

# Alternative rite of passage as a local intervention for female genital cutting

*A context- and time specific programme among Maasai communities in Kajiado County, Kenya*



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*By Marinka Wijngaard and Marit Pater*

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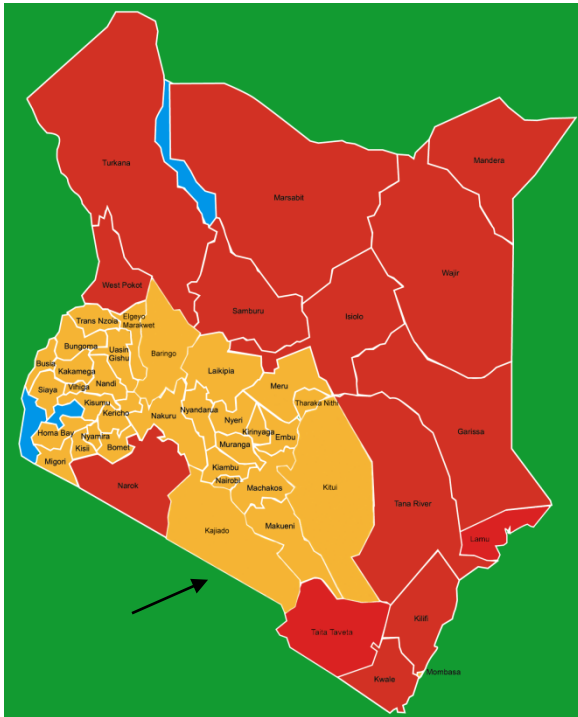
At last, we cannot stress enough how thankful we are to all different Maasai communities in Loitokitok and Magadi we have worked with. Your honesty and openness about such a sensitive topic as FGC has contributed to the refinement and quality of our research. Thank you all for your time and enthusiasm, we feel glad that we have met such proud people like you.

## List of abbreviations

AEO	=	Area Educational Officer
AMREF	=	African Medical Research Foundation
ARP	=	Alternative rite of passage
CBO	=	Community based organization
FGC	=	Female genital cutting
FGM	=	Female genital mutilation
FPFK	=	Free Pentecostal Fellowship of Kenya
MYWO	=	Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization
NGO	=	Non-governmental organization
PATH	=	Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health
Rutgers WPF	=	Rutgers World Population Foundation
SRHR	=	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
STI	=	Sexual transmitted infections
TBA	=	Traditional birth attendants
UFBR	=	Unite For Body Rights
UN	=	United Nations
UNICEF	=	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	=	World Health Organization

## Maps

Map of Kajiado County, Kenya<sup>1</sup>



Map of Magadi division (left arrow) and Loitokitok and surroundings (right arrow) in Kajiado County, Kenya. (AMREF:e 2012)



<sup>1</sup> Commission on Revenue Allocation : promoting an equitable society; <http://www.crakenya.org/cra-chairman-launches-marginalization-policy/>, visited on 09-06-2013.

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## 1. Introduction

In her book 'Female Genital Cutting: Cultural Conflict in the Global Community', Elizabeth Boyle (2002) described how global institutions (such as the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations (UN), World Bank, etc.) made use of their unequal bargaining position, power, influence and wealth to press for global cultural homogenization in ideas about the body, the family, and child development. Especially with regard to the campaign against female genital cutting (FGC), these institutions use their power to essentially intrude in the internal affairs of the poor and financially dependent nations, Boyle argues (Boyle 2002 in Shweder 2005:193). In addition, Featherstone (1990:174) argues that we find ourselves in a new world of economic giants, superpowers and multinationals in which there is no room for ethnic communities. According to Featherstone (1990:178), these global forces will eventually erode cultural differences and create a genuinely 'global culture'. He envisions a culture with generalized human values and interests, standardized commodities and a uniform discourse of meaning. A culture without historical culture, emotional connotations, rituals, traditions, memories and feelings of belonging. This, however, seems to be a rather simplistic and one-sided view that doesn't acknowledge the dynamic ways in which global discourses can be brought to practice on a local level. Ethnic communities are often willing and able to embrace outside influences of the process of globalization on their own terms (Stegner 1993). Therefore, globalization seems to increase cultural heterogeneity rather than homogeneity of cultures (Bird and Stevens 2003; Stegner 1993). Due to the fact that local cultures cannot be confined to a distinction between heterogeneity and homogeneity, the aim of this thesis is to elaborate on the dynamic ways in which global processes are represented and given shape by actors on a local level.

FGC can be seen as part of a rite of passage for girls through which they make a crucial transition to womanhood. These rites of passage are carried out in many different cultural contexts, including Maasai communities in Kenya who attach great importance to this cultural practice (Sefei Dei et al. 2000:57). In Maasai tradition, a rite of passage for girls is seen as one of the most significant stages in life for Maasai girls and women as well as for the entire Maasai community. On the other hand, FGC can also be approached by activists as a health, human rights and development issue. Despite their different discourses, these actors mainly approach FGC as a cultural practice with serious health consequences. Such discourses, that stimulate interventions with the aim to abandon FGC, can also be referred to as 'eradication discourses' (Shell Duncan 2008:225). Different interests are thus at stake and this raises the question of how to abandon FGC while preserving the cultural embedded rite of passage as part of Maasai tradition.

This thesis will focus on an alternative method for FGC as part of the rite of passage for Maasai girls which is carried out by several Maasai communities in Kajiado County, Kenya. The African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) has developed an alternative rite of passage (ARP) programme in Kenya, in collaboration with Maasai communities. ARP is an alternative in

which the harmful practice of FGC is abandoned while the rituals and practices of the customary rite of passage are mainly preserved. In this way, it seems that AMREF Kenya tries to find a balance between the international standards of human rights and cultural values and autonomy (Duncan & Hernlund 2000:27) This alternative rite of passage is often situated in on-going debates concerning ethnocentrism, a doctrine that strives to uphold universal human rights, versus cultural relativism, a doctrine that focuses on the preservation of cultural norms and values. Due to the community-based work approach, ARP can be seen as a culturally sensitive solution for FGC. In this thesis, the alternative rite of passage will be seen as an outcome of the mutual interaction between different kind of stakeholders such as AMREF Kenya, Maasai communities and other actors such as the Christian church and the Kenyan state. It should be noted that when we speak about AMREF in this thesis, we always refer to AMREF Kenya.

In the past two decades, there have been several organizations that have implemented alternative rites of passage in different communities in Kenya. Although some evaluation reports exist about previous executed ARPs among Maasai communities and other communities in Kenya, there is still little known about the perceptions of Maasai toward this alternative ritual (AMREF:c 2011; Chege et al. 2001; Oloo et al. 2011). Concrete information about the realization of ARP, which differs per context and over time, is also lacking. By studying the different perceptions of stakeholders involved in the alternative rite of passage and their mutual interaction, this thesis might contribute to further improvements of the ARP programme. In addition to its social relevance, this thesis also has a theoretical relevance. By looking at the dynamic process of the realization of the alternative and the contributions of different kind of stakeholders, ARP can be placed in a context of globalization and thereby give a comprehensive overview of the practice. In addition, this thesis might also contribute to bridge the gap between international standards of human rights on the one hand and the preservation of different cultural norms and values on the other hand because it will also focus on the (community-based) work approach of this intervention to eradicate FGC.

The aim of this thesis is to place the alternative rite of passage within a broader context of globalization and focus on the way global forces are given shape in the local context. In other words, we will look at the formulation and design of ARP, constantly influenced by the mutual interaction between stakeholders at various levels. Even though we acknowledge that FGC can be portrayed as a health issue, human rights issue and development issue, this thesis will mainly focus on FGC as part of the larger world process of globalization which covers all the previously mentioned approaches. Maasai communities have always been exposed to external influences that have increased in recent decades because of the expanding process of globalization (Greig 2002:225). In this thesis, it will be explained that many different manifestations of globalization have a huge impact on developments of local communities and therefore also on cultural practices, such as FGC, and more specifically the formulation of an alternative rite of passage.

This research is conducted in Loitokitok and Magadi, located in Kajiado County, Kenya.



These remote areas are inhabited by Maasai communities; semi-nomadic people with a conservative and patriarchal family structure (Maro et al. 2012:98). To find out how AMREF's ARP programme is brought to practice and in what way it reflects the traditions of practice and meaning of the customary rite passage, it is crucial to study the perceptions of different kind of stakeholders toward ARP, their contribution and influence on the programme and the interaction between the different parties in the field. This qualitative research is conducted from the 25<sup>th</sup> of January to 24<sup>th</sup> of April. During this period, information is collected to answer the central question of this thesis: *How is AMREF's ARP programme designed and brought to practice by different stakeholders and how does it fit within the traditions of practice and meaning of the customary rite of passage for Maasai girls, in Kajiado County, Kenya?*

This thesis will have a descriptive function for it will describe perceptions of different Maasai communities toward FGC as a rite of passage, ARP as an alternative for FGC and the way in which the alternative programme fits within the practices and meaning of the customary rite of passage for Maasai girls (Oost & Markenhof 2010:51). In addition, this thesis will also describe the way AMREF's ARP programme is designed and how the programme is brought to practice by AMREF, Maasai communities and other stakeholders. The central question entails a number of subtopics such as the customary rite of passage, the alternative rite of passage, sustainability and ownership of ARP, the influence of global forces on Maasai communities and the establishment of ARP by different actors in the field. All these subtopics will be further explained and elaborated in different sub-questions in chapter four and five.

To answer the central question and sub-questions as reliable and valid as possible, we have used different research methods and techniques that will shortly be discussed. We have used qualitative research methods such as participant observations during various activities of AMREF such as medical outreaches, multimedia sessions and educational forums, various forms of interviews (informal, open, semi-structured and in-depth) with different stakeholders, focus groups with different groups within Maasai communities like elders, mothers, girls and Morans (young Maasai warriors) and the study of visual data such as video recordings and photos. According to Boeije (2010:5), qualitative research can be used to interpret the participants 'view of their social world and their behaviour'. Qualitative research can thus be seen as the most appropriate way to study the perceptions of Maasai communities and other stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the ARP programme toward the customary rite of passage, ARP and the way it is brought to practice. In addition, we made use of different kind of qualitative research techniques such as recordings of all our interviews and photos during all research activities.

Due to the fact that some Maasai do not speak English, we worked together with translators during informal conversations, interviews and participant observations. We were aware of the fact that the personal background and interests of the translator could influence an interview which we tried to avoid by making an informed choice with regard to translators: translators who were familiar with the

customary rite of passage and ARP, both male and female translators and translators with whom we had positive previous experience. Furthermore, the majority of the interviews we conducted were in English which has not made us completely dependent on translators in the field.

It should also be noted that we mainly worked with participants who were related to AMREF, such as different partners of AMREF, including Maasai communities, that will be further discussed in chapter five. Although we have kept this relationship in mind during the interviews and when interpreting the findings of the research, we acknowledge that some participants, who had a predominantly positive attitude toward AMREF and the ARP programme, can be seen as a slight bias of this research. However, we have tried to compensate this limitation by also conducting interviews with more critical participants who were less related to AMREF.

In the first chapter of the thesis, we will explore and analyse the main theories and concepts in the field of FGC. In this theoretical framework, we will discuss different eradication discourses of FGC, FGC as a rite of passage, the concept of ARP, the process of interaction between different stakeholders in the formation of ARP and the customary rite of passage and ARP in the context of globalization. These theories and concepts will be applied to the location and context of the research in chapter two and three. Chapter four and five represent the empirical section of the thesis in which the sub-questions of the research will be answered. In chapter four, Marit will describe the meaning Maasai attach to the alternative rite of passage and their perceptions toward the practices of ARP, compared to the ones of the customary rite of passage. In chapter five, Marinka will discuss the way in which the ARP programme is designed to anticipate the cultural tradition of FGC among Maasai communities, the way the ARP programme is brought to practice by Maasai communities, AMREF and other stakeholders and how this differs per context and over time. After the empirical chapters, the conclusion of the thesis will be presented in which the main findings of the research will be linked to each other and to the different theories discussed. The data of this research is mainly complementary. The findings of both Marit and Marinka are constantly linked to the influence of globalization processes on discourses of actors who play a role in the design and implementation of ARP. Both empirical chapters show that ARP is highly dependent on and bound to context and time due to different levels of interaction of Maasai communities. Rituals and practices of ARP are different in each context, as will be described in chapter four which is consistent with the context-specific work approach of the ARP programme that will be discussed in chapter five. The last part of this thesis contains the bibliography.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Female genital cutting as a rite of passage

FGC can be traced back as far as the second century B.C. and appears in a wide variety of cultural contexts, but predominantly takes place in Third World countries, and has affected from 70 to 140 million girls and women worldwide (WHO 2012; UNICEF 2010). FGC, also often referred to as Female genital mutilation (FGM), comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (WHO 2012). FGC is often classified into different types that include the various degrees of severity, depending on the amount of tissue that is excised (Kwaak, van der 1992; Chege et al. 2001; WHO 2012). The term to describe this cultural practice changed from ‘female circumcision’ to ‘female genital cutting’ to ‘female genital mutilation’, which has been announced by activists as the more accurate term. The term female genital mutilation has been heavily criticized by feminists and scholars for being ethnocentric, a concept that will be further described later on in this thesis, and the term is now often avoided (Levin et al. 2009). In this thesis, we will mostly use the term female genital cutting because this is less politicized<sup>2</sup>. Even though this thesis will focus on female genital cutting as a rite of passage, which will be further explained in the next section, it must be noted that FGC is not always practiced because it is a rite of passage. FGC can for example also be linked to beauty and bodily cleanliness. Overall, aesthetics, social culture, economics and religion have all been identified as contributing factors to the practice (Oloo et al. 2011).

FGC is often seen, by communities who practice it, as a necessary step to protect girls, raise them properly and make them eligible for marriage. By undergoing female genital cutting, a girl changes into a woman and thereby undergoes a ‘rite of passage’. Rites of passage are customs that are associated with the transition from one stage or place of life to another and lead to a change in social status. Rites of passage can be found throughout the world (Kottak 2011:292). According to Van Gennep (1960), every tribal group, but this is probably applicable for every group of people, is made up of many subgroups that can be defined by occupation, age, sex or economic class (Van Gennep 1960 in Smith 1991:2453). By undergoing the ceremony of the rite of passage, individuals are able to pass from one defined subgroup to another which is equally well-defined (Smith 1991:2453). Kottak (2011:291) describes the phases of a rite of passage (separation, liminality and incorporation) in greater depth. During the separation phase, people are withdrawn from the group and begin moving from one status or place to another. When it comes to female genital cutting in Kenya, and specifically among the Maasai, all girls between a certain age (mostly between seven and twelve years old) are separated from the rest of the community during this first phase of rite of passage. Separation involves

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that participants of this research most often used the term FGM, instead of FGC. When referring to quotes of participants in the empirical chapters of this thesis, the term FGM will thus still be found.

symbolic behaviour that signifies the detachment of individuals from their fixed point in a social structure (Pinnock 1997) In the liminal phase people find themselves in a period between the beginning and the end stage, a period in which they have nothing: no status, secular clothing, rank, insignia, kinship position, nothing to demarcate individuals from their fellows. The group lives in separation from the community for several days and forms a communal group in which all are equal (Douglas, 1967:98) During the liminal phase of female genital cutting girls are put in seclusion, right after having undergone the circumcision, and are taught by relatives (mostly an aunt) or older friends about cultural values, sexuality and women's roles (Chege et al. 2001:5). In the third and last phase persons re-enter societies by having completed the rite. As is often the case with female genital cutting, many rites of passage are performed collectively, which can create great social solidarity, togetherness and equality within a group (Kottak 2011:292). Rituals, such as communal feasting, dancing and traditional singing, are used during the incorporation phase to symbolize an individual's re-entry into the community and into a new group (Chege et al. 2001).

Kottak (2011:291) explains that rituals are social acts that convey information about participants and their traditions and serve the social function of creating permanent or temporary solidarity among people, thereby forming a community. By taking part in public rituals, performers signal that they accept a common moral and social order that transcends their individual status. When it comes to female genital cutting, rituals can create a sense of insecurity, danger or anxiety because the collective ritual can build up stress. This stress can strongly enhance the solidarity of participants (Pinnock 1997). Women who have not undergone FGC, and this rite of passage, are often socially unacceptable because they do not adhere to community's social norms and the fear of social sanctions and moral judgment make it very difficult to stop the practice (UNICEF 2010). These girls are more likely to be discriminated by their surroundings, according to Major and O'Brien (2005:392). In this way, the fear of being stigmatized can affect people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour in daily life. In the context of FGC, this fear contributes to social pressure among Maasai girls to undergo the rite of passage.

FGC can be seen as a communal ritual that is carried out in many different cultural contexts. Rituals, according to Geertz, reinforce the traditional social ties between individuals and they stress the way in which the social structure of a group is strengthened (Geertz 1957:32; Kottak 2011:291). In this way, rituals can be seen as binding and therefore crucial factor within a particular community. It should be noted that rituals in any society are changeable; constantly re-transformed to accommodate the needs of a society at any given time (Esho et al. 2011:54). Rituals constantly adapt to new ideologies of a globalizing modern world which makes them dynamic. According to Esho et al. (2011:54), the changing character of FGC is not only reflected in traditional practices themselves but also in strategies to abandon FGC. They argue that the eradication discourses, for example, have also been subject to change; reframing FGC as a traditional practice with serious health effects to defining FGC as a human rights issue. Changing eradication discourses lead to different approaches to FGC

interventions which, in turn, influence the traditional practices of FGC. In other words, practices that belong with FGC change while adapting to new challenges presented by a particular eradication discourse (Johansen 2006 in Esho et al. 2011:56).

## **2.2. Interventions and discourses concerning FGC**

The practice of female genital cutting has increasingly become a hot topic for discussions in media, within human rights organizations and among feminists, scholars, legislators and health practitioners (Maher 1996) The United Nations General Assembly passed its first resolution condemning female genital mutilation on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 2012. The resolution, adopted by consensus by the UN general assembly's human rights committee, calls the practice harmful and a serious threat to the sexual, reproductive and psychological health of women and girls. Although the resolution is not legally binding, it reflects international concerns and carries political and moral weight (Guardian 2012)

In this section, we will discuss three perspectives on FGC by portraying it as a health, human rights or development issue. Firstly, FGC is often approached as a development issue because the practice can lead to several negative consequences in the field of development for girls and women. Development generally implies an idea of economic progress and is often confused with growth (Mc Ginty and Williams 2009:5). In this thesis development will be more broadly defined than economic progress. The focus will mainly be on social development: a process in which social structures change in the direction of more equality (Mouton 2007:11). FGC can have influence on the social position of girls and women within their communities in terms of inequality and unequal rights. Secondly, FGC can be seen as a health issue because the practice can result in obstetrical problems, early marriages with early pregnancies as a result, gender-based violence and other serious implications on the level of safety and hygiene of girls (Kwaak, van der 2012). This, in turn, can lead to girls dropping out of school which will have further consequences for their development in life. By addressing FGC, it seems that more women have the chance to stay healthy, complete an education, find a paid job and look after themselves and their families. This makes FGC part of a larger picture in which not only health, but also education, development and human rights values, a third perception on FGC, can be promoted. Esho et al. (2011:54) argue that there has been a shift in eradication discourses, from FGC as a cultural practice with health consequences to FGC as a human rights issue. During the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985), a so-called 'global campaign' was launched to eradicate FGC, framing the cultural practice as a health issue and classifying FGC among other pressing health concerns. This health approach lost favour because of a number of unintended consequences that will not be further

discussed in this thesis (Shell-Duncan 2008:225).<sup>3</sup> Since the early 1990s, this global campaign has actively attempted to abandon the health approach. In order to justify opposition to FGC, the campaign adopted a human rights framework. This approach not only aligned FGC with other forms of violence against women, but also placed it in the growing global ‘culture of human rights’ (Merry 2001 in Shell-Duncan 2008:225).

Overall, the debate concerning FGC has been reclassified, from a local to an international concern and has often become a central topic for debates concerning ethnocentrism versus cultural relativism (Boyle, 2002). A report from United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF 2010) stated that FGC is a violation of human rights of women and girls, a manifestation of deep-rooted gender inequalities and discriminatory in its nature. The pursuit of universal human rights can be seen as a central part of the doctrine of ethnocentrism. This doctrine is based on the idea that values and standards of one’s own culture can be used to judge another culture (Embree 2009:432). According to a western ethnocentric perspective, FGC as a human right violation should be abolished, regardless whether it is a valuable cultural practice in certain cultural contexts. However, human rights can be seen as a western discourse which makes the imposition of universal human rights an act of western superiority (Ibhawoh 2000:837). This reflects the on-going trend of western superiority, either overt or subtle, and the assumption that the ‘western culture’ is self-evidently the best there is (Embree 2009:2). This leads to tension between the pursuit of universal human rights from an ethnocentric perspective and the competing cultural claims of cultural relativism; a debate about possible interventions for FGC.

The doctrine of cultural relativism is based on the idea that cultures cannot simply be compared. From this point of view, it can be stated that norms and values are not universal; they can only be understood from the culture in which they arise. ‘*Cultural relativism is a doctrine that holds that cultural variability is exempt from legitimate criticism by outsiders and is strongly supported by notions of communal autonomy and self-determination*’ (Donnelly 1984:403). Today, Embree (2009:432) argues, there is an increased need for more appreciation of the complexity and depth of meaning to be found in cultures other than our own because globalization brings cultures closer to each other. This explains why cultural relativism is on the upswing in many disciplines (Tilley 2000:501). From the perspective of cultural relativism, it is not justified to intervene in a certain cultural context by implementing a certain project or initiative with regard to eradicating FGC because it violates certain cultural norms and values (Mouton 2007:15). This shows the tension between the doctrines of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism; each of them at the other end of the continuum of development thinking.

Overall, careful deliberation seems to be required to develop action strategies that offer both

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<sup>3</sup> Shell-Duncan (2008) From Health to Human Rights: Female Genital Cutting and the Politics of Intervention. *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 110, No. 2, p. 225-236.

protection and respect for the culture and autonomy of those women and families concerned'. This shows that changing eradication discourses influence the kind of intervention to abandon FGC. In this thesis, the practice of alternative rite of passage will be discussed from a perspective that leans more towards the doctrine of cultural relativism because we will mainly focus on a community-based work approach to eradicate FGC. This kind of work approach aims to integrate their services in the context of the local community which means that cultural norms and values are kept intact as much as possible and used as a means to make the intervention more accessible for a certain community. Although we strongly agree with the fact that it is not justified to simply implement a project in a certain cultural context as an intervention to FGC, we also believe it is important to uphold certain fundamental human rights. This is in line with an argument of Abu-Lughod (2002:786), stating that cultural relativism is certainly an improvement on ethnocentrism, but it has its limitations as well. It thus seems to be important to recognize and respect differences as products of different histories and expressions of different circumstances and to avoid fighting local cultures by thinking of innovative ways to bring change to the practice of FGC (Abu-Lughod 2002:787).

### **2.3 ARP as a possible intervention**

During recent years, different efforts have been made to abandon FGC because of its widespread medical and socioeconomic consequences (UNICEF 2010:34). In 1995, Programme for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) and Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) introduced the idea of an alternative rite of passage which excludes the genital cutting but maintains the other essential components such as education for the girls on family life and women's roles, exchange of gifts, eating food and a public declaration for community recognition (Chege et al. 2001:11). According to Chege et al. (2001:4), the concept of ARP refers to a structured programme of three inter-related components. The first activity is community sensitization, also called awareness raising, to gain social support of individuals and families and to recruit the girls who will participate in ARP. This activity is followed by a training for the girls; providing them with formal instruction on family life skills, community values and reproductive health. The last activity of the ARP programme is the public ceremony which requires the participation of the girl's parents, as well as other invited community members and local leaders (Chege et al. 2001:5). In this way, Maasai girls still have the opportunity to make the transition to womanhood in a socially acceptable way, which is important for Maasai. *'ARP is generally considered most appropriate for communities where FGC involves a public celebration, with the intention that the ARP graduation would, over time, replace the cut whilst retaining the traditional celebration'* (Oloo et al. 2011:6). This explains why the alternative ritual has only been implemented in parts of the country where the cultural community practices FGC as part of a rite of passage. However, the fourth chapter of this thesis will show that opinions differ about the replacement of circumcision during ARP. Some of the projects that have been implemented to

promote FGC abandonment had limited effects because they were only focused on girls, and did not address the underlying social values or were not preceded by a process of so-called ‘participatory education’ (Oloo et al. 2011:4). Other projects, however, have generated important changes in attitudes towards FGC and have even abandoned the practice of FGC collectively (UNICEF 2010:37).

Important hereby is the way that such a possible intervention, in this case ARP, is implemented and designed. A term that is often found when searching for possible interventions for FGC is the term ‘community-based’. Johnson (1998:41) explains that the term ‘community-based’ can be used in many ways, but that it refers to different techniques, programmatic approaches, methods and/or skills related to providing direct social work services in the community. Such efforts are mostly designed to make services for vulnerable populations more effective, integrated, accessible and comprehensive in the context of the local community (Schuftan 1996:260). Barbara et al (1998) explain that a tactical understanding of group dynamics increases the effectiveness of an organization’s work and it thus seems to be important for organizations to pay attention to this. The strategies should focus on being socially grounded, by understanding the people’s sociocultural context. It is also crucial, according to Esho et al. (2011) to encourage both outsiders and insiders at the forefront of the anti-FGC campaigns to be more aware of the changing dynamics of culture and its interplay with global discourses of which – as a result of the abandonment campaign – communities who practice FGC are becoming more aware of.

Overall, several studies have already been done about ARPs, even specifically about ARPs in Kenya, but these different studies don’t always show the complex developments and overall dynamics of the alternative. This research will focus more on the dynamic aspect of ARP, a practice which is often described and recognized in literature as a community-based approach to eradicate FGC. This thesis thereby contributes to the representation of the complexity of ARP. When taking matters, such as the fact that formal legislation has shown to be an ineffective instrument of cultural change, into consideration, it seems that the people who actually perform FGC have to be the change makers when it comes to this practice. We thus argue, and this is in line with statements from Duncan & Herlund (2000:52), that outsiders must learn that their knowledge of FGC will not turn the tide and this implies that working through a community-based approach might be crucial when trying to eradicate FGC in a sustainable manner.

## **2.4 Changing ideas about FGC**

During the process of data gathering for this research, different approaches toward FGC were recognized. FGC can indeed be placed within debates concerning human rights, health and development and ethnocentrism versus cultural relativism when studying different actors in the field. Overall, however, it seems that FGC is part of much more than just one of these debates. By merely researching FGC from one of the above described perspectives, a lot of crucial information is lost.



When FGC, for example, is articulated by actors from a human rights movement in political terms and possible solutions are described in legal terms, chances are that this ends up being a very poor starting point for change. Such human rights views are not necessarily the one shared by the people whose customs are actually under 'attack' and then legal strategies are unlikely to work in isolation from other efforts to end the practice of FGC. In our opinion, to try and provide a comprehensive overview of the complexity and dynamics of FGC, it is fitting to regard the practice as part of processes of globalization in which many different actors, with differing discourses concerning FGC, play a role.

Typically, globalization is seen as the expansion of political, social and economic linkages among states and/or people (Greig 2002:229). Greig (2002:225) explains that globalization and the expansion of communications can carry great consequences for all cultures. It manifests itself in increasing cross-cultural interaction that can trigger changes within communities. According to Greig (2002:232), such cross-cultural interaction can greatly accelerate the incorporation of external cultural elements into local cultures.

It is clear that globalization has an effect on cultural change and the level of cultural homogeneity in a system. Anderson (1991) however explains that sharing a culture does not have to imply a broad uniformity of all beliefs among individuals. Historically, people have been separated by time, distance and topography which automatically created diversity among groups. Historians and sociologists have been aware that the world has been a congeries of large-scale interactions for many centuries already. Appadurai (1996:27) argues that religions of conversion and warfare have been two main forces for sustained cultural interaction in previous centuries. Cultures have shown to be open to continuing change and updates through both internal innovations as well as interactions. Due to globalization, the expansion of communications, as Appadurai (1996) explains it, can nurture the development of areas of local cultural diversity by encouraging the development and maintenance of cultural diasporas (Appadurai 1996). However, the ability for cultures to be influenced by such interactions has undoubtedly been limited due to somewhat restricted capabilities for cross-cultural communications, compared to such abilities nowadays. Today, advances in communications technology together with an expanding global economic system dramatically increase such opportunities for interaction between geographically separated groups (Bird and Stevens 2003:395). As globalization increases and local and remote communications become more prompt, the relevance of physical geography and distance as forces that shape culture will decline.

Different scholars have argued that globalization can play an encouraging role in cultures uniqueness, instead of encouraging homogenization of cultures (Boyd 1988). This would mean that outside influences in fact encourage communities like the Maasai to hold on to cultural traditions such as FGC. However, Boyd (1988) explains that the fabric of a local culture can become torn as the tension between members and non-members of the global class increases. It thus seems probable that different views exist among Maasai toward the exact meaning and importance of FGC. Bird and Stevens (2003:402) also argue that local cultures can become threatened due to the emerging of a

global culture. When the worldview of a local culture no longer works or is threatened from outside, two options are available according to Bird and Stevens (2003:402): cultures can adjust or they can collapse. This theory however seems to be rather simplistic and can hardly be correct when we are truly aware of the dynamics of local cultures. Stegner (1993) points out that cultures can be remarkably persistent and enduring, as Maasai culture has shown to be. According to Stegner (1993) the cultures that survive will most likely be the ones that are willing and able to embrace the new on their own terms, while also rejecting anything that implies the total violation of their way of life. Overall, cultural change cannot be adequately confined to a mere distinction between heterogeneity and homogeneity or collapsibility versus adjustment; it seems that a mixing of cultural values is apparent throughout the world today which provides new opportunities for interactions.

It has already been noticeable that different authors use different terms, e.g. cross-cultural interaction, external interaction, outside exposure, when talking about interactions between many different actors and subsequent possible cultural changes as a result of the interplay of cultures in the context of globalization. In this thesis, we choose to use the term 'interaction' when speaking about interactions between Maasai communities and other Maasai or non-Maasai communities, different organizations (AMREF being dominant in this case), institutions or other actors who contribute to cultural changes due to two-sided interactions.

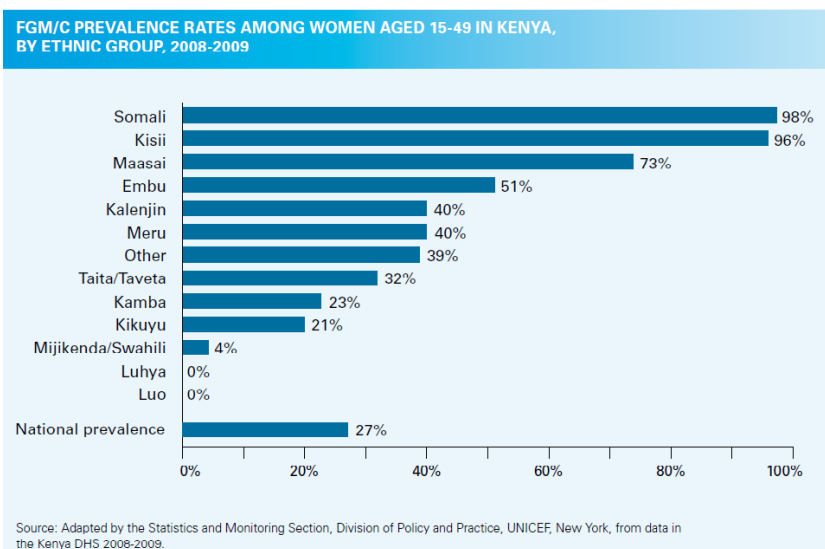
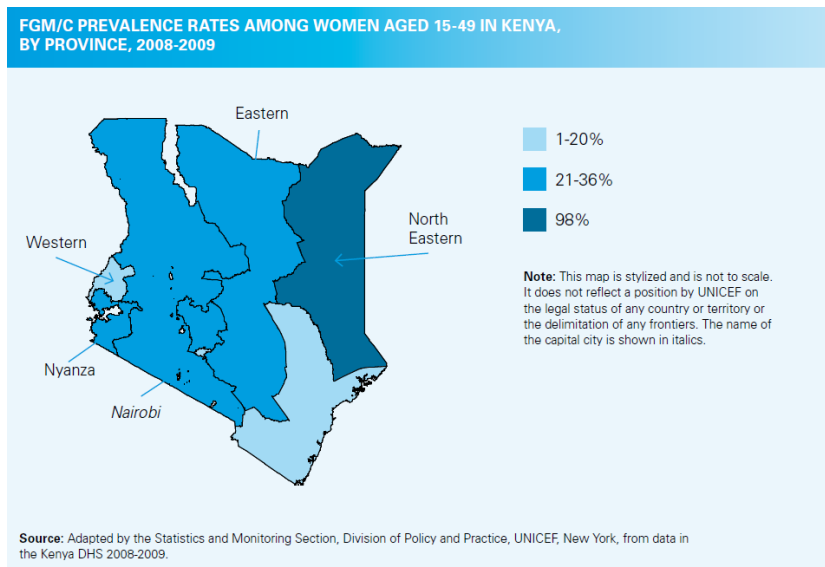
All communities, in this case we thus focus on the Maasai, with their cultural practices such as FGC, operate in dynamic environments whereby traditions are subjected to a wide variety of influences. Agreement is found in studied literature concerning globalization on the fact that globalization permits flows of cultural ideas, values and beliefs (Greig 2002; Stegner 1993; Appadurai 1996). Different actors in the field form a link between global and local discourses concerning the eradication of FGC. These actors are influenced, each in a different way, by globalization and thereby work through their own, changeable, discourses on a local level. By studying ARP from a framework of globalization in this thesis, we will try to break traditional ways of portraying and visioning FGC and show how different actors on different levels, with diverse discourses, are all related to each other and influence local ways of looking at and thinking about FGC and ARP.

### 3. Location and context

#### *FGC in Kenya*

Various ethnic groups in Kenya practice female genital cutting in different parts of the country. A great range of diversity and cultural traditions can be found and the type of cutting, prevalence rates and the age of cutting differ significantly (UNICEF 2010:34). For some ethnic groups in Kenya, FGC is an important rite of passage, as has been explained earlier in this thesis.

Girls in Kenya mostly undergo FGC when they are between twelve and eighteen years old. Overall, the Kenyan Demographic Health Survey indicates that 27 per cent of all girls and women in Kenya between 15 and 49 years old have undergone FGC (KNBS 2010). The prevalence rates of FGC among women aged 15 – 49 in Kenya by province and by ethnic group can be found in the map and graph below:



Different efforts have already been made in Kenya when it comes to abandonment of FGC. In the early 1900's first encouragements to abandon FGC were voiced. Christian missionaries attempted to ban the practice in the 1930's by portraying it as a barbaric practice. Nationalist and cultural support for FGC pushed these initiatives to the background by, for example, demanding schools to be free from missionary influence, which severely limited their impact. FGC had become an important symbol of African tradition and had powerful social, educational, religious and moral impact (Prazak 2007:22). Renewed efforts to end FGC came from high-level officials of the Government of Kenya who participated in conferences during the United Nations Decade for Women from 1976-1985. The United Nation, government ministries, local partners and international and national NGO's became involved in this movement. These efforts to end FGC have only intensified more during the recent years since the ending of FGC has become a concern of the broader community including the Kenyan state and religious groups (Prazak 2007:23; UNICEF 2010).

According to Kenyan law, FGC and other harmful practices are illegal for children under eighteen years of age since 2001. Since 2005, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development has coordinated all anti-FGC activities that are implemented by international organizations, ministries, donors and NGO's. The National Plan of Action for Accelerating the Abandonment of FGC in Kenya was launched in 2008 (Prazak 2007:23). According to Maro et al. (2012:62), criminalization however has not been sufficient to lead to behavioural change. Rather, criminalization of the practice has triggered several negative side-effects: medical complications which arise from the practice are kept secret for fear of prosecution, girls under FGC at a younger age to make sure organization cannot catch up with them, concerns exist that the practice has been driven underground and Maasai in urban areas can no longer publicize their circumcision ceremonies (AMREF:e 2012; UNICEF 2010:37).

Different approaches have been used in Kenya to abandon FGC, with varying degrees of success, including educating and providing alternative sources of income to circumcisers; health risk/harmful practice approaches; addressing FGM through religion; the promotion of girls' education and empowerment programs; legal human rights approaches; and alternative rites of passage (UNICEF 2010). The alternative rites of passage approach will be specifically examined and further explained in the next paragraph.

This thesis will specifically focus on Maasai communities in Kajiado County, Kenya. Maasai are a group of semi-nomadic people who live in Eastern Africa as extended families under a communal land management system (Winterbottom et al. 2009). They live in traditional settlements and adhere strongly to traditional cultural beliefs and values, female genital cutting being one of them. Some of these beliefs are known to have led to poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Maro et al. 2012:15). This is because health systems, which are strongly needed when complications from FGC arise, can fall short when it comes to the needs of nomadic communities such as the Maasai

(Maro et al. 2012:57). Female genital cutting however is an important part of a coming-of-age process, a rite of passage, for many Maasai communities. It is deeply embedded in Maasai tradition and therefore not easily changeable (Maro et al. 2012). According to Tarayia (2004), the risk of social isolation within Maasai community is much more tormenting than the age-old cultural practice of FGC as part of the rite of passage. *'As far as the Maasai are concerned, no matter how educated or wealthy one is, no matter who you are married to or how many children you have, as long as you are uncircumcised you still remain an "uncircumcised girl" (entito neme murata)'* (Tarayia 2004:198). This research indeed confirms that FGC is often a highly valued and deeply embedded practice for Maasai communities, but it also shows that there seems to be an increasing number of Maasai who no longer want girls to be circumcised. Maasai communities in Kajiado County have been subjected to a certain approach to abandon female circumcision: the alternative rite of passage, carried out by Maasai communities, AMREF Kenya and other stakeholders.

### *AMREF*

AMREF is an independent non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO), which was founded in 1957. AMREF considers health as a human right and aims to structurally improve health and health care in many African countries. From their point of view, health is an important topic because it has widespread consequences. Improving health means more possibilities to escape poverty which also benefits the whole community and ultimately the country (AMREF:d 2012) The major targets of AMREF are vulnerable groups including women, children, elderly, people with disabilities and the poor in rural and urban underserved areas. These groups are particularly vulnerable because their position in society is often unequal (AMREF:a 2011).

The organization works on two levels; the local and the national level. On the one hand, AMREF works to improve health and health care in many African countries by partnering with local communities, building their capacity, strengthening health systems, research and advocacy (AMREF:a 2011). The organization believes that communities must be integrated into – and should be treated as partners in – the health system. *'Communities must come first, they must lead from the front and not follow'* (AMREF:a 2011). On a national level, AMREF consults with governments of many African countries and international organizations on permanent improvements of health and health care. In 2010, AMREF Flying Doctors (Netherlands) started to collaborate with a few Dutch non-governmental organizations (Rutgers World Population Foundation (WPF), Simavi, Dance4life and Choice) on sexual and reproductive health and rights (Rutgers WPF 2012). In collaboration with local partner organizations, this Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) Alliance developed the Unite for Body Rights (UFBR) programme (Rutgers WPF 2012). The Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP) programme, which is developed in cooperation with AMREF Netherlands, can be seen as a part of the UFBR programme and will shortly be discussed below.

### *AMREF's alternative rite of passage in Kajiado County*

As already mentioned, the idea of an alternative rite of passage was already introduced by PATH and MYWO in 1996. After the first ARP had taken place in Tharaka (southeast Kenya), more alternative rites passage were carried out in different places in Kenya like Gucha, Meru North, Meru South, Narok and most recently in Samburu districts (Chege et al. 2001:4). The rationale behind ARP, according to Oloo et al. (2011:9), was to persuade communities to maintain the public celebration of the rite of passage for girls, but without the harmful practice of FGC. Since the introduction of ARP in Kenya, other NGO's have developed their own ARP models, based on the model of PATH and MYWO, which have been introduced in different parts of the country (Oloo et al. 2011:10).

The ARP programme of AMREF is one such initiative which was first introduced in 2008 in Magadi division, followed by Loitokitok, both located in Kajiado County. This area is generally a dry and remote area which has been classified by the Kenyan government as a 'hardship area' (Report AMREF 2011). Kajiado County is partly inhabited by Maasai communities with a conservative patriarchal tradition that promotes risky cultural practices such as the rite of passage, including FGC (Maro et al. 2012:105). AMREF's ARP model, based on the ARP model of PATH and MYWO, is especially founded on the understanding and respect of Maasai tradition and on-going engagement with Maasai elders, leaders and community members (AMREF:e 2012). According to AMREF (AMREF:e 2012), their ARP distinguishes itself from other ARPs that have been carried out in Kenya by complementing the general approach of ARP with a so called 'community-led ARP'. This means that the Maasai community takes the lead: Maasai girls and parents have not been coerced in participating in the ARP, the community has to be willing to contribute financial and human resources to support an ARP training and celebration and the community has to organize its ARP ceremony in a way that is meaningful for them. The idea of AMREF's community-based ARP is to work with, facilitate and support community structures which make the alternative culturally relevant for Maasai communities (AMREF:e 2012).

One of the most important key elements of this ARP approach is integrating and understanding the cultural context and leadership structures of a particular Maasai community. This makes AMREF's community-based ARP context-specific, but therefore also impossible to carry out at a large scale e.g. at a regional level. Rather, it is happening at the community level (mostly at the locational level) where a number of villages join up and take a decision for ARP (AMREF:e 2012). In Magadi division, community-based ARPs are already carried out in Shompole, Oldonyo Nyokie, Ngurumani and Olkeri and now more communities are planning to have their own ARP. In Loitokitok, two villages (Enduet and Iltlal) have adopted and taken ownership of mixed Christian and cultural ARP in 2012 (AMREF:e 2012). However, the Free Pentecostal Fellowship of Kenya (FPFK) has also been implementing Christian based ARPs for Maasai communities in Loitokitok for the past six years.

Overall, it is noticeable that Maasai communities in Loitokitok live in a less remote area and are more influenced by interactions than communities in Magadi. Many farmers from all over the country moved to Loitokitok during the past centuries because the land, on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, is fertile in this area. This led to the fact that Loitokitok has grown more quickly over the years, both in terms of cultural diversity in terms of development of the time. A higher presence of churches and different other organizations led to the fact that Maasai communities tend to be less traditional when we compare them to communities in Magadi; being a very dry and hard to reach area. Due to Magadi's remoteness and the fact that the area is mainly inhabited by Maasai, local communities tend to be more traditional and less developed. Even though Christianity is much more dominantly present in Loitokitok, the church also plays an important role in Magadi. This contextual difference is reflected in the differences between the traditionally carried out ARPs in Magadi and the Christian based ARPs in Loitokitok. These slightly different ARPs will be further elaborated in chapter four and five, where we also describe, in greater detail, the organization and involvement of stakeholders ARP. Doing so, we will show the variety of actors and discourses involved.

#### **4. Perceptions of Maasai toward ARP and the customary rite of passage**

*Written by Marit*

As already mentioned in the theoretical framework, not only rituals like the rite of passage but also eradication discourses and interventions constantly adapt to a globalizing modern world which makes them dynamic (Esho 2011:53). The practices and meanings of the alternative rite of passage, that can be seen as a replacement for the customary rite of passage, may therefore differ from the traditional practices and meanings of the customary rite of passage. This shows that rituals such as the rite of passage among Maasai communities are not fixed, but that they are constantly changing and adapting to outside influences like Esho et al (2011:54) stated. It can be stated that AMREF's ARP programme is highly context-specific, dependent on various Maasai communities with different levels of interaction, which makes the alternative dynamic and never rigidly defined. This chapter mainly focuses on the meanings Maasai attach to the alternative rite of passage and their perceptions toward the practices and rituals of ARP, compared to the meanings and practices of the customary rite of passage. In other words, a comparison will be made between the practices and meanings of ARP and the practices and meanings of the customary rite of passage from the perspective of Maasai. In this way, the following sub-question can be answered: *How do the practices and meanings of the alternative rite of passage compare to the customary rite of passage according to Maasai?* The answer to this sub-question will give a better insight in what way and as to how far ARP is seen as a comprehensive replacement of the customary rite of passage among Maasai communities. Furthermore, it will give insight in processes of change happening parallel to ARP that influence Maasai communities and the way they look at ARP, the customary rite of passage and the position of Maasai girls and women.

This chapter will start with a short summary of an ARP that has been carried out in Shompole, Magadi division, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December (2012) to show the course of events during an alternative rite of passage. The following description is based on a video recording of the ARP in Shompole, made by AMREF.

##### *ARP in Shompole*

Dozens of Maasai girls expectantly approached the school grounds of the only primary school in Shompole. Their colourful shuka's (traditional robes) fluttered in the wind and their white beaded necklaces and bracelets jingled with every step they took. The school and the dormitory of the school were totally prepared to accommodate up to 156 Maasai girls for the upcoming two days of training and the celebration day. Maasai girls of different ages, ranging from 7 to 18, took place on the wooden benches to listen carefully to the first training of a Maasai girl who was not circumcised, telling her



successful life story. Followed by some other trainings of Serem, an employee of the health facility centre, area chief Kaioni, some traditional birth attendants (TBA's) and Maasai mothers. Training topics differed from the health consequences of FGC and the risks of early pregnancy and early marriage to the rights of Maasai girls and women, Maasai tradition and the importance of education. The first training day ended with a festive supper that the mothers had prepared for their daughters: rice with egg stew, chapatti, fried potatoes and other traditional food was served. Once in the dormitory, the girls went to bed while most of them were still busy chatting and socializing with each other. Breakfast the following morning was also prepared by the mothers of the girls and served before the training would begin again. Another busy day for the girls in which they learned to play and perform a drama about the dangers of circumcision and Maasai tradition, they watched several movies about reproductive health topics and they wrote some poems about the goal of this ARP and their future vision.

The two days of training culminated in a colourful ARP graduation ceremony that started in a Maasai boma (Maasai residence) near the school compound. Maasai elders formed an arc at the gate of the boma through which the girls entered the boma while they were singing. Some Maasai elders were holding a calabash, filled with milk and grass that they splashed on the girls while they blessed them at the same time. Other Maasai elders waved with wooden sticks to seal the arc and they were singing as well. Once in the boma, the elders brought a dash of milk on the forehead of every single girl which was also part of the blessing. Then, Morans, dressed in blue robes, started to dance and jump as high as they could while they made very low and high sounds. The girls joined the dancing Morans which resulted in a common dance with the rest of the community singing and celebrating as well. The girls were symbolically circumcised in the boma, one by one, by some TBA's who were wearing red headbands. Afterwards, the TBA's were singing and dancing on the spot where they had just symbolically circumcised the girls, throwing their razor blades on the ground. Then, the girls walked in a procession from the boma toward the festively decorated school, wearing white headbands with 'No FGM' on it and waving with 'Anti-FGM' flags. The rest of the celebration day took place in the school where the entire community came together to eat traditional food, drink sodas, dance, sing and to see the girls who had just undergone the alternative rite of passage. The day ended with speeches of some Maasai girls, the chief and some AMREF employees, in which FGM was often openly rejected and approached as a dangerous cultural practice that harms Maasai tradition. The chief gave every girl a certificate, imprinted with the text: 'Having successfully participated in a three day training on anti-FGM and the alternative rite of passage'. The girls, filled with pride and satisfaction, slowly left the school compound with their families. The alternative rite of passage had come to an end, but the rest of their life had just started.

#### **4.1 Practices and rituals of ARP compared to the customary rite of passage**

The majority of Maasai who participated in this study attach great importance to rituals and certain practices of Maasai tradition that are reflected in the ARP programme, especially on the celebration day. Some rituals and practices are unchanged and mainly resemble the rituals and practices of the customary rite of passage which will be described first. After that, I will discuss some rituals and practices, performed during ARP, that are ‘modernized’ and therefore a bit changed because of the increasing influence of Christianity throughout Kenya. These modernized rituals and practices also bring forward a clear difference between rituals and practices performed during ARPs in Loitokitok and the ones performed during ARPs in Magadi. Furthermore, the cultural practice of circumcision, which can be seen as central part of the customary rite of passage, is also changed and replaced with days of training for girls during ARP which will be discussed as well.

##### *Unchanged practices and rituals*

*‘I would say that ARP would be significant because in Africa, and basically in many cultures even in the West, you cannot ignore the place of rituals. Rituals are very important, they bind people. They are so meaningful’*

Peter Nguura, Project Manager AMREF

The first similarity when you compare the practices and rituals of ARP with the ones of the customary rite of passage is the fact that girls are put in ‘seclusion’ during the days of training of ARP. As already mentioned in the description of the ARP in Shompole, the girls stay together, learn together, share knowledge/ideas/experiences, eat together and sleep together during the days of training. This is seen as an important aspect of ARP according to Maasai I interviewed because it resembles the separation phase of the customary rite of passage, characterized by the cultural concept of ‘age groups’ within Maasai tradition. Age groups have always played an important role within Maasai tradition according to Maasai who participated in this study. This cultural concept mainly concerns Maasai boys and men from a certain birth cohort who automatically form a group because they go through the same events in life which creates a strong bond. AMREF’s Project Assistant Leshore stated that despite the fact that age groups were originally meant for Maasai boys and men, age groups for Maasai girls and women have been of equal importance within the social structure of Maasai tradition. The importance of age groups within Maasai tradition is reflected in the statement of head teacher Patrick (Maasai): *‘The other thing that I have seen is that in Maasai land, they used to have what we call age groups, even girls have age groups. So, you will find that a certain age group, they grow and when they are grown, they go through FGM and there a several things that they are doing together. You will find that they are moving as groups, so it is like kind of an institution, so if you have not graduated*

*with FGM, your age will laugh at you*'.

However, it should be noted that the cultural concept of age groups is increasingly losing value in today's Maasai communities, according to most Maasai who participated in this research. Like Maasai girl Nelly said: *'Age groups are still important but because now we have dispersed, we are in primary schools, boardings, others are in secondary and others are even in university. So, you see, it will take a long time to come together. So it is slowly by slowly disappearing. But it is still there for those who live closely together. They hang together as an age group'*. Some mothers join the age group of girls and tell them about their own life experiences as a woman, the role of a Maasai woman within her community and other important aspects of Maasai tradition for women like the way of dressing and the way they use beads. In this way, the days of training resemble the days before the moment of circumcision during the customary rite of passage in which the girl is put in seclusion, together with other girls of her age group, mothers and TBA's. During these days of seclusion, the girls are not only prepared for circumcision, but also for their role as Maasai women. Mothers and TBA's inform the girls about their duties and responsibilities as a Maasai woman and their position within their community. Although the days of training are primarily intended to teach the girls and create more awareness raising in the field of reproductive health, it is also important for some Maasai who participated in the research that the cultural concept of the 'age group' is still there. This can be illustrated with a statement of Maasai girl Naomi: *'We want to maintain the grouping as girls who have not gone through FGM'*.

Secondly, after the days of training, there is a celebration day on which various rituals and practices are performed which resembles the incorporation phase of the customary rite of passage. Several Maasai who participated in this research told me about these rituals and practices that are still the same, compared to the rituals and practices of the celebration day of the customary rite of passage. First of all, the entire Maasai community comes together to celebrate; they slaughter cattle (usually some goats and cows), eat traditional food like chapatti and pilau, drink soda's, dance, sing and the girls put on particular ornaments as a traditional sign of being circumcised. The girls, accompanied by the rest of their community, also go to the closest boma to be blessed by the head of the boma with milk and grass which means that they are accepted back into their community. Blessings on the celebration day are often seen as most important and indispensable ritual according to the majority of Maasai who participated in this research. Like Maasai mother Anastacia stated: *'For Maasai, it is important to call the elders to agree and to bless the girls because they are the decision makers. If a girl is not blessed, it is a curse they said in the past. For girls, to have that assurance, the elders need to give their permission'*. According to all Maasai I interviewed during the research, these rituals and practices are exactly the same as the ones they perform on the celebration day of the customary rite of passage. In this way, rituals and practices during the celebration of ARP have the same meaning as the rituals and practices during the celebration day of the customary rite of passage: they symbolize the girl's re-entry into the community and into the new group of Maasai women (Chege et al. 2001:6).

This is also reflected in the statement of Moran Kinyanjui: *'The celebration day makes it possible for the girl to be accepted back by the community because everybody is there'*. This collective aspect is also crucial during the customary rite of passage and can be seen as characteristic of the rite of passage in general according to Kottak (2011:292). The importance most Maasai I interviewed attach to the presence of the entire community is evident in the statement of Maasai girl Nelly who has undergone ARP: *'The community is there, everybody can come. They assemble, it will be good because we can see that they are on our side, that they are supporting us'*. Or in the statement of AMREF Project Officer Vincent: *'It is very important, the recognition of the whole community has to be there, once they recognized that they are supporting them, the girls have nothing to worry about'*. The importance of this collective aspect is consistent with the statement of Geertz (1957:32) that rituals can be seen as a binding factor within a particular community.

In general, almost all Maasai who participated in this research considered the celebration day with its rituals and practices as a crucial part of Maasai tradition that should be preserved. Like Maasai mother Janet said: *'We are trying to do the same rituals during the celebration day as the rituals we were used to do in our culture. This is very important because that is the only way you can maintain the communal life'*. This perspective is in line with Geertz (1957:32) who stated that rituals not only reinforce the traditional social ties between individuals, they also stress the way in which the social structure of a group is strengthened. Preserving the rituals and practices during the alternative rite of passage, especially on the celebration day, can also be seen as an important part of the design of the ARP programme that will be further explained in chapter five.

### *Changed practices and rituals*

Although the majority of rituals and practices during ARP is preserved and still carried out, there are also some rituals and practices that are modernized and therefore a bit changed when compared to the rituals and practices of the customary rite of passage. An important change, according to Maasai who participated in this research, is the fact that Maasai mainly sing Christian songs on the celebration day of ARP instead of the traditional Maasai songs they use to sing during the customary rite of passage. Like Maasai elder Mpatai said: *'We do the same practices, although it is a bit modernized. Now, we do it in a modern way because most of the songs we sing are Christian and before they were more cultural'*. Another example of 'modernized rituals' is the fact that Maasai don't prepare and drink traditional alcoholic drinks anymore what they usually do during the celebration day of the customary rite of passage. As pastor Rafael stated: *'As the church you cannot give people alcohol, it is not good. That are the rules of the church, you are not allowed to prepare alcohol so we don't do that'*. These changing rituals and the statement of Rafael show the increasing influence of Christianity throughout Kenya, also in the often remote areas where Maasai communities live. This can be linked to Esho et al. (2011:54) who stated that rituals constantly adapt to new ideologies of a globalizing modern world

which makes them dynamic. In other words, changing traditional practices as part of ARP, such as different songs and different kind of drinks, reflect the changing character of the customary rite of passage.

It should also be noted that there is a difference between Loitokitok and Magadi in terms of the importance and presence of traditional Maasai rituals and practices during ARP due to the different role of the Christian church in Loitokitok and Magadi. It seems that Maasai I interviewed in Loitokitok, where mostly church-organized ARPs have taken place, attach less importance to rituals and traditional practices as part of the ARP, compared to Maasai in Magadi where they have mainly carried out community-based ARPs with more emphasis on the performance of traditional practices and Maasai rituals. This difference between Loitokitok and Magadi in terms of rituals and practices is for example reflected in the way pastors are involved in the days of training of ARP. Pastors played a crucial role as trainers during the days of training of the ARPs that have been carried out in Loitokitok, while they were not even present on the days of training during the ARPs in Magadi according to some Maasai in Magadi who participated in this research. Like AMREF Office Assistant Nice in Loitokitok stated: *'And then pastors, you know in this community they fear God a lot, so pastors they also play an important role'*. These differences between Loitokitok and Magadi in terms of rituals and practices during ARP also show that the kind of rituals and practices that are carried out during ARP are initiated by Maasai communities themselves or can be seen as an outcome of the mutual interaction between Maasai and other parties like the church. Therefore, rituals and practices are slightly different in every ARP which makes ARP context-specific. This aspect of ARP cannot only be seen as outcome of practical local possibilities, but also as part of the design of the ARP programme that will be further elaborated in chapter five.

Of course, the main difference between rituals and practices of ARP and the ones of the customary rite of passage is the absence of FGC during ARP. Moran Papayai explained: *'Circumcision is the most important part of the rite of passage because it is the point where the girls change into women'*. This statement is in line with almost all Maasai who participated in this study who see circumcision as the most crucial and indispensable part of the entire customary rite of passage; as the only way for a Maasai girl to become a woman. The practice of circumcision is not performed during ARP anymore; this can be seen as another changing practice which, again, shows the dynamic character of rituals (Esho et al. 2011:53) like the rite of passage among Maasai communities. According to almost all Maasai who participated in this study, female circumcision is replaced by another practice, namely the days of training that can vary per context. Like Maasai mother Ester said: *'I say, forget about FGM and think about education. The best circumcision is education. Education is circumcision of the mind'*. This replacement, instead of only eradicating FGC, is for most Maasai I interviewed important which can be illustrated with a quote of AMREF volunteer and Maasai mother Susan: *'If you take something away from them you have to make sure that you give them an alternative, so we do it with education'*. It is remarkable that a lot of Maasai who participated

in this study find the days of training even more important than the celebration day that is also highly valued as previously explained. Like Maasai elder Jacob said: *'Education, that is more important than the ceremony because that is very permanent. It will stay with you forever, it is a life lesson'*. This shows that the majority of Maasai who participated in this study attach more importance to education, perhaps due to increasing outside influences like the expanding role of education throughout Kenya.

As already mentioned in the description of the ARP in Shompole, girls stay together during the days of training in which they are trained by employees of health facility centres, employees of schools, area chiefs, employees of AMREF, volunteers of AMREF, church employees, employees of other community based organisations (CBO's), Maasai mothers, TBA's or other involved parties during ARP. The girls are mainly trained about the health consequences of FGC, other health issues that concern their age group like sexual transmitted infections (STI's), early pregnancy, early marriage, their rights as a Maasai girl/woman, good and bad aspects of Maasai tradition and the importance of education. Like AMREF volunteer and Maasai mother Susan stated: *'If you want to maintain your culture, fine! But be cautious, please. Anything that is positive of Maasai, please let's keep it. The way of dressing, respect for our parents and the celebrations we are doing, these cultural things are good. The main things that we don't want any more are the cut, the piercing of the ears, the removal of two teeth and the marks on the cheek. because of the health issues. These are the things we really advocate for during the training'*. Role models, video's and drama's are used as a means to educate the girls about these reproductive health topics. It should be noted that Maasai role models, mostly educated and successful women, often play a decisive role in educating Maasai girls and making the entire community aware of the negative consequences of FGC and the importance of education. The latter mentioned aspect is also crucial, according to many Maasai who participated in this research, because education was never highly valued in Maasai tradition. In addition, influential people within Maasai communities like area chiefs or pastors can also serve as a role model for the entire community. Like chief Kaioni said: *'As a chief, I must tell them. They are seeing what we are doing now, so we are the role models of the society. They are looking at us and see that the chief is taking his children to the school and that his girls are not circumcised. Also we are being paid every end of the month, so they now see the importance of education'*. In this way, role models can contribute to the fact that Maasai girls and the entire Maasai community more easily accept previously mentioned cultural changes in their customary rite of passage that they experience nowadays with the advent of ARP. In addition to the days of training, there are some new practices that are carried out on the celebration day of ARP: the girls receive a certificate, they wear anti-FGC t-shirts and wave with anti-FGM flags.

#### **4.2 Meanings of ARP compared to the customary rite of passage**

It is remarkable that Maasai, who participated in this study, attach different kind of meanings to ARP

which can often be linked to a particular ‘group’ within Maasai, mainly based on age. Before these different meanings will be elaborated, I will first discuss the meanings Maasai attach to the customary rite of passage which is mainly focused on womanhood and related to different kind of ‘myths’ and other reasons. Secondly, I will describe different meanings that are attached to ARP according to Maasai who participated in this research. This description will not only show that the meanings of ARP, compared to the meanings of the customary rite of passage, changed according to Maasai I interviewed. It will also show that the meaning of being a Maasai woman changed which, however, has many different reasons besides AMREF’s ARP programme and must be situated in the increasing level of interaction of Maasai communities nowadays.

### *Meanings of the customary rite of passage*

The meaning Maasai, who have participated in this study, attach to the customary rite of passage seems to be more one-sided, in contrast with different meanings they attach to ARP.

All Maasai I interviewed stated that undergoing the customary rite of passage means that a girl can become a woman. In other words, it is seen as a transition from childhood to womanhood. Maasai uniformly stated that the customary rite of passage, including FGC, can be seen as the most crucial stage within the life of a Maasai girl according to Maasai tradition. But what exactly of the customary rite of passage makes you a woman: is it the circumcision itself, the celebration day with its rituals and practices or a combination of these two? Circumcision, for most Maasai who participated in this research, is the crucial part of the customary rite of passage that makes a girl a woman. Like Office Manager Milicent Odinga stated: *‘The most important thing during the rite of passage for them is the cutting because it symbolized the transition from being a child to a woman’*. According to this perception, the celebration day is mainly seen as a platform to enable the community to introduce the girl back into the community and to recognize her as a woman. Other Maasai I interviewed, stated that it is the combination of the circumcision and the celebration day that makes a girl a woman. This makes circumcision and the celebration day interrelated, like Maasai girl Leah said: *‘You cannot be circumcised when there is no celebration and there cannot be a celebration when you are not circumcised’*. According to this view, the blessings on the celebration day are crucial for a girl to be seen as a woman. When a girl is blessed, it means that she is now able to get married and give birth which goes hand in hand with being a Maasai woman according to all Maasai who participated in this study. This perception can be illustrated with a statement of Maasai elder Lemurra: *‘If you go for the cut and you miss the blessings, it means that you are not ready to marry and you are not able to give birth. It is a combination, it is the totality’*. This can be linked to the Maasai belief, that Maasai call a ‘myth’, that a girl can only marry and give birth after she has undergone the customary rite of passage which makes her a Maasai woman. These so-called ‘myths’ mainly serve as a motivation for Maasai girls to make the transition to womanhood by undergoing the customary rite of passage and for the rest

of the community to encourage (and force) the girls to participate in the customary rite of passage. The fact that all Maasai I interviewed came up with the word 'myth' indicates that they don't believe in these Maasai beliefs anymore which they confirmed themselves as well. They mainly see these Maasai beliefs as a 'sign of ignorance' of Maasai communities in the past, due to a more limited level of interaction compared to the increasing level of interaction of Maasai communities nowadays.

The first Maasai 'myth' that makes the customary rite passage necessary is the belief that a girl can only be faithful to her future husband when she is circumcised because this practice will reduce 'promiscuity'. The second and already mentioned 'myth' is the belief that a Maasai girl has to be circumcised, otherwise she cannot get married and give birth. In case she gives birth without being circumcised, according to this belief, one of the parents of the baby or the baby itself will die during or after delivery. Like Maasai elder Lemurra said: *'In the past, Maasai were not allowed to marry an uncircumcised girl. So after FGM she became a woman and she could be married'*. Or Maasai mother Loise: *'If you are pregnant and not circumcised, they see your child as an outcast. So, FGM is to prepare the girls that if they get pregnant that their child will be accepted'*. Other less common Maasai 'myths' are the belief that the clitoris will grow or the belief that Maasai girls can easily get STI's when they are not circumcised.

It is remarkable that some Maasai girls in Magadi who participated in this research consider the fact that you can only become a woman by undergoing the customary rite of passage also as a 'myth'. This means that the primary meaning of the customary rite of passage, becoming a Maasai woman, and therefore the whole concept of a rite of passage is losing value for these Maasai girls I interviewed. According to these Maasai girls, becoming a woman does not necessarily have to be tied to a specific event in life like a rite of passage; it is subjective and can better be seen as a process. Maasai girl Nelly who shared this perspective stated: *'Becoming a woman because of FGM, I think it was just a Maasai belief of the past, but it is me now, not them'*. However, this perspective of some Maasai girls I interviewed does not automatically mean that they are not willing to participate in a ritual like the customary rite of passage or an alternative like ARP. This would imply that it is thus not necessary to believe in the reasons for such a ritual to join it. In addition, there are also other reasons for Maasai to make the transition to womanhood (by means of the customary rite of passage) that Maasai who participated in this study came up with.

Most Maasai who participated in this study also mentioned some reasons why the transition to womanhood by means of the customary rite of passage is important within Maasai tradition. First of all, peer pressure of the age group, an important concept within Maasai tradition as already explained, can be seen as one of the main reasons to take part in the customary rite of passage, especially for the girl herself. Like Maasai mother Janet stated: *'It was because of the pressure. I said if my age mates are circumcised and I am not, I will be stigmatized, I will be alone, I will be lonely. So because of the pressure, I wanted to be circumcised'*. Peer pressure goes hand in hand with the social stigma around FGC as part of the customary rite of passage that creates fear of not being circumcised, based on the



Maasai 'myth' that if a girl doesn't undergo the customary rite of passage, she cannot get married and get pregnant. According to most Maasai I interviewed, a Maasai girl who is not circumcised is a taboo and she will be discriminated and treated as an outcast by the entire community. The second reason is in line with the first one; girls themselves are willing to be circumcised because of social pressure of the entire Maasai community. A Maasai girl must undergo the customary rite of passage to be accepted by her community which mainly takes place on the celebration day because the whole community comes together. A third reason, according to some Maasai I interviewed, to circumcise a girl is because it brings pride and honour to the family of the girl. Lastly, some Maasai I interviewed stated that a lot of Maasai families are eager to circumcise their girl because it makes her ready for marriage which means that the family of the girl will receive a lot of dowry. Like Maasai mother Loise said: *'FGM was very important for the family of the girls because then she could be married off and then the family will get money and some cows who are brought by somebody who is going to marry that girl. So they will profit from that'*.

It is thus important to make the transition to womanhood by means of the customary rite of passage within Maasai tradition, mainly because of the previously mentioned 'myths' and other reasons. But what does it mean within Maasai communities to become a Maasai woman after the customary rite of passage? Most Maasai who participated in this study associated womanhood, after the customary rite of passage, with marriage, having children and household tasks. Like head teacher Christine said: *'For women, their work is just to stay in the house, give birth and take care of the children. They are not supposed to take the decisions. That is the life of a woman in Maasai land'*. Maasai women have many domestic duties and responsibilities like fetching water, taking care of the children, building the house, taking care of the cattle, preparing food for the family, looking for fire wood, milking the cows and so on. These (heavy) duties of a Maasai woman are in line with her position within the family which was mostly described as subordinate and inferior. As was mentioned by Maro et al. (2012:13), Maasai men are the decision-makers of the family and play a dominant role within their family and in the community. Some Maasai I interviewed stated that women mostly have to obey Maasai men and that they are often badly treated by their husbands. Maasai girl Nelly described the position of Maasai women, after the customary rite of passage, as follows: *'Women were beaten, they didn't recognize them as human beings, I can say that. They had a hard time you see, the men were harsh, they believed they were the head of the family. They believed they could do anything to them, in fact the women were like a sign of property'*.

#### *Meanings of the alternative rite of passage*

The meaning Maasai who participated in this study attach to ARP is not as one-sided as is the case with the customary rite of passage. Three different kind of meanings that Maasai attach to ARP can be distinguished that can all be linked to a certain kind of 'group' among Maasai. First of all, some

Maasai attach the same meaning to ARP as the meaning of the customary rite of passage; that a girl can become a woman. The Maasai I interviewed with this perspective believe in the concept of ARP and are often closely involved in the organization and promotion of this alternative. This can be illustrated with a statement of Maasai mother Janet: *'ARP is a way of changing and promoting a child to become a grownup. It's not a must to be cut. We're against that. So instead of torturing, we bless them and we celebrate and we call that age set grownups now. They're now at another level'*.

The second meaning that is attached to ARP is mainly mentioned by Maasai girls who have participated in this study, most of them have undergone ARP. According to their perspective, ARP is not seen as a means to become a woman. They mainly link womanhood to a certain age, finishing school, the physical development of the body, marriage or starting a family. This means that these Maasai girls, nowadays, don't attach value to the cultural concept of a rite of passage for girls within Maasai tradition. Becoming a woman, from this point of view, is more seen as a process rather than on a certain moment in life; through the customary rite of passage. This perspective can also be linked to the fact that some of them see the customary rite of passage as the only means to become a Maasai woman as a 'myth' that they don't believe in. Even a circumcised girl like Leah stated that she doesn't see herself as a woman, despite the fact that she is circumcised which makes you a woman according to Maasai tradition. Like Maasai girl Leah (17) said: *'I am circumcised but I don't believe I am a woman. It is not important anymore, the meaning of circumcision. The day I decide to get married, that is the time that I become a woman, when I start my own family'*. Third, there are some traditional Maasai elders, who participated in this research, who still believe that a Maasai girl can only become a woman by means of circumcision. This does not mean that these Maasai elders reject the concept of ARP, they just don't consider the girls who participated in ARP as women. For these traditional Maasai, it can be stated that the changing concept of the rite of passage has decreased in value.

When you compare the different perspectives (with regard to the meaning of ARP) of some traditional Maasai elders with some Maasai girls, it seems that the younger Maasai generation, in general, has another view on the concept of a rite of passage than the older Maasai generation. In addition, what it means to be Maasai woman changed as well, regardless of different interpretations about the moment that a girl becomes a woman. Maasai who participated in this study mostly stated that the position of Maasai women in today's Maasai communities has improved in many different ways. According to all Maasai I interviewed, womanhood is no longer linked to marriage, having children, household tasks and a subordinate position within the family and the entire community. Nowadays, women are less subordinate, they have less duties and responsibilities (not only because of improved technology, but also because men increasingly help their wives with household tasks), they have better health conditions, their level of education is higher and they have more opportunities in life compared to the life of a circumcised Maasai woman. Like Maasai mother Esther said: *'ARP changed the whole life of a woman. It has empowered her; she will not drop out of school and she will know her rights. Women have become more assertive. They are not being traded for cows, they are*

*treated as human like they are*’. It should be noted that a better position of Maasai women is not only caused by AMREF’s ARP programme. Like Office Manager Milicent Odinga stated: ‘*AMREF does not work in a vacuum*’. There are also other outside influences that contribute in a certain way to the changing position of Maasai girls and women within their communities. Therefore, it is necessary to place the changing meaning of ARP (compared to the meaning of the customary rite of passage) and the changing meaning of womanhood within Maasai tradition in a broader context. In a rapid changing global context in which different manifestations of the process of globalization shape local traditions such as the concept of a rite of passage and the position of Maasai girls and women within Maasai tradition. In other words, ARP doesn’t take place in a vacuum; it can better be seen as an outcome of the interaction between AMREF, Maasai communities and other stakeholders in an ever-changing global context which makes ARP, with its rituals, practices and meanings, a dynamic alternative.

## **5. The design and establishment of ARP by AMREF and different stakeholders**

*Written by Marinka Wijngaard*

During this research it has become clear that it is not merely the work and influence of AMREF that leads to the organization of an ARP. Due to increasing interactions with other communities and organizations, influences come through many different ways and ARP seems to be an example of a conjuncture of globalization processes, altogether leading to cultural change on a local level. In this chapter, the work approach of AMREF and perceptions of Maasai communities toward the organization will shortly be described, followed by an overview of the different partners of AMREF in the field, their discourses on FGC and role within the ARP programme. Finally, the possible different outcomes of ARP, which have been observed during this fieldwork, will be discussed. Overall, this chapter will thereby answer the second sub-question of this research: *In what way is the ARP programme designed by Maasai communities, AMREF Kenya and other stakeholders to anticipate and respond to the cultural traditions of FGC among Maasai communities and how does it differ per context and over time?*

### **5.1 Work approach of AMREF**

As already argued in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, ARP is often seen as a community-based approach to eradicate FGC. Different authors (Johnson 1998; Duncan & Hernlund 2000) have argued that working through a community based work approach can make services for vulnerable populations more effective, integrated, accessible and comprehensive in the context of the local community. And that sustainable change is only possible when the people who perform the practice themselves are involved in the changing process. Because AMREF works closely together with local communities and several other stakeholders in the field, through a community based work approach, they are able to anticipate to the discourses of local actors, most importantly Maasai themselves, on FGC. This leads to a context-specific and dynamic alternative for FGC.

By working through a community based work approach, different AMREF employees explained, the organization implies that the community holds the solution to its own problems. Maasai, especially elderly Maasai, have explained that they sometimes fear that outside influences will change their cultural traditions; something that is already noticeable according to them when it comes to Maasai language, which is slowly disappearing. For this reason, it seems to be very important for a local organization such as AMREF to work within, and respect the traditional systems of Maasai land in order to be accepted by the community. As Charles Leshore, Project Assistant of AMREF in Magadi, said: *'We align ARP within the traditional systems and structures of Maasai'*, and an elderly Maasai explained that *'AMREF has followed the right protocol of coming into the community, and that is why they are now accepted'*. By opening a dialogue with Maasai about possible solutions, AMREF

seems to focus on changing cultural practices that are harmful in their eyes; in this case FGC, while also trying to preserve non-harmful cultural practices.

To try and achieve change, AMREF works through different means of sensitization such as multimedia sessions, whereby educational movies are shown to create awareness on SRHR related issues, or the provision of trainings to influential people in the community (mainly cultural elders, Morans, group leaders and traditional birth attendants) to thereby reach entire communities. Most important when it comes to ARP are so called educational forums; where AMREF trains community groups who, after a while, often organize such forums themselves without the presence of AMREF. A Maasai mother, Ann, explained to me how Maasai react to such means of sensitization, according to her: *‘When they get the information, they will think about it, is it good or is it bad, and then in the end they change slowly.* Sensitization thus takes time, and this explains why AMREF’s ARP only takes place at a small-scale, local level, at the moment.

AMREF also works closely together with different other actors in the field to increase their impact on the community. Overall, this mainly refers to churches, community based organizations (CBO’s) or NGO’s, state institutions, such as schools, and government officials. The identity and influence of these partners on the ARP programme will be further described later on in this chapter.

### *Perceptions toward AMREF*

Due to the fact that FGC is a deeply culturally embedded and sensitive topic, AMREF sometimes experiences rejection from the Maasai community during their work. It has for example happened that Maasai walk away during educational forums or do not show up during an ARP because they do not agree with the eradication of FGC. As a Maasai mother explained to me: *‘At first we rejected AMREF, because their work had no meaning to us’.* AMREF tries to cope with rejections in different ways, for example by coming up with replacing livelihoods for TBA’s (former circumcisers), by working with smaller groups or individuals before organizing forums for the larger community or by training influential role models such as Maasai chiefs or community leaders who then influence other people. This often leads to the fact that rejections become less frequent over time.

In spite of possible rejections, interviews have shown that AMREF tends to be quite a popular organization among Maasai communities. AMREF has often been described as an organization that works closely together with communities in a culturally sensitive way. Another crucial factor to the popularity of AMREF seems to be the fact that the organization combines the UFBR project, which often touches upon very culturally sensitive issues such as FGC, with other projects which focus on issues such as water, sanitation and other health issues and thereby provide communities with their most crucial basic needs. The often positive relationship between AMREF and Maasai communities therefore is not solely based on the UFBR project.

AMREF also provides Maasai with lunch, or a small amount of money, when they are present

during the forums that are organized. Although most Maasai explained to me that they are genuinely interested in most topics that AMREF discusses it seems that there are also a few persons whose interest mostly goes out to the money they gain by being present. Whether the Maasai are genuinely interested or not, this factor does seem to enlarge the number of Maasai present and helps AMREF to at least spread their word among a bigger audience, although it remains uncertain whether Maasai will actually follow up on AMREF's suggestions or not.

#### *Anticipating to different levels of interaction*

As described in the contextual introduction to this thesis, Loitokitok and Magadi are very different areas in terms of their level of interactions. An important observation that has been made is that AMREF has very different work approaches in each area. As Peter N. Nguura, UFBR Project Manager of AMREF, explained: *'If you want to bring about cultural change, you've got to know what principles matter to the people'*. By saying this, he tried to explain that if for example religion is important and makes sense to the people in Loitokitok, it is crucial for AMREF to recognize this and thus work hand in hand with religion to reach people. For a large part, it thus depends on the community and other organizations in the specific location to determine in what way ARP is best prepared, organized and brought to practice. Again, not only AMREF is important or influential when we try to describe how the ARP programme is designed to anticipate and respond to cultural traditions of FGC among Maasai communities. The Maasai communities themselves and the other stakeholders in the field all play a crucial role because each actor has their own needs and interests when it comes to this alternative.

During this fieldwork it has been observed that Maasai, and this probably counts for all people, who interact with other communities and cultures frequently tend to strive for, and accept, changes and adjustments in cultural traditions more easily. This observation is further emphasized with the following quotes. A Maasai mother in Loitokitok explained: *'It is about how much the community is exposed to the outside world. Even in this particular area, you will find that there are areas around town and they are not highly affected by FGM because they interact with other communities who tell them not to circumcise anymore, that it is not necessary.'* And a Moran from Magadi named Noah explained to me *'When we compare ourselves to the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya, we lag behind. The Kikuyu already got out of their tradition because education and religion reached them earlier. But education and religion reached us later and that is why we are still lagging behind'*. These quotes show that cultural traditions and ways of thinking about a practice such as FGC are experienced as being strongly influenced by interactions with other communities. This also explains why rejections toward AMREF are more often experienced in more remote areas. As James, an employee from a health facility in Loitokitok said: *'This is a very cosmopolitan place, we have Maasai, Kikuyo, Luo, and much more, so we are used to different cultures. For us, getting new*

*information is not very difficult. But if you go somewhere else, they will have more difficulty.*' This quote indicates that the level of interactions of communities thus seem to determine in what way ARP can play a successful role in the eradication of FGC.

The actual effects of interactions have often been described by Maasai in terms of the increasing presence of churches and number of religious members in communities, an increasing number of schools and growing levels of education and overall changes in Maasai traditions. As can also be interpreted from the quote that was stated before from Moran Noah, Maasai tradition has often been described as something negative by Maasai themselves, whereas religion and education were more often positively emphasized. This, interestingly, not always seems to be in line with ideas about Maasai tradition of AMREF, or other stakeholders, who often strongly focus on the preservation of non-harmful cultural practices within Maasai culture to avoid an ethnocentric work approach. Differences are thus apparent among the discourses of many actors in the field when it comes to ideas about the eradication of FGC and these are, again, dynamic due to the interactions between these different actors.

Overall, the different levels of interactions between communities are noticeable in many aspects of AMREF's ARP programme. This influences the practices that are performed during ARP, as is explained in the previous chapter. It influences the role, identity and discourse of different stakeholders in the field, the entire process leading up to ARP, the ways in which ARP is brought to practice and the overall rejections and successes of AMREF in the field.

### *A context of globalization*

Different ARPs, organized by different parties, have taken place by now in the research locations that have been studied for our thesis and many Maasai stated that FGC is no longer practiced in their community. Whether this is true, we cannot confirm. After only a few years since the start of AMREF's ARP programme, it is probably too early to draw such conclusions. But when studying the data of this research, AMREF's work does already seem to be quite effective because of their specific work approach and the fact that they are often well accepted and appreciated by the communities they work with. Important hereby, however, is to recognize that this success of AMREF, and its ARP programme, takes place in a context of modernization and globalization in which the achievement of cultural change might very well be made possible by many different factors that are not directly linked to the specific work method of AMREF. As Esther, an employee from women empowerment group Ewuap, in Loitokitok, mentioned: *'When you are aware of other things like the church, the law and modernity, it increases the level of exposure, you are ashamed of being backward. Because of this exposure, culture is getting weaker.* Jacob, Maasai chief in an area near Loitokitok, said: *'Everybody is saying no to FGM now. It is not only AMREF, it is not only education, it is not only the church. It is all those together and also the government, health centres, and probably many more'*. By further

examining the influence of other role players in Magadi in Loitokitok in the next section a more comprehensive overview of different discourses and influences in the field of ARP is given.

## **5.2 Actors and discourses in the field**

During this fieldwork, many different partners of AMREF have been interviewed to find out what their discourse concerning FGC is and until which extent AMREF's ARP is influenced by all these different stakeholders, Maasai being one of them. Because it is not possible for AMREF to provide the ARP programme in totality on its own, mostly due to financial and capacity issues, AMREF tries to partner with other stakeholders in the field by providing them with lunch, transport or training in exchange for their help and cooperation. The work of AMREF hereby stretches beyond the borders of their own organization.

AMREF's partners comprise of both formal as well as informal players. Formal partners include ministries and ministry representatives, churches, NGO's and CBO's, health facilities and their staff, schools and private companies; the most important one being TATA Chemicals in Magadi. Maasai communities themselves form crucial informal partners of AMREF. Cultural elders, chiefs, TBA's, mothers, girls, Morans, peer educators and community leaders all play a role in AMREF's ARP. Each stakeholder has its own discourse concerning FGC and therefore different ideas about how to eradicate, but sometimes also preserve, the practice. Overall, human rights, health and developmental discourses concerning FGC, which have been introduced in the theoretical chapter, have all been recognized among different actors in the field. The actors which have shown to be most crucial for this thesis will shortly be discussed in the next section.

### *The state*

The different Ministries and their representatives with whom AMREF works together, mainly being the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development and the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, are the institutions that guide the legislation in Kenya. A Maasai chief in Loitokitok, who is a state official, explained: *'The constitution is being clear on terms of what is being illegal. FGM is called an illegal cultural practice. You know that gives us the backing, anybody can now talk of it explicitly, because we have the backing of the constitution.'* It seems probable that such institutions thus focus more on implementing rule of law; protecting human rights, than on conserving culture. However, in the field this did not always appear to be the case. Politicians, in this research mainly chiefs, were often described and noticed by informants as players with a double agenda in the field of FGC due to their political accountability. They often did not advocate against FGC but took up a neutral position in this area to make sure they don't lose votes. Lemorran Kaanto, human resource manager at TATA Mechanicals, Magadi,



explained: *'Chiefs are so important, although there will probably be some of them who will be part of the problem, rather than the solution'*. Different interests are thus at stake in the political field.

However, in the end, chiefs and other government officials have shown to be highly instrumental for AMREF. The Area Educational Officer (AEO) of Magadi explained *'The chiefs, you need them on board, they have to take it. Because you know it's only the chief who can call people together.'*

Interviews and data from participant observation have revealed that it is highly dependent on each chief and on the context to determine what discourse is apparent in the political field surrounding FGC.

Schools, also state institutions, most often don't tend to play a very influential role in the process towards or during ARP. However schools, and the entire growth in the educational system in Kenya, play a crucial role in overall developments of Kenya. Different schools, mainly primary schools because girls are usually circumcised at a young age, have also shown to increasingly integrate lessons about FGC in the customary schooling curriculum and thereby strengthen the success of ARP. Peter N. Nguura, UFBR project manager of AMREF stated that *'ARP needs to move hand in hand with education for it to be successful'*. Education is mentioned by almost all participants as a crucial, maybe even the most crucial, factor of influence when it comes to changing perceptions about FGC.

During this fieldwork it has been observed that the state tends to have quite a different role in Magadi and Loitokitok. Because Magadi is more remote and very hard to reach, less institutions and organizations have settled in this area. This has led to the fact that state institutions in Magadi are less dominant in comparison to Loitokitok. It has been noticeable, for example, that chiefs in Magadi don't report on people who have broken the law by circumcising a girl, whereas in Loitokitok many stories about Maasai being fined or going to jail for practicing FGC have been heard. The following quote shows that the state is not always experienced as being an active contributor in the lives of Maasai in Magadi. Julius, a Moran, said: *'Maasai don't care about the law. Even AMREF has reached out much further than the government. FGM is going down slowly, but it's not because of the law. Maybe in the bigger cities they would listen to the law, but not here. So to me, it's doing nothing.'* Other opinions have been noticeable in Loitokitok, where a church volunteer said: *'Now, with the reinforcement of the Kenyan law, everybody knows that it is an offense to carry out FGM, and people are scared to go to jail.'*

Overall, it seems that because the Kenyan government has not been an active player in the struggle to eradicate FGC for a long time yet, their role still differs per community; again depending on the level of interactions and remoteness of an area. When reading the quote of Julius, which has just been cited, and many other interviews, it seems to be clear that the higher the level of interactions among Maasai communities, the more dominant government officials and the overall relation between communities and state institutions become who carry out a discourse that is globally influenced, concerning FGC as a human rights violation, on a local level.

## Churches

Churches, mainly Catholic churches, have also shown to have some mixed interests when it comes to eradicating FGC. Because FGC is not mentioned in the Bible, as opposed to male circumcision, it is often not approved of within Christianity. This is emphasized by the following quote from a church volunteer in Loitokitok: *'The Bible does not say circumcision is bad, but it does not mention female circumcision at all. Therefore we know that it is against Gods words.'* Another argument heard is that Christians believe that the clitoris is made by God, it has a purpose, so human beings have no reason to take it away. Because of their often strong negative views about FGC, churches can become dominant and very influential anti-FGC advocates in Kenya. On the other hand, to churches the conservation of Maasai culture is not always as important as the promotion of religious practices and beliefs. Patrick, head teacher of a primary school near Magadi, explained that *'the church has often lost the war on FGM, because they came through that community path and said: it is witchcraft, it is devil, it is un-Christian. You cannot come and call somebody's culture devilish, you see?'* and Maasai elder Shinai described that he felt the church was not effective in the eradication of FGC because *'the church is just condemning the practice, they say it's bad. But what they forget to do is explain people why it is bad. The reasons are missing. It's just like if you tell me not to smoke, you shouldn't just tell me it's bad, you should give me reasons why it's bad.'* Several Maasai explained to me that they feel this is an important difference between AMREF and the church, and the reason why AMREF is sometimes more appreciated than the church for their efforts to eradicate FGC, due to the fact the organization does educate communities and raises awareness on the health consequences of FGC.

The data described above show that ARPs which are organized by religious institutions tend to have less emphasis on traditional cultural practices, as is described in chapter four. On the other hand, churches benefit from the growth and retaining of members. Some Maasai, who value FGC highly, might therefore turn their back toward the church when FGC is advocated against. Churches have therefore sometimes taken up a more neutral role in the ARP process to avoid loss of memberships. It must be noted that the church is still often highly appreciated and valued by both Maasai communities as well as AMREF, for their work against FGC. Susan, staff member at a health facility, explained that *'Our church is a very good place. Levels of FGM have changed a lot through church. What the church is telling the people, is to bring that love back at home and that has been really important'* and Serem, head nurse in Magadi division, stated that *'even though the church sometimes works against Maasai culture, they are very influential. Because religion changes people themselves. If you go to church you change. If you read the Bible, you see that it does not support FGM and then you change as an individual.'*

Again, it highly depends on the context and individual institution to determine what the influence on ARP exactly is. But because churches were apparent in Magadi and Loitokitok long before AMREF started working in these areas and are often appreciated for the work that they have

done, e.g. giving shelter to homeless people or caring for parentless children, many Maasai tend to trust the church and its staff. The majority of Maasai who have been interviewed for this research regard the church as a permanent structure which has been with them for as long as they can remember and this makes religion an important factor in the eradication of FGC and the ARP programme.

#### *Other NGO's and CBO's*

Apart from AMREF, other NGO's, and on a smaller-scale many different CBO's, play their part in the ARP programme; each with their own goals. AMREF often collaborates with such organizations by integrating their objectives into the work of these organizations to reach more people. People who work for CBO's are most often inhabitants from the community and such organizations often work hand in hand with the community to strengthen local development. By integrating their objectives into the work of other organizations, AMREF tries to increase the impact of their work. As Nice N. Lengete, project assistant of AMREF in Loitokitok, said: *'CBO's are everywhere and are here to stay. Even when AMREF has left, and one day we will, they will still be here.'* This statement is in line with overall perceptions heard about the church; these organizations are seen as a permanent structure. By thus involving different NGO's and CBO's in the ARP programme, AMREF tries to create sustainability for ARP. This fieldwork has shown that, overall, NGO's and CBO's, don't tend to have a large impact on the actual design of ARP. They do however play a role in overall developments in communities and thereby indirectly influence what ARP looks like in terms of changes concerning traditional practices and customs, and needs of the community.

The following quote from a volunteer, and ex-employee of AMREF, Ann, shows how all the different stakeholders that have just shortly been described, and of course there are many more that have not played a major role in this research, such as youth groups or individual activists, are important in the work field of AMREF: *'Churches are getting more important, education is growing, there are other NGO's, there's the government, there's youth groups, the constitution is coming into play, women are becoming more empowered. We hope, one time, we stand up and say no to FGM all together.'*

### **5.3 Different outcomes of ARP**

It has become clear that different actors, each with their own discourse on FGC and ways to eradicate this practice, are involved in the ARP programme. However it is still not clear yet how all these different actors, who are continuously influenced by global and local discourses of other actors and institutions with whom they interact, influence ARP and bring this alternative to practice together. This will be further discussed in the following section, whereby different outcomes of ARP and the role of different actors in these ARPs are discussed, starting with Magadi and followed by Loitokitok.

## *Magadi*

Because Magadi is remote and because the town is built completely for the purpose of the private company TATA Mechanicals, it is not easy for organizations and institutions to settle and work in Magadi. Therefore, apart from AMREF, there are not many CBO's, NGO's or other institutions present in Magadi town. It has been observed that AMREF thus tends to have more of a 'solo-position' in the field in Magadi when it comes to deciding how ARP is designed. There are, however, still some important partners to AMREF when it comes to the ARP programme.

As several participants of this research have explained to us, various attempts have been made by churches in Magadi to implement ARPs before AMREF came. These attempts supposedly failed because the community rejected the ideas of the church to ban the traditional cultural ceremonies and replace them with religious ceremonies. AMREF tried a different tactic, by working through a "cultural approach", as they call it themselves. This means that AMREF tries to involve the entire community, and work closely together with local leaders, to gain trust from the community and thereby respect cultural traditions while trying to eradicate practices that AMREF sees as harmful. Millicent, project officer of AMREF in Magadi, explained that *'ARP is not something that has been started up by AMREF, it has been going on. But I think our interesting contribution is by making it a community led movement.'*

AMREF organized a divisional ARP in Magadi and this turned out to be a learning experience for various communities that were present. After this first ARP, other community-led ARPs have been organized. Hereby the community was in charge of the design and implementation of ARP and AMREF merely played a supportive role in terms of finances, transport and the provision of facilitators and trainers. In Shompole, one of the towns in Magadi region, the community however did not invite any guests but decided to organize the ARP with just members of the community. This shows that ARPs are different per community due to the fact that the communities are the designers of the entire rite of passage themselves. Maasai mother Janet: *'a community-led ARP is much stronger because this is a community issue. FGM is a traditional issue. It's not an AMREF issue, so that's where the difference is. So community-led ARP is even sustainable.'*

It has been observed that local leaders, who have often been trained by AMREF, are mostly the people to take the initiative to organize an ARP for their own community. The AEO of Kajiado County stated that *'Chiefs are the key people to take initiative in the organization and initiation of ARP'* and head teacher Patrick believed that *'the next ARP all depends on the people who coordinate it. These are the cultural elders, the chiefs, the community health workers. Those people who have been trained by AMREF and who are role models to the community'*. The visions and actions of individual leaders concerning ARP can thus be the crucial factor in the success or failure of an ARP. This has been clearly noticeable in the field where the difference between communities who do and

the ones who don't organize ARP is often linked to the progressiveness of local leaders. When asking a Maasai girl, Valery, why her community had not yet organized an ARP, while a neighbouring community did do so, she answered *'I would blame our chief. It is the leaders who need to come and give their support for us to be able to have an ARP'*. Also very influential and crucial when trying to discover such distinctions between communities is the remoteness of an area and, related to this, the level of interactions of communities with people with different cultures and discourses concerning FGC. *'Intermarriage, education or other forms of interaction with different cultures will change the Maasai. Isolation is still holding them back'* Christine, head teacher at Magadi Primary School, explained. Communities in Shompole, for example, have a large-scale market day each Friday where Maasai (even from Tanzania) come to do business. Such a market day, whereby people from many different communities come together, has a huge impact on the level of interaction and increases the knowledge and cultural diversity of an area. A Moran explained *'We're passing the message on to other people. People from the other country are coming to learn from Kenya. And maybe there's no ARP in Tanzania. Probably not. So this message, because Shompole is near the border, they should come and learn and take this message to the other part. So now it's spreading all over.'* It thus seems that interactions not only increase the likelihood for an ARP in the area where AMREF works, but also contribute to the spreading of ARP among other communities. Globalization, as explained in the theoretical chapter, tends to increase the level of interactions of communities and thereby influences discourses concerning ARP of actors on a local level.

Communities from a very different place in Magadi, namely Musenke, showed to still have very conservative views concerning FGC and still value customary traditions such as early marriage, FGC and early pregnancy very much. Musenke is much more remote than Shompole and AMREF speaks about Musenke as an extreme hardship area. AMREF has been working with Musenke for less than a year and the level of education and interaction among Maasai communities in this area is very minimal, compared to other communities. This links to the fact that the larger part of Maasai from Musenke do not agree with the replacement of FGC by ARP. These examples show that even communities within Magadi region can strongly differ from each other when it comes to the design and implementation of ARP. The example of Musenke shows that overall perceptions of communities toward ARP seem to, again, be strongly related to the remoteness of an area and the level of interactions which are influenced by global processes.

### *Loitokitok*

The way ARP is organized and implemented in Loitokitok has shown to be very different from Magadi. ARP in Loitokitok has never been fully organized by AMREF, it has merely been a scale-up of ARP in Magadi. AMREF also has more dialogue with other stakeholders in the field, mainly CBO's Ewuap and FPFK; a well-known Pentecostal church, when designing ARP in this region. This is

partly explained by the fact that there simply are much more different organizations and other stakeholders apparent and active in Loitokitok region. Because the area is less remote than Magadi, the level of interactions of Maasai communities with other cultures is higher. Christian religion is also stronger and more apparent; mainly visible by the high numbers of churches in the area. This has a strong effect on AMREF's ARP in Loitokitok region. Churches in Loitokitok already organized several ARPs before AMREF came to the region. These ARPs mainly entailed two days of training and a certification of girls, which is similar to AMREF's ARP, but these church-led ARPs did not include a cultural ceremony on the day that girls were certified. As has been explained in the previous chapter, the traditional cultural aspects of ARP; such as blessings from the elderly and Maasai dances or songs are less present in church-led ARPs, whereas Christian aspects of ARP are more dominant.

AMREF personnel have described their work method in Loitokitok as a "CBO-approach" or a "religious-approach", thus different from the so called "cultural-approach" in Magadi. Charles Leshore, Project Assistant in Magadi, explained that *'the approaches are different in each place. Magadi is more cultural, traditional, and Loitokitok is more Christian. So the point is that you first have to understand the culture, it all starts with research; who are the decision makers in a community? Then you have to adjust your format to that.'*

Overall, it is clear that the growth of Christianity, globalization processes and overall developments, which can be noticed by, for example, the increasing numbers of schools and growing infrastructure, are very visible in Loitokitok and have an impact on the decreasing level of FGC overall in this region. Also, as is the case in Magadi, ARPs in Loitokitok region are different per community. This is, for example, emphasized by the fact that some Maasai communities in Loitokitok have claimed to no longer practice FGC without having replaced FGC with an ARP. Maasai explained that changes in their community are due to overall modernization and developmental processes in the area. This again shows that interventions on FGC, such as the ARP programme, don't take place in a vacuum and that many different actors who all play a role in the creation of ARP are influenced by global discourses and processes which lead to change on a local level.

#### *A context-specific intervention*

ARP is a highly context-specific intervention because the structure and activities of ARPs are designed by the community themselves and thus depend on cultural and environmental needs and conditions. AMREF therefore has a different role and level of involvement in each ARP. Interviews from this fieldwork have shown that more and more Maasai feel that ARP is for their own good because it involves their own girls and it therefore seems that ownership over ARP grows quickly over time. *'AMREF is just a boost, now it is up to us'*, a Maasai girl from Loitokitok explained, and a head teacher at a primary school near Magadi said *'Initially AMREF was doing all these things, but we've been saying that if we depend so much on AMREF to do, tomorrow when they go, what will happen?'*

*So that is why I am saying, it has to be an initiative of the community, we really want AMREF only to come and help where it is necessary. But some places are more active than others. Like Shompole, they have a very active chief.*’ It thus differs per community as to how far Maasai still depend on organizational and financial support from AMREF. Communities who live in areas where higher level of education and church involvement are apparent seem to depend less on AMREF and take more initiative in the organization and follow-up of ARP.

Community-led ARPs that have been organized so far in Kajiado County have mostly taken place at a community or locational level whereby a few villages join up and take a decision for ARP. It has been observed that such pioneering communities then invite their neighbouring communities to witness their ARP celebration, a gesture which sometimes led to those visitors starting to plan for their community to also adopt ARP. Interactions between Maasai communities thus seem to be a powerful tool for learning and for creating sustainability and ownership over ARP among Maasai communities in a wider region.

Just like the fact that the way in which FGC is practiced is not uniform across all communities and differs per context and over time, this is also the case with ARP. It is important to consider this when trying to study or adopt either an AMREF-led or a community-led ARP model. Each community has different needs and it seems to be important for AMREF to work closely together with all the different players in the field and be up to date about on-going changes and processes in a community to be able to assess what kind of an alternative a community needs and wants and support them in that. Overall, ARP is an intervention which is influenced by many different stakeholders, including Maasai communities, and the final impact, or outcome, of the alternative seems to be highly dependent on and bound to context and time.

## 6. Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter the main findings of this research will be recaptured and discussed to provide an answer to the central question of this thesis: *How is AMREF's ARP programme designed and brought to practice by different stakeholders and how does it fit within the traditions of practice and meaning of the customary rite of passage for Maasai girls, in Kajiado County, Kenya?* The goal of this research question is to describe ARP as a social change within a global context.

When aligning the empirical chapters with each other and with the theoretical framework of this thesis to provide an answer to the central question of this thesis, some interesting parallels can be discovered. The conclusions that are drawn in this chapter are all formed on the basis of the fieldwork that has been conducted for this research. This research has focussed on the role of Maasai communities within, and their perceptions toward, the ARP programme, as well as the role of AMREF and other stakeholders in the field. We will firstly discuss the main findings concerning the meaning that Maasai attach to alternative rite of passage and their perceptions toward the practices and rituals of ARP as an alternative for their customary rite of passage. Then, we will discuss the main findings concerning the role of AMREF and other relevant stakeholders within the ARP programme and their influence on ARPs. When aligning these main findings together we will be able to draw some general conclusions concerning ARP, linking this local intervention for FGC to discourses on a global level. This chapter will close with a short description of the social and theoretical relevance of this research and recommendations for future research.

### *Maasai communities*

It has been discussed that the majority of rituals and practices that are carried out during ARP mainly resemble the rituals and practices of the customary rite of passage. The cultural concept of the age group and the days of training for girls are mostly seen as replacement of the separation phase during the customary rite of passage. In addition, the celebration day of ARP with its rituals, practices and meanings mainly resembles the celebration day of the customary rite of passage. In general, the preservation of most rituals, practices and its meanings during ARP is highly valued by almost all Maasai who participated in this study. From this perspective, it seems that ARP still forms a binding ritual (Esho et al. 2011:54) and therefore a crucial factor within Maasai communities.

However, some rituals and practices that are performed during ARP seem to have changed, in comparison to the rituals and practices of the customary rite of passage. This is partly due to the increasing role of the Christian church within Maasai communities which can be seen as part of the larger process of globalization. Furthermore, circumcision, which is almost always seen as the most crucial aspect of the customary rite of passage, can be seen as an important changing ritual that is not carried out during ARP. Almost all Maasai who participated in this study stated that the days of



training are now seen as the most crucial part of ARP. These changing rituals and practices within Maasai tradition are consistent with Esho et al. (2011:53) who stated that rituals have a dynamic character and are therefore never fixed. In this way, it seems that ARP can be considered as a suitable replacement of the customary rite of passage; preserving most rituals and practices while replacing circumcision with another practice that is highly valued by Maasai who have been interviewed. In other words, globalization processes influence the ideas and practices of actors on a local level. In the case of Maasai communities who participated in this study, these processes can have an impact on cultural traditions such as FGC, as part of the rite of passage, which manifests itself in changing rituals and practices. In addition, the differing levels of interaction of Maasai communities in Loitokitok and Magadi are reflected in the diverse ways that rituals and practices are experienced and carried out during ARP

Changing rituals and practices that are carried out during ARP go hand in hand with the changing and differing meanings that Maasai attach to ARP nowadays. Some Maasai who participated in this study attach the same meaning to ARP as to the customary rite of passage which shows that there is still a need to continue with the cultural concept of a 'rite of passage', regardless of a changing form of the associated rituals and practices. Another perspective, with regard to the meaning of ARP, was mainly shared by traditional Maasai with a relative older age who stated that a girl cannot become a woman by undergoing ARP because of the absence of circumcision. Other Maasai, especially girls who have been interviewed, see womanhood more as a process rather than a transition at a certain moment in life; during the customary rite of passage. This means that the primary meaning of the customary rite of passage, becoming a Maasai woman, and therefore the whole concept of a rite of passage seems to be losing value for these Maasai girls. It should be noted that this change in meaning, which is acknowledged by some girls, cannot only be ascribed to changing rituals and practices. This perspective can also be seen as an outcome of changing cultural values and beliefs due to the increasing level of interaction of Maasai communities, as a consequence of globalization (Greig 2002; Stegner 1993; Appadurai 1996). These different meanings are also in line with the changing meaning of being a Maasai woman. The changing position of Maasai women within Maasai communities cannot only be seen as a result of AMREF's ARP programme, it also seems to change due to a wide variety of external influences like the increasing role of education, the church, other NGO's and other communities in Kenya by means of interaction of these different actors.

Overall, ARP is seen as a comprehensive replacement of the customary rite of passage according to most Maasai who participated in this study because it fits well with their needs in terms of Maasai tradition. Stegner (1993) stated that cultures that are willing and able to embrace external influences on their own terms while also rejecting anything that implies violation of their way of life are most likely to survive. This statement seems applicable here.

### *AMREF and other stakeholders*

As has been discussed in chapter five, AMREF uses a community based work approach, implying that the community can find the solutions to their own problem. This work approach seems to be in line with the doctrine of cultural relativism; whereby Maasai are not forced to change the practice of FGC by AMREF but rather are empowered to make their own decisions concerning health. The perspective of cultural relativists is that norms and values can only be understood from the culture in which they arise because they are not universal (Donnelly 1984:403). AMREF has shown to avoid interventions in Maasai culture as much as possible by trying to eradicate FGC in a culturally sensitive manner. This is in line with Mouton's statements who argues that, within the doctrine of cultural relativism, it is no longer justified to intervene in a certain cultural context by simply implementing a certain project or initiative with regard to eradicating FGC (Mouton 2007:15). It thus seems to be clear that AMREF leans strongly toward the doctrine of cultural relativism, in comparison to ethnocentrism. However, if AMREF would work through a discourse of cultural relativism completely, they would probably not even start to talk about possible changes concerning a culturally embedded practice such as FGC. Some tension between ethnocentrism and cultural relativism seems to thus probably always be apparent, whereby an organization such as AMREF needs to find a well-balanced position between the two ends of this continuum. On the one hand trying to achieve change, fighting for human rights and following Kenyan law, on the other hand trying to preserve and respect Maasai' culture. However, as we have explained, it is crucial to not only analyze the work of AMREF from a perspective of cultural relativism versus ethnocentrism, but to focus on, and include, more actors with their different discourses.

It has become clear overall that AMREF, with their community-based work approach, tends to have a good relationship with local communities which has an effect on the level of cooperation with which ARP is organized by AMREF, Maasai communities and other stakeholders. This way of cooperating with local communities seems to be in line with what Barbara et al (1998) stated: it's important for organizations to pay attention and achieve a tactical understanding of group dynamics in order for them to increase the effectiveness of an organization's work and what Esho et al. (2011) suggested: that FGC strategies should focus on being socially grounded, by understanding the people's sociocultural context. AMREF has shown to work together with many different players; both insiders and outsiders of Maasai communities. Esho et al. (2011) described that working together with both insiders and outsiders is very important when campaigning against FGC because it helps an organization become more aware of the changing dynamics of culture and its interplay with global ideologies.

Because AMREF has so many partners and works together with many different stakeholders in the field, various different discourses, needs and expectations are apparent throughout the ARP programme. Churches, for example, try to spread the word of the Bible and tend to emphasize

religious aspects of ARP more than the cultural aspects, whereas politicians, as representatives of the government, have to implement the law; which forbids FGC, while also maintaining the support from the Maasai community.

### *Overall findings*

In the theoretical chapter of this thesis it has been described that the customary rite of passage, with its rituals, practices and meanings, is dynamic rather than fixed. Maasai communities who participated in this study are constantly involved in the process of negotiation about the design of their rituals and practices. This leads to the fact that ARP is dynamic as well; it seems to be in line with the situation in which Maasai communities find themselves. During this fieldwork the different discourses that have been discussed in the theoretical chapter of this thesis have all been recognized among actors in the field. This, to recapture, concerns perspectives about human rights, health, development and also the debate between ethnocentrism versus cultural relativism. However, as has been argued before, in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the dynamics and complexity of the alternative rite of passage, the cultural tradition needs to be studied as part of larger processes of globalization, which includes all the studied actors, in relation to each other, with their differing discourses.

Overall, literature has shown agreement on the fact that globalization permits flows of cultural ideas, values and beliefs (Greig 2002; Stegner 1993; Appadurai 1996). Less agreement was found on the effect of increasing levels of interaction on local communities. Boyd (1988), for example, argued that globalization can play an encouraging role in cultures uniqueness. In her article it is then argued that this would mean that communities will hold on to cultural traditions such as FGC more strongly. This however does not seem to be the case when looking at the findings from this fieldwork. Maasai do not necessarily need to hold on to FGC, as part of the rite of passage, and thereby distinguish themselves from other communities to maintain their heterogeneity. Bird and Stevens (2003) and Stegner (1993) have described that increasing levels of 'external interaction', as they call it, does not necessarily have to lead to the homogenization of cultures or the collapse of local cultures as some writers have argued. Instead, a mixing of cultural values seems to be apparent which then again leads to new opportunities for cultural interaction (Bird and Stevens 2003; Stegner 1993). During this thesis we have also used this perspective to be able to acknowledge the diversity of ARPs. We have found that ARP is different in each location, at each time, due to the many different discourses, expectations and needs of actors that play a part in the design and implementation of the programme. Globalization thus rather seems to increase heterogeneity than homogeneity; even when looking at one cultural community such as the Maasai in a comparatively small area of the world; Kajiado County. Even though AMREF's ARP might have started as a standard model, the outcome is different in each occasion and will probably always keep changing. AMREF tries to anticipate to the context in which ARP takes place to make their own programme more effective, as is described in chapter five. This

context-specific aspect of the design of the ARP programme is in line with chapter four, which discussed that there is a slight difference between rituals and practices carried out during ARPs in Loitokitok and Magadi because of the different context. The importance of recognizing the dynamics of ARP and working in a context-specific manner is thus dominant throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis.

Overall, it is clear that ARP is a highly context- and time bound intervention for FGC, influenced by different actors and environmental conditions. It is also clear that cultural change, in this case we thus refer to ARP among Maasai communities, cannot be adequately confined to a mere distinction between heterogeneity and homogeneity or collapsibility versus adjustment; cultural values mix and new meanings and practices of ARP arise.

### *Social and theoretical relevance*

With this thesis we have tried to place the alternative rite of passage within a broader global context, instead of merely studying the subject from one perspective or one discourse. This perspective might contribute to a more comprehensive overview and understanding the process by which ARP takes shape. Different actors, e.g. Maasai, AMREF, churches, the state, NGO's and CBO's, all have different discourses concerning FGC and ideas about how to eradicate this practice. What we have seen in practice is that when these actors with differing discourses come together in the field to try and find an alternative for FGC, this leads to very dynamic and diverse outcomes. Because so many different actors play a role in the design and fulfilment of ARP, it is too simplistic to merely study the implementation of ARP as a bridge between the discourses of human rights, or ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism. We thus acknowledge that FGC can be portrayed as a health issue, human rights issue and development issue, but we argue that the practice cannot be seen as merely one of these discourses.

This research is theoretically relevant because it tries to contribute to bridge the gap between international standards of human rights on the one hand and the preservation of different cultural norms and values on the other hand by giving insight in AMREF's community-based work approach, which tries to eradicate FGC in a sustainable way. In other words, with this thesis we try to transcend the debate between ethnocentrism and cultural relativism by acknowledging the complexity and dynamics of ARP.

This research also has a social relevance because even though several organizations have already implemented ARPs in Kenya there still seems to be a lack of information about the role of these programmes within the daily lives of Maasai communities and their perceptions toward this alternative (AMREF:c 2011; Chege et al. 2001; Oloo et al. 2011). Concrete information about the realization of ARP, which of course differs over time and per context, is also lacking and that is where this thesis will provide a useful addition. By having given more insight in the different perceptions of

Maasai and other stakeholders within the ARP programme and their mutual interaction with each other and AMREF, this thesis might contribute to further improvements of the programme.

#### *Recommendations for future research*

Due to the fact that ARP is so bound to context and time it is recommendable to continue researching the processes of change over time to be able to capture a more comprehensive view of the programme. AMREF's ARP programme has only been apparent for a few years now and therefore it is highly recommendable to continue researching its progress over time. Then again, when looking at our findings, we can also argue that it might never be possible to truly understand the design and practices of ARP because of continuing changes due to interactions between actors and the adaptive nature of ARP. Maasai live and operate in dynamic environments which ebb and flow and where traditions may emerge and die due to a wide variety of influences. There seems to be a process at hand in which Maasai find themselves in increasing interaction with external actors. This becomes clear in processes of change, such as those in relation to the eradication of FGC. Moreover, this does not mean that Maasai communities change in similar ways or lose their culture. Rather, it shows that rituals and practices during ARP can be seen as an outcome of the mutual interaction between Maasai communities, AMREF and other stakeholders which makes ARP context-specific, dynamic and complex. Future research may focus more on this dynamic process of mutual interaction and influence between local and global forces. This might give a better insight in the needs of communities on the local level and ways to integrate these needs within a larger and rapidly changing context.

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