olng'esh* and *enkan'g'olorikan* rituals, finally, lift the last of the warriors' food restrictions – that prohibiting them from eating meat which has been seen by women – and mark the transition from warriorhood to full elderhood.

The *olng'esh* ceremony in the Kisongo section of Tanzania, which precedes the *enkan'g'olorikan* ceremonies of the other sections, takes its name from the meat rack on which the meat of the sacrificial beast is roasted, and thus points to one of the central elements of the ceremony, namely the ritual consumption of blessed meat by the senior warriors which symbolically accomplishes and confirms their transition to elderhood. The ritual meat-feasting at the *olng'esh* and *enkan'g'olorikan* ceremonies which complete the cycle of age-set rituals, and thereby ultimately create the age-set, also in a profound symbolic sense complete the spiritual creation of men, and confer upon them the status of full humanity. At the ritual, which gathers thousands of warriors from all parts of Maasailand, the initiates receive the blessed meat from the hands of women (which releases them from the ban on eating meat which has been seen by women) and, from their *olpiron* elders, the tobacco container which confirms their transition to elderhood. After the celebration of *olng'esh* and the subsequent *enkan'g'olorikan* ceremonies, local meat-eating rituals (*enkan'g'oonkiri*) are held in the individual homesteads throughout Maasailand.

Between circumcision and elderhood a series of lesser, homestead-based rituals take place, the exclusive purpose of which is to successively remove the warriors' *enturuj* restrictions. They are known collectively as *itaara enturuj* ('killing the *enturuj*'). First, there is a milk-drinking ceremony which allows young men to drink milk from their fathers' herds. Nowadays this usually takes place before *eunoto*. Then there is another milk-drinking ceremony which allows the warriors to drink

<sup>11</sup> The term *enturuj* refers to both the rules themselves and the age-set enforced fine levied against the man who breaks them (cf. Galaty 1977: 113).