

DEDICATED TO
Salaton Ole Ntutu - Susan
and
Sabore

May 5th, 2018
Grateful and
forever obliged.

THE MAASAI

On the Photographs by Reinhilde Gielen

*Where is your self to be found?
Always in the deepest enchantment
you have experienced.*

— HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

We had hardly prepared. A few emails, that's all. Based on a recommendation and an email intro. We knew that we would be taken care off. Confident enough with the country and its people, we could just let everything happen.

Maji Moto sounded exquisitely Japanese to me when I first heard the name. But it is Kiswahili for 'hot water'. A village named after its hot springs. The springs that allow villagers to bathe daily in hot water. The springs that provide water for the cattle. Even in severe droughts. The springs that furnish hot water for our shower at the camp.

It is at Maji Moto Cultural Camp that we met with the Maasai. That we learned about their culture, revelled in their hospitality, heard of their concerns and felt attached. We ate, drank, sang, danced and laughed. Just like people do. Everywhere.

It's at Maji Moto that we made these photographs.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF

Maji Moto

BY

Reinhilde Gielen

WITH TEXTS

BY HANS PAUWELS

BRUSSELS 2018





MAJI MOTO WELCOME

*There are no strangers here.
Only fiends who have
not yet met.*

— W.B. YEATS





AGNES AND PARMELAI

*The greatest obstacle to
discovery is not ignorance—it is the
illusion of knowledge.*

— D.J. BOORSTIN

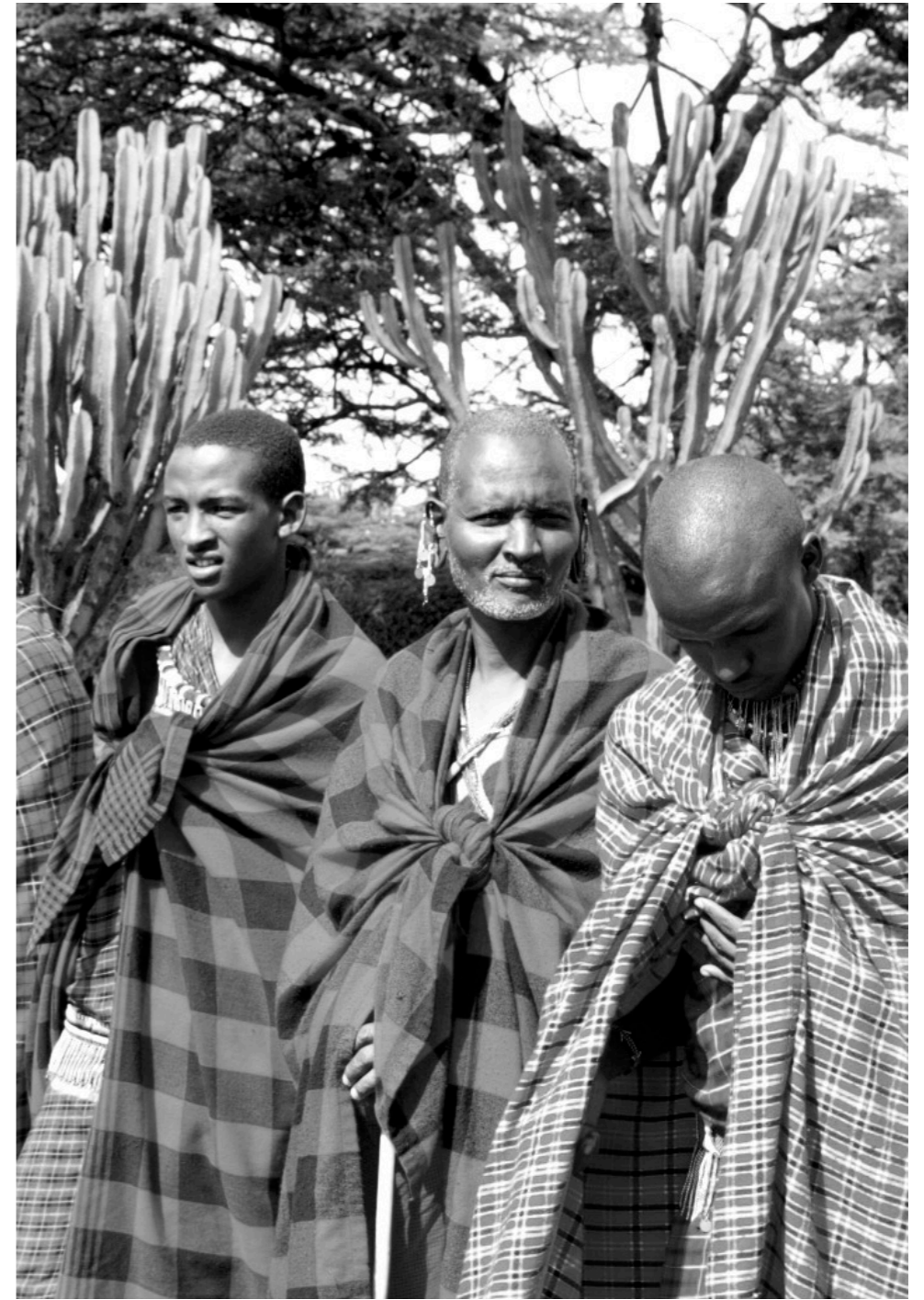


SUSTAINABILITY

We walked from the camp to the dam along a recently fenced area where young plants and trees were growing. Bizarrely it appeared as wild, but still somehow well-kept. Meeri explained that the whole area had recently been planted with medicinal herbs, plants and trees. It would mature soon and the plants would be used to re-educate people on how to benefit from traditional plant medicine.

Education is high on the agenda and is approached from every angle. The village now has a recycling centre. Recyclable waste is collected, sorted and sold. Whoever contributed gets paid. Result: there's not a trace of litter to be found in the village. Not a single plastic bottle lies around. No plastic bags stuck to any of the fences.

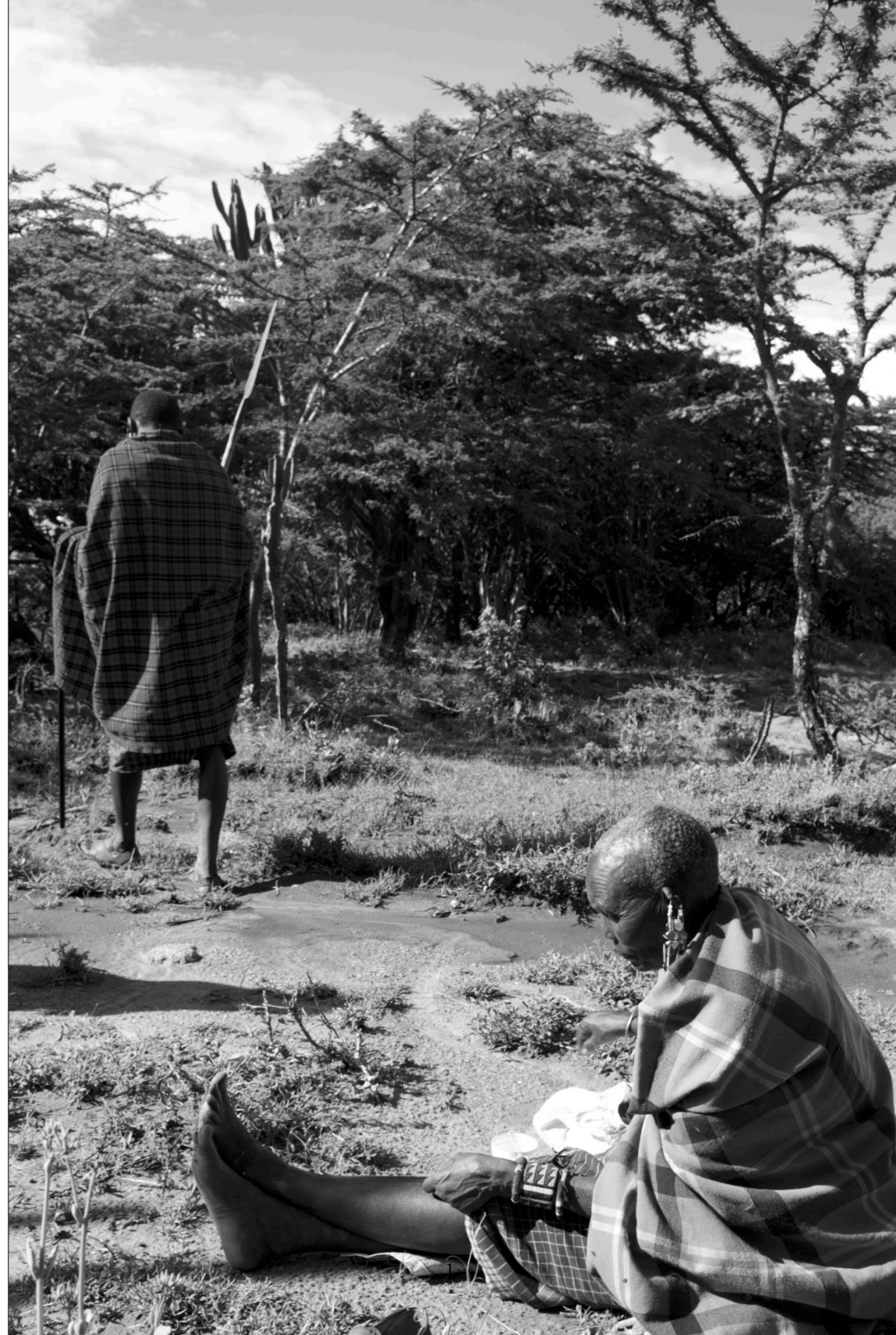
The camp provides education, creates responsibility and generates self-supporting reward systems for everyone involved. Sustainably that is based on patience and persistence.



When looks say more than words.



Maintaining skills and culture.





PREPARING FOR DINNER

Using only the tools that you can carry.



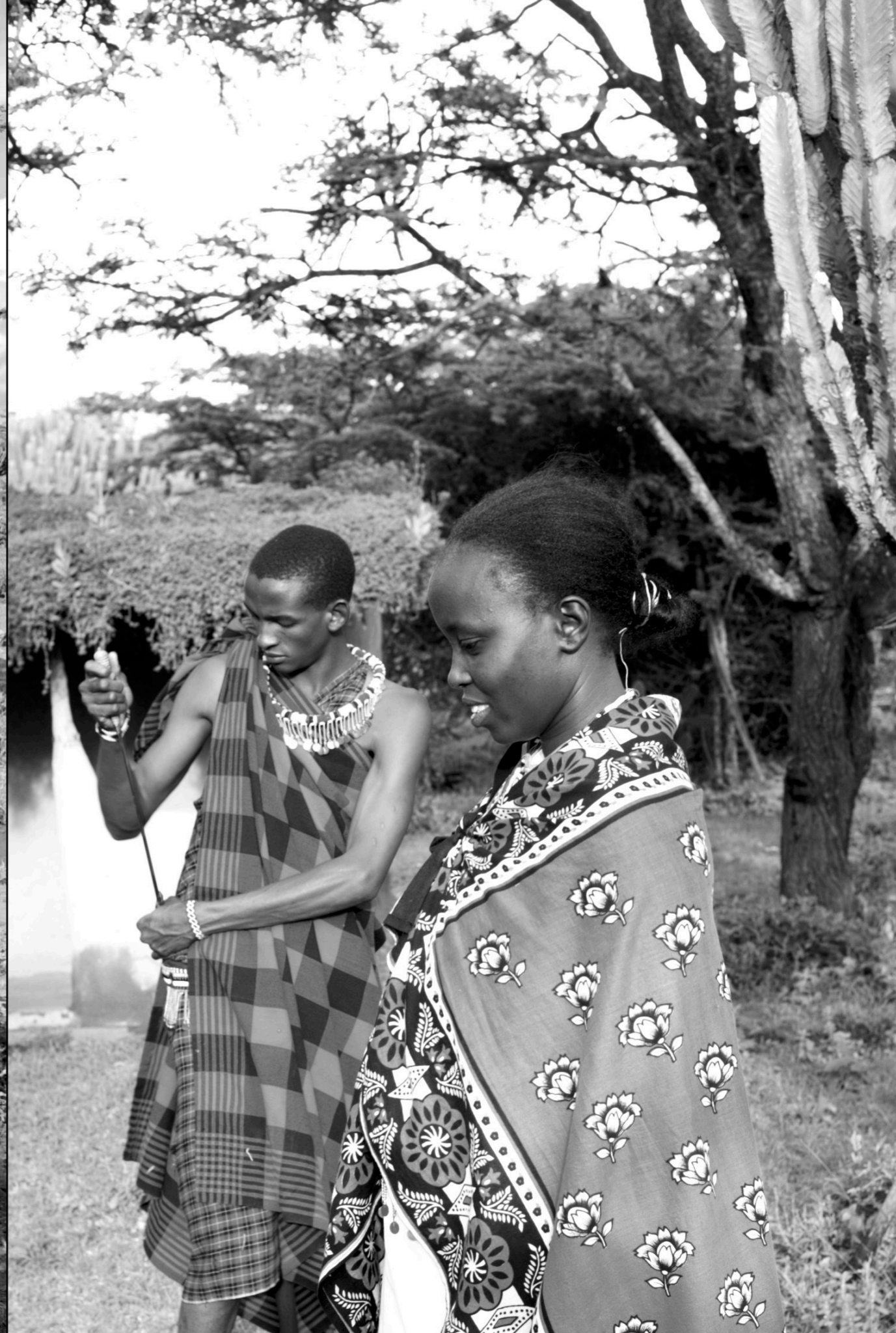
*In the shadows of the campfire,
the travelling storyteller.
Every story revealing the character,
the time, the meaning.*

The goat was slaughtered painlessly. Treating its death with the same respect as the care and protection it received while it was alive. On a bed of wild sage. Almost a shrine. Rarely have I witnessed a bond so tight between man and animal. In life and death.

I drank the goat's blood, still warm. It tasted salty and mineral. I tried a piece of kidney. Raw and delicate. Like a rosé baked calf liver. Pieces of tendon from its hoofs. Cooked in its own skin and exploding with taste. Maasai warrior fare. Graciously shared and respectfully accepted.

The meat was stretched out over branches and sticks that were planted around the fire. As it roasted gently, it reminded me of a Brazilian churrascaria. Out in the Kenyan grasslands at night rather than in bustling Sao Paolo. The city background noises a distant memory. Finding perfection in simplicity.







EXCEPTIONALLY BEAUTIFUL

*A landscape like a natural
sculpture park. Forever alive,
forever evolving.*



It's not different from any other village that you find dotted around the vast Maasai land. Wooden sticks as a fence and a thorn bush that is pulled into the gate at dusk. There are hyenas around. The cattle are brought into the corral at night for protection. There's space for a goat in most off the small clay houses.

But there's no men around. Only women. Some widows and some that were abandoned by their husbands. Building their own houses and running the village as a community. The atmosphere is overwhelmingly social but restrained. This is no holiday camp but harsh reality. Relying on their livestock and their craftsmanship for subsistence. Stronger as a group than as individuals.

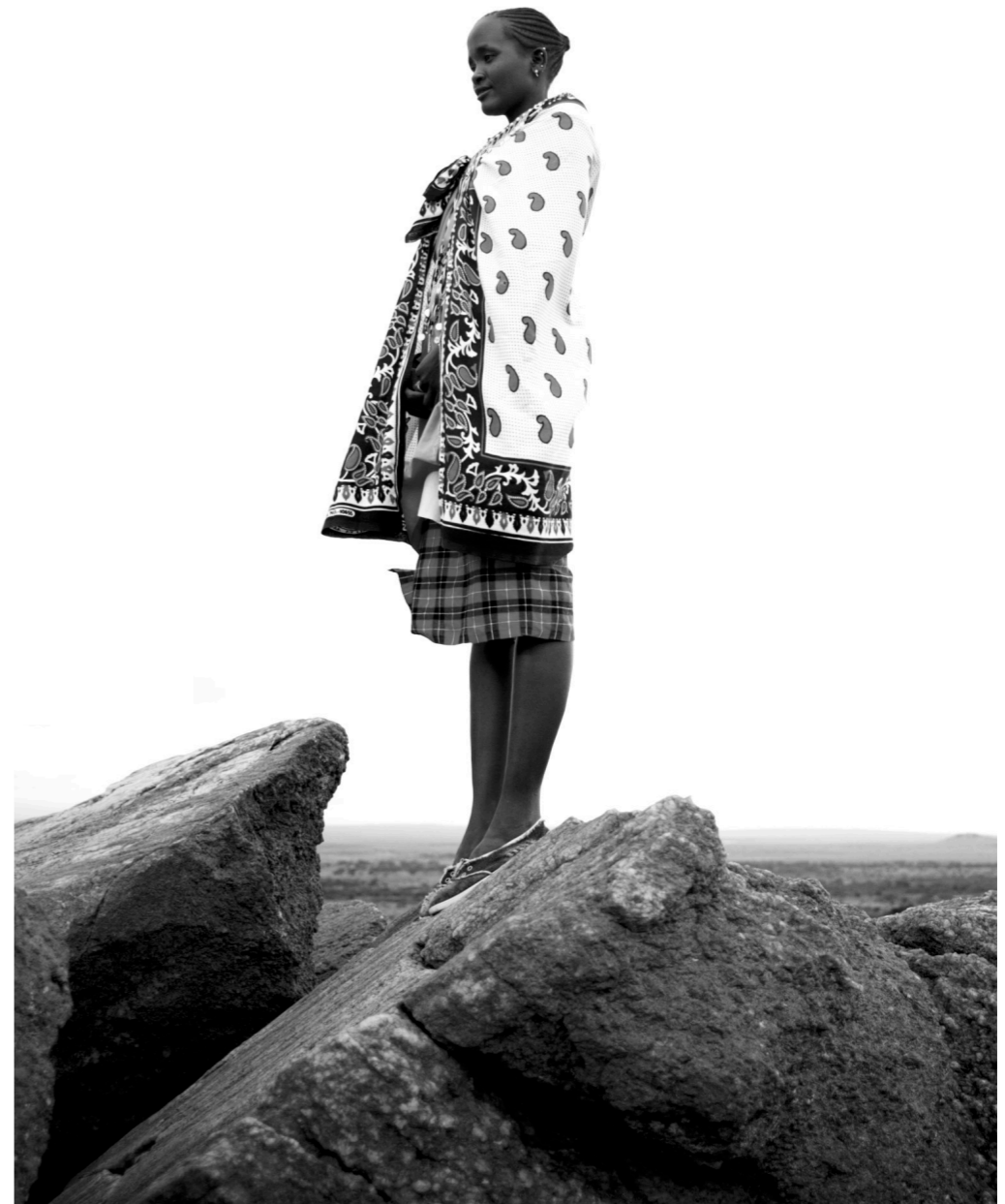
But still extremely vulnerable.

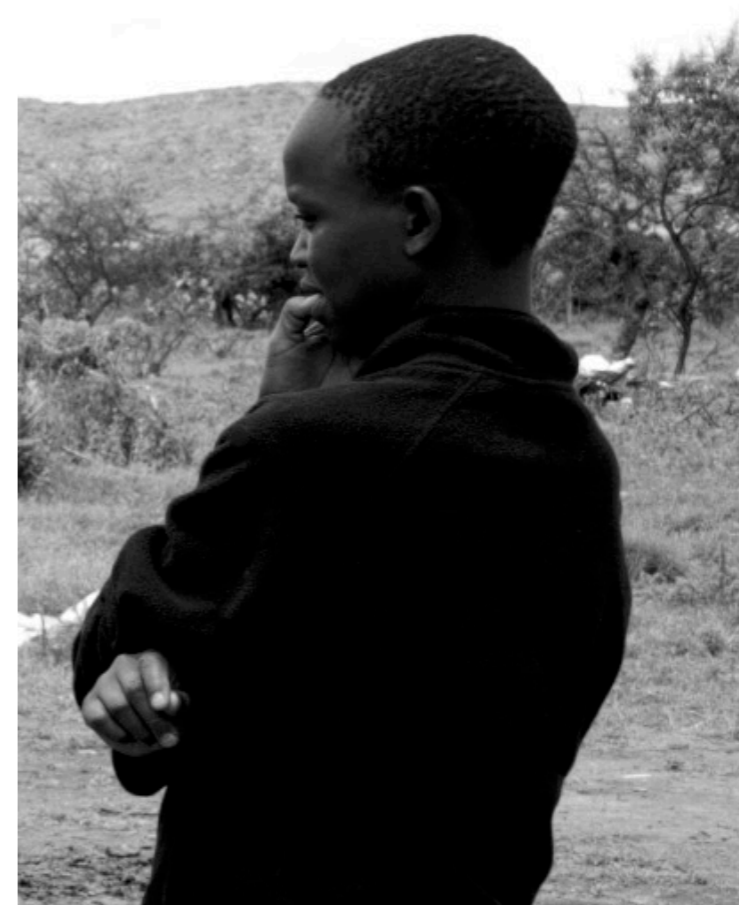


At a time when she can obtain everything she needs from her smartphone, a young Maasai woman, Meeri, decides to return to the village. With her degree in community development. After traveling to the USA and to Europe. Foregoing the obvious comforts, to continue promoting Maasai culture. Maasai heritage. Maasai values. Values that she holds dear but freely shares. Values that make us—visitors to her world—reconsider ours.

*Viewing the Maasai expanse from
the rocks outside the camp. Joined by rock rats
sunning themselves in the last rays of the day:*

We arrived during the long rains. Grass knee-high. The cattle looked happy and fat. Their coats shining in the sun; on the flanks their ribs are just a suggestion. Heavy rains during the night broke the bank of the reservoir. Thousands of cubic meters of water wasted. Salaton was talking quietly to the village elders about the damage. Composed and with the authority that comes naturally to him. Facilitating consent and decision making. Not imposing. But leading by example. An early morning lesson in management.





PROGRES AND YOUTH

*Finding ways to introduce technology
without abandoning tradition.*



*A superb 1990's Land Cruiser, Sabore's expert guidance
and Tiampati's unmatched driving skills.*





Borehole in Sabore's village.





*Utterly fulfilled cattle, their coats
shining in the sun and on their flanks
a mere suggestion of their ribs.*

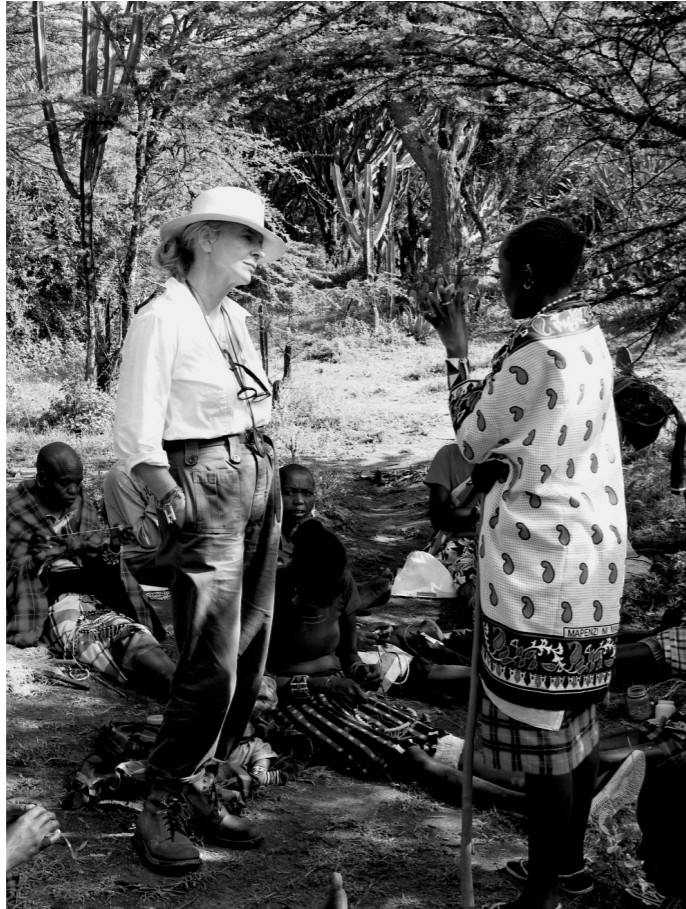
Even in the most remote Maasai villages, people know more about our world than we know about theirs. They need the things that we take for granted. Like access to education, affordable healthcare or—very simply—an electric light bulb in their home. We seek to reclaim the values we have lost: a sense of community and a closeness to nature in all simplicity.

Spending time at Maji Moto is enriching for the visitors as for the Maasai. Sustainable tourism with a focus on culture provides income stability for the families in the village and beyond. And it safeguards traditional but universal values that we can all learn from and should subscribe to.

It's not what you pay to come to Maji Moto and stay there that's important. It's the pricelessness of what you take back when you leave.

THANK YOU!





All photographs of the Maasai people
were taken at or near Maji Moto in 2018

© by Reinhilde Gielen

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