



Pokot Masculinity: The Role of Rituals in Forming Men

Kjartan Jonsson

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How is masculinity formed and transmitted between generations among the Pokot people in Kenya, and what are the most important male values? The author, Kjartan Jonsson lived and worked among the Pokot people for more than 11 years as a pastor and researched their life and religion, especially the rituals men go through from birth to death. The initiation rituals are the most important, particularly circumcision, as the initiates stay in special circumcision camps for up to three and a half months with mature men who teach them how men should live and the values of the Pokot male society. Rituals often reflect the importance of cattle in the life of the Pokot people, as cattle are the chief form of wealth and also serve as ritual sacrifices. A rich man can afford to have many wives and children, who serve as an important labour force tending to the man's wealth. All this gives him power and respect in society. Pokot men finally have one goal: to prolong their lives as ancestral spirits, which is only possible if they have sons who provide them with progeny, for which they become guardian spirits. The author's material on the Pokot people is put into the context of African traditional religion and theories of anthropology and science of religions about rituals.

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