

**SIGNIFYING BODIES: THE BODY IN BUKUSU CIRCUMCISION RITUAL**

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for the Master of Arts Degree in Literature of Egerton University**

**EGERTON UNIVERSITY**

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## DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

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This thesis is my original work and has not been submitted in part or whole for an award in any institution.

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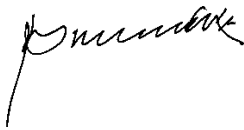
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## **DEDICATION**

To my father, Augustine Lutukayi Chagalwa for his love, patience and tireless support that has taught me to endure good and hard times in life. You taught me the value of education and hard work in life. Thank you for filling my life with love and protection.

And to all those who toil in pursuit of knowledge, I dedicate this work.

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## ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the possible meanings that can derive from the body significations during the Bukusu circumcision ritual, and the contexts in which those meanings were constructed. The objectives of the study were to identify the cultural signs exhibited by bodies during the Bukusu circumcision ritual, to map out the figurative relationship and interaction among bodies during the initiation ritual and to understand the symbolic and cultural significance of the relationship of the bodies in the context of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The study uses historical and ritual data collected ethnographically among the Bukusu of Western Kenya to understand how bodies within the Bukusu circumcision ritual construct ritual meanings. The study was framed by the Carnival Ambivalence Theory. The researcher approached the study from the premise that culture is a social construct and, therefore, must be studied from its immediate context. The study was informed by the social constructivist paradigm. The target population comprised initiates and participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The data collection methods were participant observation and interviews. The data collection tools included the interview guide and video recorder. The findings of the research led to the conclusion that body signification in the Bukusu circumcision ritual embodies meanings that inform the practice of everyday life of the community. The emergent meanings which the bodies embody are of great significance to the participants within the current dispensation and socio-cultural context. The relationships emerging from the Bukusu circumcision ritual emphasise the significance of collective unity and the need for coexistence. Bodies in Bukusu circumcision ritual are avenues for communicating important messages to the initiates and the community at large and the bodily praxis are effective communication tools for relaying concepts that touch on the continuity of the community. The study complicates the understanding of the carnival ambivalence theory, particularly the extent to which it could help understand the carnival genres and contribute to the appreciation of cultural diversities.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUALISING THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The Bukusu of Western Kenya have a number of traditions and cultural practices which inform their concepts of life and the world. Whereas the number is not agreed upon, a number of cultural experts<sup>1</sup> consulted put the number of the Bukusu traditions to between nine and fourteen. Childbirth, marriage, death-related traditions<sup>2</sup> and circumcision are perhaps the most significant traditions that bring an entire clan and often more than one clan together to celebrate or mourn as the case may be. Among the Bukusu, each set of traditions is inspired by a specific *kumusambwa* (spirit) and the practitioners, and leaders of each tradition are selected through procedures that are specific to the tradition which are respected and held as sacrosanct by all the Bukusu. For instance, it is believed that funeral orators must come from particular clans such as Babuya, Bameme, Bamanga and Babana Mwayi while *Buliche* is associated with clans such as Barefu, Balukulu, Bakoboolo among others (Pius Wekesa [73 years old] interviewed on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

Of the main sets of traditions mentioned above, which are fundamental to the Bukusu concept of life and being, the circumcision ritual as a rite of passage stands out as being at the core of the Bukusu philosophy of life and the self. The ritual is particularly revered because it is during initiation school that the boys are taught about the ancestral ways, fighting skills, tribal folklore, discipline, and where they are introduced to the social and communal responsibilities of adulthood. It is believed that circumcisers must come from particular clans such as Bamasike, Bamwaya, Basombi, Bamuki, Bakisongoli, Baliuli and Bamasaba clans because the circumcision *kumusambwa* (spirit) is their traditional heritage (Yohana Namakelo [85 years old] interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018). The circumcision ritual takes place in August

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<sup>1</sup> Opinion is divided but some Bukusu community cultural experts (for instance, Pius Wekesa [73 years old] interviewed on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017) argues that there are ten or eleven main Bukusu sets of traditions, depending on who you ask. Each set of tradition is usually associated with corresponding elaborate rituals. These are ‘*bukhebi*’ (circumcision), ‘*bukimbi*’ (rain making), ‘*bubasi*’ (blacksmithing), ‘*buliuli*’ (witchcraft casting) ‘*bung’oosi*’ (prophesying), ‘*bufumu*’ (divination), ‘*kumuse*’ (funeral oratory), ‘*efumbo*,’ (drum beating) ‘*buliche*’, and ‘*kamaiya*’ (magic). However, Frederick Khuteka, interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2018 includes *siselelo* (related to marriage) while Simon Simiyu, interviewed on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 adds ‘*bubini*’ (night running) as some of the traditions.

<sup>2</sup> Rituals related to death include *khuswala kumuse* (funeral oratory) and *khukhala kimikoye* (cutting ropes/connections), a let-go ritual performance to cut the links between the living and dead to allow the dead to take up residence in the world of ancestors, and grant freedom to the woman to remarry if she so wishes.

and December of every even<sup>3</sup> year. However, preparations for the ritual begin as early as a year before the time of the actual ritual. The main events of the ritual, though, start at least two months before August of the ritual year. So significant is this rite of passage in the life of a Bukusu man that it is inconceivable for an uncircumcised man to lay claim to Bukusu identity and manhood. Somehow, if anyone were to manage to evade the traditional ritual and get circumcised in hospital, he would still not be regarded as any better than an uncircumcised boy. He would be looked down upon, marginalised, rejected, and considered a coward and an incomplete man for missing that very significant stage in a Bukusu man's life. Such a man would not hold any official position in the community, neither would he be allowed to talk before "real men." Were any Bukusu male to escape the "knife" and left to live far away and died there, his body would still be circumcised before burial if the body were ever to be brought back to his Bukusu ancestral home for burial. This is because the Bukusu consider the uncircumcised body as perfidious and believe that removing of the foreskin from the body before burial helps to avert the abomination of defiling the earth by embedding underneath it an unmanly and "incomplete body" (Frederick Khuteka, interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2018).

One of the most outstanding characters of the Bukusu circumcision ritual is in the significance of the demands made on the initiate during the ritual. In the last few days before the day of the cut, the initiates dance to specific genres of ritual songs as they go around the village half-naked. The songs and dances themselves focus pretty much on themes around sex and other bodily practices that one would usually find hard talking about in public at any other time and place. With the initiates in the lead, the dancing groups often engage in acts that heighten sexual undertones, which characterize the whole ritual with little regard to who might be in the audience or within earshot. This experience hardly betrays the fact that ordinarily, the Bukusu would be cautious before they mention words or dance in public in a manner that might be regarded as obscene or sexually suggestive, especially in the presence of elders (Wanyama, 2006; Wekesa, 2015; Were, 2014).

The height of the events starts on the last evening before the morning of the circumcision when the initiates are prepared for the crucial events that mark the climax of the initiation process. Around 6 pm on the last evening, the initiates are stripped stark naked and rituals performed on their bodies with raw contents of the entrails of a bull slaughtered solely for the

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<sup>3</sup> Among the Bukusu, the even year is regarded as the year of the living/life in contrast to the odd year as the year of the dead, and activities of these years.

ritual. The song leaders seem to get more emboldened after that part of the ritual, with their songs seeming to focus more boldly on nakedness, and legitimate/illegitimate sex while exposing publicly in song or chant those thought to have engaged in illicit sex and other socially sanctioned taboos. The following morning the initiates are taken to the river, stripped stark naked and mud applied all over their bodies in the early August morning chill. While mudding is going on, the singers shift gear and seem to become even more robust in their songs that justify the impending “cut” later that morning urging the initiate to display his courage, which is a symbol of masculinity, even as they also advise him against going for women deemed to be “loose” because they are the storehouse of all manner of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS (Pius Wekesa, interviewed on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017).

In addition to the exposure of the bodies of the initiates, talks about sex and bodily practices dominate the circumcision ritual whereby at the end of it nobody evades exposure to criticism. These occurrences are accentuated by the festive mood of feasting on plenty of food and drink for the visitors, the initiate and his relatives. Speech genres typically employed in talks by participants during the Bukusu circumcision discourse are marked with profanity, curses, abuses, and improprieties especially with regard to talks concerning acts of courage and sex. To an outsider, the discourses may sound coarse because of the sexual connotations in the songs, chants, and in the body language of the participants. In a word, the ritual discourse at this point centres primarily on the body and bodily practices, and especially on intercourse, legitimate or otherwise (Simon Simiyu [48 years old a circumciser], interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018).

Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of the ritual is the extent and manner in which the body and bodily practices are inserted into the activities of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Not only is it apparent that the mouths, noses, buttocks, and genitals constitute the central metaphor of the Bukusu circumcision ritual, but so too do the physical functions that mediate the relationship between the body and the world: eating, drinking, digestion, copulation, childbirth and death. Thus, the naked body is central to the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

At the same time, the singers foreground other bodies in their songs, especially bodies of those deemed to have transgressed the moral norms of the community, particularly those thought to have engaged in morally prohibited acts such as incest, bestiality and theft. Apart from the literal naked body of the initiate, the manner of singing and dancing of other bodies participating in the ritual is usually tinged with sexual undertones. In the same vein,

conversations during the rituals intensify the centrality of the nakedness to the ritual. At the gathering of age sets on the eve of the surgery, for instance, the parents of the initiate openly discuss sexual intercourse, especially the story of the specific act(s) of intercourse that resulted in the conception of the boy(s) to be circumcised on that occasion.

Due to several external factors such as formal education, globalization, urbanization, intercultural marriages, rural to urban migrations, and Christianity, the traditional concept of the Bukusu circumcision practice of the Bukusu has been compromised. The aforementioned aspects have impacted the way the community used to handle the ritual bodies.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that for the most part of the ritual performance especially on the eve of circumcision, there is copious enactment, narrative and display of nakedness in the circumcision ritual. The questions that arise are; first, what does the body mean in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and to the Bukusu people generally? Secondly, are there other meanings, either literal or figurative that are discernible beyond the tendency to focus on the whole idea of nudity and bawdiness as such? Thirdly, what literal and symbolic meanings are discernible beyond nudity, both literal and implicit during the Bukusu circumcision ritual? Similarly, if the bodies are observed closely, in what ways could they be said to speak to each other? For instance, are there meanings that are being signified by these bodies? This study advances the argument that if these bodies were read together as texts, especially the bodies of the initiate(s), those of the spectators/participants in the ritual and those that form the subjects of the ritual songs, they convey specific meanings that in literal and symbolic ways are crucial to the circumcision/initiation ritual in particular and to the Bukusu history and life in general.

Literary scholarship on the Bukusu circumcision ritual has tended to focus on the procedural details of circumcision, and on content and formal explication of the Bukusu circumcision music, for instance, De Wolf (1983), Wafula (2006), Wanyama (2006) and Simiyu (2011). As a result, not much attention has been paid to the pervasiveness of the body in Bukusu circumcision ritual. This study pays attention to the possible meanings that emanate from the nakedness either literal or figurative, which pervades the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The study also shows that there are arrays of complex significations that are emitted by bodies of the initiate and those of the other participants during the Bukusu circumcision ritual. If looked at closely, these signs provide vistas of understanding the Bukusu circumcision ritual and other rituals which focus on the body in a manner that may not be apparent to the casual

observer. This study, therefore, shifts from the trends in scholarship on content and formal explication of the Bukusu circumcision music and procedural details to unravel new ways of understanding the body as a text within rituals of passage.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Studies on the Bukusu circumcision ritual have tended to focus on the procedural details of the ritual on the one hand, and on the formal explication of the texts of the songs and chants on the other hand. However, it is apparent that the body is more fundamental to the meaning of the Bukusu circumcision ritual than may be apparent to those who do not understand the Bukusu concept of the world and being. The most conspicuously visible body around which circumcision is organised is the body of the initiate. What may not be immediately apparent, though, is that throughout the ritual season, the body of the initiate emits specific signs which can only be read in relation to other bodies and the symbols they emit. Yet the success of the circumcision ritual depends on both the literal and metaphorical signs emitted by the bodies which can only be understood in relation to the initiate's body and the other bodies participating in the ritual. Therefore, this study seeks to interpret and explicate meanings that can derive from the body significations during the circumcision ritual in the context in which those meanings are produced and consumed.

## **1.3 Objectives**

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- (i) To identify the cultural signs emitted by bodies of the participants during the Bukusu circumcision ritual and their significance in the Bukusu worldview.
- (ii) To map out the figurative relationships between the initiate's body and the other bodies present in the circumcision ritual.
- (iii) To explain the symbolic and cultural significance of the relationships among bodies and in the context of the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

## **1.4 Premises**

This study was based on the assumptions that:

- (i) There are cultural signs and meanings emitted by bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.
- (ii) There is a figurative relationship and interaction between the initiate's body and other bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

- (iii) Meanings derived from body significations in the Bukusu circumcision inform the Bukusu concept of life in the world.

### **1.5 Justification of the Study**

This study is important as it examines the body symbolism as depicted in the Bukusu circumcision hence contribute to the existing knowledge about the Bukusu circumcision ritual in particular and Bukusu oral tradition in general. The focus of most scholarly studies on the Bukusu circumcision ritual has been on the procedural details, content and formal explication of the Bukusu circumcision music (De Wolf, 1983; Simiyu, 2011; Wafula, 2006; Wanyama, 2006). Little attention has been paid to the examination of the position and meanings that bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual emit. This study propounds that to understand the meaning of the Bukusu circumcision ritual, you need to study bodies in both their actual and figurative entities within the context of the circumcision ritual. The study aims to enrich the existing studies on the Bukusu circumcision ritual as a whole by looking at bodies as texts in order to understand the meanings bodies emit, their significance in the ritual and also to the Bukusu world. It also adds on literature on bodies. This study, therefore, opens new frontiers among scholars and critics for further interrogations into body significations in rituals.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The primary focus of this study is on the representation of bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and the meanings they emit, both literal and figurative. The study also considers other elements underpinning the constitutive elements of the circumcision ritual in the Bukusu community. The unit of analysis in this study is the body, that is the body of the initiate, participants and those talked about during the Bukusu circumcision ritual that I observed in the months of August and December 2018. The study is also limited to Kabuchai Constituency of Bungoma County.

This study was faced with one particular limitation. There were some ritual events where by elders did not allow the researcher to use a camera for recording or even access. The nature of the occurrences in the prohibited events was hard to establish, especially when we consider that these events were a taboo for an outsider to access. However, it was possible to get insights into the happenings of events from the numerous comments of cultural experts I interviewed.

## **1.7 Literature Review**

### **1.7.1 Overview**

This study examines the body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual as a communicative entity and a signifying phenomenon which relies on figurative interpretation in the sense that the body can embody central messages and meaning-making in the Bukusu community. The body, its practices and the verbal utterances constitute meanings which when read together embody the fundamental understanding of the ritual to the extent that one might perceive that the significance of the ritual lies in these practices carried on the body. The focus of the current study is the bodily symbolism and bodily practices, the embodiment of socio-cultural meanings during circumcision ritual, and the inter-body and intra-body significations. Studies on the Bukusu circumcision ritual have focused on verbal utterances at the exclusion of the bodily utterances which complement the verbal discourses. This study implies that when the two are read together they might well constitute the meaning of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. This review of literature focuses on the studies on the Bukusu circumcision ritual to discuss the way the Bukusu understand their circumcision ritual, its elements, and worldview, studies on ritual bodies and the carnival theory.

This section has been organised around the following areas: the studies on the Bukusu circumcision, body significations and symbolism in rites of passage, studies of the body as a communicative phenomenon, the body imagery in the Bukusu rites of passage and finally, literature on the Carnival Ambivalence Theory.

### **1.7.2 Studies on the Bukusu Circumcision**

The overall question that guides this study relates to the body, its practices and bodily symbolism that emerge from the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The Bukusu place their narratives and histories in circumcision ritual, particularly through songs, chants, dance, bodies, and the overall significance of the ritual to the society. Thus, it is also important to look at the bodies, their practices and bodily symbolism as being the carrier of messages in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

Circumcision for the Bukusu is an indicator of the economic, gender and familial roles, and an important part of the creation and perpetuation of social relationship conventions in the community. According to an interview with Simon Simiyu, a circumciser in Bungoma on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017, circumcision, which possibly started at around 1804 by Mango is attributed to the Saboat of Mt. Elgon with whom the Bukusu started interacting with around that time. Further

interview with Pius Wekesa, another circumciser in Bungoma County on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2017, however, pointed out that Samba Sambaranengunyi was the first person to bring circumcision to the Bukusu people, but due to the severe disease – measles, which was ravaging through the nation by that time, the circumcision ritual was stopped and restarted later.

Among the Bukusu, a man has to undergo circumcision to attain manhood. The Bukusu consider uncircumcised men as children and unclean who cannot be allowed to participate fully in the daily activities of life in his clan regardless of his age (De Wolf, 1983). Since circumcision among the Bukusu serves as a transitional stage from childhood to adulthood, initiates are mentally and physically prepared as a way to face responsibilities that come with adulthood. The Bukusu being a patriarchal society, draws a distinct line between sexes, each tasked with certain responsibilities (Khaemba, 2013). Masculinity is emphasised on the side of men, which foregrounds why courage and resilience are regarded as cardinal requirements for anyone willing to undergo the “cut.” Any Bukusu man who shuns circumcision is disparaged and repudiated by the society for contesting the cultural norms that inform the behaviour and the life of the member of the Bukusu community (Wafula, 2006). Makila (1978) asserts that the Bukusu culture values circumcision as a marker of identity, an end to childhood and with which new responsibilities and opportunities are offered for the initiated boys. Thus, the lessons and techniques imparted to the newly initiated through songs and ritual actions, enable them to acquire the required knowledge in the Bukusu culture.

According to De Wolf (1983), the Bukusu put essential considerations in circumcision ritual as depicted in its elaborate planning and organisation before it takes off. The real preparations begin within a month or two weeks to August. De Wolf (1983) observes that after the initiates have expressed their desire to get circumcised, they dance at nights in the company of boys and girls who do the singing along the roads as they practice. The first prerequisite for the ceremony to be held depends on the initiate’s voluntary acceptance to undergo the whole process. However, in situations when the boy exceeds the prescribed age by the community for the circumcision act, his father or circumcised brothers will eventually waylay him and have him circumcised by force (Wanyama, 2006). Onyanacha (2021) observed that it is through rituals that men and women are “made” by being taken through rigorous and painful experiences to fulfil the moral and cultural expectations of the society. The observations by De Wolf (1983), Onyanacha (2021) and Wanyama (2006) propound the prominence of the Bukusu circumcision ritual by highlighting its preparations and essence

hence help the current study in explicating the position of body practices in the circumcision ritual.

Wagner (1949) points out three significant phases involved in the Bukusu circumcision: First are preparative observances of the candidates which proceeds to the actual operation. Secondly, the life of the circumcised boys in the hut of seclusion where they stay as their wounds are healing up and get instructions in both practical and theoretical knowledge. Finally, the commencement of the feast of coming out of the hut in seclusion is then followed by a series of further rites and festive celebrations (Wagner, 1949) which foreground the Bukusu circumcision phases as being essential in depicting bodies and bodily practices that this study intends to study. For instance, it became apparent that after the boy has volunteered to undergo the process of circumcision, he puts on the emblems of an initiate. These emblems include beads which he would wear around his waist and a month later, iron wristlets, cowbells and other items (Wanyama, 2006). This is then followed by initiates visiting their relatives who shower them with gifts. Before the final operation, Wanyama (2006) observes that there is always feasting, drinking beer, singing, dancing and mocking of the initiate and his parents at night before the morning of the surgery. After the surgery, the candidates' progress to the next stage called seclusion. At this point, candidates stay in secluded huts in a particular compound or in the bush where the initiation lessons commence, running over the course of the next few months. Also, the candidates are detached from their relatives and live under surveillance and care of some guardians or tutors.

The seclusion ceremony is conducted in each December of every circumcision year. During this event, all resources are set aside specifically for celebrating the new age set of men. Halfway through their stint at the initiation camp, they hold a sacrificial ceremony, which Wanyama (2006) found out comprises a ritual enactment of death and rebirth of the initiates. At the end of the initiation life at the camp, there are sequences of elaborate ceremonies, a period of feasting and lastly a fete of coming out. The current study examines the circumcision ritual activities and their relation to the body and its implication to the life of the Bukusu.

Were (2014) narrows his study from the broader view of the ritual per se to the investigation of the Bukusu traditional initiation as drama and in the process, he also explores the conduct of the Bukusu in the initiation ceremony. According to Were (2014), the Bukusu circumcision ritual contains elements of drama emanating from the dramatized dance

formations, postures, facial expressions and gestures which convey messages that transcend mere dancing. Several processes in the ritual are marked with everything done to encourage the initiate and reinforce the resolve of the initiate during the circumcision period (Were, 2014). For instance, the initiate is half-naked and later left to walk naked and jeered through songs and actions. Were's viewpoint on why the Bukusu perform their circumcision the way they do is in reference to the Bukusu beliefs pertaining courage, identity and their worldview. Thus, Were's (2014) study helps the current investigation in addressing the body practices and the conduct of the participants during the ritual.

Nang'oli (2000) views circumcision ritual as one of the most significant rites in Africa that one has to undergo to achieve manhood. His argument is that until a man is circumcised, he will forever be considered a child, unclean and irresponsible. Makila (1978) and Simiyu (2011) underscore the role of the Bukusu circumcision rite as mentally preparing initiates to face responsibilities and challenges that come with adulthood as imparted thorough instruction embodied in songs. The current study builds on the earlier studies by depicting that the meanings and concepts of the Bukusu circumcision ritual are also ingrained in the bodies and body practices. These studies highlight the importance of circumcision in circumcising communities and relate closely to how bodies make meanings in the context of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The enforcement of creation of a responsible and mentally strong man are some of the major items developed through body practices. Hence, the current study utilizes findings by these scholars to examine the development of a responsible and a mentally stable man ready to face the challenges of adulthood through examination of body practices in the circumcision ritual.

The current study focuses on body practices in the circumcision ritual as texts that convey socio-cultural concepts within the Bukusu community. Though most of these studies have focused on the Bukusu circumcision songs, they aid the current study in unraveling meanings implied by the body and its practices as a medium that can communicate artistically with the intent to appeal to the community.

### **1.7.3 Body Significations and Symbolism in Rites of Passage**

One of the critical issues in the Bukusu circumcision ritual is the symbolism and signification of the ritual itself within the Bukusu community. Apart from the Bukusu circumcision ritual, different communities around the world contain a number of cultural objects and practices that signify and inform their concept of life. Anything in culture can be a sign and send a

specific message to the owners of the culture and that signifying can also be a way of using a language or discourse to assert cultural identity amongst communities (Barthes, 1972; Campbell, 1994; Gates, 2014). A number of scholars suggest that the body is at the focus of the discourse on masculinity (Arthur, 1994; MacMullan *et al.*, 2002). While observing the Xhosa circumcision ritual, Mfecane (2016) argued that the identity of being a “real man” among the Xhosa is grounded chiefly in the physical body, specially through the mutilated penis. The current study considers some of the sociocultural properties of the initiation ritual and takes note of the specific symbolic themes that concretely express indigenous concepts about the nature and existence of the Bukusu. The study is also premised on the notion that the mutilated penis serves as a site for the symbolic location of masculinity among the Bukusu. The study reveals that these sociocultural properties and symbolic themes can be depicted not only through songs, chants and other ritual practices, but also through bodies.

According to Turner (1967), the change through the initiation ritual is bound up with biological and meteorological rhythms and recurrences which also indicate and constitute transitions between states of a person or a group. Van Gennep (1960) points out three significant phases that represent initiation; separation, margin, and aggregation, all of which constitute figurative behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group from one social structure, set of sociocultural condition, state of the ritual subject or consummation. Thus, the initiation ritual practices symbolically endow one with the rights and duties of a distinctly defined structural pattern and are anticipated to behave as per established conventional norms and ethical standards. The current study is informed by the observations of Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1967) in investigating the significations that emanate from the bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

Wafula (2006) and Wanyama (2006) assert that circumcision is not just the process of removing the prepuce from a boy’s penis but a cultural communication with significant symbolism within the Bukusu culture. The Bukusu circumcision rite is marked with a lot of symbolism and beliefs that are depicted in the actions of participants beyond the mere cutting of the foreskin. For instance, Wanyama (2006) observes that the slaughtered animals and their blood are uniquely chosen. The songs, the mud, the grass placed on the head of the initiate, and the composure of the initiate are some of the few elements which convey meanings beyond the literal ones. Therefore, the Bukusu circumcision ritual encompasses and serves different aspects ranging from the sacred to the cultural in that the circumcision ritual

cannot be successful without the moral support of the ancestors and the elderly (Wafula, 2006; Wanyama, 2006). Such ideologies, for instance, are crucial to the Bukusu social and cultural life. The current investigation focuses on the symbolism enshrouding the Bukusu circumcision ritual, particularly on body symbolism.

Greimas *et al.* (1989) assert that signification is at the centre of preoccupations of human life. The presence of shrines, slaughtered animals, songs, and unique initiates' actions are some of the elements of symbolism in rituals that have implication in the human life. Thus, it is through this signification that the world can only be called "human" to the extent that it means something. Greimas *et al.* (1989) and Wanyama's (2006) suggestions foreground signification as being at the core of human's life. Though the studies conducted by Greimas *et al.* (1989) and Wanyama (2006) do not put emphasis on the body signification in the Bukusu circumcision, they help this study in laying the basis by which it builds.

Circumcision rituals contain a number of symbols and elements pertaining life values, social norms, and phenomena that a particular people who practice it regard as a reality. In the Ndembu initiation ritual, the body is regarded as a symbolic template for the communication of mystical knowledge about the nature of things and how they come to be what they are (Turner, 1967). The cosmos, for instance, is depicted as a vast human body representing invisible faculties like reason, passion, wisdom and aspects of the social order which are arrayed in terms of the human anatomical paradigm. It is due to some of the significance attached to these faculties that the Ndembu chased away grown-up men from important rituals like circumcision for not having been "made men" by the circumcision ritual practices (Turner, 1967).

Strangely, worth noting is that theft, assault, and damage done on property at such times went unpunished among the Bukusu. This was observed by Weeks (1914: 166-7) on the Bakongo, Gorer (1949: 34) on the Wolof, Gulliver (1953: 25) on the Teso, Rattray (1954: 122) on the Ashanti and La Fontaine (1959: 45) on the Gisu during their initiation rituals. Sometimes all or nearly all restrictions on behaviour are said to be lifted during certain rituals (Junod, 1913: 297; Smith & Dale, 1920: 113; Valyaneka *et al.*, 1937: 160). The lifting of the restrictions during the Bukusu circumcision provides the participants to verbally and non-verbally express themselves about topics termed lewd during ordinary days. The argument is that the uncircumcised men missed the esoteric teachings which were supposed to make them grow into mature people, replete with communal responsibilities. Thus, circumcision ritual serves

not only as a process that renders change, but also the acquisition of knowledge gained through nonverbal and symbolic communication.

Rituals involving dance play a significant role in relieving and treating symptoms of psychological distress, as well as neutralise and lessen the impact of psychological trauma and also encourage harmony (Hanna, 1973; Koss-Chiono, 2006; Monteiro, 2011; Sow, 1980). Among the Bukusu, mental challenges may be related to social causes or the spiritual realm. For instance, the transgression of societal norms regarding relationship and social roles, the malicious intentions of another person, the angering the gods or spirits, and the spirit possession are just but a few. Eliade (1965), Hanna (1987), Kuper (1961:200; 1973), Leseho and Maxwell (2010), Slutskaya (2008) and Turner (1967) acknowledge dance as a larger sense of a social spectrum where collective body, power and history are celebrated by members of the community. These studies are relevant to the current one in studying the communicative behaviour exhibited by the Bukusu circumcision ritual participants' body language and related movements in dance as standardised and patterned symbols intended to represent Bukusu experiences and meaning of an individual's eternal and psychic world. The studies also help the current study in investigating the body gestures and movements by the circumcision ritual participants as providing interface between the spirit realm and the community. The above studies are relevant to the current study as they will help in deciphering the Bukusu circumcision ritual dances and symbolic body movements by ritual participants.

Gilmore (1990) asserts that convergences in many societies are found in concepts, symbols and exhortations of masculinity as depicted in rituals. Gaining of a new status calls upon a rigorous test of skill, power, endurance and the exhortation to act like a man which can only be found in how the culture manipulates certain physical aptitudes in particular ways to reflect a community's worldview. Gilmore (1990) argues that manhood is vital to the continuity of social systems and to the psychological integration of men into their communities. Thus, the male ideology and the aspect of being a man becomes a symbolic script, a cultural construct and a cultural category replete with societal responsibilities and practices. Their ideas foreground rituals as vehicles which communicate values of a particular culture at the deepest level, and reflections of economic, political and social relationships. Turner's (1969) and Gilmore's (1990) studies point out the significances of the initiation rituals toward the understanding of how a people's perception of their socio-economic

relationships, nature and environment in which they operate. The present study on body significations in the Bukusu circumcision ritual agrees with Turner (1969) and Gilmore (1990), especially when they note that rituals and ritual practices contain elements replete with cultural concepts, symbols and exhortations of masculinities.

The focal point of this subsection has been to provide the necessary background information that is crucial for the clear understanding of body signification and symbolism that emanate in rituals. Though these scholars have studied elements of signification in selected human practices, it is apparent that they have not examined the body significations in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. This study is premised on the assumption that the Bukusu circumcision is a cultural phenomenon beyond mere “cutting” of skin and that the body is central in emitting meanings in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

#### **1.7.4 The Body as a Communicative Phenomenon**

This study is based on the assumption that the body communicates sociocultural meanings and it is vital in the understanding of a people’s perception within the context of ritual and the community at large. Douglas (2004), for example, interprets the body as a vehicle for social symbolism, whereas Foucault (2002) argues more radically that the body is an effect of discourse. Silverman (2004) asserts that the bodily rite has become a text for disputed inscriptions of power, sexuality, gender and ethnic particularism. Boon (1999) asserts that circumcision is all about a people’s culture, their symbolic message regarding personhood, cosmology, gender, status and community inscribed in the body. According to Connell (1995, 54), the body is a medium through which individuals experience manhood or emasculated when they feel they do not represent “appropriate” masculine attributes. It is through the body that masculinity is enhanced. The human anatomy, thus, provides tools for understanding the meanings of body parts, their sensations, and activities as the products of particular social forces. In ritual contexts, for instance, bodies become systems of signs that stand for or express social relations. Consequently, engagement with this tradition gives one the possibility of seeing ritual as an act of social inscription, as writing on bodies. The Bukusu practice circumcision in which the body plays a central role for the ritual’s completeness. Thus, the body becomes the pre-eminent symbol which conceives the society’s meanings.

A number of scholars among them Douglas (2004), Foucault (2002), Garfinkel (1956) and McLeod (2013) have studied the human body, its roles, and the relatedness between the

social body, the individual, the mental body, and the body politic in different societies. Rituals contain embodied knowledge of the social world which, at the same time, is an essential constitutive element of the world (Mauss, 1979). This study builds on the notion that the body is a socially constructed artifact and its image and depiction are the effects of various behaviours, practices, and discussions which build it as a culturally noticeable attribute of socio-political correlations.

Due to the primacy of space that the body occupies in human and sociocultural and political domains, the body bears certain significance in African rituals, both as the subject of practice and also as the object towards which much of that action is directed (Grillo, 2012). The body is culturally marked in initiatory “ordeals” such as circumcision. Bodies made, thus, distinct bear emblems of cultural identity and a visible insignia of the religious ideology that organises both the society’s and the individual’s moral life. In this manner, the body can be said to be a cultural phenomenon, resonating with the rich associations of the surrounding “life-world” (Devisch, 1993: 1). Referring to the Yaka culture of the Congo, Devisch (1993: 1) contends that ritual does not impose meaning, but discloses and activates it. That is, apprehension of meaning is sensuous and bodily. To Stoller (1995:7), the human body becomes sentient, culturally consumed by a world filled with the forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes. Rituals in turn, recapture some of the changed values of bodily experience and make them available for investment in performance. The observations by Devisch (1993), Grillo (2012) and Stoller (1995) on body significations in ritual contexts are significant to the current study that examines the emblems of cultural meanings emitted by bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

Borrowing hints from literary studies, Ogude (1997) argues that Ngugi utilizes images of the body and generic names in his demarcation of character types in the *Devil on the Cross* (Wa Thiong’o, 1982) as the oppressor or the exploiter types. Wa Thiong’o employs the grotesque as an instrument of social satire, especially by the depiction of thieves and robbers (Ogude, 1997). For instance, Ogude observes that Ngugi’s portrayal of the devil as having two mouths, sagging belly, and a red skin like that of a pig is allegorical to the current leadership and to draw the reader’s attention towards the body as a site upon which stereotypical character establishment occurs. Ogude’s (1997) study is relevant to the current research in the sense it shows that indeed bodies can be read figuratively as sites which can convey cultural

meaning. The introduction of these literary texts into the conversation shows the relationship between fiction and the socio-cultural and political meanings related to the bodies.

The body is a focal segment of the social part of the people, whether working, playing, celebrating the sacred, or being “civilized” (Durkheim, 1965; Elias & Jephcott, 1978). Bell (1989) and Durkheim (1965) point out that there is a connection between ritual, identity, and other bodies. Thus, ritual performances are characteristic of frantic bodily gratifications and compact physical proximity which kindles robust feelings that evoke collaborative energy that comes over celebrants as they come together in familiar dance, songs, and frenzy. In the process, these rituals invoke a passionate ritualised society, reinforce social harmony and celebrate collaborative identities grounded in the lineage (Langman, 2003). For Durkheim (1965) the body is also a site of primary categorizations marked not only on the body but etched through ritual practices like circumcision, scarification, tattooing or piercings associated with birth, gender, sexuality, or rites of passage. The current study borrows these scholars’ broader and more inclusive conceptions of the ritual performances involving the body in reading and understanding the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

In her analysis of the postcolonial state and its leadership in Sony Lab’ou Tansi’s and Dambudzo Marechera’s works, Veit-Wild (2005) observes that the postcolonial state embodies the figure of a leader depicting his bodily attributes as ugly, deformed, lecherous and authoritatively imbecile to satirise him and his rule. Marechera and Labou manipulate the bodies’ sexual explicitness, and obscenity to portray a carnivalesque situation and depict the corrosion, and violence marring the country and to mirror the corruption and moral illness of society (Veit-Wild, 2005). For instance, the postcolonial dictator is portrayed as fluid and deformed through protruding body parts such as his oversized hernia or penis to show an openness state of the grotesque body (Bakhtin, 1994). Thus, Dambudzo Marechera’s and Sony Lab’ou’s manipulations of the grotesque body primarily through their emphasis on bodily functions, orifices, excretions, and sexual acts, help the current research in analysing the body practices in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

Douglas (2002) views cultures around the world as vehicles to realize particular aspects of the body and to convey social interpretations. Her study analyses how body symbolism is always deployed in the service of social intentions. Douglas (2002) shares her position with Fraser (1983) and Kreydlin (2008) on how particular forms of social life bring forth the same varieties of symbolic expression and meaning making through the reflection and particularly

the body language. Studies by Douglas (2002), Fraser (1983) and Kreydlin (2008) offer essential understandings concerning the cultural forces supporting the position that human bodies are engraved with interpretations to specific societies. This study develops from these studies by focusing on the manner in which bodies communicate through its practices and functions but specifically as depicted in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

Analyses of Turner (1997, 1999) of the body in ritual points out that the body in human cultural history acts as a metaphor for economic, pragmatic and social concerns of a particular people. Turner (1999) draws attention to the relationship between the exterior order of the socio-political world and the equilibrium of the human body and asserts that weaknesses within the body reflect weaknesses within the broader social system. Turner's observation reads into Foucault's understandings (2012) of the role of the body as a symbolic structure which produces metaphors by which power is gestated and understood as a reaction of lifelong historical reconstructions in human society. For instance, Turner (1997, 1999) observes that the custom artfulness of earmarking the criminal body symbolically allows convicts a chance to re-enter "conventional" society and attain peace after death. Zito's and Barlow's (1994) observations on the meanings created by the body demonstrate that discourses of the body must be viewed culturally and historically. This study explores the metaphoric concepts emitted by bodies, especially the relationship between the ritual body practices and the cultural concepts that define the Bukusu man.

Dissanayake (2009) says of the singing, expressive gesture, playing instruments, movements (performance, clapping, marking time, dancing), as behavioural manifestations for relaying the message of a set ritual. In that way, they symbolise the ceremony's significance and may even be utilised to provide some kind of rudimentary changes in individuals' responsiveness (Alcorta & Sosis, 2005; Nettle, 2000: 468). In ritualisation of body movements and undulant sounds (Dissanayake, 2009; Hinde, 1982; Huxley, 1914; Tinbergen, 1952), ordinary contexts of body practices become altered through a number of ways like repetition and exaggeration, so that attention is drawn to it, and they then communicate socio-cultural messages. The Bukusu circumcision ritual is marked with exaggerated movements and actions involving the body of the participants and even initiates. On the same note the manipulation of attractive and emotionally enchanting colours, movements and sounds that have inherent sensory and cognitive appeal. The manipulation of the body in rituals through the use of fascinating colours, energetic and graceful movements is also observed by Dissanayake (2009) as

harbouring a specific people's socio-cultural and political connotations. Ottenberg (1982: 180) observes that among the West African masqueraders of the Afikpo, for instance, men displayed their sexually desirable traits for women, with striking presence, competitive performance, rhythmic emotions, and physical force all being manipulated as modes of flirtation. By portraying one's desires in a collective character, participants attain a felt sense of social identity resulting in minds alleviated of existential tensions, firm by beliefs, and bonded with their community members in common cause.

McGuire (1990) points out that the body is not only a physical product, but also a cultural and figurative one occurring in a specific social and environmental context in which its agents are fashioned by each social moment and its history. Thus, bodies become vehicles for perceiving our world and interpreting theoretical concepts that are culture specific, but also universal literary structures that represent a people's traditional worldview and cultural heritage (Wako, 2002). These observations help the current study to identify elements of body significations in the Bukusu circumcision ritual with the aim of explaining their significance to the Bukusu.

From the foregoing, it has been established that bodies in general and the Bukusu circumcision ritual in particular have attracted attention from different scholars and researchers. Some of these studies have been quite general, while others more specific to particular communities and genres. Nonetheless, they are valuable sources for the current study in examining the body practices and analyzing the meanings this body emits.

### **1.7.5 The Body Imagery in the Bukusu Rites of Passage**

One of the primary objectives of the current study concerns the bodily practices in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. This study is premised on the assumption that the body is central to the Bukusu circumcision ritual and contains symbols which reflect the history, and the socio-economic aspects that also inform their identity. This section reviews the literature of the works which have examined the body practices apparent in the Bukusu rites of passage.

Senoga-Zake (2000) examination of the phases involved in the Bukusu circumcision ritual highlight the significance of the vigorous dances, often squats and kneeling during the arrival of the initiate at his home after paying courtesy calls. The escorts of the initiates join the dance in a circular motion while moving either clockwise or counter-clockwise at walking speed as they tramp their feet in a dance (Wanyama, 2006). At night, the singing and dancing

continue up to dawn with the initiate dancing in the middle of a circle formed by the singers-cum-dancers. The initiate's father's agemates occasionally join the song and dance in a house specifically set aside for them on the eve of the surgery (Wekesa, 2015). The studies Senoga-Zake (2000), Wanyama (2006) and Wanyama (2006) outline the context of the body in ritual dances and songs and lay the base by which the current one builds. The findings by Senoga-Zake (2000), Wanyama (2006) and Wekesa (2015) highlight the role played by different players in the circumcision ritual and their practices. Their findings demonstrate that the wordings of the circumcision songs, the presence of certain participants in particular ritual events, the dances, the distance between initiates and participants and the gestures are geared toward encouraging the initiates to face the knife and thus, render a successful ritual event.

Wekesa (2015) observes that early in the morning, the initiate in the Bukusu circumcision is taken to the river, stripped naked ready for mudding and after that, the singers-cum-dancers sing and call upon the initiate to present the penis for "sharpening" while heading back home. The candidate is warned against exhibiting any form of cowardice, slapped several times to awaken him to reality and to test his resolve to be circumcised before his whole body is smeared with mud (Wekesa, 2015). The slaps and the harangues by the elders to the initiates are believed to play a vital role in the enhancement of masculinity in the boys. The operation takes place in an open yard in front of the initiate's parent's house surrounded by a large crowd. It is a stage where the candidate is not supposed to whimper but face the knife with courage. The group then sings the song *Khwera Omurwa* (we have killed the enemy) immediately the initiate has been circumcised as they sing and dance in triumph. Wekesa's (2015) observations pinpoint the centrality of the initiate in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and what is done on his body in meaning-making.

Wagner (1949) observed that in the Bukusu birth songs and dances, dancers-cum-singers mimic sexual acts, and sing songs filled with sexual content that they would not dare sing under normal circumstances. This freedom of song is also noted among the Chopi people by Tracey (1987) who posits that one could say publicly in songs what one could not speak privately to a man's face in other ordinary occasions. Khamalwa (2004) makes a similar observation that the apparent suspension of the Bukusu conventional moral code is a common phenomenon associated with ceremonial undertakings which act as a safety valve for pent-up tension to be vented and dissipated. Khamalwa (2004) posits that the imitation of copulation movements by individual performers and the singing of obscene songs can be explained

regarding psychic forces, drives, sexual impulses, repressed wishes, structural or cultural imperatives. Wagner's (1949), Tracey's (1987) and Khamalwa's (2004) studies affirm that bodily practices play crucial roles worth to be studied.

Language has an immense significance on the organization of a community's culture, and that it shapes a people's social constructions in their societies, thus, acts as an essential instrument of communicating a people's culture (Ikeke, 2021; Lamunu & Wanyenya, 2021; Mose, 2022). Kibigo (2020) opines that language is culture of people and that it cannot be divorced and discussed individually without linking it to a specific community. Matere (2013) examined circumcision and termite harvesting songs in the Bukusu and argued that these songs contain references on private parts of the body not for their own sake, but directed towards some aim by drawing their imagery from nature and the body. For instance, soloists relate a woman's vagina to a natural stone which feels nothing even when one hits it and urges men to pound the "stone" harder to procreate in large numbers. Unmarried women were reminded through these songs to get married to access the penis that will enable them to get children. Merriam (1964) shows that music contains particular cultural concepts that are reinforced through a people's behaviour and interactions. The current study investigates the meanings the body emits and the embodied discourses in the Bukusu circumcision ritual context and their implications to the Bukusu community.

The explanations by these scholars on the body show that there is a possibility of body signification in ritual contexts that reflect on the socio-cultural life of the people who practise these rituals. However, no study has been conducted on the body and its practices towards meaning-making within the Bukusu circumcision ritual context. That is the knowledge gap that the current study aimed to fill.

#### **1.7.6 Literature Review on Theory**

This study is interested in the semiotic aspect of the body in a ritual context. The study is informed by the argument that whereas the Bukusu circumcision ritual is a serious undertaking as depicted through the myths that justify it, the ritual also has a copious share of light moments whereby the serious ritualistic elements are interspersed with the jocular and the carnivalesque especially during the song and dance, and other ritual discourses as explored in Chapter Five. To a casual observer, the lighter moments may make the event seem less serious than the term ritual implies. During the circumcision ritual, lighter moments characterized by jokes, abuses and profanity are evident as people talk freely about parts of

the body even as they condemn those who have engaged in such socially sanctioned behaviour as incest and promiscuity especially by the married people. The talks and songs about genitalia are informed by the belief that among the Bukusu, a good penis must inflict pain and pleasure simultaneously during intercourse, hence circumcision is seen as the process of preparing it for that purpose.

This study seeks to understand meanings that can derive from body significations in the Bukusu circumcision ritual, the context within which those meanings are produced and consumed. The circumcision ritual is marked with exposure of the bodies of the initiates, open talks on sex and feasting on copious amounts of foods and drinks. The body and its functions seem to form the central metaphor of the Bukusu circumcision ritual as depicted through ritual activities. The study is informed by the Carnival Ambivalence Theory. The theory, which is attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin is concerned with the comic uncrowning of the high to the low, elements of free and familiar relations between people, “weird behaviour” and the irreverent (Bakhtin, 1994). These elements are real world experiences depicted in bodily forms of ritualistic practice that are enacted as being part of life itself and reflect a space in which hierarchy, rules and inhibitions are suspended allowing room for equal ground for all (Pikli, 2001).

The Carnival Ambivalence theorists argue that emphasis on the body is fundamental to body imagery. One key element proponents of the carnival theory point out is that the body and the images of eating, drinking and sexual exploits reflect the world, time, change and a people’s daily practices. Thus, the exaggerated bodily parts, the emphasis on eating, drinking, and recurrent physical abuse and debasements form the fundamental elements of a complex communal perception and understanding of human life (Bakhtin, 1994). The Carnival Theory offers strategies for the body and bodily practices in the carnival and the meanings that the body emits from its nakedness and its sexual characteristics. Stallybrass and White (1986) and Bakhtin (1994) view the sensuality of the bodily images, the profanity and the excesses as embracing all people and as representing the socio-cultural and economic aspects of a community. Bakhtin (1994) locates the aspects of flaying of the body through beatings, abuses and curses as signifying the downward movement such as mortification but also renewing.

In the text, *Rabelais and His World* (1965), Bakhtin examined how the European communities in the Renaissance period subverted the established dogmas of the society. The

government and churches would set aside specific days in which the masses and leaders had the freedom to engage in activities and practices that were outside the everyday experience and practice. Moreover, the masses could wait for the day of Mardi Gras<sup>4</sup>, a day before lent, in the custom of the Roman Catholics in which they were expected to prepare themselves to forego eating meat and engaging in sexual practices (Njogu, 1994). The masses would celebrate feasting on copious amounts of foods and drinks as they took part in the carnival festivities.

In addition, the carnival time was the time to publicly celebrate freedom, which often consisted of taking liberties to make utterances. In such situations, talks otherwise deemed impolite, profane and irreverent, especially about parts of the body that would not usually be mentioned in public in everyday practice seemed to be widely tolerated. Participants would openly and freely talk about nakedness, copulation, defecation, sweating, blowing of the nose among other acts that are socially sanctioned in everyday speech. Even though such utterances were upsetting and degrading, Bakhtin (1994) observed that the acts themselves were important and had significance in matters of existence of a community. Through such seemingly deviant talks, Bakhtin (1994) argues, humans can access the truth about their origin and existence.

Brown (1969) argues that the signification emanating from discussing sexual matters openly within the ritual context is not taboo but a subject to be celebrated and even boasted about. In the process, such talk signifies one's community's sociocultural practices such as marriage, copulation, greed, discipline among others. Brown's (1969) assertion demonstrates how talk regarding sex has a deeper significance in a ritual setting compared to non-ritual contexts where sexual matters are regarded as taboo. In addition to the license, carnival participants in the French concept of Mardi Gras (Fat Tuesday) could also drink excessive alcohol and wear comic garments so as to engage in anything that could point toward contradicting socially sanctioned practices. In summary, life during the carnival was "upside down." This study looks at the circumcision festivities comprising the festive mood, proliferation of profanities and licentious talk about private parts during the Bukusu circumcision ritual that point toward meaning making.

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<sup>4</sup> Mardi Gras is French for "Fat Tuesday," also called Shrove Tuesday. It is the day before Ash Wednesday, which marks the start of Christian Lent season leading up to Easter. Njogu (1994) posits that during Lent, many Christians fast. However, on the last day before fasting, Christians eat richer foods before the leaner days of Lent begin. The tradition dates back to thousands of years to pagan celebrations of spring and fertility and it is also known as carnival.

The carnival provides a short-term suspension of social hierarchies making it possible for a particular kind of communication that would be inopportune, inappropriate and intolerable in everyday life. Hence, there emerges a unique category of speech, gesture, freedom and frankness akin to what Bakhtin refers to as “the marketplace discourse” that allows little or no distance between those who come in contact with each other and liberates the participants from norms of etiquette and decency that govern the practice of everyday life. Bakhtin (1994) points out that in such a place, the form of verbal discourse between people is characterised by use of abusive words and mutual mockery. In relation to speech evident in the carnival, feasting on copious amounts of food and drinks creates an atmosphere that allows freedom and frankness. Prevalent in this frankness is the use of abuses and curses, which represent the humbling of an individual (Bakhtin, 1994). Gilmore (1998) observed that the carnival in Andalusia is replete with a kind of festive madness that momentarily levels out the lives of the disadvantaged and the advantaged people in society. Thus, he argues, the carnival becomes a vehicle where themes including sex, gender relations, status, human relations and other issues that affect the Andalusian are talked about openly. This study focuses on circumcision festivities with their emphases on talks on the body practices as a vehicle for conveying cultural concepts.

Wako (2013) asserts that jokes, mock antagonisms, terse criticism and banter within the Borana culture as manifest through genres like narrative, poetry and satire thematise unconventional marriages, greed, deformity, sexual perversion and inadequacy. Wako’s argument is that the clan jokes comprising of profanity serve as a forum for taking stock and of compliance with a generally accepted code of conduct in the Borana community where nonconformity is ridiculed and subjected to sharp criticisms. In a similar vein as Wako (2013), Mwamzandi (2002) examined how the dynamics of performance and carnival in Taarab becomes as effectual communicative tool as well as communicative artifices that expresses a people’s worldview. Mwamzandi (2002) observes that there are elements of the body, those of profanities and suspension of hierarchy in the performance of Taarab which communicate the socio-cultural and political concepts such as discipline, religion and relationships among others. Thus, the Borana clan joke and Taarab performance provide platforms for performance of poetry and songs that are rich in eloquent metaphors and imagery as an integral part of a living oral tradition.

There are essential elements that occur both in the carnival festivities and the rites of passage that signify the sociocultural and economic concepts of the particular communities. For instance, Turner (1969) asserts that the initiation ritual phenomena blend lowliness and sacredness of uniformity with comradeship. In the process, the combination of sacredness, lowliness and comradeship present moments in ritual that seem out of time and out of the secular social structure. Turner further points out two prototypes for human interrelatedness, alternating and placed side by side that depict the people's lives. The first is structured where there is hierarchy and order, while the second is unstructured, which emerges in ritual situations and where the society is undifferentiated, and hierarchy is suspended. The initiation ritual, according to Turner (1969), characterises elevation of status in which the initiate is being relayed irremediably from a low to a higher status and where there is collective responsibility from members of the community. Turner's observation is that initiation, as a transformative stage is characterised by insults, tolerance, sexual continence, nakedness, the absence of rank, foolishness, the simplicity of speech and sacredness (1969: 6). Hence, the robust verbal and nonverbal behaviour during the ritual, therefore, not only demonstrate the humbling of an initiate in a rite of status elevation, but also encapsulates the potential of structural elevation and gaining of a new status within the community (Turner, 1969). This study interrogates how the Bukusu circumcision ritual with its human interrelatedness as necessitated by the robust verbal and nonverbal behaviour become an arena for the bodies to emit sociocultural concepts that inform the Bukusu way of life.

Turner (1967) further asserts that the disguise through masks, grotesque costumes, stripping and painting the body with clay as such displayed in the initiation rituals depict specific natural and cultural features of a community. The Bukusu circumcision ritual is replete with incidences of masking, use of uncanny costumes, body stripping and painting that communicate the Bukusu worldview. Turner (1974) observed that in the Ndembu twin ritual of Zambia, for instance, men and women engage in the playful and mocking behaviour and abuse each other verbally in an exceedingly sexual and jocular way not for the sake of it, but to symbolise social sanction, maintain reasonable fertility and restrain unreasonable fecundity. Turner (1974) asserts that the jocular aspect and the ludic behaviour present in the Ndembu ritual are not just for fun, but are connected with the performance of symbolic actions and manipulation of symbolic objects in order to promote and increase fertility of men, animals, and crops, to avert plague, to turn girls into women and boys into men, to cure

illness, and to ensure the proper succession of seasons and the agricultural responses of the community.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the rites of passage and the carnival festivities encompass properties which signify particular aspects of a community beyond their literal presentation. While Bakhtin based his study on the carnival and carnivalesque aspects in the Renaissance period in Europe, other studies like Mwamzandi (2002) and Wako (2013) have arrived at the particular concepts touching on discipline, relationships, marriage, respect among others, embodied in the carnival from studying other rituals. With this knowledge that the body plays a significant role in the life of man, it is vital to examine the body significations in other rituals, particularly the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

### **1.8 Theoretical Framework**

The study is informed by Bakhtin's carnival theory (discussed in section 1.7.6). The Carnival Theory is suitable for this study in a variety of ways. First, it shows how body texts under study not only signify, but also render cultural significance and interaction among the Bukusu. Secondly, it aids in unraveling and explaining issues regarding the relationship and interaction among bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual, the figurative meanings these bodies emit and the implication of these messages in the life of the Bukusu. Finally, it helps the study in deciphering meanings emerging from the carnivalistic misalliances, collectiveness and eccentric behaviour evident in the Bukusu circumcision.

This study relies on three tenets of the carnival theory. First is the tenet of the body principle encompassing its functioning, and its conventions, where the body parts such as genitals, buttocks, hands, feet, intestines, body orifices and extensions together with the imagery associated with them reflect the world, time, change and a people's daily life (Bakhtin, 1994). The orifices, the genitals and other body parts, representing the beginning of life and end, portray the incompleteness of the body as well as its connection with the natural world outside (Bakhtin, 1994). Bakhtin believes that it is within these orifices that the confines between the body and between the bodies and the world are overcome. The study examines the ways in which body practices are presented during the ritual, for instance, body stripping, body markings, movements, dances, gestures, ritual objects and body adornment are manipulated in the Bukusu circumcision ritual by ritual participants to make meaning.

The second tenet is on the body relations and interactions. The relations embracing all the people and as representing the socio-cultural and economic needs of a community. Here, the aspects of comradeship, uniformity, sacredness, identity and continuity are highlighted. The theory talks about the symbolism of the body relations, interactions of the participants, and the feasting as means through which social, cultural, and spiritual needs of a community are satisfied (Bakhtin, 1994). The ritual is perceived as creating a cultural context whereby different voices interact and speak to each. The feast, status elevation, and elements of collectivity are some of the few elements that the researcher examines with regard to their peculiar traits, the roles they play and their significance in Bukusu circumcision ritual and culture as a whole. The researcher examines circumstances where free and familiar contacts are deeply felt as brought about by the temporal suspension of everyday rules and regulations present in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

The third tenet is on the carnival festivities, eccentric unruly behaviour and language use. The researcher examines carnivalesque elements such as inanity, ritual talks and festivity depicted in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Some of the characteristics of the Bukusu circumcision ritual include the use of insults, swearing and profanity. Language, especially insults, profanities, and sexual intimations and violation can signify the sociocultural practices of a particular community according to Brown (1969), Campbell (1994), and Gates (2014). That is, they serve specific purposes in the understanding of a people's perspective on life. The researcher, thus, examines talks concerning sex and acts of courage and their relationship to the feast and the body as depicted in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Feasting and merriment are inherently connected to bodily contact with and mastery of the material world (Bakhtin, 1994). Through the openness and frivolity evident in the ritual, serious communal issues such as marriage, greed, copulation, security and harmony are addressed. The researcher will observe and examine elements of feasting, including excessive drinking and eating, their role and explain their significance in the circumcision ritual and to the Bukusu culture.

## **1.9 Methodology**

### **1.9.1 Introduction**

The focus of this chapter is on the approaches to the study. This study is generally interested in the Bukusu people's culture, specifically their circumcision ritual and the ways in which it informs their practice of everyday life and identity formation. The researcher is particularly interested in ways of discerning body significations in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and the

ways in which ritual and cultural meanings can be read in ritual body significations. As an investigation of meanings in the Bukusu circumcision ritual as part of the culture, traditions and identity formations of the Bukusu, the study relies on ethnographic methods for data collection. This choice is informed by the nature of culture, which is at the core of the study, and ways in which culture can meaningfully be studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002).

Ethnography requires that the researcher goes to observe the culture under study in its natural setting to observe their daily life, events, actions and specific encounters with a view to gaining fuller understandings of the culture in its context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Tedlock, 2000). Thus, ethnographic methods permit the researcher to access meanings of the Bukusu circumcision ritual in context of practice. The ethnographic methods also allow the researcher to access the cultural significance associated with the ritual event through a close association and familiarisation with the social setting (Brewer, 2000; Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). As Anderson (2006) argues, culture is contextual so it is important to understand the context in which culture is produced and consumed. In this study, therefore, the ethnographic methods demand of a researcher to accord significance to the context of the event under research. Thus, it would make sense to attempt to understand body significations in the circumcision ritual within the context of the Bukusu history, culture and traditions which inform modes and processes of interpretation of the ritual.

This study belongs broadly to the field of semiotics, which according to Geertz (1975) as quoted in Kweya (2011) is based on the interpretation of patterns of signification and that culture is a construct whose rendering is made apparent by deployment of relevant material culture that helps to enhance ways in which the cultural expressions should be read. Therefore, this study pays attention to ways in which such cultural elements such as costumes and other artifacts are used to represent the importance and seriousness attached to the cultural ritual and ways of reading it. Specifically, this study is informed by the constructivist paradigm whose central argument is that meaning is constructed through experience and events which exist through human interaction (Geertz, 1975). The study is informed by the argument that culture is a construct and idiosyncratic, and is the product of the need to respond to or to make sense of the experience at a particular point in time (Anderson, 2006).

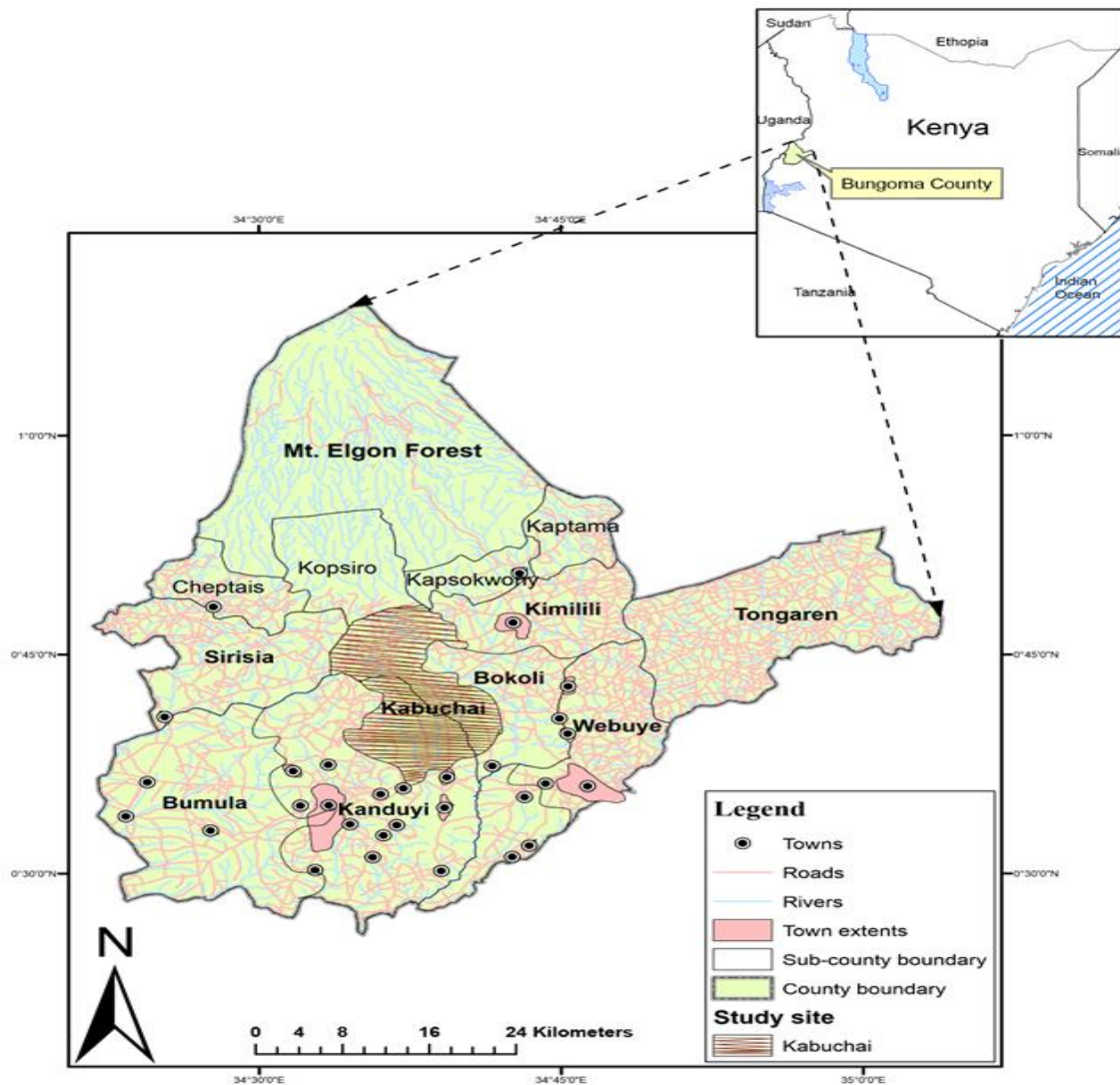
### **1.9.2 Research Design**

As observed above, this study employs the constructivist paradigm. The underlying argument of constructivism is that meanings is sought in social contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The

constructivist model is premised on the assumption that reality is a construct influenced by knowledge of the social world of human beings within their natural settings (Wisker, 2007). Constructivists also assume that people's knowledge of reality, is socially constructed. In other words, different people construct and relate their own subjective and inter-subjective meanings in the world around them as they interact with and try to make sense of that world (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This paradigm also takes cognizance of the fact of meaning as multiple and contradictory because meaning is a product of individual and idiosyncrasy. Hence, there is need for the researcher to immerse herself/himself within the social/cultural context of the research and interrogate participants for their opinions on the subject of research conscious of the fact that these opinions are potentially contestable and contested by the opinions of other participants.

### **1.9.3 Study Area**

The fieldwork was conducted in Kabuchai Constituency, Bungoma County. Kabuchai constituency borders Kanduyi, Kimilili, and Sirisia constituencies and it is largely inhabited by the Bukusu. Kabuchai Constituency was selected because it had a significant number of elders who are well versed in the Bukusu traditions and had accepted to participate in the research. Most significantly, Kabuchai is a bit more removed from any major urban area. Meaning that Kabuchai is one of the few areas in Bukusuland where Bukusu traditional practices remain at the core of the practice of everyday life in closer to the ideal ways in which the Bukusu have imagined such traditions over time.



**Figure 1:** Map showing Kabuchai Constituency in Bungoma County

#### 1.9.4 Sources of Data

The study is interested in body significations brought forth by the Bukusu circumcision ritual. During the circumcision event, people talk about the history of the Bukusu circumcision and the community especially through songs and social gatherings. Therefore, the historical experiences are important. For that matter, the study comprised of two sets of data. The first set is contextual information consisting of background history as well as the Bukusu concept of how the ritual began and its significance. This data which was obtained through interviews helped to contextualise the ritual. The second set of data is the events of the circumcision ritual. Specifically, the data is derived from circumcision participants' roles and actions, relations to each other, conversations, artifacts, songs and dances.

### **1.9.5 Target Population**

The study is interested in body significations during the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Therefore, the study is interested in all the participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual that took place in August and December, 2018.

### **1.9.6 Sample and Sampling Procedure**

The focus of the study was on Bukusu culture and traditions as sources of the Bukusu socio-cultural concepts, its history and collective identity. Therefore, the researcher was interested in the understanding of the Bukusu worldview through social interpretation of their traditions and history (Vansina, 1985). As mentioned in section 1.9.5 above, two sets of data were important for this research: firstly, the events of the circumcision ritual itself and secondly, the Bukusu community traditions and historical experience, which contextualise and legitimate the ritual. For both kinds of data, purposive sampling was used.

For the purpose of selection of the rituals the researcher observed during the fieldwork, my field assistant identified homes in which circumcision events were scheduled and sought permission in advance for me to attend, observe and record the entire ritual. The researcher then used participant observation whereby he mingled with the people and asked for clarification as the ritual unfolded. Because of the nature of the ritual, which takes about 4-5 days in each home, the researcher targeted six homes in which the circumcision events were observed. The second set of data consisted of the history of the community's experience. Since not everyone possesses oral historical knowledge of the community, this study purposively targeted knowledgeable persons who were above 50 years of age. Such participants were identified by my field assistant who was familiar with the research site and the people. Other participants were identified through snowballing with the help of a cultural expert who suggested other experts (Barbour, 2001; Etikan, 2016; Patton, 2002).

The researcher interviewed twenty experts on the traditions and oral history of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Geertz (1975) recommends thick description that can be obtained by a significantly small and manageable sample size in ethnographic research. Snowball sampling technique was also used to obtain new cultural experts for interviews when other contact avenues had dried and delivered a unique type of knowledge (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Nov, 2008; Patton, 2002). Thus, the study identified an elder who led the researcher to his peers that he knew had the information the study was seeking.

### **1.9.7 Methods of Data Collection**

As observed above, this study is principally semiotic and it is concerned with bodies in Bukusu circumcision ritual as texts. The study is interested in both the audio and visual aspects and therefore, it employs the following methods to collect data;

#### **1.9.7.1 Participant Observation**

The study used participant observation to capture the performance items and semiotic elements concerning the body, relationship between these bodies, utterances, dances and songs during the circumcision ritual. The researcher also used participant observation during interviews on the Bukusu traditions and oral history. This technique allowed the researcher to share as intimately as possible the life and activities during the ritual (Patton, 2002).

#### **1.9.7.2 Interviews**

Interviews were used to get the oral historical experience and information regarding the Bukusu traditions to contextualise and legitimate the ritual. On each occasion of an interview with an expert on the Bukusu traditions and culture, the researcher used an interview guide. In each case, the researcher explained the objectives of the research and sought permission. Once the interview was in progress, the researcher deployed the participant observation method for interaction with the cultural expert whereby the researcher occasionally sought clarification and performed such roles as the expert expected of him. The researcher interviewed individuals who were regarded as experts on the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The open-ended nature of the interview allowed probing which was used to get deeper information intended to guide the respondents towards giving data to meet the study objectives (Creswell, 2009). The style of the interview was conversational to make the interview interactive.

### **1.9.8 Instruments of Data Collection**

This research was largely semiotic in so far as it was interested in bodies as texts. Video recording was the appropriate instrument for data collection for this study. The advantage of video recording for this kind of study is summarised by Kiesling (2006) when he postulates that video captures the audial and visual significations and observations both of which are focal to this study. A field diary was also used to remind the researcher of the homes and the days when ritual events and interviews were held.

### **1.9.9 Data Analysis**

The study is interested in body significations and the meanings they emit during the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The researcher analysed the data extracted from field interviews, field notes, photographs and video recordings with regard to the objectives of the study and presented the information in a narrative form. The recorded interviews, field notes, photographs and video recordings were interpreted, first, with respect to the immediate semantic environment and experience. Secondly, with regard to the tenets of the carnival ambivalence theory; the body itself, their imagery and how they reflect the world, time, change and a people's daily life; body relations and interactions; and finally, carnival festivities including feasting, discourse, eccentric and unruly behaviour, sexual intimations, profanity and free and familiar contacts between the ritual members.

Data analysis comprised a close observation and interpretation of two sets of data. First, was the interview text on the traditions and the cultural experience of the Bukusu which provided contextual information that legitimated the circumcision ritual. Thus, interviews on the traditions and the oral history of the Bukusu provided the background against which the ritual texts were reinforced. The second set of data consisted of the circumcision ritual itself. The data was categorised on the basis of the theme(s) and a tenet or more of the Carnival Ambivalence Theory deployed in the interpretation of the data for each chapter within the context of the overall aim of the research. Data is analysed in categories whereby each chapter raises arguments, extracts relevant texts and uses pertinent tenets from the carnival ambivalence theory to back the arguments as shown in the chapter outlines in section 1.9.11.

### **1.9.10 Ethical Considerations**

This study involved getting the research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, a letter from Egerton University and the student identity card for accessing permission from the participants. While in the fieldwork, the researcher first introduced himself as an MA student in Egerton University and expressed his interest in the story of the Bukusu circumcision. The researcher then stated the purpose of the research and sought for the participants' consent to participate at their own free will. Secondly, as Smythe (2000) avers on consent to use the participant's identity, the researcher sought the participants' permission to have their names and pictures appear in the research as visual representations of some field activity. Therefore, the researcher asked to use their names of which they were eager to do so. The researcher also guaranteed them anonymity for those

who did not want their identity revealed. The researcher specified to them that he had no money to pay their work as it was more valuable and he could not afford to pay. However, the researcher offered a token to them. Participation was voluntary and in case one felt uncomfortable at any stage, the researcher told them that one was free to stop from participating. The researcher assured them that the data gathered will not be used for any other purpose other than for the purpose of the research. After the interviews, the researcher thanked them.

### **1.9.11 Chapter Outline**

#### **Chapter One: Introduction: Conceptualizing the Study**

This chapter introduces the study. The focus of the chapter is on the main arguments and the approaches to the study. The chapter therefore justifies the study and the choices made.

#### **Chapter Two: Context of the Text: Locating Sikhebo within the Bukusu Traditions**

Taking over from Chapter One, this chapter introduces the setting in which the socio-cultural events at the core of the study take place. This chapter is informed by the consciousness that this is a textual study as far as its focus is on oral/social texts. Therefore, the chapter highlights the nature of texts as the object of study and the specific socio-cultural and historical background that justifies the production and belief in the social significance of the *sikhebo* texts. Thus, the study is informed by the argument that texts only make sense within the context in which they are produced and consumed. Therefore, to understand the texts, there is the need to understand their contexts of production and consumption. In other words, there is the need to understand the historical and socio-cultural experiences of the community under study, which inform the production of the culture/traditions under study and the ways in which meaning is discerned from the texts of community traditions by the target audience.

#### **Chapter Three: Conventions of Body Praxis in the Bukusu Circumcision Ritual**

Chapter Three and Four are related. Chapter Three focuses on the participants in the circumcision ritual and what they do or what is done to them on an individual or group basis. Chapter Three is informed by the argument that although what one sees during the ritual does not seem to imply any specific roles and duties for any and each of the participants, experienced ritual owners and practitioners fall naturally into their duties and roles to ensure an ideal ritual for a particular group of initiates. The chapter is, therefore, interested in the consciousness of the social contracts of each participant in the ritual to ensure as much as possible the enactment of what they understand as the ideal representation of the ritual practice in order to give the initiate a head start in life. Consequently, the chapter focuses on

the synchronization of the body acts and significations in order for them to play their culturally assigned roles during the initiation of the youth. The study is based on the assumption that each act of a participant is in one way or the other in sync with the acts of the other participants towards the overall objective of ideal ritualization of the initiate(s) transitional process. The chapter is based on the assumption that the ritual enacts the Bukusu practice of everyday life in relation to procreation, social structure, gender relations, personhood, status, enhancement of masculine virility and fecundity, and hardening of the boys for adulthood responsibilities and challenges. Therefore, the chapter is informed by Bakhtin's argument that body significations in a ritual reflect the world, time change and people's daily life.

#### **Chapter Four: Mapping Body Relationships in the Bukusu Circumcision Ritual**

This chapter takes over where Chapter Three stopped. The focus of Chapter Three is on the relationships and significations among the participants and the ritual signification of that. Chapter Four focuses on the relationship between the initiate and the participants. The study charts the body relationships that emerge between participants during the circumcision ritual with the core purpose of highlighting the meanings these bodies emit. These participants include initiates, circumcisers, singers-cum-dancers, animals used in for ritual purposes, uncles, mothers, fathers and ritual elders. The chapter is informed by Bakhtin's argument that we exist in relationship to one another and that when one speaks not with an individual voice, but within a cultural context where one's voice dances and speaks with other voices.

#### **Chapter Five: Festivity, Inanity and Body Discourses in the Bukusu Circumcision Ritual**

Chapter Five discusses the symbolism apparent in the peculiar behaviour, excessive bawdiness, antagonisms and sexual filled texts in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. It also interrogates the nature of discourses on the body, both verbal and embodied, established during the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The chapter elucidates images of robust erotic behaviour, bawdy language and jokes on the body and body practices. These include the use of erotic props or objects and intimate interactions, dancers, jocular taunts and excessively bawdy filled songs and conversations. It also discusses the feast, talks about the body, elements of collectivity and temporary madness as some of the few elements that form part of the Bukusu circumcision ritual practices. Bakhtin (1994) avers that feasting and merriment are inherently connected to bodily contact with and mastery of the material world. Similarly, the researcher explores elements of free and familiar contacts, essentials of verbal etiquette,

the roles they play, their peculiar traits and their significance in Bukusu circumcision ritual and culture as a whole. Bakhtin (1994) opines that it is characteristic of the carnival to use abusive language, and insulting words or expressions. Language, especially abuses, profanity, sexual intimations and violation can signify the sociocultural practices of a particular community as established by Brown (1969), Campbell (1994) and Gates (2014). Driessen (1983) avers that the exchange of boastful stories about male sexual conquests, obscenities and jokes about sexuality are intimately tied to the meanings of rituals. Bawdiness, insults, jokes and profanity directed toward the body are some of the common characteristics of the Bukusu circumcision ritual and are directed towards the body. Thus, the chapter examines their nature, role and significance in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

### **Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter offers a brief summary of the entire study. The chapter similarly focuses on the main research findings, general conclusion and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONTEXT OF THE TEXT: LOCATING *SIKHEBO* WITHIN THE BUKUSU TRADITIONS

#### 2.1 Overview

This chapter explores ways in which the Bukusu circumcision ritual is contextualized within the Bukusu culture. It focuses on the social dynamics within the oral history of the Bukusu circumcision, the circumcision ritual events, songs and performances, stages involved and their implications within and on the Bukusu worldview. The chapter is informed by the premise that bodily practices within the Bukusu circumcision ritual imitate and reproduce the cultural and historical experience of the Bukusu people. The chapter is also informed by the assumption that the physical body, for instance, the marked penis is integral to the cultural definition and formation of identity among the Bukusu. The chapter approaches the circumcision ritual from the angle in which the ritual has a relationship to history. As Bakhtin (1994) refers to the carnival as a significant primary custom of a people's culture, and one that has a relationship to history. The chapter is informed by Bakhtin's notion that the body of the people participating in the carnival has a historic nature conscious of its unity in time with its relative historic immortality and uninterrupted continuity of a community's becoming and growth.

Everybody participates in the Bukusu circumcision ritual since its precise idea embraces all the people. The circumcision ritual ensures victory of the Bukusu future with all the community's material abundance, equality, liberty and brotherhood. Hence, the chapter explores the Bukusu circumcision ritual events where the bodies of the ritual participants are seen to signify and affirm the history, identity and culture of the Bukusu. In effect, part of the argument of this chapter is that the ritual as a process of becoming (transformation from boyhood to adulthood) is also a process of reenactment of the Bukusu experience and being in the world over time.

It is apparent that the Bukusu circumcision is motivated by a range of modes of making sense of experience of the world (Khamalwa, 2004; Mbachii & Likoko, 2013; Merritt, 1976; Simiyu, 2011; Were, 2014). From their assertions, it becomes clear that the ritual is inspired by the understanding that there is meaning waiting to be unraveled in the complex Bukusu circumcision songs, chants, ritual paraphernalia, body practices and other ritual activities, which address issues pertaining the Bukusu culture, history, socio-economic challenges and

generally Bukusu concept of being and time. Body depiction, as one of the core components of meaning-making in the Bukusu circumcision ritual is profoundly entrenched in the Bukusu concept of the world. The body's representative style and the effect and affect resulting from it are informed by the cultural context. For instance, the manifestation of courage and valor depicted by bodies is associated with the initiates looking forward to becoming "real men," an allusion to the Bukusu ancestral father of circumcision called Mango. The aspiration to be a "real man" just as Mango is deeply ingrained within the initiate, thus constructing masculinity and surety of the continuity of the community as it is depicted through the traditions and customs of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. As an upshot of such prior happenings, this chapter addresses the historical, socio-cultural and political contexts of the Bukusu community, and the social-cultural items from the Bukusu community encapsulating rites of passage, symbols and, taboos. It also analyses the context of the circumcision ritual in the Bukusu community.

This chapter explores the ways in which the body is represented in the Bukusu circumcision origin story and the various stages involved. The context of the Bukusu circumcision ritual draws out the complex socio-cultural and economic aspects that inform the body, the body's practices and its signification within the Bukusu culture. Thus, the investigation of the history of the Bukusu circumcision, and its phases enhances our analysis of the phenomena of the body signification in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

## **2.2 History of the Bukusu Circumcision**

This section explores the origin of the Bukusu circumcision ritual through location of Bukusu circumcision tradition in the context of the community historical experience. The focus under this section is on foregrounding elements within the origin and history of the Bukusu circumcision ritual that the bodily practices during the circumcision ritual events are seen to signify to.

The common pattern encountered in interviews during my fieldwork suggest that the cultural experts do not agree on how the Bukusu circumcision ritual began. For example, on the one hand, Simon Simiyu (a 48 years old a circumciser, interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018), argued that the origin of the Bukusu circumcision tradition could be traced back to around 1800 as a

consequence of the interaction between the Bukusu and the Sabaot<sup>5</sup> a Kalenjin sub-tribe group residing on the slopes of Mt. Elgon. Mango is said to have killed a serpent called *Khururwe-yabebe* at a place called Mwiala wa Mango. The serpent *Yabebe* is described as being gigantic in size, terrifyingly vicious in appearance, having sharp jaws, overgrown with whiskers like those of a he-goat, with its throat criss-crossed with white, black and red strips. Its movement was said to cause the breaking of trees.

The story has it that Mango armed himself with a sword (*embalu*) and a sharp spear, and hid strategically in a corner of a snake's cave as he awaited the return of the serpent from its wanderings. As the serpent entered the cave and rested its head on a log of wood Mango had placed at its entrance, he summoned all his strength and with one blow, chopped off the serpent's head. Legend has it that the head flew out of the cave and sunk its fangs deep into a tree at the entrance of the cave. The head got stuck there and due to its lethal venom, it caused the tree to dry up. On realizing his achievement, Mango came out of the cave running and ululating with joy. The Sabaot are said to be shocked at how Mango, an uncircumcised person, was able to achieve such an incredible accomplishment. In recognition of his courage, the Sabaot offered him a bride. However, he could not take her as he was uncircumcised. The Sabaot volunteered to circumcise Mango so he could marry their daughter. Thus, the Bukusu circumcision tradition was born. Since then, the Bukusu circumcision has come to be associated with courage, masculinity, status, cosmology and gateway to marriage and procreation.

On the other hand, two Bukusu elders John Wekesa (73, Interviewed, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2017) and Yohana Namakelo (86, Interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018), indicated that the first Bukusu to be circumcised was called Samba Sambaranengunyi. After him circumcision became part of the Bukusu practice for quite a while. However, a severe contagious pestilence affected the penises killing many of them, the consequence of which the practice was halted for the time the pestilence was on.

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<sup>5</sup> The Sabaot people live on and around the slopes of Mount Elgon. The close proximity between the Bukusu and the Sabaot according to Yohana Namakelo (interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018) is that it has necessitated a long history of conflict between the Bukusu and Sabaot over power and resources especially cattle and land. Though Yohana Namakelo posts that the Bukusu circumcision was started by Samba Sambaranengunyi, Frederick Kiberenge (interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018) countenances that the Bukusu borrowed the circumcision practice from the Sabaot. Unlike the Bukusu who only circumcise boys, the Sabaot circumcise both their boys and girls. Interview with some respondents intimated that the variation in circumcision rituals between the Bukusu and the Sabaot is a significant feature that is often used to reinforce and cement their differences as separate ethnic identities and contribute to conflicts between them.

The story has it that one day, a woman who had gone into the forest to look for firewood spotted a young boy who had run away into the forest to escape the pestilence after his circumcision. She was so excited to meet the young man that she convinced him to accompany her to her home. She went and hid the young man inside her house and ensured that no one else knew that she was lucky as to have a man at a time when the other women could not find any. After sometime, her fellow women started noticing changes in her physique and attitude, and particularly the fact that her stomach seemed to bulge by the day. The women got curious and demanded to know what she was eating that seemed to make her grow bigger. They kept pestering her to reveal to them the secret behind the changes in her body. After a lot of pestering, the woman yielded and finally revealed the secret. The other women became so envious that they set out in search for their own men.

Two issues are apparent from the two stories. First, whereas the second story seems to focus on the women's desire to have husbands in a context scarcity of the same, the emphasis of the story seems to focus on the elimination and absence of men in order to gesture to the identity of the man in the Bukusu community. The man is put on the pedestal as being vital in the community. Second, unlike the first narrative as rendered by Simon Simiyu regarding the Bukusu as having acquired the circumcision ritual from the Sabaot, the second narrative by John Wekesa seems to affirm the Bukusu claim to the origination and ownership of the circumcision. Thus, John Wekesa's and Yohana Namakelo's story deliberately suppresses the narrative by Simon Simiyu regarding the Bukusu circumcision as an adoption of a Sabaot ritual.

A number of observations can be made from the foregoing. First, the concept of bravery, as exemplified by Mango's actions of confronting *yabebe* and facing the Sabaot circumciser's knife are symbolic of Bukusu masculinity which the initiates attempt to replicate during the circumcision ritual. Secondly, the fact that Mango demanded to be circumcised without flinching is the highest manifestation of masculinity that according to Simon Simiyu (Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018) it is acknowledged by the initiates during the circumcision ritual through the body postures. For example, the act of appearing to dare the circumciser and withstand the pain of the cut is considered a true demonstration of emulation of Mango, the epitome of masculinity among the Bukusu. The boys are seen to emulate Mango, firstly, by offering themselves to have the foreskin cut off from the penis, considered as the most sensitive part of the male body and secondly, through facing the knife without cringing.

One remarkable observation regarding the time of the cut that is tied to the origin of the Bukusu circumcision and history<sup>6</sup> has to do with the directions in which the initiates face during the cut. Initiates from the Baliche clans face East while the others face West the phenomenon Yohana Namakelo (85, interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018) and Moses Barasa (41, interviewed, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2019) explain. According to Yohana Namakelo, in the early years of the migration and settling of the Bukusu people in the western parts of Kenya, the Bukusu community was faced with a solemn problem of sterility and barrenness heaped upon them due to the incest taboo committed by Maina's son. Maina's son had slept with Maina's last wife. This made Maina<sup>7</sup> so angry that he left Bukusuland in a huff and went to unfamiliar territories. However, before Maina left, a delegation was called to deliberate on a number of problems affecting the community such as barrenness and sterility regarded as the major causes of the Bukusu's sufferings. A delegation comprising of three people; Iyaya, representing Bamuyumbu and Batachoni clans; Wandaba, Omumutilu; and Wakhulunyi, Omukitwika deliberated over the issues at hand. The panel suggested that during circumcision, their sons should face the westerly direction to which Maina had left, an idea Iyaya opposed arguing that they should face east, the direction his people came from.

Moses Barasa (41 years old, Interviewed, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2019) claims that it is because of the Bamwalie belief that their origin, attributed to Keywa<sup>8</sup> who is believed to have come from the east direction. The same practice is evident when Baliche approach the river. The reason behind this is that usually, the river is approached from the west if the clan of the father entered the area from the east and vice versa for those from the west.

This purpose of this section is to show how the history of the Bukusu and their circumcision is tied to the circumcision ritual events as manifest in the actions of the ritual participants as discussed above. The argument of this section is that the ritual events, especially through those involving the bodies of the ritual participants, signify the history and origin of the Bukusu circumcision.

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<sup>6</sup> There are six key trajectories through which the Bukusu clans have emerged. The five of the six include Bakikayi, Babanabayi, Basilikwa, Babeala and Bamalaba which circumcise their sons in the same manner. However, the sixth group of the Bamwalie have a distinct ceremony called Khulicha that the other five lack.

<sup>7</sup> Maina is one of the ancestors of the Bukusu people.

<sup>8</sup> Keywa is regarded as the ancestral father of the Bamwalie and their respective clans. He is believed to have led the Bamwalie people to settling in their current location from the eastward direction. It is a memory the Bamwalie commemorate by having their initiates face east during circumcision as part of their history and identity.

### **2.3 Circumcision Ritual Practice and its Significance in Bukusu Imagination**

This section focuses on contextualising the body, its practices and its significance within the Bukusu circumcision ritual practices. The significance of some of the ritual events and the general meaning of the Bukusu circumcision ritual has been highlighted in various studies (Makila, 1986; Nang'oli, 2000; Wanyama, 2006; Were, 2014). For instance, Wanyama (2006) observed that the choice of the slaughtered animals and the use of the animals' blood in the Bukusu circumcision ritual is meant to guarantee a successful Bukusu circumcision. This section underscores the view that highlighting the significance of the ritual and its practices legitimate the claims of this study that the body within the Bukusu circumcision ritual emits myriads of symbols that invigorate the Bukusu community's concept of being and of becoming and growth.

The Bukusu circumcision ritualizes the transition from childhood to adulthood. Merritt (1976) observed that circumcision among the Bukusu offered a great bonding experience evoking support and sympathy of kinsfolk and neighbours who played indispensable roles in the ritual. Almost the whole community observes the circumcision ritual. Circumcision is considered by the Bukusu to help induce valour among men who could probably be depended on to defend their community (Akivaga & Odaga, 1982; Nang'oli, 2000; Simiyu, 2011; Were, 2014).

The body is central to all the procedures of the Bukusu circumcision ritual as an entity through which the ritual processes are mediated. The penis, testicles, eyes, and dismembered parts of the animals play crucial roles in the success or not so of the circumcision processes. Bakhtin (1994) identifies the shoots and branches such as the nose, penis, nose, mouth and anus as elements that prolong the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside. This is because acts such as copulation, defecation, pregnancy, eating, and dismemberment are performed on the confines of the body and the outside world (Bakhtin, 1994). It is through the surgery mark made on the penis that the Bukusu can experience the sense of what it is to be a "real man," epitomize virtue and ensure the continuity of the community. In terms of the pecking social order, circumcised men are thought to symbolise Bukusu concept as masculine and, thus, they are respected. The uncircumcised men are considered as feminine, emasculated and cowards whose existence negates the Bukusu concept of masculinity.

Those who volunteer to undergo the ritual have to physically prepare themselves for, in the words of Eliade (1958) and Turner (1967), the "ordeals of initiation" which consist of

physical torture, lack of sleep, minimal food and exposure to harsh weather conditions. The expectation is that only the courageous can undergo the process. The boys who show fear are scorned and regarded as women because the Bukusu do not tolerate any man who as much as shows any. It is because of such requirements that some Bukusu circumcision songs censure men who fear the cut and ask them to relocate to Luoland where circumcision is not practiced.

The implication of the circumcision ritual is in its import as the most significant process in the change of social status (Van Gennep, 1960; Wagner, 1949). Among the Bukusu, any man who refuses to be circumcised is bound to fail in fulfilling his societal and clan obligations. *Omusinde* (the uncircumcised man) is prohibited from carrying out any communal oaths because the Bukusu ancestral spirits that apply sanctions do not recognize the uncircumcised. Therefore, *Omusinde* must be circumcised by force if he has to undertake any social responsibilities (John Musoboi, 80, interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018). A Bukusu man who refuses to get circumcised is perceived as one who has refused to form part of the Bukusu world. To remain uncircumcised is a “disability” in Bukusu social regard which is seen as a disgrace. Thus, partaking in rituals and serious communal activities is a preserve only initiated by the circumcised.

Circumcision ritual ensures that the initiate is in a position to share full privileges and responsibilities. Through circumcision, Bukusu boys are physically, socially, and psychologically prepared for matters regarding procreation. Marriage and procreation are matters only accessible to those men that have conformed to the Bukusu cultural dictums of what it takes to become what they understand as a “real man”. A “real man” is expected to act with decorum. That is the cardinal reason why marriage is unheard of involving uncircumcised men. After all, among the Bukusu, no woman will be willing to get married to an uncircumcised man. The uncircumcised man is regarded as having missed missed important lessons that are only accessible after undergoing circumcision (Makila, 1978). Hence, elements of the circumcision ritual such as endurance of the ordeal of the cut, dietary and sexual taboos among others are strategies for socializing the boys. The knowledge imparted in the youth gives them orientation in the social life of a Bukusu man.

In this section I have highlighted the significance attributed to circumcision and the the circumcised body in the Bukusu community. In the next section I look at how the body is represented in the Bukusu circumcision ritual events.

## 2.4 Body Representation in the Bukusu Circumcision Ritual Events

The Bukusu circumcision ritual performances narrativize the deeply rooted socio-cultural and political fabric of the Bukusu. Wanyama and Egesah (2015), highlight the importance of circumcision songs among the Bukusu as bestowing upon the initiate a sense of belonging to the community and address fundamental issues such as respect, unity, marriage and copulation.

The chapter takes note of the fact that the body is significantly represented in songs and performances. For instance, below is the chant *Sioyaye* chanted at different intervals starting with during the day of *khuchukhila*, on the eve of the “cut,” on the day of the “cut,” and during the coming out of seclusion, highlights the history and identity of the Bukusu.

### *Sioyaye* in English Translation

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
You, you, you, the uncircumcised one	hoo o
You the uncircumcised one	ho o
You the uncircumcised one	hoo oo
You, you, you, we have started	hoo o
This song	ho o
The one of our forefathers	hoo oo
The one who fears should go to Luoland	haa ho
Go to Luoland	ha ho
Go to Luoland	ha hoo
You, you, you, the song of our forefathers	hoo o
Oh, this song	ho o
Of our fore fathers	hoo oo
The uncircumcised one who fears the knife should go to Luoland	haa ho
Should go to Luoland	ha ho
Should go to Luoland	ha hoo
You, you, you, child	hoo ho
You child	ho ho
I tell you	ho oo
The uncircumcised one who fears the	

knife should go to Luoland	haa ho
He should go to Luoland	ha ho
He should go to Luoland	ha oo

*Sioyaye* chant foregrounds the history of the Bukusu and it shows the importance of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Any time it is performed, it confirms that circumcision is near. According to the Bukusu tradition, the chant was first sung by Mango's mother after she was overwhelmed by what her son had undergone. It is said that Mango having agreed to be circumcised, his burst into tears screaming: "Uuuuui, uuuui! My only son. Ahaa, hooh, Mango did I tell you that this circumcision is painful? You have chosen it yourself. There you are!" Mango's mother's words became the basis of the *Sioyaye* chant that must be sung for every initiate before the cut. The chant encourages the initiate to face the "knife" with bravado while it ridicules, and taunts those who fear the knife. The chant calls upon cowards to relocate to Ebunyolo (Luoland), home to a non-circumcising community, despised by the Bukusu for that reason. By mentioning Ebunyolo as the place of cowards, the chant symbolically places the Bukusu circumcision ritual on the pedestal as a site for both the contested inscriptions of ethnic belonging and particularism, and construction of masculinity.

The performance of *Sioyaye* chant triggers high emotions in some circumcisers and those who harbour *bukhebi* (the circumciser's spirit) by virtue of the fact that they come from circumcising clans. Such people go into a trance, shake and tremble uncontrollably when the chant is performed in their presence. Merritt (1976) posits that the chant affirms the Bukusu desire to draw the ancestral spirits into the circumcision ritual. The supernatural interacts with normal characters to make the event a success (Bakhtin, 1944). The *Sioyaye* chant psyches the initiates to face the knife with courage just like Mango did after he killed the snake.

The Bukusu circumcision ritual comprises different phases; the preparatory stages, the central initiation ritual held in August, and then the practice of the coming out of seclusion held in December of each even year. For the 2018 circumcision season, prospective initiates started preparations as early as May. Some initiates obtain the basic instruments called *chinyimba* from blacksmiths while others borrow used ones. However, before acquiring *chinyimba*, the initiates, inform their mother who then discusses the case with the initiates' father. Having granted permission to the boys to undergo the process, the father requests the mother to inform close relatives, such as the maternal uncles and aunts about their boys' wish to get

circumcised. By late July, the boys who are scheduled to get circumcised in early August start inviting relatives to participate in the circumcision ritual.

Two days after the commencement of the circumcision ritual, a ritual process called *khuchukhila* (literally “to pour upon”). It involves preparation of *busaa*<sup>9</sup>. *Busaa* is prepared for the visitors and for other ritual purposes. The initiate’s central role in the process of brewing beer demonstrates his act of responsibility and generosity. The act of preparing *busaa* is a symbol of the initiate’s commitment to the communal responsibilities (Susan Namakhuli, 72, interviewed, 18<sup>th</sup> August 2018). Why the boy has to make beer for elders is a symbol of compliance to greater authority than him.

The initiate, escorted by his elder brother who has already undergone the traditional circumcision, proceeds to the river to fetch water. The initiate carries the pot on the shoulders to symbolize perseverance and patience. The circumcised brother is an embodiment of masculinity. When back at home, the initiate pours the water into a bigger pot containing a portion of fried fermented millet porridge/dough. The mixture of fried dough and water with fermented millet is then smeared on the initiate’s body from the head to the toes. The purpose of covering the body of the initiate thus (see plate 1) is to have the boy appear like Mango, as legends put it, resembles the way Mango appeared when he confronted *yabebe*. In effect this process gestures towards community recognition of the fact of Mango as the originator of the circumcision tradition and as the epitome of masculinity because of the way he confronted the dangerous and the unknown when he dared challenge the serpent that threatened to annihilate the Bukusu nation and won. Thus, circumcision celebrated the duality of Mango’s courage in both confronting and killing the serpent that threatened the future of the community and seemingly contemptuously proffering his penis to be cut without flinching. The penis is arguably regarded as the most sensitive part of a man’s body.

The father then addresses the initiate reminding him of the community expectations on him such as being respectful to the elders and adhering to the traditions of the clan. The initiate is cautioned against fear of the cut and reminded that after circumcision, no more room for childish behaviour. After the father’s address in the presence of the gathering, the chant *sioyaye*, is sung to signify the impending circumcision. At this period, the initiates are

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<sup>9</sup> *Busaa* refers to the Bukusu traditional brew. In preparation for the *Khuchukhila* event, it is prepared by the initiates with the help of their parents.

expected to display utmost signs of courage in readiness for “the knife” by standing stiff, staring straight into his father’s eyes, and betraying no emotion.

The *khuchukhila* event marks the point-of-no-return in the Bukusu understanding of the circumcision ritual. After *khuchukhila* (the initiate’s preparation of *busaa* and the rubber stamp of circumcision), the initiate could not change his mind about getting circumcised whatsoever. If he acted in any way to suggest that he was about to change his mind, he would still be circumcised by force anyway. The water from the river that is used in the *khuchukhila* even and the circumcision itself are symbolically related in the sense that they both signify the continuity of life. Just as the river water never stops running, the circumcised penis is seen through its role of procreation and bringing forth new life, thus guaranteeing continuity of the Bukusu community and traditions.

After *khuchukhila*, the initiate makes a journey to the maternal uncle’s place. The uncle slaughters a bull, and smears *buse* (offal/chyme) of the slaughtered animal on the initiate’s bodies. The animal slaughtered for the initiate at the maternal uncle’s place is meant to strengthen the relationship between the clan of the uncle and that of the initiate’s father. The action is also an acknowledgement of “closure of relations” since the gift from the maternal uncle also symbolizes the boy’s leaving his mother’s clan to be “born” into the paternal clan. The act of smearing the initiate with *buse* is followed by the dressing of the initiates with *likhoni* (a piece of the stomach lining of the bull) by the uncle. This is followed by song, dance and ululations by the mothers and aunts, song and dance sets off the procession of the initiate in the company of singers-cum-dancers from the maternal uncle’s home back to the initiate’s home.

However, there are situations where no animal may not be slaughtered when the boy goes to his maternal uncle. The reasons for that may either be that the initiate’s father never paid dowry, or perhaps the uncle was simply unable to afford a cow to reward the boy for the courageous decision to get circumcised. In that case, the uncle ties around the initiate’s neck a special kind of grass called *lukhafwa* (star-grass). That way, the public image of the body of the initiate with *lukhafwa* around his neck is both as a sign of the uncle’s blessing for the boy in his future life and a promissory note, an irrevocable public commitment by the uncle that the boy will receive the cow from him at a later date. The type of animals slaughtered or rewarded to the initiate are ritual specific and conform to the particular standards as stipulated by Bukusu traditions as being healthy and young (discussed in Chapter Three). The animal

slaughtered for the initiate at the maternal uncle's place is meant to strengthen the relationship between the clan of the uncle and that of the initiate's father. The action is also an acknowledgement of "closure of relations" since the gift from the maternal uncle also symbolizes the boy's leaving his mother's clan to be "born" into the paternal clan. Having finished with the ritual events at the uncle's place, the procession sets on their way back home.

Back at home, the initiate's father conducts a ritual process of dressing the boy with *lisombo* (a piece of the stomach lining of a bull) and applying chyme of a slaughtered bull on the body of the initiate from head to toes. The application of *buse* (offal/chyme) on the body of the initiate is believed to "attract" ancestral spirits that promote fecundity in the initiates. That is, the spirits are believed to feast on the chyme/offal, which guarantees their attachment and benevolence. Some of the demands made by the father on the body of the initiates during the dressing of the boy with *lisombo* included; a straight, firm and rigid posture; straightened arms and fingers; legs placed slightly apart; eye contact with no blinking; and no shaking of the body (see plate 1). The body postures as depicted in plate 1 are construed as signs of bravery, and to the Bukusu, bravery is the ultimate signifier of manhood. Circumcision itself being a test of masculinity, the initiates portrayed extreme signs of courage as a symbol for the readiness of the "cut." Coupled with nakedness, the spiritual aspect of the ritual is emphasised. Merritt (1976) asserted nakedness among the initiates in the Bukusu circumcision ritual is a kind of openness and thus, openness promotes the participation of benevolent spirits. In the process, these spirits will ensure a successful circumcision process.



Plate 1 (Picture taken on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018): The initiates' bodies smeared with dough from fried fermented eleucene flour, just before being dressed with *lisombo* (a piece of the stomach lining of a bull) and smeared with *buse* (offal/chyme).

The eve of the cut is characterized by dancing and feasting on copious amounts of beer and food, praising and mocking of the initiate and his parents till daybreak. In this sense, circumcision ritual signifies the moment of openness and truth, symbolized by the parading of the stark nakedness of the initiate all the way from the time of mudding at the river the way to the point where the surgery takes place. At around five o'clock, the procession leaves for the stream for mudding of the boy. Before the "cut," the initiate has to wash the inner part of the prepuce (see plate 2) to make the prepuce easy for handling during the cut and as a symbol of cleansing in readiness for a cleaner self. The aunt, the circumcisers, the age-sets of the father and the father himself do not form part of the procession to the river because according to Simon Simiyu (a circumciser, interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018), the Bukusu believe that they may trigger fear in the initiate and cause evil to befall on the initiate.



Plate 2 (Picture taken on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2018): The initiate washing his penis at the stream near the mudding site (*sietosi*). The purpose is to get rid of all *chifuniu* (*Smegma praeputi*) which makes it easy for handling during the "cut." Symbolically, is a sign of cleansing oneself from the dirty former self.

Men brandishing all sorts of crude weapons in the sky to punctuate the rhythm and exhortation of the spirits of their songs and dances mark the procession that proceeds to the river. Usually the choice of the path from the initiate's home to the river is informed by the consciousness of the demand by tradition that the procession has to return using a path different from the one they use to the river. Some participants in my study asserted that the reason why different routes have to be used each way is to avoid coming across malicious material planted along the way that may bring misfortune to the initiate. Some intimated the

use of different routes is precaution against evil intentions by evil people toward the initiates while others linked it to the origin of the Bukusu clans.

According to Frederick Kiberenge (a circumciser, 54 years old, interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018), the use of different routes symbolises the Bukusu societal position on heterosexuality as the ideal sexual orientation, hence it signifies to the initiate to take note that homosexuality is prohibited through the use of different paths each way. Hence, the boy has to leave home to the river using a path to the left of the home and comes back via a path to the right. This is because the Bukusu have a belief that the left side is associated with women, mysteriousness, uncertainty and the unknown, the same approach by (Kweya, 2011; Olumwullah, 2002) while the right side is associated with men, hence straightforwardness and openness. Thus, the choices here seem to symbolise the signification to the boy of movement from the realm of the omen (to which the uncircumcised are consigned) using a feminine path one last time, to discard femininity as it were. By the time he starts to come back home after the ritual at the river, he has discarded femininity, symbolized by his return using the path to the right.

A few metres to the river, the initiates undresses to remain stark naked in readiness for the mudding process. Women and those who have never undergone the Bukusu circumcision ritual are ordered to maintain a distance as mudding and instructions take place as the event is considered to be a sacred place that should not be contaminated by the feminine and unclean uncircumcised energies. An impeccable agnatic relative who courageously faced the circumciser during his circumcision operation conducts mudding (*khulonga*). Ideally, the man who muds the initiates should be an embodiment of a culturally accepted masculine decorum exhibiting ultimate boldness.

On the way from the river back home after the mudding, the atmosphere surrounding the procession characterised by the emotional ferocity and aggressiveness of the singers-cum-dancers, making the environment tense. Those members possessing the circumcision spirit begin to tremble under the influence of the circumciser's spirits (*Bukhebi*). Future circumcisers, as well as the current ones and some women, tremble upon being possessed by the circumciser's spirit. The gesture is associated with the presence of ancestral spirits in the circumcision ritual.

Though uncircumcised boys and women are allowed to accompany the initiate to and from the river, they are prohibited from walking too close to the initiate or in front of the

procession. The participants regard those who have not undergone the traditional circumcision ritual as cowards and traitors of the Bukusu tradition and way of being. Women are particularly perceived as potential triggers of fear in the initiate that might make him run away from the cut (Merritt, 1976), hence the deliberate effort to distance them from the initiate. This might be informed by the Luhya's perception of women as freaky and easy to stampede (Kweya, 2011; Olumwullah, 2002). Consequently, since the Bukusu circumcision ritual is regarded as the epitome of Bukusu concept of masculinity and manifestation of courage, anything associated with femininity and its attributes which usually echo their marginality in Bukusu world view, is detested and represented as the contrast of the ideal Bukusu man that the initiate seeks to attain through circumcision. Thus, the objective of the circumcision ritual is to release the boys from the women's "realm" and locate him into the masculine "domain" where he ought to belong. That may explain the rationale of distancing the uncircumcised and allowing only those initiated in the traditions of the Bukusu are allowed to closely walk by the initiate.

During the cut, the initiate stands rigid without flinching, or moving his feet (see plate 3). Any contrary behaviour like flinching or crying is regarded as signs of cowardice. According to Wagner (1949), in the past, brave initiates could jump up and down after the "cut," blood splashing over the observers. The mark made on the penis of the initiate after the removal of the foreskin is regarded as a marker of identity within the community as a circumcised man, and as one belonging to the Bukusu. Ritual inhibitions and ordeals like having little food, insufficient rest, sleepless nights and staying naked is meant to instill in initiates virtues of endurance and alertness (Simiyu, 2011; Were, 2014). The initiate's regulation of the movement of eyes and facial passivity is construed as the ability of the initiate keep secrets and to make tough decisions according to some participants. Jackson (1983) evinces of the initiation inhibitions and ordeals apparent in ritual as a way to remind the initiates to be mindful of the sacred ritual domains and the "discreteness" associated with becoming a man. Among the Bukusu, endurance, perseverance and self-control, which are regarded as attributes of masculinity, are cultivated.



Plate 3 (Picture taken on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018): After the cut, the initiate standing still after the cut. In other instances, the initiate keeps on standing until a cow or goat is awarded to him.

The initiate who shows extreme signs of bravery remains standing and he is free to demand any type of gift bit money or animal before sitting for having faced the circumciser's knife (see plate 4). As the blood coagulates, the mud from the initiate's head is removed before the initiate is admitted to the seclusion room. In some other incidences, the initiate is taken around the house in reverse in the company of a sister before being admitted into the house. A selected circumcised man, an embodiment of masculinity, stands astride at the door and then the initiate bents as he goes through his legs which is a symbol of respect, rebirth and as a means to enhance sexual virility of the initiate.



Plate 4 (Picture taken on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018): After the cut, the initiate's younger sister helps the initiate to sit.

The ending of the cut emphasizes gender roles and identity (Yohana Namakelo, Interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018). Women come into the equation as helpers and subordinates. This is shown

when the mother takes the winnowing basket, which has farm produce, puts it under the initiate's legs while his sister clears the mound of clay and the star grass (*kwa ututu*) from his head. She also takes away all other paraphernalia that has been used during the cut. A sister who is still a virgin is chosen to assist the initiate occupy a comfortable sitting position (see plate 4). The choice of the sister who is considered pure from any sexual activity is pegged on the Bukusu belief that circumcision has to remain undefiled by anything impure. Later on, in December and after seclusion, the boy is given a spear as a reminder of his roles as a man. The spear, thus, becomes a symbol of masculinity. The tunnel of legs made by a close relative under which the initiate must go through is equated to the ritual rites under which the initiates must pass. This is meant to enhance sexual strength for the junior guardians passing beneath it, a shift of social status from childhood to adulthood.

During seclusion, the initiates are expected to heal and learn under strict regulations. Seclusion is a period of regimentation among the Bukusu where the initiates are isolated and given a special hut to stay. The initiates operate under rigid rules and regulations as a way to develop character. For instance, they are prohibited from sleeping outside the seclusion hut or being rained on while away from their seclusion abode. They are not supposed to shave, trim nails or look after cattle and rather than take a bath, the initiates apply clay soil (*lulongo*) on their bodies in symmetrical relationships. They guard their walking stick lest someone takes the sticks robbing them of the right to return to the seclusion hut.

The initiates avoid the age sets of their fathers as a sign of respect. The only greetings permitted between initiates and the elderly involved the senior members patting initiates slowly on the initiates' lateral malleolus. Using normal greetings and names could endanger the initiate's fertility and sanity (Frederick Kiberenge, Interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018). Initiates also avoid girls as they could trigger their penis wounds to tear in case, they became sexually aroused.

The period of coming out is coordinated with beer brewing called the coming out beer. On the eve of the coming out, initiates construct dome-shaped structures called *lisali* in a banana plantation. Around 8:00 pm, the initiate lights *chimuli* (grass) and sets out running toward the *lisali* (banana grove). Running with fire is interpreted as a purificatory rite connected with lighting the initiate's future. Eliade (1965) argues that the initiates' act of running with the fire is related to the enhancement of sexual fecundity and virility. The night spent in the *lisali* is punctuated by willful wastefulness of roasted banana fingers and "destruction" of

properties. None is allowed to sleep. The boisterous party goes on till 5:00 am when it is halted for bathing and shaving procedures. At around midday, the initiates' younger sisters and brothers bring them new clothes. The *omufulu* (initiate) has now transformed into *Omutembete* (a new and soft one). In the company of others, they walk home while singing songs of encouragement and of triumph. In songs, they talk about how parents and relatives used to deride them for who they used to be before they got circumcised and acquired new "clothes." Hence, they express their happiness for putting on new clothes, a symbol of a new person of high status.

At home, they are welcomed with a festival. During this exhortation, the initiates feel empowered regarding the process of socialization and to socio-culturally embrace social values highly respected in the community (Khaemba, 2013; Mbachii & Kariuki, 2013). The circumciser wishes the initiate good health, fertility and then instructs them in proper etiquette for men. Thus, real education and character development take place during this period which started during the seclusion period. The ideal circumcised Bukusu man is expected to be respectful, responsible, and selfless to the elders, family and society at large. The festival commences with the exhortation from either the maternal uncle, the father or the circumciser:

*Mwana wase, walekhile enyuma engubo ya mao nono sai bakhufwarire engubo ya rarao! Nonyola enju enjikale, okhengilamo tawe! Kumuliango kumwikale sekuli kukwoo tawe. Kuli kumwikule nikwo kukwoo. Nonyola omukuka namwe omukhukhu wenya buyeti, muyete. Ne nonyola yesiyesi obakubenga, yeta bakhulu boo mala otimanie omusiku obanania. Balakhuwa chikhabi mala okhamenye bulayi. Omwana omusoleli oli nende kimima kimilayi akhanyole chikhabi nende chimbosi chili chindayi. Busale bukhila khuba nende bibindu bie kusibala bikali. Nono wabele omusecha. Lekhana khukhola biakoko nende bibindu bie lulwana. Okhecha wengila mumukhumg'ano kwe bakhasi ne balomana tawe mala wesi wanje khuloma nabio bibindu bie bukhasikhasi. Enja niye basakhulu bekhale mala wikhale nabo! Ne nonyola babandu balomana, besaye bakhalomana tawe.*

("My son, you have left behind the mother's cloth (prepuce), but now you're given the father's cloth! If you come to a house that is closed, do not open and enter! The closed door is not yours! The one that is open is yours. If you find an old man or woman who is in need, help them. If you find anyone troubling them, help the elderly

people and fight the person troubling them. They will bless you, and you will live in peace. A well-disciplined man is always assured of eating the secret things. Friendship is better than having many material possessions. Now you have become a man. Stop engaging in the things you used to while still uncircumcised. Do not join the women when they gather together and talk about women's issues! Go where the old men are seated and join them. If you encounter people quarrelling, tell them not to quarrel.”)

From the above address, the circumciser clearly outlines the moral code for the initiates and stresses of what it means to be a man, how to relate with other people, the essentials of good leadership and he is counselled on how to look after a family as he soon will be granted the license to get a woman for himself. The concept of not “entering closed doors” and “entering open doors” is emphasized. The metaphor is interpreted as caution against having sex with married women. Therefore, the Bukusu community intended sexual decency (Were, 2014). Here, initiates are challenged to look for unmarried girls if they want to marry. Simon Simiyu, a circumciser, (Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018) extended the imagery to mean that initiates are cautioned against stealing or taking any property that is not theirs. The communication evident here can be read in Bakhtin's (1944) as creating a culture and humanity across differences.

After the commencement of feasting and the session of drinking beer, each newly emerged man is handed a spear, a shield and gifts. The initiates are ordered to guard the territory of his community. The festivities continue and within three days, the new warriors started making rounds in the community to collect other gifts (*khubachukha*) from relatives who had not attended the feast. The spear, a phallic metaphor, features in some rituals like oathing during circumcision. The spear is usually handed to male initiates to signify the end of puberty for boys. From that moment, the newly emerged person is considered a man. He is now allowed to interact and form relations with other members of the society.

It is important to note that while in the seclusion period, the initiates are prohibited from sharing anything and freely mingling with other community members. They are forbidden from leaving the compounds by regular paths, instead, use a particular path designated for them. They are also prohibited from exchanging standard greetings with those outside seclusions, whether circumcised or uncircumcised. At the end of the seclusion period, a ceremony is observed to mark the initiates' entrance into an elevated realm of adulthood. It is

also apparent that ceremonial practices like washing, shaving, putting on new clothes and being bequeathed a spear upon reaching the initiates' homes from the river is a symbol of attaining a newly elevated status in the Bukusu society. The restrictions presented to the initiate during the circumcision period to seclusion is an index of the status of the initiates. The initiates only recommence normal relations after seclusion.

The recommencement of relations with people of the other gender and social status is typically a ritualistic mark of the return to society as a construction of status (Grillo, 2012). The Bukusu's emphasis on kinship and age set systems as the basis of numerous forms of group affiliations, sexual continence has additional sacred force. Generally, the initiates are given advice touching on the tasks that they are expected to perform as an adult and to act as responsible members of the community. It is for such education that the uncircumcised are never respected or entrusted with any social, cultural or political communal roles because they are regarded to have missed crucial lessons only offered during the circumcision ritual.

The Bamwalie clans of the Bukusu practice open curses and insults during the period of coming out of seclusion. As the initiate is secluded, members of the community use the occasion to settle old scores on their perceived enemies. According to Merritt (1976), members engage in eccentric behaviour, insult and curse those who do not act with proper dignity in Bukusu society. For instance, on one particular day, one person who wanted to settle the old scores climbed on a house or a tree and called out:

*Khuli nende omundu wenya khukhwala wandaye omukoko mala bakhasi bakhila khungo khuno babenye babakhwale! Mubolele alekhe! Wanjala niye we kukwima kuno! Niye abonela wandaye omukoko ne kesinga, amulengelela mala endene yewe yima busa nge embwa eambilwe!*

("There is a man who wants to sleep with his sister and there are many women in the village who wants to be taken to bed! Let him stop! Wanjala is one of the types! Every time he sees his sister taking a bath, he peeps at her with his penis erect like that of a stray dog on heat!")

This call is meant to police members of the community and caution them against engaging in incest. The call is about Wanjala, a middle-aged man, who despite having attained the age of marrying, he had failed to show any signs of doing so. Due to his delay to find a wife, he has

gradually developed sexual urges toward the sister and on several occasions, he is caught red-handed ogling at his sister. To the Bukusu, a brother ogling at a sister is uncalled for.

The most outstanding distinct occasion during the coming out of seclusion event is called *khukhupa kamechi* (beating the water). It is performed after the initiate has healed. A feast with plenty of alcohol and food is prepared, and all circumcised young men from the Bamwalie clans of the larger Bukusu head to the river under the authority of the selected elder. On the way to and from the river, one is free to utter any obscene words, remove clothes and/or chase after men or women in a manner to suggest soliciting for sexual favours. Some elderly men and women take off their clothes and openly gesture sexual activities with the ground or each other even in the presence of young children. By engaging in these sexual gestures, the community foregrounds the concept of copulation and fertility. They are used as teaching designs to the initiates as learning by seeing and doing.

Only those initiated in the secrets of the Baliche clans are allowed to accompany the initiates to the river. The selected elder called *omubiti* stands near the river and sticks a bamboo stalk into the mud as he calls for abundance, fertility and many children for the initiates. The theme that emanates from this is copulation. The initiates are instructed to strip naked and go through the *sitabicha* one by one with their eyes closed. A selected elder then pinches marks on the initiate. Another elder says:

**Elder:** *Eyino niyo engwe ekhuluma! Okhalila tawe! Ewe omusecha omukhebe!*

(“This is the leopard that bites you! Do not cry! You are a circumcised man!”)

After all the initiates have gone through *Sitabicha*, the singers-cum-dancers break into song as they lead the young men back home. The journey back home is characterized by scolding of those who have transgressed which happens at sporadic intervals, and talks and songs that imply sexual activities. Mostly, the song and calling, often begins as ridicule only to degenerate into curses and insults.

As the feasting on *busaa* and food by the revellers go on at night, the initiate heads back to the *sitabicha* to wrestle the “leopard.” During this wrestling practice, the initiate is grabbed by two men and two parallel surface cuts, supposedly by the leopard, are made on the left arm near the elbow. The initiates are also tested by being stung with nettles, pinched, and cut on the arm as a way to inflict pain to test their ability to endure hardships. In the face of pain, the initiate is expected to act brave, which is a superior tactic to those who have to defend

themselves or the community against any external attacks. Defense is necessary for the continued existence of the Bukusu community. The initiates are taught to be hard and stoic in the face of pain or disaster. The initiates are then sworn into the secrecy of *khulich*a as they are cautioned against revealing those secrets lest they become mad. The body markings and open curses contribute in signifying the Bukusu concept of that it takes to be a “real man.”

One of the main characteristics of the *khulich*a ceremony is for those who felt they have been mistreated to call upon the community for help and join in the societal discipline. The taunts as evident in the calls depict the carnivalesque nature of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. In this particular incident, one person climbed a tree and shouted:

*Mumanyile Wafula?*

*Yee!*

*Mumamyile muli Wafula akhwalanga omwana wewe?*

“Do you know Wafula?”

The crowd will answer, “Yes!”

“Do you know Wafula sleeps with his daughter?”

Then the caller would continue all the way with the accusations until when he felt satisfied. In the call, the accused is being scolded for his inability to control his manhood by allowing himself to engage in incest which is taboo among the Bukusu.

The end of the circumcision process is marked by the wearing of new clothes by the newly initiated which symbolises the acceptance of a new rank by the newly initiated and their recognition to join the community as men. Thus, circumcision symbolises the leaving of all that pertains childhood as it leads to the emergence of a new member who has honour in society. The initiated is believed by the Bukusu to have achieved another mode of existence which is inaccessible to those who have not been circumcised.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter set out to provide the context of the Bukusu circumcision ritual, its origin, phases and the significance. The focal point of this chapter has been to provide the necessary background information that is vital for the understanding of the minute details of the Bukusu circumcision ritual and how the body elements manifest themselves within the circumcision ritual. The Bukusu circumcision songs are intertwined with bodily, and their performances narrativize the deeply rooted socio-cultural and political fabric embodying their functions and

significance. From the above discussions and as asserted by the Bukusu cultural experts interviewed, the Bukusu circumcision ritual is embodied as manifest through body gestures, patterned movements, dances and body postures which signify meanings that are significant for this study. The chapter establishes that there are certain body practices and gestures as performed by participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual that render the ritual's meanings and that signify the Bukusu concept of life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONVENTIONS OF BODY PRAXIS IN THE BUKUSU CIRCUMCISION RITUAL

#### 3.1 Overview

Chapter Three is compelled by the field experience whereby several observable elements within the Bukusu circumcision ritual demanded interrogation. The most pronounced element being the actions that the ritual participants undertook. Many of the human and animal experiences signify the Bukusu cultural meanings. Several cultural experts interviewed (Frederick Kiberenge, a circumciser, Interviewed, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018; Wafula Manea and Mulongo Manea, Interviewed, 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018; Simon Simiyu, Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018; Yohana Namakelo, Interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018) talked about the significations of particular participants, the participants' spaces within the ritual and how their activities informed the Bukusu concept of life and worldview.

The chapter investigates the conventions of the bodies of the individual or group participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual, and the meanings they signify. It also explores ways in which cultural implications manifest in the bodies of the ritual participants in the Bukusu circumcision. The chapter is cognizant of Bakhtin's (1994) argument that although what one sees during the ritual does not seem to imply any specific roles and duties for any and each of the participants, experienced ritual owners and practitioners fall naturally into their obligations and roles to ensure an ideal ritual for a particular group of initiates. It is based on the assumption that the ritual, through ritualized bodies, enacts the Bukusu practice of everyday life in relation to procreation, social structure, gender relations, personhood, status, enhancement of masculine virility and fecundity, and hardening of the boys for adulthood responsibilities. Therefore, it is informed by Bakhtin's (1994) argument that body significations in ritual creates a culture and reflect the world, time, unity, change and people's daily life.

When interpreting meanings concerning the stripping of the initiate's body in preparation for mudding in the morning, and facing the "knife" without flinching, Simon Simiyu, a circumciser (Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018), says that it is the culture of the Bukusu that each initiate must adhere to the Bukusu cultural dictates regarding every activity as each has its connotations. For instance, the courage as depicted through the nonverbal cues of the initiates before getting circumcised are interpreted as symbols of readiness by the initiate to face the knife and the challenges of life. Frederick Kiberenge, a circumciser (interviewed, 28<sup>th</sup> July

2018), also talks of initiates aura of bravado during the circumcision ritual as a re-enactment of Mango's escapades, a symbol of masculinity, when he killed *Yabebe* the serpent. The narrative of Mango's daring moves is depicted through the initiate's body smeared with white dough during the *Khuchukhila* time (see plate 1). The interaction between the initiate and the circumciser (see plate 6) marks the beginning of entrenchment of manhood. It leads to the cutting off of the initiate's foreskin, which acts as a site for the symbolic location of what it takes to be *omusani*.

More observable trends also emerged in the roles and the way ritual participants presented themselves in signifying the Bukusu desires and understanding of life. Other aspects manifested themselves through ritualized objects, body markings and the manipulation of bodies through song and dance. The body parts of the ritual participants, both in human and animal forms, are emphasized during the circumcision ritual. For instance, while talking about how dismembered body parts make meanings within the circumcision ritual, Frederick Kiberenge, a circumciser (Interviewed, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018), asserted that the bull's testicles tied and embedded on the groins of the initiate symbolised the community's desire for fecundity. Comparatively to the role of the dismembered parts of the butchered animals, the slaughtered animal is meant to strengthen the existing relationship between the clan of the initiate's father with that of the initiate's mother. The circumciser's knives which are shaped like a man's penis have phallic symbolism. The point here is that there are a number of field observations related to the image of the body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual that act as depositories of Bukusu cultural values.

A number of studies on bodies (Alcorta & Sosis, 2005; Bell, 1989; Best, 1978; Dissanayake, 2009; Douglas, 1966, 1970; Jackson, 1983; McMullan, 2002; Nettle, 2000; Ngwane, 2004; Ottenberg, 1982; Stallybrass & White, 2002) have shown that bodies are a means through which social, cultural and spiritual needs of a community are satisfied. These studies speak to the current one in interrogating how embodied texts "speak" social relations and values with striking force and how body discourses have deeper social-cultural and economic values that they articulate. The observations by Merritt (1976), Simiyu (2011), Wafula (2006) and Were (2014) regarding the Bukusu circumcision ritual activities imply the existence of body significations in the circumcision ritual as instruments through which Bukusu socio-cultural and political meanings are inscribed and transmitted.

The study is premised on the notion that the Bukusu circumcision ritual acts as a powerful ideological arena in which symbolic images and embodied texts exercise a particularly persuasive effect on the participants' sense of identity, history and social reality. The representations of the physical body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual advance several definite issues that direct this investigation. First, who are the core participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual? What specific actions do these participants engage in, especially in particular ritual events and why? How do these participants manipulate their physical bodies when carrying out specific circumcision ritual events? What are the other participants, other than the present ones talked or sung about, exist during the ritual? What tools or animals are utilized during the circumcision ritual and why? Secondly, how do we account for the cultural meanings emitted by the physical bodies of the individual participants during the circumcision ritual. Below is a discussion of the roles of participants and their significations as bodies located within the broader Bukusu cultural context.

### **3.2 Ritualised Bodies and Meaning-making during the Bukusu Circumcision Ritual**

Different aspects of body praxes including body disguise, adornment, body painting, dances, stripping and shaming are utilized by participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The study draws primarily on the definitive analyses of body symbolisms and body practices as means through which a community's cultural, spiritual and social needs are satisfied (Bakhtin, 1994; Becker, 1994; Bordo, 1999; Brownell, 1991). The section also borrows from other scholars such as Beidelman (1964), Bourdieu (1977), Douglas (2004), Foucault (2002, 2012), Hambly (1935), Heald (1986), Holderedge and Young (1927), Mauss (1979), Schilbrack (2004) and Turner (1967, 1969) on their views on body in ritual settings as a site of metaphoric representation, and also as having the potential to manifest fundamental social values. Mfecane (2016) theorises the physical body, specially through the mutilated penis, as a site for inscribing masculinity among the Xhosa males. The meanings of body movements, postures, gestures, physical tests, the imagery of death and rebirth, seclusion, masked costumes, dance, dietary and sexual taboos are geared toward communicating cultural values such as abundance, unity, victory and freedom.

Makila (1978), Mbachii and Likoko (2013), Mbachii and Kariuki (2013), Wanyama and Egesah (2015) and Were (2014) assert that the concept of testing the psyche of the initiate is a means to assess the readiness of the initiate for the responsibilities that await him after circumcision. With this in mind, there is the need to examine individuals in the Bukusu

circumcision ritual, their roles and the cultural meanings they emit, more so with emphasis on their physical bodies. The examples mentioned below show how, in the Bukusu circumcision ritual, what is done on the physical body forms the basis of what is conceptualized and said. From a practical standpoint, it could be said that the bodily practices mediate a distinct cognizance of the Bukusu social values, and marks an instantaneous grip of conventional precepts as sensible facts. Such a perspective is congruent with the propensity to effect interpretation through bodily modes, to advance to verbal skills and moral views.

### 3.2.1 Initiates and Body Conventions

The initiate is the core component in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and all the attention is focused on him. The mark on the initiate's penis marks the transition from childhood to adulthood and consequently, renders him as an *Omusani*, masculine man. The acceptance to have his physical body, precisely his penis, tampered with accords the initiate certain privileges like owning property, decision-making and marriage, which unmarried men cannot access.

The initiate's stature (see plate 14) must always reflect the Bukusu cultural requirements that befits a warrior. Therefore, in all the activities and actions the initiate engages in, the initiate is always reminded that the task lying ahead of him is not for the faint-hearted or the unmanly. The satirical songs (See Song Appendix 4), the humiliation that often take a physiological dimension and the physical ordeals to which the initiate is subjected to partially represent an annihilation of the former uncircumcised status and the emergence of a new masculine man. The tests cultivate character and prepare the initiate for the "cut" and for future responsibilities. For instance, during the dressing of the initiate with *luliki* (the underside of the bull) by his uncle, the initiate is slapped incessantly, threatened with more violence, banishment from the Bukusu community to non-circumcising tribes and even death. The initiate is always reminded:

*"Mukholo yefwe sekhurichanga ambalu tawe! Ne oria embalu, cha ebunyolo namwe khukhwire!"* (In our clan, we don't fear the knife! If you dare show cowardice, go to Luo land or we will kill you!)

Such exhortations are often accompanied by slaps the right and left cheeks. Also, the fact that the initiates are forced to eat raw meat, are tests meant to trigger daring impulses in the initiate. The slaps, jeers and undressing of the initiate are also meant to humble the initiate to a significant level. During the *khuchukhila* event, inhibitions on speech and of sight, and

exchange of greetings on the side of the initiate are emphasized. The initiate portrays extreme daring facial signs which are also replicated during the dressing of *lisombo* (stomach lining). A straight, rigid posture, open arms with straightened fingers, legs apart, and eye contact are displayed. The meanings derived from the initiate's body disposition signify courage and masculinity. It is believed the depiction of courage enhances a prosperous future for the initiate (Jacob Wekesa, 98 years old, interviewed 29<sup>th</sup> July 2018; Walubengo Wamalwa, 61 years old, Circumciser, interviewed, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2018).

The primacy given to both the embodied and the verbal understanding of the ritual occurrences is readily exemplified in the following excerpt from an address by a father to his son on the eve of the "cut":

**Father:** *Yakhaba bakhebi nebaba nebarema lifunga khumubili kwoo, okharengarengakho namwe wisindukhekho tawe! Wime busa bureke nge Mango kema! Okhecha wautulakho esauti khwama mukhanwa mwoo tawe! Ese nema sirii barema chinyuni chakwa!*

(Even when they (circumcisers) are cutting the foreskin from your penis, you must not shake or even dare flinch! You have to stand stock still like Mango! You must not make a sound from the mouth. I withstood the knife agnatically!)

It was a common trend to encounter such expressions directed at the initiates where most practical learning was considered a matter of direct observation and imitation. It is on this emphasis on embodied knowledge and proprioception learning that explains why those who failed to uphold ethical expectations and traditional practices were usually perceived in bodily terms as dirty, weak and feminine. The cowards, just like the uncircumcised and the women are lumped together because they are considered as unmanly. Therefore, the initiate's morale is tested and is stiffened by the effect of the addressee's slaps, harangues and threats. The "violence" meted on the initiates is central to being a man.

Other tests including withstanding harsh weather conditions, keeping long vigils, and having insufficient rest prepare the initiate, both physically and psychologically for the "cut." They also construct masculinity and consequently, develop character by preparing the initiates for the responsibilities pertaining adulthood like marriage, owning property and making critical decisions in the community. On the eve of the "cut," the initiate is offered a thin-layered mat

and allowed a few hours of sleep to teach them the virtues of perseverance and humility. It is the moment of the “cut” that marks the zenith of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Any expressions of fear, primarily by blinking, shaking, touching of the hands of the circumciser or calling out for help are prohibited (see plates 3 and 14). Any initiate who grabs the hand of the circumciser is heavily fined and made the brunt of ridicule and jokes. They are also isolated from essential Bukusu social functions for being non-conformists.

Patterns of the body and its practices in the Bukusu circumcision ritual call forth mental associations and inculcate moral qualities. Facial and body passivity as a demand on the side of the initiate is correlated with moral attributes as a way of controlling emotions. Jackson (1983) underscores such distinctive techniques used during initiations as creating images in the mind whose configuration is most directly determined by the composure of an individual. During the Bukusu circumcision, the interdiction on the initiates crying during the “cut,” quivering, urinating and speaking is taboo and it is immediately interpreted as signs of fear and weakness. Upholding the set practices is linked to endurance, submissiveness, and the ability to keep oaths, promises and secrets. An ideal *omusani* is supposed to uphold the secrets of the ways of the community, more so of the circumcised.

The moment of the “cut,” brings out the extent to which the Bukusu tests the initiate during circumcision. The crowd watches the initiate and the grass on the top of his head to detect any movement that reveals fear (see plates 3 and 14). The subsequent instructions and harangues from the observers complement the tests through circumcision songs and jeers. The idea behind these tests is that if the initiate could not withstand them, then he could not withstand the “cut,” and consequently, he will fail in defending his community against any adversaries. That way, bravery is enhanced as a trait essential for a would-be warrior. Manhood is largely grounded through the physical body of the initiate.

The sacredness of the circumcision ritual is emphasized during the *khuchukhila* event (discussed in Chapter Two). The initiate is escorted to a chosen stream by a circumcised relative, an embodiment of Bukusu accepted representation of masculinity, to fetch water in a pot the initiate carries on his shoulder. The initiate is not supposed to look back for the fear that there are always malevolent spirits who may strike him dead if he dared steal glances at them. Back at home, the initiate’s body is smeared with dough. It is believed that the white dough attracts benevolent spirits that bless the ritual process at the same time as they “confuse” the evil ones who might frustrate the circumcision process. The same concept

echoes through the muddled physical body of the initiate during the day of the “cut.” The smearing of the initiates’ decorated bodies with white dough and mud invokes the spirits in the promotion of fecundity and success.

Within the period of seclusion, initiates in the Bukusu community do not mingle with other community members. They do not exchange greetings in the “normal” ways other people do. They also do not share food or establish normal relationships with the community. Their body modifications are marked by overgrown hair and fingernails. Sexual continence is seriously required as normal relationships with other people are prohibited. The initiates are socially unclassifiable, as neither children nor adults, suspended in what Babcock (1974) and Jordan (1999) call a liminal condition “betwixt and between” until they are ritually “reborn” and returned to society as cultured adults. The Bukusu believe that while in seclusion, the initiates are in close proximity with the ancestral spirits who bless them. Their removal of the old clothes and taking bath is a symbol of the annihilation of the old. The putting on of new clothes at the end of the coming out of seclusion ritual dramatizes their transformation from boys, who are considered feminine to the society of men. The [old]body, as it were, is debased and annihilated only for it lead to the renewal of the new one (Bakhtin, 1994). At one stage, some initiates are challenged to wrestle a “leopard” to assert their power and confirm their masculinity.

The treatment of the initiate’s body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual leaves no doubt that character development, especially in the physical aptitudes and acquisition of moral qualities, are essential elements that the circumcision ritual emphasizes. The tests that take a physiological dimension signify the annihilation of the immature “dirty” childhood status on the one hand, and on the other hand, the as a tempering of the initiates’ essences to prepare them to manage their new responsibilities and new privileges with restraint. Nakedness, while bracing the harsh weather conditions is essential in readying the boys for the “cut,” and in character development. These observations resonate with those of Wanyama (2006) and Were (2014) on warriorship among the Bukusu as being entrenched in the psyche before a boy becomes a man, thus, vital in the construction of Bukusu identity.

Eliade (1965) and Ngwane (2004) provide an appropriate frame within which to read the exposed bodies of the initiates as representing a variety of secret ceremonies and as a way of undergoing a series of tests on the part of the initiate. The nakedness and the tests have a greater goal of transforming the initiate from one stage to another. On the day of the “cut”

and during the coming out of the seclusion festival, the initiate is naked. Firstly, by nakedly exposing the initiates' bodies to the masses, the initiates are reminded that in themselves, they remain mere children, whose form is fashioned upon them by society. Only after circumcision will they emerge as men. Secondly, nakedness is likened to openness, which promotes the involvement of benevolent spirits in the circumcision ritual. Merritt (1976) asserts that nudity is observed in a society that usually identifies seeking the participation of spirits in initiation with spirit possession.

### 3.2.2 Circumcisers and Body Conventions

This section examines the body outlook of the circumcisers in the Bukusu circumcision ritual with the core purpose of identifying and explaining their significations as far as the Bukusu cultural concepts and worldview are concerned. In the Bukusu community circumcisers are highly respected. Simiyu (2011) points out that the circumcisers mentor the initiates that they circumcise. They are expected to be always “clean” and well behaved. Circumcisers should embody masculinity and they are expected to entrench the power of being *omusani*.

Before August of each even year, circumcisers partake in several tasks including sharpening and cleansing their knives (*khubita chingembe*). Upon the beginning of the circumcision ritual season, circumcisers refrain from activities such as attending funerals and engaging in sexual activities as a way of ritually readying themselves for circumcision. It is believed that any circumciser who contravenes these rules is likely to cause damage to the initiates. The knives are cleansed in a special ritual at a shrine (see plate 5) the circumcisers agree to gather. The shrine symbolizes the sacredness of the ritual. The ancestral spirits are invoked to ensure a successful circumcision.



Plate 5 (Picture taken on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2018): The circumciser in his attire with the knife near his *namwima* (shrine).

On the day of the operation, circumcisers tremble in anticipation of their work due to the nature of their uncontrollable blood. Circumcisers are possessed by the circumciser's spirit (*bukhebi*) making them shake uncontrollably, pace up and down and run all over the place (see plate 13). It is said that sometimes the effect was extreme such that those possessed by the circumciser's spirit collapsed and died if the spirit went unchecked and uncontained (Susan Namakhuli, Interviewed, 18<sup>th</sup> August December). The *Sioyaye* chant and the frenzied dances (as discussed in Chapter Two) are also instrumental in triggering *bukhebi* (circumciser's spirit) possession among some ritual participants. The moment one of the members says the circumciser is possessed, the spirit easily seizes other members. This spectacle underpins the ancestors' connection and the mythological powers extant in the circumcision ritual, and which was manifest through the frantic possessed physical bodies of the circumcisers and those harbouring the circumciser's spirit.

Among the Bukusu, the *Bukhebi* trance is subject to constraints of cultural convention and particular people from the circumcising clans such as Bamasaba, Bakhone, Basombi, Bamuki, Bakisongoli, Baliuli and Bamasaba among others (as discussed in Chapter One). In all the cases involving a possessed individual, a circumciser played the role of a healer. A few individuals, especially the males are handed a circumciser's knife. The women are patted on their chests by the circumciser. Their fingers and toes are also hard-pressed. The incidence of ritually remedying the situation by invoking the spirits is also echoed by the observations of Grillo (2012) regarding the indigenous explication of spirit possession as granting agency to the spirits and the divinities who displace an individual to become an embodied presence in the living community.

During fieldwork on July 22 2017, Simon Simiyu, a circumciser, emphasised the essence of ritual purity as highly considered for a successful Bukusu circumcision ritual. This ranges from the circumcisers preserving their bodies in purity, such as abstaining from sex, to the cleansing of their knives in anticipation of their work. The knives are first ritually cleansed in a religious practice called *khubita chingembe* and after that, none, apart from the circumciser is supposed to touch them for fear of being "contaminated." The concepts of ritual purity and impurity, the sacred, the clean and the unclean as postulated by Douglas (2002) and Turner (1969) play a critical role on guaranteeing either successful ritual or a polluted one. It is also

anchored in Bakhtin's (1994) view of perceiving the body as pure and being cautious of the acts that may be performed on the body, either through the body or on the body, that may make it less pure. This is because the body in this case is a recognition of the life cycle through birth, death and rebirth.

During circumcision, the whole process roughly lasts for about five to fifteen seconds. However, there are incidences where the process takes more than a minute. Regardless of the time taken, the initiate has to remain standing as the circumcisers work on him (see plate 6). Immediately after the "cut," the circumciser runs away. The trilling of *Sikalala* (ululation) and the running away of the circumcisers from the initiate dramatize the triumph of the initiate in the circumcision. The apparent escape from the scene immediately after the "cut" is regarded as a symbol of one running away from a battle scene after having slain the enemy (Chapter Four discusses the symbolism emerging from the interactions between the initiates and the circumcisers).



Plate 6 (Picture taken on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018): Circumcisers in their action.

Another profound observation regarding the body praxis of the circumcisers during the Bukusu circumcision ritual pertains to their dress code. The choice of the circumcisers' clothes, their colour and his adornments are intended to make them look exaggeratingly menacing. As seen in plate 6, they choose colours such as red, white and black that make them stand out. Their decorated bodies with spots are meant to make them resemble the serpent *yabebe* or leopards, dreaded and tactical animals. The upper part of their bodies and their faces are spotted with streaks of red, white and black paint. Other circumcisers wear headgears made of Colobus monkey skins (see plate 5 and 12). The use of the imagery of the leopard symbolises the battle that is about to ensue between the circumciser and the initiate.

The intimidating look of the circumciser and the pain he inflicts are expected to harden the initiate and, subsequently, transform him into a new man. The mark made on the penis of the initiate is also instrumental in helping the initiate identify with men who bear such marks. Actually, the circumcisers are cosmic fear in themselves. They are the serpent *yabebe*, the Barwa and the enemy that needs to be vanquished. Therefore, they promote human dignity as seen through a circumcised man's character, manhood, and introduce the initiates into the association of the "real men."

On different ritual occasions, circumcisers wear garments made from animal hides. They utilize *ekutwa* (headgear), as shown in plates 5 and 12, and sometimes *likutu* (animal hide) to communicate the sacred ideals of the circumcision ritual. They also present themselves as the central figures in the circumcision arena by decorating themselves (see plate 7). The circumcisers' knives and the meanings they generate are the manifestations of the transition stage. The knives and spears are sexualized (discussed in sub-section 3.3.2). The last part of the coming out seclusion is marked by circumcisers giving spears to the initiates. The spear is handed to the initiates by the circumcisers to mark the end of childhood. The spear is also a symbol of power where the men are expected to shield society against any external attack and similarly, virility. In particular, the dynamic media circumcisers possess via the headgear, knives and spears vividly appeal to the audience and to convey fundamental values such as representing mastery and containment of ritual power. They also express issues of responsibility, transformation, the human relationship with nature and the sacredness of the circumcision ritual.

### **3.2.3 Parents and Body Conventions**

During the Bukusu circumcision ritual, the parents' body praxis is intimately linked to a particular moral theory. The notions of ritual purity and impurity permeate the Bukusu circumcision ritual. There are various measures taken by parents to maintain ritual purity and to ensure the success of their son's circumcision. A successful circumcision ritual will then afford their sons undeniable influence in the society. Therefore, to guarantee their sons a fruitful circumcision ritual process, the parents embody the cultural traits that enhance masculinity and power, and this pertains the state and what they do with their physical bodies.

For instance, from the onset of their son's circumcision ritual process, parents refrain from engaging in any sexual activity and attending funerals upto until their son has been

circumcised. Parents who engage in sexual activities risk jeopardizing their son's future. Mothers and aunts who are menstruous are not allowed to go near the initiate during the operation for fear of triggering excess bleeding after the "cut." Morally delinquent aunts, widows and the barren are prohibited from initiating any ritual activities. The selection of specific characters to participate in the Bukusu circumcision resonates with the views of Turner (1969) on the Ndembu and Douglas (2002) concerning the choice of particular people and animals for ritual purposes as a mode of conforming to a specific societal requirement.

On the day of the "cut," mothers and aunts sit on the floor of the house facing *etyang'i* (circumcision arena). Their physical bodies assume a posture of straightened legs with their hands resting on their laps (see plate 7). These postures serve different roles. Elizabeth Changalwa (48 years old, Interviewed, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2018), for instance, intimated that the mother's sitting posture replicates the gesture of giving birth. It is a symbol of a rebirth of the initiate as he attains his new status, which includes "giving birth" to manhood. It is equated to the birth of a child, in this case, the birth of a masculine man. Merritt (1976) reads it as a way of warding off evil spirits that may affect the initiate during the operation while invoking benevolent ones for blessings. Additionally, the mothers' and aunts' postures dramatize the extant relationships between the initiate and motherhood. The circumcision ritual, therefore, can be said to be the way in which a people as Silverman (2004) puts it, "dramatizes unease over separation-individuation" through imagery that sustains yet blurs the normative margins between motherhood and masculinity.



Plate 7 (Picture taken on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2018): Mothers seated on the floor with straightened legs

While meeting the initiate coming from the river, the aunt serves several symbolic purposes. First, the cooking stick/pestle she pats on the initiate's cheek and the small gourd she bears are symbolic of a number of aspirations. First, it is the virtues she and the community hopes will enhance the success of the operation especially in enhancing masculinity. Secondly, it symbolizes generosity, abundance and prosperity in the initiate's life. Kindness and self-reliance are cultivated in the initiates. The meat on the aunt's right ear symbolizes how the boy will be "cut" by the circumciser.

Upon hearing the *Sioyaye* chant, sometimes the maternal aunt and the mother of the initiate are possessed by *Bukhebi* (the circumciser's spirit). Immediately after the "cut," the mothers trill and ululate to show that the "battle" has been won and that the initiate has successfully emerged victorious in transitioning into an *omusani*, a masculine man.

During the coming out of seclusion festival, mothers take porridge from a bowl placed on the ground (see plate 8) just after their sons have finished sipping the same porridge while on their knees. It is assumed that the gesture represents the mothers' collaboration in their sons' process of being initiated into the responsible world. The mother's imitations of their son's practices are intended to promote a sense of what it is to be a humble and a responsible man. The act by the mothers show that they are also in better positions to effect change in their sons' lives. Often, the boys are reminded that they should do what they used to do while they were still young and uncircumcised.



Plate 8 (Picture taken on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018): A mother taking porridge while on her knees.

Besides what the aunts and mothers do, the uncle to the initiate plays a crucial role in launching the initiate into the wider society. The uncle slaughters an animal for the initiate at

his place. This is meant to strengthen the relationship between the clans of the initiate's parents. The action is also an acknowledgment of closure of relations since the gift from the maternal uncle also symbolizes the boy's leaving his mother's clan to be "born" into the paternal clan.

The father is instrumental in his son's circumcision process. He helps the mother prepare food for the visitors who have come to witness their son's circumcision. The father hands his son a pot for fetching water meant to make dough for *khuchukhila*. As the *khuchukhila* process goes on, he gauges the initiate's stature to see whether he is ready for the cut or not. He also advises him accordingly as he cautions him against fearing the knife. When the initiate has taken a break to sleep, the father watches over the initiate to protect him from any physical attack. On the material day of the cut, the father adorns himself with a blanket. Sometimes bedsheets are used, and together with the circumcisers, prepare *etyang'i* (circumcision arena). He meets the boy, singles him from the procession coming from the river, and places him at the *etyang'i*.

#### **3.2.4 Age-sets and Conventions of the Body**

The Bukusu have a total of eight age-set systems; *Bakikwameti*, *Bakolongolo*, *Bachuma*, *Basawa*, *Banyange*, *Bamaina*, *Bakinyikeu* and *Bakananachi*. These age-set systems are significant in establishing status among the age sets. The age set's role is to educate and encourage the initiate and support the initiate's family financially and morally. The age sets have several taboos that underpin their relations. First, the age-sets are restricted from going to the river to watch the boy being muddied. Secondly, they are constrained from marrying each other's daughters and from fighting each other. Thirdly, the father of the son being circumcised has to slaughter a bull and share meat with members of his age set so they will not curse the initiate.

The father's age sets attach a lot of respect to the events that go on in their gathering because of their symbolic nature, and the powers vested upon them by the culture. As such, everything the age-set's physical bodies engage in or whatever status the bodies are in is assumed to have a bearing on the initiate and the whole ritual process. Morally delinquent men, widowers, eunuchs or sterile men are prohibited from engaging in any age set role within the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

The father's age sets are allotted exceptional treatment as it is believed that they can harm the initiate through their utterances and bodily actions should they get irked by the initiate's father. For example, the damages they can bestow on the initiate may range from excessive bleeding and prolonged healing among others. One of the most profound experiences of the body significations as depicted by the father's age sets was evident in a number of prohibitions revolving around the physical body as a means of maintaining ritual purity and ensure the success of the circumcision ritual. The prohibitions include holding on to both sides of the door or knocking while coming in, being seated while bent/slanting forward, fidgeting, sleeping, crossing of the legs and folding of the hands. Those who flouted the set rules were fined and thrown out of the home hosting the circumcision ritual event. Anyone forfeiting the set rules by engaging in the inhibitions mentioned above was regarded as an enemy of progress, of the initiate and his family. Thus:

**Changalwa:** I noted that in the house by the *Bakoki* (age sets), there were many rules regarding how one handles his body like sitting straight, keeping vigil, among other regulations and the *bakoki* had some special treatment. Why was that the case?

**Simon:** A *Bakoki* is a significant person but also a dangerous one. If he disagrees with the initiate's father over a matter, he can decide to settle his scores by punishing the son.

**C:** How can he punish him?

**S:** If he decides to cross the legs or the hands or even stand on the wrong side during the "cut," he can "spoil" the boy. Even the circumciser may unintentionally chop off the initiate's penis. Or if the circumcision goes on successfully, he may render the boy useless - can't sire or even marry or go mad. Crossing legs and folding hands while seated is like closing the boy's reproductive system. He won't make a woman pregnant in the future. Again, he may be weak. Or the boy might all of a sudden show fear and refuse to get circumcised mid-way into the process.

The crossing of legs is believed to shackle male fecundity. In brief, the Bukusu perceive the initiate as a representation of mature masculinity in its unadulterated expression and as such is "lethal" to unmarried women.

The other aspect of body signification emanating from the father's age sets' actions that has a bearing on the initiates is the consumption of the roasted meat. Spices, even salt are

prohibited. It is believed that salt might cause excessive bleeding during the “cut.” The first person who tastes the meat immediately after being roasted is the mother. This is because the meat is regarded as a symbol of the mother’s breast and her partaking in it is thought to bless the initiate with a good sexual life and fecundity. The meat is eaten while hard because it is assumed it symbolizes the community’s aspiration for a rigid penis efficient enough to “pierce” women’s vaginas and sire healthy offspring. Whoever fails to partake of the meat while seated in the gathering of the age sets is fined and subsequently thrown out of the gathering. The refusal implies malice toward the initiate and his family.

### 3.2.5 Singers-cum-dancers and Body Conventions

Singers-cum-dancers in the Bukusu circumcision ritual act as sites of the Bukusu cultural meanings. Were (2014) observed that all the songs and dances present in the Bukusu circumcision ritual have their meanings, primarily meant to train the initiates to take responsibility in society and become courageous. Singers-cum-dancers praise, cheer and jeer both the initiates and their parents. They also castigate other members of the community deemed to have broken the Bukusu moral code.

Singers-cum-dancers sing and dance alongside the initiate as they tour villages and pay courtesy calls to respective homes. In most ritual events, the performances by the singers-cum-dancers are imbued with body movements that dramatize sex, chaos and the reversal of dress code. Sex features as a predominant theme as different dancers manipulate their physical bodies to imitate sex (see plates 19 and 20). At other times, they enact sexual acts with the ground in tandem with the circumcision songs they perform. Such actions are not just for entertainment, they are teaching instruments on matters copulation through the utilization of drama involving song and dance. An example is the following song:

#### *Sekhwakhunyolile* (English translation, “We have found you”)

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
You, we have found you	You, we have found you
You, we have found you	You, we have found you
You fuck a sheep we have found you	You, we have found you
You fuck people’s wives we have found you	You, we have found you
You excrete in coffee plantation we have found you	You, we have found you
You steal people’s maize	You, we have found you
And if I’m lying	Why can’t you cry?

We from Nalondo

Why can't you cry?

You Wekesa

Why can't you cry?

You fuck small children

Why can't you cry?

*Sekhwakhunyolile* song is about an individual who was caught red-handed engaging in bestiality, stealing and engaging in promiscuity. The song, mentioning unruly bodies, cautions people who engage in improper acts like taking people's property, sleeping with other men's wives and underage girls. Whenever they perform episodes where a man is said to have engaged in bestiality, they dramatize a scenario whereby one acts as sheep while the other as a man mounting the sheep. The song also castigates those engaging in incest and generally undesirable escapades which are taboo in the Bukusu community, thus, good morals are entrenched in the initiates.

The Bukusu assume that the manipulation of the bodies of the singers-cum-dancers dramatize the community's cultural aspirations primarily through their exaggerated intimate and frenzied body movements. The Singers-cum-dancers create a utopian kind of world as exhibited through the copious amounts of alcohol and food present during the circumcision ritual. Alcohol consumption binds them together in achieving their common goal, a positive circumcision ritual. In extreme scenarios during the coming out of seclusion festival, some dancers-cum-singers stripped semi-naked, hopping from place to place while dancing. Some dramatize sexual acts with the ground and trees. Cross-dressing is the norm where some men put on women's attires while some women men's clothes. In other incidences, the dancers dramatize gender role-play with each other (see plates 19 and 20). Real sex-like scenarios and "mayhem" of all sorts are experienced.

The increase in the tempo of the dances by the singers-cum-dancers is also intended to invoke ancestral spirits especially when pleasure emotions escalate due to such actions as continued dancing. Initiates are regularly encircled by the singers-cum-dancers who hope to transmit power to them through repetitive and highly frenzied movements (Merritt, 1976). The more frenetic the dancing becomes, the nearer the spirits close in and consequently guarantee a smooth operation and a fecund son. The singers-cum-dancers also trigger *bukhebi* (circumciser's spirit possession) primarily through their highly continuous dances, drumming and singing of songs like *Sioyaye*. The *Sioyaye* song affirms the desire to not only draw the ancestral spirits into the circumcision ritual activities, it also dares the initiate to withstand the "knife."

Furthermore, the proximity and repeated cyclical movements trigger courage in the initiates. The close proximity stimulates the initiate to ready himself for circumcision. The songs and dances also stimulate the young boys to have the urge to get circumcised in the subsequent circumcision year. The Bukusu also believe that the singers-cum-dancers play a vital role in invoking the involvement of benevolent ancestral spirits in the circumcision ritual so that the initiates' fecundity can be enhanced.

During the coming out of seclusion ceremony, parents assemble in a special hut selected for them and dance while naked. On other occasions, the dance is performed during the daytime when initiates arrive home from the stream (*esitabicha*). The dance places emphasis on the shaking of the waist (see section 3.3.1 and plate 10). The adults' sexualised dances are believed to teach the initiates the art of sex. The combination of nakedness and dance are believed to "attract" the ancestral spirits who bless the ritual and enhance fecundity in the initiates and productivity of their land (Merritt, 1976). The following conversation shows why specific body movements are emphasized during the dance:

**Changalwa:** I have seen that there's a lot of merriment and euphoria, more so as demonstrated from the euphoria depicted by the revellers. Most noteworthy, the dances seem to emphasize the shaking of the waist. I even heard calls for that dance and only that. No other. Why?

**Barasa:** We dance a style called *Khukhupa engeye* (beating water) and we vigorously shake waists because we want our sons to be fecund. They must be extremely strong and good in bed. Their penises must be as hard as a steel rod and any woman they sleep with, must recognize their prowess. We are experienced and we are teaching them to do these things.

At some point during the period of coming out of seclusion, the initiates undress, and parade their penises, then sleep on the ground while jiggling their waists vigorously as if they are having sex. At times, men and women chase passers-by as they touch their private parts and solicit for "sex." The revellers' frenzied dances in the Bukusu circumcision ceremony acts as an avenue to let out the repressed emotions that are forbidden in the "typical" day to day interactions. The Bukusu community relieves itself from the pressures of its stressful life challenges. There is a total depiction of a clear inversion of daily life. In the process, these

acts of copulation and eccentric behaviour act as confines between the bodies and the world whereby the beginning and end of life become closely interconnected and interwoven.

For instance, Gluckman (1959) viewed the lewd behaviour and transvestism among the Zulu rituals as a kind of compensation for a usually submissive role in their life and as a kind of rebellion between the sexes. Stallybrass and White (1986), drawing on Bakhtin's (1965) work on the carnival "madness," argued that the carnival's arena and energy depicts a stage characterized by the mingling of the high and the low with the common aim of earthly pleasure. Among the Bukusu, the excesses depicted by the dancers show the community's joy in having their son go through the circumcision process. The "madness" is also characteristic of the initiate's state as a "dirty and unruly" body that needed to be cleansed by being circumcised. According to Bakhtin (1994), such an atmosphere with such a tone corresponded to the exact essence of truth inwardly gay, materialistic and free.

### **3.2.6 Ritual Animals and their Body Parts as Ethical Engagement**

Animal sacrifices are vital to the Bukusu community in that any home that holds a circumcision ritual event without including animals is criticized. Other than being used as a source of subsistence, animals and their dismembered body parts are ritualised to act as a site for the symbolic location of Bukusu culture-specific messages touching on manhood and sacredness.

Douglas (2002) and Morris (2011) assert that ritual situations offer strict laws that dictate the type of animals used in rituals as their ritual practices champion people's cultural traditions. It is a concept she (ibid) avers as of the observance of laws in rituals as either a form of ritual purity or impurity. Among the Bukusu, the scope of human-animal interaction is also seen through the humanization and perception of animal traits as metaphors that foreground the choice of animals in the circumcision ritual with the goal to enhance specific characteristics in the initiates. Douglas (1990: 33) talks of how ritual players perceive the way animals connect, on the basis of our relations, thus, making us understand why human social divisions are extended into the world of animals. Among the Bukusu, animal sacrifice in the circumcision ritual show life's dependence on death and establishes the mutual bond between the spiritual realm and the initiate as depicted in the presence of shrines and offerings. Borrowing from Douglas (1990:3, 2002) and Morris (2011), this section examines how the choice and use of specific types of animals in the Bukusu circumcision ritual accommodate the Bukusu socio-cultural issues.

Animals slaughtered in the Bukusu circumcision ritual must always be physically able-bodied and healthy. The animals must be of good health, not deformed, hornless, or castrated. The goal is to entrench wellness and vigour in the initiate. The castrated one is equated to a man who is a eunuch while an old one is considered as having no vigour to sire a healthy offspring. The believe among the Bukusu is that the initiate is directly affected by the animals used in the ritual. Sheep among the Bukusu is associated with the dead and death-related rituals and circumcision being a matter of the living, and it proscribes the usage of the sheep. Animals that are deformed, hornless, old and castrated are believed to block the future of the initiate, making him childless and useless. In contrast, young animals, either goat or cattle, are believed to have a positive impact on the initiate. The choice of individual animals over others advances the Bukusu vision of the circumcision ritual. It symbolizes themes such as the enhancement of masculine virility, fecundity, and preparation of the boy's marriage. A "good" animal begets a good man and a "bad" animal begets a bad man.

Whenever an animal is slaughtered in the Bukusu circumcision ritual, Merritt (1976) observed that the Bukusu attribute *Bukhebi* (circumciser's spirit) possession "trembling" to the spiritual consumption of the animal's essence by ancestral spirits. The *buse* (chime/offal) of the slaughtered animal is believed to regulate the ancestral spirit's participation. It entices benevolent spirits as it chases away the malevolent spirits. The trembling of certain ritual participants is a recognition of the presence of the ancestral spirits, which in the process, bless the ritual, enhance fecundity and help launch the initiate into the wider society. The animal killed for the initiate at the uncle's place symbolises unity and cohesion. The slaughtered goat or bull is meant to smear the relationship between the clan of the father and that of the uncle. The action is also an acknowledgment of closure of relations since the gift from the maternal uncle also symbolizes the boy's leaving his mother's clan to be "born" into the paternal clan. Thus, the slaughtered animals are meant to seek and cement an extension of association between the initiate and the paternal clan, and even to the ancestral world.

The dismembered parts, especially the horns, the testicles and the legs have phallic symbolism. A hornless animal, just like a castrated one is equated to a sterile and sexually impotent man. Themes accruing from the selection of animals based on their body dispositions also stress the adherence to ritual purity and ritual laws. The right choice of animals enhances good health, prosperity and virtuous fecundity. Similar observations from the ritual occurrences and explanations from Frederick Kiberenge, a circumciser

(Interviewed, 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018), showed that chyme/offal, the forelegs and the hind legs among other parts of a slaughtered animal have symbolic meanings. Thus:

**Changalwa:** What are the Bukusu cultural meanings of some of these body parts of the slaughtered animals like *buse* (chyme), *likhoni* and others used in the ritual. I saw the bull's testicles attached to the boy's private parts.

**Kiberenge:** When we apply *buse* (chyme) on the body of the initiate, we connect the slaughtered animal with many things like the exchange of cattle. I mean dowry paid to the mother of the son we're circumcising. The dowry is related to the fecundity of the boy. It also connects us to our ancestors. When our ancestors see that we're following the traditions properly, they will bless the ritual, our son and our land. That's because they're happy with our offering. Did you notice that the uncle used the left-hand when applying chyme? Maybe you didn't but the reason is that he (the uncle) is from the mother's side and his advice to the boy is from the mother's side. He can't use the right hand!

**C:** Explain more about it, please!

**K:** Look, when the initiate goes to the uncles' place, we connect that with motherhood and only after circumcision does the boy shift from identifying himself with women to fathers. Now he (initiate) becomes a man.

**C:** What about the hindlegs and forelegs?

**K:** Let me tell you something about those. And listen to me keenly. The two *binama bia mbele* (forelegs) took the mother to where she got married. *Sinama sie takho* (one hindleg) gave birth to the boy. It was the one that pushed the penis into the vagina of the mother the way sex is done (*laughing*). It's like a penis. The remaining *sinama sie takho* (hind leg) is now given to the initiate to have him go sire his kids.

On some occasions where no animals are slaughtered, the uncle dresses the initiate with star grass as a promise for rewarding him with the animal on a later date. If the father had not paid the dowry, then the initiate is not offered any animal. However, in cases where a bull or a cow is slaughtered, *luliki* (a piece of the underside of the stomach) is dressed around the initiate's neck. The slaughtered bull's testicles are embedded on the initiate's genitals. Frederick Kiberenge, a circumciser (Interviewed, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018), asserted that the linking of the two sexual organs, the bull's and those of the initiate, has phallic symbolism with the core

purpose of enhancing fecundity. The remaining body parts of the slaughtered animals are converted into food, which also happens to symbolize generosity. Therefore, the relationship between the initiates' bodies and those of the animals is that the ancestral spirits are involved which are vital for promoting fertility in the initiate's future.

### 3.2.7 Transgressors and Conventions of the Body

One of the most sui generis observations regarding the body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual manifests itself through members of the community who have transgressed the norms of the society. The Bukusu community members who have engaged in such morally prohibited acts such as incest, bestiality, prostitution and promiscuity among others are shamed in public. These members are jeered and castigated as an indirect way of policing and ridding the society of "pollution." In the process, initiates become enlightened about what is wrong and right of the society. For instance, while heading to *Esitabicha* (ritual scrubland) on December 15, 2018, an elder climbed on a structure (see plate 9) on the Nalondo market and gave a performance that he repeated at several intervals. The elder started "calling" or "piercing" (*khuuna*) members who are notorious for engaging in immoral behaviour. Those captured in the calling or piercing are mentioned by their real names before the crowd, especially at the market place. Having climbed the structure at the market place before a large crowd, the old man began:

**JM:** *Mbole namwe khabola tawe? Enje ebweni ndomalome namwe tawe? Omukhasi ali nende kiminie kinga? Khuli nende omukhasi khungo khuno bamulanga bali Marita mukha Wanjala! Omukhasi sali nende kumuliango khumunie kwewe tawe akhwalana busa nende omusecha yesiyesi wenya khungo khuno! Lwo khulala kakhwalana nende Juma! Lwo khabili kakhwalana nende Wekesa! Lwo khataru kakhwalana nende Wanyama! Lwo khane kakhwalana nende Wamalwa. Mala alota mungo nawelesa omusecha wewe kumunie chana. Khubola khuli nakhalekhile kukwima okwo tawe khulamutimania musirekere sino namwe khumwire. Khumutimanie namwe tawe?*

(Should I say it or not? Should I go on and say it or not? How many vaginas does a woman have? There is a woman called Marita, the wife to Wanjala! The woman has no lock on her vagina, and she is always having sex with every man in the community! On Monday, she had sex with Juma! On Tuesday, she had sex with Wekesa! On Wednesday, she had sex with

Wanyama! On Thursday, she had sex with Wamalwa! And she still feeds the same vagina to her husband. We are saying that if she does not change, we will ban her from this village or stone her. Should we chase her out or not?)

This harangue is intended to both shame and correct, lest the lawbreakers are banned from the community or killed as indicated. The woman, Marita, is being warned to cease her immoral behaviour or else face the wrath of the community, that is, be rendered an outcast. This process of *khuuna* (calling/piercing) took place several times on the way to the *Esitabicha* (ritual scrubland). Quite often, each time the elder climbed a tree to call out, the initiates stooped low on their knees and faced the ground with their bodies entirely covered from head to toe (see plate 17). The fundamental intention of conducting the calling session is to shame those who have broken the conventions of Bukusu society and engaged in immoral acts, especially incest and bestiality. The session is also regarded as a time to, in a friendly way, settle scores with the person who might have wronged the other. The harsh carnivalesque language is used to punish the wrongdoers for not conforming to the Bukusu moral conventions and further, putting them on the right track. These experiences offer participants to freely and frankly speak about issues always frowned upon. In the process, a certain terror and fear associated with certain acts is mocked, mastered and transformed.



Plate 9 (Picture taken on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2018): An elderly man being helped to climb a structure at the market place in a ritual event called *khuuna*.

In the following performance below, the jibe seems to have been directed at a man, Wasike, who is said to have engaged in bestiality:

**WM:** *Mbule lundi namwe tawe? Khuli nende omusoleli khungo khuno bamulanga bali Wasike! Omusoleli kaangale kolile khurera omukhasi mala abe nende lukoba lwewe. Badala yekhubeyisha omukhasi wewe owmene, omwana akwana akhwala likhese. Na khakhumobeleda khuli nakhalekha kukwima kuno tawe mala arere omukhasi khulamutimania musirekere! Khukhole khuriena nakhalekha kukwima okwo tawe?*

(Should I spill it out again or not? There is a boy in this land called Wasike! The boy is old enough to marry and have a family of his own. Instead of marrying a wife, the boy goes on to seduce and sleep with a sheep. We ask him to stop this behaviour and marry, or we chase him out of the village! What should we do if he does not change?)

These utterances entail a disapproval of Wasike's behaviour and those who engage in bestiality. Wasike's is being castigated for defiling the sheep's body and his. The shaming of these characters shows how the body in Bukusu becomes the space for negotiating cultural issues like problem-solving and handling sexual taboos. Any person who feels that has been offended is allowed to condemn the "villain" and express his indignation with as much detail as she or he desired. In this way, the calling/piercing (*khuuna*) becomes the avenue through which proper morals are inculcated in the society. Initiates are made aware that bestiality is prohibited.

Upon asking why the circumcision ritual is replete with incidences of the unruly bodies depicting undesirable tendencies like same sexes mounting each other and groping of women's or men's genitalia, John Musoboi (Interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018) said:

**C:** Why is it that from these *khuuna* (piercing) calls, the caller acts as the moral police of the society and seems to discipline the "bad" members yet, the whole ritual is replete with some sexually erotic acts where people do and say things that are considered taboo in other times? For example, I saw three men, one dressed as a woman being mounted while the other man was also being mounted. I also encountered elderly people and children openly talking about sex.

**JM:** Let me tell you something my grandson. Our circumcision is full of "crazy" incidences which, to begin with, display the community's happiness. Secondly, it's about fecundity and procreation. So, we use this opportunity to

indirectly teach these initiates how to do certain things. Remember, it is a time the community issues a blanket license to individuals to say or do whatever they want. People are happy and when you're happy and drunk and have eaten enough, you enjoy and do anything you want.

**C:** So, what does it mean to the initiate or the community?

**JM:** But also note that the initiate at this period is uncircumcised and such a person is an "unruly," "dirty" and "irresponsible" person. So, the madness is characteristic of his unclean and irresponsible state. So, we're telling the initiate that when he's circumcised, he should become a man who should refrain from such acts as evident in the circumcision process. It's just the same as him walking around naked. He will never walk naked again.

The above interview shows the ambivalence emanating from the participants' talks and actions as far as moral instruction is concerned. They utilize the *khuuna* (calling/piercing) event to police, make amends and teach. Thus, there exists some degree of ambivalence whereby on the one hand, the mentioning of private parts, enaction of "chaos," sexual actions and debauchery are evident, but, on the other hand, the actions are meant to rebirth an initiate into a non-violent and responsible man. Besides, the circumcision ritual is full of incidences cautioning initiates to behave well in society. The ritual with such eccentrics and talks about the body play an important role in celebrating, uniting and renewal of the community.

### **3.3 Interpreting other Institutionalised Departures and Body Practices with apparent Moral Significance**

This section highlights the position of elements such as the circumcision dances, ritualized objects, the genitals, the buttocks and the anus, uses of masks, beads, animal and plant materials and body markings. For the purpose of this section, I foreground the elements mentioned because, first, dances, body markings and the use of masks involve the manipulation of bodies which in their corporeality signify the Bukusu cultural concepts. Studies on other circumcision rites have shown that the rites typically entail physical tests, death and rebirth imagery, seclusion, masks, dance, dietary and sexual taboos (Beidelman, 1964; Hambly, 1935; Heald, 1986; Holderedge & Young, 1927). What makes the body vital in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and its representations via dances, masks, costumes, ritualized tools and the genitals is that the body celebrates corporeality and communicates the Bukusu cultural concepts.

Second, the circumciser's knives, the penis, the prepuce and the buttocks act as avenues in which the Bukusu community fashions its culture-specific messages and the processes they mediate gain new meanings beyond their normal physiological and physical dimensions. In exploring the body as the site of Bukusu meanings, I pay attention to Bakhtin's assertion (1994) that the objects and body parts in festivals play more than just their normal physiological processes by taking on new cultural functions. I also borrow Mfecane's (2016) theorization of the body in circumcision ritual as a site for the symbolic location of a community's desires. The sub-sections below focus on several aspects of the institutionalised emblems and body practices that signify the Bukusu needs and worldview.

### **3.3.1 Body Dances, Movements and Gestures in meaning-making**

This subsection explores the trends that emerged during the Bukusu circumcision ritual whereby dances and body movements conveyed incidents of body significations. The Bukusu circumcision ritual is marked by behaviour that is characteristic of participants bursting with exuberant sexual vigour. Triggered by different ritual events like songs and constant drumming, participants enter a trance-like state and engage in erotic moves, sometimes fondling with inanimate objects. Dissanayake (2009), Gluckman (1935), Rigby (1968) and Stoller (2014) provide appropriate frames within which to read bodies in rituals as expressions of a community's wishes and desires.

During the Bukusu circumcision ritual, dancing and singing begin from the day the initiate starts paying courtesy calls to his relatives. It continues till the early morning when the initiates are taken to the stream for mudding. The dancing and singing resume again during the coming out of seclusion festival. Participants of different sexes at some point engage in cross-dressing (see plates 19 and 20), while some go stark naked and vigorously shake their waists. The initiates are also involved in the dancing. Other participants disguise themselves with animal and plant materials. Throughout the dancing the rocking of their waists (see plate 10) imitates copulation movements as the signature move.



Plate 10 (Picture taken on 12<sup>th</sup> December): Mothers to the initiates shaking their waist.

The dance as shown in plate 10, is a symbol of the Bukusu's aspiration for fecundity and fertility. The erotic jiggling of the waist dances is grotesquely utilised as a way to show how the body is continually built as it builds another. Everywhere, the imagery of genitals, sex and the orgy are emphasised in dance. During the coming out of seclusion, initiates engage in the same dances while naked. The intensification in vigorous dances is also envisioned to "entice" the ancestral spirits, especially when emotions escalate as attributed to the continued "wild" dancing. The more the frenzied the dancing, the nearer the spirits close in and consequently guarantee a smooth operation. Additionally, the Bukusu believe that the dances engender the involvement of benevolent ancestral spirits in the ritual in order to enhance the fecundity of the initiates. The recurring theme is that these eccentric behaviour affirms the people's immortal and immortal character. People are reborn and assured of their future.

The procession of singers-cum-dancer's movements are indicative of the happiness and joy for having one of their own, the initiate, accept to undergo the process of becoming a "full" Bukusu man. From the body movements that were accompanied by songs and various utterances, one could see that they encouraged the initiates and other participants to sire as many children as possible to guarantee the community's survival. The excitement of these dances coupled up with the swaggering about also draws young boys who wish to undergo the circumcision, cultivate togetherness and engender equality.

Another possible explanation of the apparent observations concerning body dances and body movements can be explained regarding the psychic forces, drives, sexual impulses, repressed wishes, and structural and cultural imperatives (Gluckman, 1935; Khamalwa, 2004; Mwaniki,

1986; Nevile, 2004). Whereas participants may fabricate and wear animal skins and dance in some different suggestive ways (see in plates 10, 13 and 19), and whereas the Bukusu circumcision ritual may be about attaining a new social status, the peculiar modes involving body manipulation in dances and their certain practical ends attain force and conviction via the emotional meaning that is mediated through bodily praxis. These observations are a reflection of the behavioural manifestation or channel of beliefs mediated by the Bukusu circumcision ritual, allowing the community to perform and share emotional and non-verbal, as well as socio-cultural concepts and meanings. The ritual's behavioural manifestations through dances and gestures act as conduits of beliefs transmitted through the ceremony, though temporally, allowing the participants to dramatize and share cultural and social meaning on issues such as the enhancement of fecundity, hardening of boys and preparation for marriage life.

### **3.3.2 Ritual Objects and Masquerades as Embodied Rhetoric**

This sub-section examines the position of an excessively caricatured disguised person and the ritual objects utilized in the Bukusu circumcision ritual including headgears, animal hide, beads, spears and knives. Grillo (2012) and Jordan (1999: 34) call attention to the factor of disguises and emblems in rituals. Scrutiny is placed on the cultural meanings of a disguised body and the paraphernalia used for disguise in the production of meanings as emblems that depict primordial beings, cultural heroes, mythical ancestors and divinities whose significant precedents are dramatized in ritual performances. A close reading of Bakhtin (1994), Douglas (2004) and Czachesz (2014) and Turner (1967) show that the symbolism of objects and props within rituals bear cultural significance to those particular communities.

The Bukusu circumcision ritual participants employ masked performances that “bring to life” issues of ancestral influence. Babcock (1974) and Ware (2001) espouse disguise, whether thematic or of character, as essential on pragmatic and figurative levels in celebrations. That is, masks and regalia, though they do not at all times provide actual or consistent anonymity, they free and permit circumcision ritual revellers to engage in new habits. As Renée Frugé (in Ware, 2001) puts it, “whenever you put the mask on, it’s so different. You can act the fool, and neighbors and friends never know who it is.” The disguises become artistic expressions, a form of cultural commentary that permits the circumcision ritual participants to cross or sustain a variation of social boundaries.

The Bukusu circumcision ritual utilizes secondary ritual resources to emphasize ritual meaning as worn by circumcisers and initiates. The established ritual paraphernalia in the Bukusu circumcision ritual aid in assigning an identity to an individual. For instance, circumcisers and ritual elders in the Bukusu circumcision utilize *ekutwa* (headgear) and *likutu* (animal hide) as their sacred components that communicate the ideals of a leader and a centre of authority (see plates 5 and 12). The whole experience of the ritual is replete with headgears, use of blankets, and bedsheets for body cover (see plates 16 and 17), beads and circumciser's knives. The meanings they generate are manifestations of the transition stage and the knowledge the participants want to transmit. The meanings and knowledge transmitted touch on issues of gender, communal roles, maturity, celebration of a victory, the human relationship with nature, culture and sacredness of the circumcision ritual.

The body make-up of the mound of clay soil on the head of the initiate and the thatching grass (*Lusinyande*) placed on it dramatizes the Bukusu understanding of sexuality. The star grass and the mound placed on the head (see plate 11) of the initiate at the mudding place symbolizes a home. After circumcision, the initiate is sanctioned at his free will by the community to build a house, get a wife and establish his own home. However, some elders challenged the boys to study up to university first before marrying. It is also believed that the grass is used to detect any slight body movements that reveal fear. Wanyama (2006) further notes that the heap of mud (*kwa ututu*) is related to a dark bird whose feathers are poisonous, symbolizing the pain associated with the Bukusu circumcision rite. Therefore, glory and courage are also thematized if the finger of grass on the initiate's head does not shake.



Plate 11 (Picture taken on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018). At the mudding scene. The initiate's uncle mounting *kwa ututu* on the head of the initiate.

The other ways sexualized objects are integrated into the Bukusu circumcision ritual are through spears and creatively shaped knives. For instance, circumcisers use “phallically” shaped knives for circumcising. On the last moments of the coming out of seclusion event, the newly initiated are given a spear by their elders. The spear is given to the initiates to mark the end of childhood. The spear expresses the idea that men are expected to defend their community against any adversary. The initiates are, thus, socialized to be defenders of the community. The use of the spear becomes a text for the inscription of power and gender roles.

Participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual sometimes align themselves with nature by masking animals (real or imaginary) or part-human creatures or integrating animalistic features in body disguises using improvised headgears materials from plants and animal hides. Abrahams (1995:128) and Ware (2001) envisage such as another form of inversion which lies in crossing the line between civilization and untamed nature through the disguise. The initiates' bodily disguise, those of the circumcisers and revellers are connected to the virtues of courage and bravery as vital concepts in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and the community at large. In this regard, the initiate realizes that he is uniquely dressed, making him the key player and subject of interest. Hence, developing the courage necessary to accomplish the task, circumcision, awaiting him. The relationship between the circumcision ritual and nature is foregrounded. The headgear (see plates 5 and 12) conveys fundamental values such as representing mastery and containment of ritual power. Their dynamic media especially in garments vividly appeals to the participants, and also dramatize the boy's separation from the natural unpolished state, and motherhood to a polished, responsible man and menfolk.



Plate 12 (Picture taken on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018): A circumciser dressed in a headgear made from animal skin.

The majority of the circumcision ritual events encompass matters touching on sex which are manifest through participants carrying big clubs, sticks and all manner of crude weapons pointed to the sky. Participants consistently emphasise the objects' meaning at the mudding scene (*silongo*) where all those who gather around it are demanded to lift their sticks, machetes and clubs to the sky. This gesture is imbued with phallic symbolism in that the lifted materials are regarded as the penises while the sky as a vagina. The emerging interaction is believed to be a sexual act. Another meaning attached to the lifting of the weapons is that it is a way of building tension that is vital for making the initiate to psychologically realize that the Bukusu circumcision ritual is a serious affair. The initiates are made fully aware of the dangers surrounding them in case they tried to run away from the “cut.” These dangers may involve being whipped, stoned or even slashed by machetes.

### **3.3.3 Genitals, Buttocks and Body Markings as Embodied Texts**

The sexual and excremental zones of the human body prominently feature in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The circumcision performances surfaced nuanced manipulations of body parts as texts, mostly revolving around the genitalia, buttocks, prepuce and body markings in the circumcision ritual. As is evident below, the claims are as much approved as implied by socially recognized discourses and as contextual knowledge (Bakhtin, 1994; Wall, 2008).

The body is unavoidable in the understanding of and construction of masculinity. Among the Bukusu culture, the removal of the foreskin from the penis is one way of confirming that the body complies with the cultural ideals of Bukusu manhood. The penis with a mark acts as a symbolic location of manhood status through which men can “authenticate” and “protect” their manliness status. Having a circumcised penis is regarded as a sign of an ideal man (Jacob Wekesa, 98 years old, interviewed 29<sup>th</sup> July 2018; Walubengo Wamalwa, 61 years old, Circumciser, interviewed, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2018).

It is important to note that Bukusu notions of masculinity are embodied in the concept of a traditionally circumcised men. The customarily circumcised man, contrasting with the uncircumcised and the medically circumcised man, is viewed as *omusani*, meaning a real man, and this affords him certain rights and privileges. *Omusani* is the most “honoured” form of masculinity. A male who still bears a foreskin is generally referred to as a boy, regardless

of his age. Traditionally, a man with a foreskin is not allowed to marry or perform rituals. Even though medically circumcised men have a marked penis, they are still branded as boys, feminine and often termed as the women’s age set. The uncircumcised is positioned at the bottommost position of the hierarchy as compared to the circumcised man who occupies the topmost position (Jacob Wekesa, 98 years old, interviewed 29<sup>th</sup> July 2018; Walubengo Wamalwa, 61 years old, Circumciser, interviewed, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2018).

The fact that there is an association between sex and marriage in the Bukusu society makes the penis an instrument of interest in the ritual. Throughout the circumcision period, the penis is exalted through songs and conversations. It is sometimes compared to several lethal weapons and dangerous animals revered by the community like jackals (see Song Appendix C). It is, more so, a circumcised penis, a symbol of manhood which also comes with the power over women and of sex. Only those circumcised enjoy the privileges of marrying. Moses Barasa (Interviewed, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018) intimated that one of the core cultural reasons for the physical “cut” is to sharpen the penis with the core purpose of “piercing” women’s vaginas. The emphasis on sexual potency and fecundity explains why the testicles of a bull and those of the initiates are made to touch the initiate’s genitalia. This assessment can be supported using Gell’s (1971) analysis of the treatment of the penis and the practices done on it as customary behaviour and a way of articulating a people’s social world. For example:

***Luwaya* (English Translation “Wire”)**

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
E the wire	Ah
My beloved brother, the wire	The wire
E, the wire	Ah
My agemate, the wire	The wire
E the wire	Ah
Let me say, the wire	The wire
The wire	Ah
The wire gave birth to the initiate	The wire
The wire	Ah
You see, it gave birth to the initiate	The wire
Ezekiel Biketi	Ah
A man from <i>babayayo</i> clan of Tulweti market	The wire

Tabalia	Ah
A farmer called Wandabwa	The wire
Kusimba's children	Ah
Vincent, receive greetings	The wire
Kusimba's children	Ah
Wilson, receive greetings	The wire
A man of <i>baengele-banyala</i> clan	Ah
Vincent receive greetings	The wire

The song exalts the penis and what it does. Literally translated, “the wire,” refers to the phallus, and the song praises sexual virility and its importance in procreation. “The wire” has produced essential members of the society including the initiate, and in the process, ensured continuation of the community. The comparison of the penis to a wire and in some cases, to animals like jackals, also underscores the notion by Morris (2011) of a range of human-animal interactions seen through animal characteristics as metaphors and the humanization of these animals. The Bukusu regard the penis as a source of life, as a symbol of a generation’s continuity and overabundance.

Unlike the penis, the buttocks and the anus are overly mentioned through humour to represent disgraceful actions such as homosexuality, disease and defecating that makes the body less pure among the Bukusu. Babcock (1974), Bakhtin (1994) and Turner (1974) assert that ritual scenes characterised by talks on the reproductive and excretory parts and their functions are not just for fun, but they convey deep meanings. At some point, the manipulation of the buttocks and the anus within the Bukusu circumcision ritual are understood as a representation of homosexual relationships which are prohibited among the Bukusu. Thus, they act as avenues through which the Bukusu world is depicted as real and replete with certain vices that could be ridiculed, but not ignored.

Body markings have served different roles in various societies. Such roles include guaranteeing good health, and warding off evil (Hildburgh, 1955; Turner, 1999), as indicators of critical secular accomplishments (Cohen, 1994), to inscribe involvement in a social group, and as a way to assert an identity and to gesture a significant change in social status (Berndt & Berndt, 1988; Douglas, 2004). The Bukusu circumcision ritual has two body markings; marks made on the arm during the time of seclusion (especially for the Bamwalie) and a mark made on a circumcised penis. These marks are culturally pertinent given the context or

exertion of authority between the circumcised and the uncircumcised men within the Bukusu community. Among the Bukusu, the prepuce is always cut from a boy's penis to prove manhood and, consequently, to inscribe power and identity vis-a-vis incapacity and uncleanliness.

Following the Bukusu inclination towards the principles of social and communal membership as expressed via bodily modifications, body signs indicate social and communal affiliation. Spencer and Gillen (1997) and Turner (1999) observed that marks made on the boy's penis and hands among other places on the body are essential in delineating phases of sexual maturity in the societies that exercise them. Among the Bukusu, ritual mutilation of the penis of the initiate designates the male identity at a point in the life cycle where boys transform into and also associate with the circumcised men. The meanings of the body marks in the Bukusu circumcision ritual are inserted in the social processes, especially the sexual and economic aspects. Those with the foreskin are regarded as "dirty" and as outcasts. The marks indicate social and economic membership (Mbachii & Likoko, 2013). According to the circumcisers (Kundu Sitati [45 years old] and Cleophas Barasa [43 years old] Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018), a circumcised penis comes in handy during copulation. The removal of a foreskin is vital in avoiding diseases like HIV/AIDS among other venereal diseases.

Simiyu (2011) observes that the Bukusu circumcision ritual contains a myriad of symbols that are deployed to seek divine blessings and wisdom by which cutting of the prepuce is just one of the many aspects. The cutting of the foreskin from the penis has several meanings related to the transformation of the initiates from being the "untidy" and "irresponsible" boys to neat and responsible men. The prepuce is regarded as a woman's clothing that the initiate needs to discard as he transitions from childhood and motherhood to adulthood and masculinity. The removal of the foreskin also acts as a site for contested inscriptions of ethnic particularism and masculinity. The Bukusu have a condescending attitude towards their Luo neighbours who do not circumcise. They also abhor the Sabaot ethnic group with whom they used to engage in wars over property. By cutting off the foreskin and singing the song *Khwera Omurwa* (see Song Appendix D), the Bukusu dramatize the annihilation of their enemy. The next song underpins meanings associated with the removal of the foreskin:

***Khwera Omurwa* (English Translation ("We have killed *Omurwa*"))**

**Soloist**

My brother we have killed *Omurwa*

**Response**

Aah we have killed *Omurwa*

We have killed <i>Omurwa</i> my brother	Aah we have killed <i>Omurwa</i>
We have killed <i>Omurwa</i> my father	Aah we have killed <i>Omurwa</i>
We have killed <i>Omurwa</i> my age mate	Aah we have killed <i>Omurwa</i>
We have killed <i>Omurwa</i> my Chuma age group	Aah we have killed <i>Omurwa</i>

The song celebrates the killing of Omurwa. It represents the Bukusu emphasis on a cut prepuce and a concentration of masculine power and dominance over other tribes. The dryness of the glans is a symbol of the attainment of an auspicious masculine adult status and power (warriorship). It is one of the objectives of the Bukusu circumcision ritual for the glans of an uncircumcised boy is regarded as filthy and distasteful, hence inauspicious, beneath the prepuce. To render the glans “clean,” the dirty foreskin has to go. Omurwa, in this context, is a representation of the Sabaot, a community the Bukusu engaged in recurring wars. The cutting off of the prepuce and the celebration thereof signifies the desire by the Bukusu to defeat Sabaot. It is also a process of inscribing masculinity and assigning identity in relation to the uncircumcised. Thus, the circumcised Bukusu man is able to identify himself with the circumcised Bukusu men.

The representation of body art in the Bukusu circumcision ritual has symbolic and decorative meanings. The initiate, who is usually at the centre stage of the ritual process, becomes apprehensive of what is expected of him. He therefore, through his body language, portrays signs of courage and emotional steadiness. The colour pigmentation, especially the white colour is utilised as a symbol of a bright future enhancing fecundity and harmonious coexistence. The bodily ornamentation and painting foreground the initiate as being the focal point and at the centre stage of the ritual practices. The initiate’s importance is also foregrounded through this aesthetic and symbolic art.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored each participants' role, and the physical statuses of the physical bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual to identify the cultural signs they emit. The section has also offered analyses and discussions of the social-cultural signs and concepts produced by other elements such as dances and gestures, ritual objects, parts of the bodies and body markings. The preceding discussions show that the participants' bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual signify meanings that represent the Bukusu concept of life and communal aspirations. The dances, ritual objects, body parts and body markings are but elements of embodied texts thematizing values like harmony, victory, courage, perseverance, success and

copulation in the community. Body disguises and masking create humour through masquerades, foreground leadership, depict primordial beings, Bukusu cultural heroes, mythical ancestors like Mango and divinities whose significant precedents are dramatised in ritual performances. The dances by the singers-cum-dancers are also believed by the Bukusu as seeking the involvement of the ancestral spirits in the circumcision ritual in ensuring a smooth operation, enhance masculinity and to promote fecundity. The actions carried out by the ritual participants and those meted on the initiates are geared toward preparing the boys for adult responsibilities, marriage life, and hardening of the boys for circumcision and life after circumcision. The body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual becomes the pre-eminent text which conceives the society's meanings. The body symbols in the Bukusu circumcision are, thus, tied to the Bukusu worldview and the nuanced performances portended by the body movements, dances, body marks, possession trance and disguises are a complex understanding of the Bukusu human life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MAPPING BODY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BUKUSU CIRCUMCISION RITUAL

#### 4.1 Overview

The Bukusu circumcision ritual possibly provides the occasion for the performers to champion the community's repertoire of their desires and history. The circumcision ritual participants, consciously and unconsciously draw upon the symbolic resources emanating from their interactions as a range of communicative forms. The relationship among the initiates, the circumcisers, the guardians to the initiates, the age sets to the father of the initiates, the singers-cum-dancers and the slaughtered animals in the Bukusu circumcision ritual have cultural and social meanings attached to them. The relationship is contextualised in such a way that participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual have cultural ways in which they interact and from those interactions, signify meanings.

Chapter Four takes over from where Chapter Three stopped. The focuses on the relationships that develop between the initiate and the participants. The study charts the body relationships that emerge among participants during the circumcision ritual with the core purpose of highlighting the meanings these bodies emit. These participants include initiates, circumcisers, singers-cum-dancers, the father's age set, animals used in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and guardians, that is, uncles, mothers, fathers and ritual elders. Their contacts are explained in terms of each other's reciprocal activities and direct involvement with each other before and during the circumcision ritual period.

For instance, on mapping the relationships between one participant and [the] other(s), Nyongesa Sinino, a circumciser, (Interviewed, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018) confirms that, "there is a culturally specific way in which certain participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual conduct themselves which in a way prompts other participants to communicate the intended Bukusu wishes, fears and values." He further adds that, "the actions of the circumcisers, of the parents of the initiate, and those of the initiates are amongst the few practices that must be upheld to ensure a successful Bukusu circumcision ritual." Thus, these assertions depict the existence of relationships amongst the circumcision ritual participants that this chapter puts emphasis.

Our inquiry into the physical body relationships in the Bukusu circumcision ritual is also validated by the arguments on the carnival ambivalence theory regarding the carnival

festivities, precisely the body. Bakhtin (1994) posits that the carnival is not as a spectacle mapped by relationships between participants who live in it, rather, he argues that it is an arena where everybody participates since its actual idea embraces all the people. Bakhtin visualizes the people within the carnival as a whole, but then again organized in their way, the culture of a people who are related to each other. In this whole, the individual body ceases to a certain degree to be itself, and lends itself to be renewed (through the change of costume and mask) but in a distinct way to contrive meanings reciprocated by the other bodies within the carnival. To Bakhtin (1994), one within the carnival does not speak with an individual voice. Rather, one speaks within a specific cultural context where everyone's voice dances and interacts with other voices. So, in the process, people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity, culture and their environment. They become joyful, united and renewed. Taking cues from the carnival ambivalence theory and several scholars' reading of the body as the site of symbolic representation, and as having the potential to express core social values, chapter Four attempts to address the distinctive significations that emanate from the body relationships of the participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

The chapter is premised on the notion that relationships of the participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual act as sites through which the Bukusu perform their culture and where bodies come to serve as artifacts of inscription of the community's ideals. It shifts attention from the conventions of the implications produced by the individual bodies themselves (discussed in Chapter Three) to the joint contextual subtle-interactions emanating from the participants or what Bakhtin (1994) calls the collectiveness that underpins the performances and production of the field data. In many respects, the relationships among the participants and what they engaged in pervaded all aspects of the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

Observations from previous studies carried out on the Bukusu circumcision ritual (Khamalwa, 2004; Merritt, 1976; Were, 2014) imply the existence of relationships among the Bukusu circumcision ritual participants. Their research indicate the Bukusu circumcision is a rite replete with a lot of symbolism, taboos and beliefs that are depicted via the actions of the ritual participants whether group or individual participants(s). From the onset of the Bukusu circumcision ritual up to the day of the "cut," initiates and parents abstain from attending to sexual and funeral practices. The parents' inability to adhere to the conventions regarding sexual abstinence is believed to cause a myriad of misfortunes on the initiate like his circumcision process becoming a failure, and by extension, his future. The mother's sitting

posture, which is a symbol of rebirth, during the moment of the “cut” is substantial in meaning-making in relation to the initiate’s body as will be discussed below.

The father’s age sets who gather in a special house sequestered for them have strict rules they adhere to that relate to those of the physical body practices of the initiate. For instance, all members of the father’s age-set are commanded to avoid folding hands, crossing legs, fidgeting, facing down, nodding, tying anything including the drinking straw and cracking their knuckles. Most of the physical body practices that the initiates set in motion are replicated by the members of their fathers’ age set, for example, sitting without fumbling, crossing legs, folding hands and keeping awake. The members of the age set who break the customary laws by taking a contrary body disposition as stipulated by the Bukusu circumcision customs, for instance, either by folding their hands, crossing legs or sleeping, are castigated by being thrown out of the home hosting the ritual event and being fined by their fellow age set members.

During the time of dressing the initiate with *likhoni* (a piece of the underside of a bull), a gesture that Simiyu (2011) sees as a symbol of honour from the maternal uncle toward the initiate, the maternal uncle presents himself as the centre of authority and an idyllic embodiment of masculine power. The bodies of the initiates and those of uncles are always within each other’s close range. The uncle demands for eye-contact while applying chyme on the initiate’s body which is followed by advice and cautionary harangues about displayed cowardly acts. He uncle also provides security to the initiate against harassment by participants who sometimes become unruly and abusive. By doing so, the uncle epitomizes masculinity. The uncle’s act of slaughtering an animal for the initiate is meant to several purposes including strengthening relationships and as an acknowledgement of closure of relations.

On the night of the eve of the “cut,” another experience depicting body relationships occurs whereby the initiates are dressed with *likhoni*. The occasion of dressing the initiate with *likhoni* is culturally significant since it is considered as the last ritual event toward the “cut.” During this period, initiates are commanded to stand straight, put their legs astride, straighten their hands and avoid fidgeting, facing down, folding their fingers, crossing legs and shuddering as a way of communicating their bravado. The initiates are reminded to take a straight body position while being slapped and scorned. The “violence” meted on the initiate in terms of slaps and harangues is part of the ritual as it acts as a facilitator of masculine

ability. On the day of the “cut,” the father arms himself with a club and wears a cow hide while some cover themselves with blankets before proceeding to meet the initiates.

Studies on numerous rituals outside the Bukusu have shown that bodies are expressive conduits of a community’s belief system and wishes and so, have deeper social-cultural and economic values that they articulate by drawing richly on bodily symbols in every possible dimension (Alcorta & Sosis, 2005; Bell, 1989; Best, 1978; Dissanayake, 2009; Douglas, 1966, 1970; Jackson, 1983; McMullan, 2002; Nettle, 2000; Ngwane, 2004; Ottenberg, 1982; Stallybrass & White, 2002). These scholars’ readings of the body are instructive for this study in understanding the reality of the Bukusu as depicted in the events of the circumcision ritual. For instance, Bakhtin (1994) points out that all the images emanating from the interactions of the participants in the carnival have a collective unity. Bell (1989), Becker (1994), Bordo (1999), Brownell (1991), Czachez (2014), Durkheim (1965), Kreydlin (2008), Mauss (1973: 73) and Mwamzandi (2002) point out the existence of a connection between ritual, identity and ritual participants as sites of metaphoric representation with the potential to manifest fundamental social values of a community. Hence, the pervasiveness of the body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and the natural symbols they emit are critical for this study.

From the previous observations, it emerges that the body significations of different participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual raise some specific issues which direct the chapter’s inquiry. The chapter seeks to answer a number of questions. First, what are the common trends that occur among various participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual? What are the uncanny body practices that each participant or group engage in that are replicated by the body practices of the other individual or group during the Bukusu circumcision ritual? Why do different performers during the Bukusu circumcision ritual engage in reciprocal body activities and what kind of cultural concepts are thus produced from these interactions? The chapter seeks to explain the way two or more sets of performers, for instance, between the initiate versus the circumcisers; the initiates versus the parents; the initiates versus the singers-cum-dancers; and the initiates versus age sets interacted to convey specific cultural meanings.

#### **4.2 The Relationships between the Circumcisers’ and the Initiates’ Bodies**

Section 3.2.2 and 3.2.1 discuss the roles and practices related to the body that circumcisers and initiates as individual entities perform during the Bukusu circumcision ritual. This section explores the relationship that exists between the initiates and those of the circumcisers

as a means through which the Bukusu convey their worldview, celebrate victory of becoming, affirm freedom, enhance masculinity and foster character. From the events of the circumcision ritual as well as the interviews conducted on several circumcisers regarding their activities, it emerges that there are culture-specific body practices exhibited by circumcisers and initiates that engender the meanings of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Noteworthy is that manhood, which is grounded through the physical body and which also forms the core objective of Bukusu circumcision ritual, is entrenched primarily through the interactions that emerge between the initiate and the circumciser. It is through the circumciser-initiate contacts that a cultural mark is inserted on the penis of the initiate. The marked penis and the related events, therefore, launches the initiate to adulthood from childhood status. Thus, the interactions between the initiate and the circumciser become unavoidable in the understanding of and construction of masculinity among the Bukusu.

For instance, as circumcisers operate on the initiates, the initiates face the knife without flinching, shaking, crying or touching the hands of the circumciser. Again, the circumciser operates on the initiate with confidence and only departs after having confirmed that he has done a perfect job. This demands that both the initiates and the circumcisers prepare for each other's encounter physically and psychologically. Before the commencement of the ritual, the circumcisers are immersed in sharpening their knives as they await to circumcise the initiates. Equally, the initiates physically and psychologically prepare themselves by engaging in activities that make them withstand the circumcisers' "knife" without flinching. Before the "cut," circumcisers hid among the crowds and behind structures only to silently spring on the initiate for the "cut." The dynamics of body practices between the initiates and circumcisers depict a battle that heightens the Bukusu worldview.

The dynamic nature of the animal hides and headgears appeal to the participants making them easily identify the initiate and the circumciser as being at the centre of the ritual process where contest and triumph come in play. Bakhtin (1994), Czachesz (2014) and Turner (1967) observes that the uses of animal materials such as masks and disguises in rituals symbolizes the way of life of a particular society. Among the Bukusu, the usages of disguises and animal materials by both the initiates and circumcisers depict the involvement of ancestors in the circumcision ritual. The Bukusu ancestors are invoked to engender a successful circumcision ritual and bless the initiate. Bakhtin (1994) talks of incidences where the supernatural interact with normal characters to advance the socio-cultural wishes of a people.

The circumcisers manipulate their bodies by first, dressing in special outfits and secondly, by applying streaks of black, white and red paint on their faces, legs and arms as was seen on *Yabebe* or those on leopards. *Yabebe*, just as the leopard is a revered animal in the Bukusu community and by invoking them, the circumciser portrays his utmost tenacity toward the circumcision process. The circumciser, thus, inflicts pain on the initiate which is a way of entrenching masculinity. The wearing of *ekutwa* (headgear) and *likutu* (animal hide) by the circumcisers accentuate their position as leaders of the ritual, the power they wield over the initiates. Afterward, the initiates are bestowed with the ability to wield power over the uncircumcised. They influence change.

The body disguises by the circumcisers exhibit virtues of courage and perseverance which are attributed to Mango. The mudding of the initiates' bodies with thick layers of clay soil reenacts how Mango looked like when he killed the serpent. The story of the origin of the Bukusu circumcision is associated with the Mango narrative in the sense that circumcision is meant only for those who are daring enough to withstand the harsh realities of adulthood and warriorship. The story of the origin of the Bukusu circumcision (discussed in Chapter Two) underscores the symbolism emanating from the interactions of the initiates and those of the circumcisers as opponents whereby the initiate's body triumphs. It is Mango versus yabebe, fear and Omurwa. That is why the end of the "cut" is marked by ululation, celebrations and awarding of presents to the initiates. The initiate stands boldly as the circumcisers run away.

The end of the cut is also marked by the singing of the *Khwera Omurwa* song (See song appendix 4) which symbolically represents the vanquishing of Omurwa (the Sabaot), the enemy of the Bukusu. The trills that follow symbolise a victory in transition that has led to the emergence of a new man. Thus, triumph and masculinity are dramatized. History, in this context comes into play. The initiates withstanding of the cutting of the foreskin, an act that is followed by the running away of the circumciser, has the symbolic significance. This circumciser-initiate interaction gestures at the symbolic defeat of Omurwa by the Bukusu. Omurwa is exaggeratingly caricatured in terms of the foreskin to make him seem less powerful. Cosmic fear in this way is dispelled.

The display of the physical bodies of the circumcisers and the initiates during the day of the cut is antagonistic. The initiate is required to face the circumciser, withstand the "knife" without flinching and even after the cut, keep on standing stoutly as a sign of courage, and as a symbol of masculinity. Meanwhile, after the "cut," the circumciser is forced to escape. The

episodes depict a battle between the circumciser and the initiate where apparently, the initiate overwhelms the circumciser. The events also dramatise how Mango looked when he attacked the serpent. This courage is conceptualised as the apex of what it takes to be a Bukusu man. By exhibiting immense bravado, the Bukusu circumcision ritual, through the interactions of the initiates and the circumcisers, tend to idealize men as strong and capable of not only defending the community or themselves against any physical attack from an enemy, but also being able to counter the usual life's challenges. It evidently demonstrates the representation of the men as warriors, tough, physically strong, courageous and responsible in the Bukusu community. Simiyu (2011) says that in the past, any initiate who yielded to the power of the circumciser was met with catastrophic measures like being killed and his parents being chided.

During the cut, both the bodies of the initiates and the circumcisers appear daring as depicted through their body representations. First, the interactions apparent from the decorations of both the circumcisers and initiates bring the circumcisers and the initiate to the focal stage making them apprehensive of what is expected of both their roles (see plate 13). Secondly, the events, often of daunting nature makes them aware that circumcision is a dangerous undertaking which is akin to a soldier going into war. The analogy of the Bukusu circumcision ritual to war is drawn from the episodes witnessed from the beginning of the circumcision ritual and heightened on the day of the cut. For instance, the circumcisers are always engrossed in sharpening their knives. On the day of the "cut," the circumcisers hide among the crowds or any nearby structure only to pounce on the initiate and circumcise him. While coming from the river, initiates stay focused, pace faster and look stern as depicted by their facial expressions. The stature attributed to the display of the body of the initiate during the cut makes reference to the Bukusu as dramatised formations conveying messages regarding the Bukusu notions of courage, masculinity and victory. What is thematised from these body relations is courage, unity of all the members, and perseverance, virtues that are regarded as substantial for the making of *Omusani*, real man among the Bukusu and continuity of a community.



Plate 13 (Picture taken on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018): Circumcisers pacing up and down and stretching as they await the initiate.

Mauss (1973: 73), Ozturk (1973) and Paul (1990:328-9) assert that certain manipulations of bodies are constrained by our relations with others and that circumcision rites practically always unleashes male fecundity. Accordingly, one can claim that the Bukusu regard certain physical body displays as either “masculine” or “feminine.” One of the key aims of the Bukusu circumcision ritual is to construct masculinity and the processes that occur during the time of the “cut” especially between the circumcisers, the crowd and the initiates help in sustaining that. The whole ritual process calls for a rigorous test of skill, power and endurance for a successful circumcision ritual process. However long it takes for the circumciser to cut the foreskin from the initiate’s penis, the initiate is expected to remain standing still without flinching (see plate 14). The interaction between the initiate and the circumciser, foregrounds the essence of manhood in the Bukusu social systems and for the psychological integration of the boys into the community as masculine and matured men. Thus, the Bukusu understanding of being male and a “real man” becomes a significant script manifest in body conventions replete with societal responsibilities and practices.



Plate 14 (Picture taken on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018): The daring body of the initiate's posture after the circumciser has left.

The act of the circumciser fleeing after the “cut” is also interpreted as a sign of a job well done. The circumciser is viewed as a mentor who ushers the initiate to manhood through the circumcision ritual. The public witnessing the “cut” heightens the initiates' body stature and will to triumph over the circumcisers. Any initiate who fears the “knife” is met with catastrophic measures. The initiates and the circumcisers depict a contest of masculinities whereby one prevails.

The circumcisers wear headgears improvised from animal hides as a means of communicating the Bukusu worldview and as conveying fundamental cultural values such as mastery and containment of ritual power. The donning of the *ekutwa* (headgear) and *likutu* (animal hide) in their sacred components communicate the ideals of a leader and as a role model. By utilisation of *ekutwa* (headgear) and *likutu* (animal hide), circumcisers accentuate their position as leaders of the ritual, hence, wield power on the initiates and subsequently, the initiates are bestowed with the ability to wield power over the uncircumcised. That way, they are in a position to effect change. The dynamic nature of the ritual paraphernalia appeals to the participants making them identify the initiate and the circumciser as being the centre of the ritual process where contest and triumph come in play. My reading of the uses of animal material such as masks and disguises can be understood along the lines of Bakhtin (1994), Czachesz (2014) and Turner (1967) studies which suggest

that disguises symbolise socio-cultural concepts of a particular society. Among the Bukusu, the uses of disguises and animal materials by both the initiates and the circumcisers depict the involvement of ancestors in the circumcision ritual. The ancestors are invoked to engender a successful circumcision ritual and give blessings to the initiate.

The circumcision ritual tools (the circumciser's knife), used by the circumcisers contribute to meaning-making between the circumcisers and the initiates in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. For instance, the utilisation of the penis-shaped-like knives by circumcisers depicts the Bukusu aspiration of a "sharp penis" and a fecund man. Robert (1994) refers to use of ritual items as evident in rituals as emphasising the significance of a particular item within a society. In the last segment of the coming out seclusion, the circumcisers give spears to the initiates to mark the end of puberty and the beginning of maturity. As such, the circumcisers' knives and the meanings they generate are a marker of this transition. Through the initiate-circumciser relationships, virtues that inform the Bukusu worldview, and particularly on manhood, decision-making, copulation and fecundity are emphasised.

### **4.3 Parents, Uncles, Aunts and Initiates**

This section focuses on the conventions that emerged from the relationships of the activities of the initiates and those of the parents, aunts, uncles and ritual leaders. Chapter Three separately discussed in some detail the body conventions of the initiate and those of the guardians of the initiate in the Bukusu circumcision ritual as individual players.

The manipulation of bodies of the parents and those of the initiates contain meanings pertaining to life values, social norms and phenomena that the Bukusu regard as their way of life. Such interactions of the circumcision ritual contain esoteric teachings which are supposed to make the initiates morph into mature responsible men. Slutskaya (2008) views relationships of ritual participants as communicative behaviours containing cultural symbols that are intended to represent the experiences and meanings to not only an individual's eternal and psychic world, but also providing the interface between the spirit realm and the community. Silverman (2004) observed that circumcision, which separates Aboriginal boys from motherhood, also attaches them to strong paternity. Thus, circumcision dramatises unease over separation-individuation through a symbolism that affirms yet blurs the normative boundaries between motherhood and masculinity. The Bukusu circumcision, through the son-mother interactions rebirths boys into manhood, identifies them with mothers and enacts the birth of a new masculine man. The vanquishing of the circumcisers by the

initiate who boldly keeps on standing after the cut is also accentuated by the mothers' standing, ululations and gyrations in dance.

The events witnessed across all the Bukusu circumcision ritual events especially on the day of the cut, portray the relationships between physical bodies of the initiates and those of their mothers. The mothers of the initiates, in the company of aunties, sit in a house leading to the open yard to where *etiang'i* (circumcision ground) is established. They sit on the floor horizontally with straightened legs and only access the rearview of their sons' naked bodies until when the operation is complete. The imagery manifest in the contacts of the body practices between the mothers and their sons is that of the enactment of the becoming anew of their sons from childhood to maturity and consequently, the change of the boy's social and economic status (see plate 7).

The body relationships between the initiates and parents are also exemplified through ritually holding each one's body pure by abstaining from sex at the onset of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Through abstaining from sex, a unique connection conveying the Bukusu cultural ideas on ritual purity is depicted. First, the Bukusu circumcision ritual is regarded to be a sacred process which needs to be held in high esteem. Such a view is brought into a sharper perspective through studies done by Douglas (2004) and Turner (1969) on the avoidance of certain body practices as a means of maintaining ritual purity. Secondly, the Bukusu believe that refraining from sex guarantees one a successful circumcision process. Any parent or initiate who breaks the sex rule convention risked jeopardizing the initiate's circumcision process and that in most cases, the repercussions are bound to be life-long and threatening.

During the coming out of seclusion ritual event, the initiates went down on their fours and sipped porridge from a bowl placed on the ground (see plate 15). This move was also replicated by their mothers. The relationships emanating from the body practices of the mothers and the initiates from the act of sipping porridge while on their fours are symbolic. The stooping low to take porridge from the ground in itself is a symbol of humility. It also symbolizes the intention of the community to have their sons productive, generous and to promote a sense of what it is to be a man in the Bukusu culture. The coming out of seclusion is marked by the initiates and the parents dancing vigorously jiggling their waists at different occasions. The manipulations of their bodies in such dances binds the family together. The parent-initiate interactions through dances enhance fecundity among the initiates.



Plate 15 (Picture taken on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018): An initiate taking porridge while on his fours.

There also exist interactions between the bodies of the initiates and those of the uncles whereby after the cut, the initiate goes through the legs of an elder who is an embodiment of masculinity before accessing the house. This initiate had to bend low as he crawled past the elder. The symbolism emerging from the interactions between the bodies of the initiates and that of the person standing in the door with his legs astride is associated with several cultural issues. First, by bending before going through the legs of the elder, the elders put the initiates in their “place” and further entrench in the initiate the tendency to be humble and respect authority. Secondly, it “gives birth” to manhood. To gauge the initiate’s stature, the uncle scowls at the initiate as he slaps him. If the initiate shakes while being mudded, the uncle lashes him. These acts involving the use of abusive language and “violence” by the uncle towards the initiate entrenches the power of *omusani*.

Among the Bamwalie clan of the Bukusu, the coming out of seclusion is marked by both the initiates and the ritual elders covering their physical bodies with blankets and bedsheets (see plate 16) as they head to a bushy and damp location, *esitabicha*. A few minutes later, a ritual elder *engwe* (leopard) followed the initiates. Every time an elder climbed a tree to censure the alleged wrongdoers, the initiates went down on their fours (see plate 17).



Plate 16 (Picture taken on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018): On the way to the river, *Esitabicha*, during the coming out of seclusion. Initiates covered with blankets from head to toe.

Their physical bodies of the initiates stay covered in bedsheets or blankets as shown in plates 16 and 17. The Bukusu consider the initiates as vulnerable, susceptible to “evil eyes” and as having no special status in relation to those in the “normal” society. Their covering of their bodies depicts their need for protection. At this period, the initiates cease to be called by their real names. They are also prohibited from mingling with other members of the community.

The elder, *engwe*, “leopard” also disguises himself by covering his physical body. None is supposed to see his face, mingle with him or even know the route he uses to access the river. The only interaction that happens between the two parties, the initiates and the “leopard, is during the wrestling bout that takes place in the bush at a riverside. The initiates’ and the “leopard’s” undertakings are always enshrouded in secrecy. This is because ritual secrecy plays a vital role in the construction of masculinity among the Bukusu. To further strengthen and entrench the initiates’ manhood, the initiates have to wrestle the “leopard” upon which certain marks are marked on their arms. This also symbolises the initiate’s introduction into the secrets and teachings of the community. The “leopard” is a representation of authority and the instructor on matters Bukusu teachings and customs. The two, secrecy and character development, are important elements for constructing manhood in the initiates.

The dynamics of the body processes of both the initiates and the ritual elders could be understood as a process of passing the knowledge and wisdom of the community to the initiates and which pertains to the initiates’ new status. The initiate is often regarded as one who is void of any knowledge pertaining to adulthood. The passivity and the humbling of the

initiates as manifest through their physical bodily practices such as kneeling (see plate17) and being bruised by the “leopard” is perceived as a way of effecting change. It is also a representation of the “giving birth” to the “real men.” The acts of being humble paves way for the initiates to the access powers that the uncircumcised cannot. The newly achieved status, though powerful, it is also a humbling one.



Plate 17 (Picture taken on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2018): Initiates fully covered in bedsheets while the caller, John Musoboi, is on top of a tree chastising the wrong doers.

The elder who later disguises as the leopard represents authority. The manner in which the bodies of the initiates and the elders portray themselves signify the perception of the body in the circumcision ritual. As discussed above, hiding of the initiates’ faces, bending of their bodies and keeping silent are interpreted as important ways to of enhancing a successful circumcision ritual. The conventional understandings of the inhibitions of the physical body, for example, against open expressions, accessibility, and freedom to join others can be interpreted as a kind of renewal and emergence of a new being.

#### **4.4 Singers-cum-Dancers, the Masses and those of the Initiates**

Section 3.2.5 discussed how singers-cum-dancers and the masses, as a single unit, manipulate their physical bodies to depict Bukusu desires and way of life. The body interactions, primarily through their body movements can be understood in tandem with the views of Dissanayake (2009), Dewey (1929: 277), Fraser (1983) and Kreydlin (2008) on the interactions among ritual participants as conduits of beliefs transmitted by the ceremony that allows participants to enact and share cultural and social meanings. The Bukusu circumcision ritual arena presents its participants as an organised body, one in which the initiate is fused

with the community. This is because the Bukusu man does not exist as an individual but as a part belonging to the whole community.

By engaging in dances and singing as singers-cum-dancers move around and interact with the initiates, the Bukusu circumcision ritual conceivably provides an occasion for their contact and performances to champion the ritual's objectives of masculinity. The collective spirit as manifest in the ritual participants' actions and interactions represent the ecstasy associated with having their son undertake the process of becoming a man. Their revelry, singing and expressive gestures bind the circumcision ritual participants together in facilitating acts of "performative masculinity." By and large, the connection among sex, alcohol, violence and masculinity permeates all aspects of the Bukusu circumcision ritual process.

The dances and body practices evident in almost all the events of the circumcision ritual by singers-cum-dancers are replicated by initiates during the coming out of seclusion. The interaction between the two is meant to inform the relatives of their sons' willingness to undergo the circumcision ritual and to invite them to participate in the ritual activities. The dances and body practices evident in almost all the events of the circumcision ritual by singers-cum-dancers are replicated by initiates during the coming out of seclusion. Right from the onset of the circumcision ritual, singers-cum-dancers accompany initiates toward the homes of the relatives of the initiates to pay courtesy calls.

The close proximity of the two sets of bodies, those of the initiates and the singers-cum-dancers, sparks robust feelings of excitement that evoke collaborative energy symbolizing the joy of the community. The circular body movements made by both by the singers-cum-dancers and the initiates serve the purpose of transmitting certain energies to the initiates necessary for withstanding the "knife." The body conventions of the initiates and the dancers become interactional and connected to the life of the Bukusu man. The close proximity exhibited by the participants towards the initiate through their bonding and cohering also helps in emphasising the significance of the circumcision process. It also serves the role of collectively admitting the initiate into the community as a responsible member.

The singers-cum-dancers are believed to take the initiates through rigorous exercises meant to enhance resilience and train them to endure the harsh realities of life. On the day of the "cut," the singers-cum-dancers parade the initiate while armed with all manner of weapons. Their

stern looks evoke the seriousness of the occasion in the initiate as he waits the circumciser's cut (see plate 18).



Plate 18 (Picture taken on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2018): At the initiate's home, the public gathers to witness the circumcision process.

The Bukusu also believe that the dances by the initiates and the singers-cum-dancers are a means of seeking the involvement of the ancestral spirits in the circumcision ritual. For instance, the dancers and initiates go into a trance with the hope of transmitting power to the initiates through their repetitive and highly frenzied movements while dancing.

#### **4.5 Father's Age Sets and those of the Initiates**

Chapter Three section 3.2.4 discussed the roles played by the father of the initiate's age sets and their body conventions within the Bukusu circumcision ritual. On the night of the eve of the Bukusu circumcision ritual, the members of the father's age set gather in a special hut selected for them. Among the Bukusu, the members of the father's age set are considered have immense power over the initiate during and after the circumcision ritual. Therefore, in every activity their bodies engage in, they act in tandem with the body practices of the initiate and what they anticipate the initiate to display during the "cut" and after the circumcision ritual. Wanyama (2006) and Were (2014) also observed that whatever the age sets engaged in bore a significant impact on the initiate.

For instance, the age sets hold their physical bodies in a composed manner and those who portray any signs of uneasiness are heavily fined. Every member within the hut sits with an uncurled posture as bending is prohibited. Other body practices barred include crossing of the legs, folding of the hands, sleeping or dozing off, fidgeting and making noise. The age sets, while assembled in the hut specially sequestered for them, were refrained from sitting while crossing legs, folding hands, leaning, dozing or fidgeting, gestures the initiate had displayed.

For example, he was demanded to stand straight, avoid crossing his legs, folding hands, clenching fists and fumbling. Any time the initiate clenched his fist, he was slapped and scorned. As for the age set, he was thrown out of the home of the ritual event and fined. Greetings too are emphasised whereby the younger men in terms of the age set cluster bend, lift the drinking straw up and pass by. Individuals belonging to the same age set cluster held the drinking straw, passed and then gave it back to whoever was drinking using it.

The crossing of the legs and the folding of the hands are regarded as bad omen for the initiate and his family. The Bukusu believe that the crossing of the legs makes the initiate unable to procreate, and if he happens to procreate, the offspring are likely to have deformities. It is also believed that something bad like cutting off of the initiate's penis during the "cut" might happen. The age sets claim that the crossing of the legs and the folding of the hands is regarded as cowardice and bad omen for the initiate and his family. For example, the Bukusu believe that the crossing of the legs makes the initiate unable to procreate or if he happens to procreate, the offspring are likely to have deformities. It is also believed that it could lead to something terrible happening like the failure of the ritual process.

During the time of the cut, the age sets avoid clenching fists, folding legs or crossing hands. Standing in the wrong direction during the juncture of the cut is believed to enhance the failure of the operation. Either the initiate would fear the knife or the circumcisers might chop off part of the initiate's penis.

#### **4.6 Slaughtered Animals and the Initiates**

Chapter Three section 3.2.6 discussed the roles and body conventions of the slaughtered animals and their body parts. From the events of August 2018, it became apparent that animals serve important purposes in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The examples below show that what is done with the bodies of the initiates and those of the animals form the basis of what is desired and done. This desire is critical in understanding the body in its entirety in the circumcision ritual as a reservoir embodying the values and needs of the Bukusu. It can also be understood alongside Li's (2018) understanding and theorization of the use of animals in ritual as propagating a spirit of subrogation, rebirth and philosophy of happiness for the ritual participants. Also, Douglas (1990:33) says that humans perceive how animals behave, relate to one another based on human relations. Odutsa (2021) observed the besides using chicken for food, the Luhya traditionally use it for rituals such as circumcision, welcoming

son-in-law, divine intervention and burial to signify the Luhya cultural concepts and inform their way of life.

In the Bukusu circumcision ritual, animals are carefully selected before being slaughtered. The reason behind the selection of individual animals for particular usages is because of the Bukusu belief that animals champion their cultural understanding of masculinity, fecundity and aspiration to have a successful ritual process. To enhance fecundity in their sons, the testicles of the slaughtered bull and those of the initiates are attached to each other. The same is observed when the meat of the slaughtered bull is eaten by the age sets when it is dried, hardboiled and not salted or spiced. The belief behind the eating of a dry piece of meat is to have a very sexually robust son with a “rigid” penis.

The uncle hands over or slaughters a bull or a he-goat for the initiate on the eve of the cut. The ritual rites the uncle performs such as dressing *likhoni* around the initiate’s neck foregrounds the symbolism of the meat as the uncle’s commitment to the process of the nephew’s transition process and his best wishes to the initiate’s future life (Simiyu, 2011). The animals used in the ritual must be healthy, not deformed, castrated or hornless to symbolise that the circumcision ritual is associated with fecundity and success. In another observation, any animal that bellows when it is about to be slaughtered is abandoned. The bellowing is related to the cries of a coward animal. Therefore, it is abandoned for fear that the initiate is likely to fear the “knife” and scream.

On the day of the coming out of seclusion, initiates wrestle a “leopard.” Immediately, the initiate ventured into the bush, the “leopard” attacks him and leaves marks on his arm. The initiate physically retaliates by wrestling back the “leopard.” This process subjects the initiate to physical and emotional tests. The relationships also act as a hallmark of the sacredness of the ritual and its secrets. The initiates are trained on how to uphold secretive information.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the relationships among bodies of the initiates with those of the other ritual participants. The ritual’s common symbolic themes deriving from the interactions include enhancement of virility and fecundity, victory, history, preparation for adult responsibilities, masculinity, recognition of the life cycle of the community, and to engender peaceful coexistence. Their interactions mediate distinct cognizance of the Bukusu socio-cultural values and advance the Bukusu circumcision goals. The primacy given to the body

significations in the Bukusu circumcision ritual participants' relationships rely on the interactions emanating from the bodies of the ritual participants to help them achieve a successful circumcision ritual, produce an ideal Bukusu man and cultivate character integrity and entrench masculinity. The chapter also establishes that it is through body interactions that various forms of masculinity are inscribed in initiates. The concept of masculinity is reinforced via body relations amongst bodies of different participants; initiates, age sets, circumcisers, singers-cum-dancers, parents and slaughtered animals, and their practices. Additionally, the body interactions, especially as they emerged through the initiates' and circumcisers' relationships, not only prepare initiates for the larger communal responsibilities, but also play a crucial role in constructing the identity of what defines a Bukusu man. Themes accruing from the selection of animals based on their body disposition stress the adherence to ritual purity and ritual laws, and the enhancement of prosperity, abundance, virtuous fecundity and enticement of the supernatural. The dance by both the initiates and the singers-cum-dancers is also envisioned to "entice" ancestral spirits especially when emotions escalate as witnessed with continued dancing. The coming together of the community members facilitates the entrenchment of manhood status. The participants' interactions, thus, are symbolic messages concerning personhood, status, becoming, manhood and community history inscribed in the body.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**FESTIVITY, INANITY AND BODY DISCOURSES IN THE BUKUSU**  
**CIRCUMCISION RITUAL**

**5.1 Overview**

Festivity, momentary inanity, peculiar behaviour and discourses of the body have always been examined as social experiences with a view to interpret their nature and purpose in the societies they occur. The Bukusu circumcision ritual creates a unique bond that unites participants as established by the conception of a utopian and a hypersexualized atmosphere where the temporary suspension of official dogmatism is observed. The aura created from the euphoria of the Bukusu celebrating the coming of age of one of their members creates a special type of communication replete with extreme exotic sexual symbolism, prescribed profanity, taboo words, and jocular performances as manifest in bodily praxis, songs and conversations.

This chapter discusses the symbolism apparent in the peculiar behaviour, excessive feasting, bawdiness, antagonisms and the sexually inflected texts in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. It also interrogates the nature of discourses on the body, both verbal and embodied, established during the Bukusu circumcision ritual. It elucidates images of robust erotic behaviour, bawdy language and jokes about the body and body practices. These include the use of erotic props or objects and intimate interactions, dancers, jocular taunts and the excessively bawdy songs and conversations.

One of the occurrences witnessed in the Bukusu circumcision ritual characteristic of the close proximity and familiarity fashioned by the participants and their open references to the bodies, body parts especially the genitalia and the processes they mediate. The presence of *busaa* (local brew) and food necessitated the manifestation of robust erotic feelings whereby the participants expressed themselves freely and frankly concerning issues such as bestiality, incest, copulation, pregnancy, impotence and barrenness.

The temporary “insanity” was also expressed through excessive consumption of alcohol, frivolous dressing (see plate 19), bawdiness, “violence” and wrecking of properties. Babcock (1974), Bakhtin (1994: 203), Banerjee (1987) and Evans-Pritchard (1929) assert that the euphoria exhibited in rituals and the uses of vulgarity, curses, and indecent phrases are unconsciously used in festivities to serve a particular people’s understanding of life. The

phenomenon of feasting and temporal freedom is extensive in the Bukusu circumcision ritual and so is the fascination with the body and its practices as elucidated in the subsequent subsections.

It is increasingly customary for the Bukusu circumcision ritual participants to conduct themselves in a “queer” manner (see plate 19) and display bawdiness. Out of the circumcision period, profanity and bawdiness are behaviours that are not found in everyday interactions and speech among the Bukusu. As the ritual seasons appear every even year and ritual participants take centre stage in participating in the initiate’s transformative stage, it becomes more socially tolerable for the Bukusu to acknowledge that they are entitled to a season of freedom. The circumcision ritual speaks in numerous voices at the same time as seen through the verbal and non-verbal discourses. Participants, both self-consciously and unconsciously, draw upon the symbolic resources of their Bukusu culture with their complete range of expressive forms, including rituals songs, dances and others gestures as well as developing voices of their ritual inventions.

The fascinating modes of inanity and the resultant talks on the body manifest themselves in the jocular episodes. Here, participants teasingly use bawdy language and taboo words to deride each other, jeer the initiates, and those in absentia. References are often directed to the physical bodies in an attack and counter-attack format. By and large, when several people in the circumcision ritual established friendly relations, their form of verbal intercourse also changed abruptly. They addressed each other casually, used offensive words affectionately, freely spoke out about topics considered taboo, bantered in mutual mockery and erotically engaged each other (see plates 10, 19 and 20). They also indulged in lewdness, expressed resentment and to some degree, a few jilted participants committed theft. Mwamzandi (2002) and Wako (2002, 2013) argue that mock antagonisms, joking relationships, and talk on buttocks and genitals, such as practical communicative tools where cultural meanings are communicated and where irreverent traits are derided and subjected to punitive condemnations.

Babcock (1974) and Clifford Geertz (1972) assert that literary play which draws upon the semiotic of the carnival is a serious aspect in several respects hence the need to examine the “deep” or “serious” sides of performances. The circumcision vision of the Bukusu society depends upon the mission and the ritual performances of the participants. The circumcision ritual participants’ activities are tainted with disorder or breakdown of and freedom from the

rules of everyday life with “un-seriousness” to depict the pressing matters of the community. First, the verbal manipulations and rearrangements of semantic categories are serious because they are socially and politically appalling. Secondly, the carnivalesque nature of the Bukusu circumcision ritual events is no less than an “element of a culture’s own negation.” That is, the ritual participants’ performances call attention to the social ills of the society and its institutions by playing one mode of arrangement off against another.

Through parody, the Bukusu circumcision ritual makes use of rules that it at the same time breaks. The participants’ laughter at someone breaking the conventional rules is dependent upon an awareness of the rules which are violated. Babcock (1974) asserts that parody is as much the merging, the reaffirmation and renewal, of an alternative performance code as it is the desecration of that code. The very act of deconstructing reconstructs and celebrates while in the process, rules assert themselves in another essential way. The Bukusu circumcision ritual may be a license from the provisions of the every-day, but it is not merely a depiction of disruptive behaviours. The ritual recreates the boundless world of carnival which can be read using Bakhtin’s (1994) theorization on the carnival as having its own language (or adequately, register). Firstly, the ritual spectacles (for instance, carnival processions and pageants, feasts, comic displays of the marketplace with clowns and fools, madmen). Secondly, the comic oral compositions (parodies), and lastly, the various genres of billingsgate (curses, insults, oaths, jokes).

Having observed the Bukusu circumcision ritual events alongside their images of queer behaviour, body imagery, jokes, and inanity, this study takes stock of the embodied messages and conversations as the focal point for advancing the Bukusu people’s cultural aspirations. This chapter is framed by the ideas drawn from Babcock (1974), Bakhtin (1994: 225), Banerjee (1987), Coates (1998: 127) and Evans-Pritchard (1929) who aver that carnivals and initiation ceremonies incorporate offensive language and indecent phrases unspoken of in formal conversations, with the aim of acquiring a particular meaning and addressing a primary state of humankind. Through vulgarity, sexual pleasures and celebrations, real-world experiences are portrayed in bodily forms of ritualistic practices and enacted as part of life itself. The field experience can be understood by interrogating the effects of the feelings, expressions and memories of the circumcision ritual participants as communicating significant cultural concepts and as having substantial impact on the lives of the community way after the close of the festivals.

## 5.2 Interpretation of the Dynamics of the Feast within the Bukusu circumcision ritual

This section explores the intrinsic connection among the elements of feasting, food, local brew, free speech and the conduct of the Bukusu circumcision ritual participants. Abundant *busaa* and food is prepared and served to the many relatives and visitors available during the circumcision ritual. The Bukusu circumcision ritual occasion creates an arena where unique forms of free and familiar contact occur among the participants who are otherwise conventionally separated by the barriers of property, age, caste, sex and profession.

The circumcision ritual participants are “freed from the shackles of convention” compelling them to act more boldly than usual and in the process serve as a site for the symbolic location of the society’s needs. Incidences of feasting underscore the connection among alcohol, food, eating, masculinity, strength and the body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The merry atmosphere gives license to the ritual participants to openly and erotically express themselves in a manner that seems to compensate for their usually submissive role in ordinary interactions. For instance, calls like the one below were common occurrences and in situations where alcohol was not served to the revellers, the singers-cum-dancers went on rampage destroying property:

“I don’t want to brag about my tools! Listen to me, young girl, your vagina has no springs! Strip naked I want to mount you. I want you to feel the vigour of the sharpened weapon. Forget about those small filthy uncircumcised ones you’ve been playing with.”

This sort of bragging was a common occurrence and none appeared to take offence. The revellers freely engaged in incessant banter that was laced with sexually erotic physical actions and laughter. The free mingling of participants without demarcation as necessitated by the feast provides the ground for participants to blend and in the process, symbolize the Bukusu cultural understanding of sex and adherence to societal norms. Such observations can be understood from notions of Douglas (1968, 1975) and Radcliffe-Brown (1940, 1949) on blatant sexual advances in ritual as frames to manage ambiguities and ambivalences in relations among communities and laying bare the taken-for-granted issues of society. However, there is also a degree of ambivalence in that even though food and drinks are served to enhance generosity, foster strength and entrench sexual virility, excessive wastages are likewise castigated. Thus, the feast is part of the Bukusu circumcision ritual that not only

binds the ritual participants together but also becomes an enabler of the acts of performative masculinity. In many respects, the relationship among violence, masculinity, alcohol, and sex as aspects of the Bukusu circumcision ritual are emphasised.

The emphasis on the relationship between feasting and body imagery raises a number of specific themes such as copulation, fecundity and cohesion which direct this section's inquiry. First is the idea of the collective spirit and its connection to feasting and the frequent references on the participants' bodies. Secondly, it is the carnivalesque behaviour and disarray effected by the license during the circumcision ritual. The views from numerous scholars (Babcock, 1974; Bakhtin, 1994; Eliade, 1965; Montemuro, 2003; Turner, 1967) show that there is an interconnection between feasting and sexuality in the initiation rituals. The subsequent sections 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 illustrate how the acts of feasting, exuberant joy and the intimate talks on bodies within the Bukusu circumcision ritual offer a complete picture of the community's socio-cultural concepts and worldview as discussed in the subsequent sections.

### **5.2.1 Aesthetics of Joking Relationships and Images of Corporeal Humour**

The Bukusu circumcision ritual is imbued with the carnival spirit characterised by constant jokes on body parts and sexual acts. During fieldwork, the researcher was cognizant of the fact that apart from the outward seriousness attributed to the circumcision ritual, most of the circumcision process was suffused with the jocular, the peculiar use of language, the display of overindulgences in vulgarity and the playfulness of the participants.

Were (2014) underscores the essence of language in communicating the community's concepts. Fairclough (1989, 1993), Hu (2012) and Talbot *et al.* (2003) aver that language has power and is effective in constructing a people's identity, ethnicity and ideology. Karimova (2010) and Kakraba and Addei (2011) underscore the effect of abusive and vulgar language as extricating the speaker from social orders and conventional canons and as a therapeutic tool. Much of the focus in the Bukusu circumcision ritual places a lot of emphasis on the genitalia, anus and buttocks.

The joking groups were legitimized by the feast within the circumcision ritual to act "outrageously," swear, insult, make blatant sexual gestures and advances, create "havoc" and sometimes steal food, all without causing offense. The episodes cast no doubt that the Bukusu circumcision ritual is imbued with Bakhtin's view of the carnival. The ritual is characterized

by the joking on matters touching on erotic issues and the uninhibited references to specific parts of the human body as shown in the following text:

**Woman:** *Ebaye! Esino siloko sina? Nabukula omusecha niye nauka nandi esang'i mubulili. Khane nicha khumanyilisha mbo khane ali eyeyi endosi.*

(Huh, what a curse? I chose a husband whom I thought was a beast in bed. But later, I found out that he was an aged castrated bull.)

The woman metaphorically uses the terms “beast” to refer to a man with great stamina during sex and “aged castrated bull” to refer to the sexually inadequate. The woman uses the imagery of “beast” and “aged castrated bull” to express her displeasure of being starved of sex and also to express her need for a sexually robust man. Such references to the body processes are significant bearing in mind that one of the core purposes of the Bukusu circumcision ritual is to enhance fecundity, entrench manhood and permit the newly circumcised men to exercise their sexual freedom. The Bukusu believe that it is only through being circumcised that a man can attain the vigour to satisfy a woman sexually. Sexually weak men are derided. In the same occasion as the previous one, the following discourse ensued:

**Woman:** *(Addressing a man in the seating) Icha ewase musilo musale wase! Ndakhuwa buchuli bwase okholekho ekasi. Olakunyola busa ngene wenyanga bora lifumo lio libe lilioki. Ese nabele omwibo khukhwama nge nama munda mwa mai wase. Endamba omusecha.*

(Come to my house at night, man! I'll give you my naked body to work on. You'll get it in all measures as long as your spear is sharpened and strong. I've been a widow since I came from my mother's womb. I don't have a husband.)

The husband to the woman was around and he became sullen because he felt derided on his ability to perform in bed. This triggered uproarious laughter from the observers. Such raw wit combined with the metaphor of spear created humour. The crowd laughed at the audacity of the woman to openly challenge a man for sex if only he was sexually virile. Though satirical, it emphasizes the significance of sexual vitality in a man. Still, the prominence of “a sharp and strong” circumcised penis is underscored. Such jokes on the human body, especially the genitals and sexual matters among others, were a common occurrence and formed an essential part of the circumcision ritual and the Bukusu communal life.

On some occasions, females deride the genitalia and prowess of the males as they praise their own. Some women derisively joke that they have multiple secret lovers with whom they cohabit. The men counter by retorting that after all, all they get from the women are venereal ailments, a ramification of adultery. The whole atmosphere is buoyant with joviality as males and females praise the pleasures of sexual intercourse. In a real-life situation, such assertions would be hidden from the public ear as extra-marital affairs are frowned upon in the Bukusu society. The circumcision ritual arena affords its participants the license to joke about such matters. Below is a typical example of a jocular exchange between a man and a woman:

**Woman:** (*Gesturing to an energetic young man by her side, oblivious of her husband's presence*) *Inja musecha wase we kumubili kwe sichuma. Newenya khukhombakho khubukhi bwase mala okonekho musifwa siase. Inja luno musilo.*

(Come here, my man with a penis of steel. If you want to feast on my honey and sleep in my nest come tonight!)

This annoyed the husband who retorted:

**Man:** *Ewe waba orie mala endiano? Omusecha otamba endene keche akhwale omukhasi wase mali ndionao? Kaba kario khoche mukhasi. Basakhulu omukhasi yuno kukatapila ne kunie kwewe kwabalaaa.*

(How is that while I'm here? A man with no penis to come and chew my woman while I'm here? Anyway, go on young man! That woman is a caterpillar and her vagina is hollow. You'll die on top of her. Don't say I didn't warn you!)

By calling upon a younger man to have sex with her, the woman mocks her husband's inability in bed. The husband not accepting to fall to the wife's scorn retorts that the woman is sexually insatiable. The husband perhaps points out the "hollow" vagina he "drilled" as a sign of his sexual robustness insisting that the young man cannot equal him. Such occurrences also allowed participants to express the naughty thoughts and antagonisms lurking behind the suppressed moods that are often openly erotic.

The jocular aspects of the ritual directed at the body emancipates the participants' spontaneity from the chains of customary norms and restraints imposed during the non-ritual days. The ritual is tainted with what looks like "moral decline" as evident through their unrestrained verbal conversations and gestures. The ongoing actions enhance the Bukusu's consciousness

of their culture with correctness and consequently, foregrounds the attainment of the purpose of circumcision which is “making a man out of a boy.” The address below depicts one of the many incidences in which the Bukusu circumcision ritual participants, liberated from the norms of etiquette and civility imposed at other times, freely joke about the genitalia and sexual intercourse:

**Teenager:** *Ewe mukha marehemu ndecha ekhwekeshe bunulu bwe endene. Basakhulu, luno mukha marehemu alalenya khu sitanda. Namanyile nandi emalwo eyo bufumbo bwong'ene.* (You widow, I will come to show you the pleasure of the penis! Gentlemen, today, the widow will moan and groan on bed. I know down there is just a bush of pubic hair.)

**Widow:** *Yicha wukhwale oulushe kumubili. Lola khumunie kumutoratore. Okuno kulakhuwa bunulu bwosi.* (Come and copulate to relieve my body! See, have a look at my wet vagina! That will give you much pleasure).

**Teenager:** *Okhekalayo tawe butiu bwarura! Kumunie! Kumunie!* (Do not close I'm ejaculating! Vagina! Vagina!)

**Widow:** *Kamafuli kamanefu, kharene khatiti. Lola likanda lileyi. Ese nanya omusecha omuangafu. Ese mukha marehemu otambile endene. Ese khwira mwanawe!* (I have a large vagina, yours is a small penis. Look, a long clitoris! I want a real man. I, the widow who has missed a good penis. I can kill you in bed. Who wants the vagina?)

**Woman:** *(Sneeringly) Nakhablela bisinde bino nandi birene biabwe bititi sana khunjikusia lakini biakhaile busa bili bienya khukona nase. Ndabakanianga, senenya bibiana bisiunya chifunie binjafusie kumwena tawe! E sese nanya omusecha omuangafu. Cha engo obolele mao oli luno musilo khengona nende raro. Aundi omwenoyo anyala kanjikusia.* (I've told you that your penis is too small to satisfy my vagina but you insist on wanting to have sex with me. Wait until you're circumcised, then we can talk. Be warned, I don't want small boys who still smell of smegma to dirt my vagina! I need a grown-up man's penis. Go home and tell your mother that tonight I will sleep with your father. At least his penis can satisfy me.)

**Boy:** *(Sensing defeat) Eshida yoo eli mbo kumunie kwoo kwabalaa lunde khane kamake kamenyamo. Omusecha yesiyesi okhakakho khukhwingsia endene mumwena kwoo enyala yamamo yatikhekake lundi eli nende endwasi.* (The

problem with you is that your vagina is too wide and full of termites. Any man who dares penetrate it with the penis, his penis will come out shredded in pieces and bursting with syphilis.)

What is conspicuous about such jokes is the ideal equality between men, women, children and the elderly in the jesting and mutual teasing. The apparent freedom of expression affords them an opportunity to lay bare the severe or taken-for-granted matters of society and be in a position effect change. By constantly focusing on copulation and related issues, themes like sexual virility and fecundity are emphasised. The boy demonstrates his desire for sex only to be brought down by the woman who desires a circumcised man. Her emphasis for a circumcised man comes from the fact that the Bukusu regard the uncircumcised as unmanly and immature. Thus, the moral of the jokes reminds the uncircumcised that sex is a preserve of only the circumcised men and, therefore, challenged them to get circumcised. The mere fact that one, regardless of gender or age, could express oneself on subjects considered taboo in other times depicts the significance of the apparent license in the Bukusu circumcision ritual arena toward tackling issues related to construction of manhood.

Abrahams (1974), Evaldsson (2005), Evans-Pritchard (1956, 1965), Kochman (1983) and Labov (1972) have demonstrated that ritual insulting presupposes a well-informed interactional competence part on the part of participants. The Bukusu circumcision nearly falls into the classification of the rites established and suffused by bawdiness. However, it contains important happenings exalting marriage, whose relations are typically inhibitory of expressions of vulgarity. The jokes and the gross delight in the sensuality of Bukusu circumcision ritual events transform the seriousness of official ritual and bring it down to the level where uninhibited references to particular parts of the body and jokes about certain bodily functions are communicated.

Images of bodily humour were also manifest through the way ritual participants manipulated their bodies by engaging in amatory actions (see plate 19) and sexually conversations. Gluckman (1935, 1963) and Montemuro (2003) conducted research on the participants dressing code and behaviour in different rituals and asserted that the excessiveness of sexual expressions within the structure of such rituals as initiation is meant to act as a kind of compensation for a usually submissive role in the official days. During the Bukusu circumcision ritual, men put on women's clothing and adorned themselves in phony breasts improvised from plant products. Others rushed forward leaving the procession behind

enacting orgy scenes (see plate 19). In another episode, a man took a walking stick, laced it on his groins and kept pushing it through a woman's skirt. Though such scenes elicited humour, their manifest function became symbols representing joy, issues of fecundity and copulation. However, the same gestures achieved a degree of ambivalence in moral instructions whereby excessive sexual intimations, rape and homosexuality tendencies are rebuked.



Plate 19 (Picture taken on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2018): Men, one dressed as a woman enacting a sexual scenario as the other revellers cheer.

The fact that such representations of sex matters as evidenced in the plates and conversations contained in jokes and actions were treated with wit during the Bukusu circumcision ritual was quite telling. The jocular relationships become vehicles through which the Bukusu traditions and customs of the circumcision ritual get ingrained in the initiates. Babcock (1974), Czachesz (2014) and McMahon (2000) assert that the roles of jokes and humour in rituals is to minimize deviance from the society's moral code and function as a release from all that may create a serious conflict if posed in a non-humorous context. The people's laughter at someone breaking the rules of sexual intimacy is dependent upon an awareness of the conventional sexual rules which are violated. Thus, the parody is as much as the very act of deconstructing while in the process reconstructing where rules assert themselves in another indispensable way. The humorous events also offer a cathartic role to the ritual participants.

In summary, the jocular elements present in the Bukusu circumcision ritual provide a propitious platform for depicting human behaviour, sexual lessons and entrenchment of manhood. The jocular context offers elders an appropriate opportunity to offer advice to the youth pertaining challenges facing the community such as crime, poverty and chronic diseases. The jocular exchanges provide a condition of euphoria and induce a state of ritual well-being triggering pleasure in participants who, in the process, propel the ritual to its apex.

### **5.2.2 Prescribed Vulgarities and Taboo Words**

This subsection explores ways in which the body imagery as manifest through the ritual participants' engrossment in taboo expressions and vulgarity frame the Bukusu circumcision narratives and experiences as central to the meaning-making. The readings by Fairclough (1989: 1993), Hu (2012) and Talbot *et al.* (2003) on language as powerful and as an effective tool in constructing a people's identity, ethnicity and ideology read into the current study in identifying meanings that accrue from the use of taboo words and profanity by the participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Thomson (1935) says of licensed swearing and obscenities in rituals as engendering a state of euphoria. The Bukusu circumcision ritual is a platform replete with the participants' fixation in disproportionate expanses of obscenities and "debauched" language mainly directed toward the body.

Indangasi *et al.* (2013) highlight the pivotal role of taboo words as depicting sexual experiences or referring to parts of the human body that are not supposed to be discussed in public or polite society. The taboo words are characteristically emotive, thus, arouse feelings of anger, revulsion and excitement (Akmajian *et al.*, 2001). During the Bukusu circumcision ritual, the ritual participants often mention words like *kumunie* (vagina), *endene* (penis), *kumutwi* (anus) and *khwala* (make sex), *kamatakho ka mao* (your mother's buttocks) and *kumunie kwa mao* (your mother's vagina) as evident in the conversations below.

From a pragmatic standpoint, the humiliating processes as manifest through the abuses directed toward the bodies of the initiates and of those who have transgressed the norms of the Bukusu community, achieve their didactic power when tied to the core values on which the Bukusu circumcision ritual is based. The frequent use of taboo words and vulgarity presuppose a well-informed interactional competence on the part of participants to engender a state of euphoria. From such utterances, as illustrated below, the initiates are taught the virtues of humility and resilience. The insults not only humble but also revitalize the initiates to develop courage in readiness for the cut. The concept of humbling before elevating is key

in engraining power vested upon the circumcised. The following is an address from an uncle to an initiate:

**Uncle:** (*Slaps the initiate twice*) *Chisaaa cholile ewe mwanawe. Sewikana sai tawe. Chisuku chawe! Ndolele mumoni! Ese sendi kumunie kwa mao tawe. Namwe wenyese nifule mala khifulamile? Ewe mwanawe, ese ekhulama!*  
(The time has come you boy! You can't change your mind now. It's time! Look at me in the eyes! Your mother's buttocks! Your mothers' vagina! Whom do you want to show fear? You dare and I will beat you (*the uncle slaps him again*)! Here we do not fear the knife!)

In the above address, the uncle challenges the boy to face the pain that comes with circumcision. The uncle repetitively mentions the taboo words more so touching on the initiate's mother's private parts. The seriousness that pervades the above admonishing is meant to remind the initiate that the ritual must go on at whatever cost as there is no turning back. The initiate is left with no choice but to gather enough courage for the cut. In the process, manliness is exalted while fear is lambasted as shameful not only to the initiate but also to his entire family. These prescribed insults and mentioning of taboo words became segments of a multiplex perception of the Bukusu life where manhood and virtues of courage, masculinity and perseverance are cultivated. On this basis, the uncle in this context is in a better position to influence the needed transformation. Thus, there is also a degree of ambivalence in moral instruction that emerges from the mentioning of these taboo words. When the uncle mentions the buttocks of the initiate's mother and generally, the female genitalia, the instructions emanating from it are highly moralistic and touch on issues of character development and matters identity. The insults humble the initiate and challenge him to muster the courage needed for the cut.

The effect of abusive and vulgar language in the Bukusu circumcision ritual also extricates the speaker from social orders and conventional rules. For that matter, none is limited to express oneself about any pressing issue at hand. The uses of vulgarity, especially the kind that targets the body, purposefully shock the audience drawing their concentration to the issues at hand. The following conversation demonstrates the overemphasis on the genitalia, sex and descriptions of the naked body:

**Man 1:** *Ewe Wanyonyi! Omukhasi oyusi ano omukhwale. Namwe Sali nende kumunie tawe?* (Hey Wanyonyi! Here is a woman you fuck her. Or doesn't she have a vagina?)

**Man 2:** *Bolela kumunie nikwo olalomanga okwo kwicha ano kubone sichuma.* (Tell that vagina you're talking about to come here and have a taste of my metal.)

**Man 1:** *Ewe Nafuna! Lera kumunie kwoo ano basecha benya khukhwala.* (Hey Nafuna! Bring your vagina here men want to fuck it.)

**Woman:** *Endene eli waye? Kumunie kwase kwakala nono kwenya bakukhwale. Ndolele endene yimile busa mala yoma busa nge sichuma.* (Where is that penis? My vagina is itching, and it wants to be fucked now. Get me an erect penis that is as hard as steel.)

**Man 1:** *Wanyonyi icha ano. Kumunie okusi. Muninekho.* (Wanyonyi come over. Here is the vagina. Mount her).

**Woman:** *Mbukule namwe ewe omukhasi namwe wakana sewengila tawe?* (Take this vagina, or are you a woman or an uncircumcised boy?)

**Man 1:** *Kwanza lekha endolekho. wefwarire esuruari? Newabikile bufumbo kweli?* (First, let me have a look at it. Do you have pants on or not? Have you shaved your groin area?)

**Woman:** *(Lifting her dress for all to see) Lola, kumunie okusi. Senabikile tawe sewabone. Ndabeka muchuli asubuhi ne babana.* (Look, here is the vagina. I have not shaved it as you can see. I will shave it tomorrow in the morning with the initiates.)

In the conversation above, taboo words characterise much of the language used in the banter among the members. The genitals are frequently mentioned. The conversations were often accompanied by the public display of nakedness by women to the amazement of the onlookers. The banterers are talking about genitals and the (un)shaved groin areas. In this context, the unshaved groin area is perceived as representative of the unclean and profane status similar to the uncircumcised while the shaved groin area signifies a circumcised man. The shaving of the pubic area heralded the putting on of new clothes by initiates.

As Indangasi *et al.* (2013) observes, the pivotal role of taboo words depicts sexual experiences or refer to parts of the physical body that are not supposed to be talked about in public. Evans-Pritchard (1956, 1965) assert that vulgarity and the use of taboo words

targeting the body and its practices as evident in some rituals indicate a society's withdrawal from its ordinary inhibitions, hence giving a people special channels of expressing their socio-cultural values and feelings. The Bukusu circumcision nearly falls into this classification of the rituals replete with bawdiness. Except during an occasion like the Bukusu circumcision ritual, taboo matters concerning genitals and copulation are never publicly talked. The ritual contains important incidences that extoll marriage, sexual prowess and fertility. The following conversation comprised boys, who were as young as twelve years engaging an elderly woman:

**Boy 1:** (*Laughing uproariously*) *Kumunie kwo kwabalaa khumusecha mulala.* (That vagina of yours is too big for a man to handle!)

**Woman:** *Wenyile khukhwala mwanawe? Icha osokemo.* (Did you want to fuck me? Come and drown in it.)

**Boy 2:** *Kumunie kwoo kwenyekhana eyeyi. Omusecha sakhunyala tawe.* (That vagina can only be satisfied by a bull. Not a man.)

**Woman:** *Ata eyeyi seinyala tawe. Nenya epunda. Ndolele epunda.* (Even a bull can't satisfy me. I want a donkey. Get me a donkey!)

**Boy 3:** (*Groping his genitals as he gestures toward a woman*) *Ese khukhwala mukhasiwe yakhaba noli nende bufumbo enge kumusiru. Ese khupamo busa endene mukumunie lubire mpaka emutwi yakhaba noli nende omusecha.*

(I will fuck you woman even if you have pubic hair like a forest! I will hit my penis right in your vagina till it comes out via your anus! It doesn't matter whether you have a husband.)

**Woman:** *Wenya kumunie? Bukula. Kumunie kwase kuli nende bulesi bwe kumubili kumubafo, nende kamaneko kamabofu nende butiu bukali. Lola, bufumbo twa. Icha otilekho khumunie kumunefu mala kufwototokha. Likanda lilioko ata lilauna endene yoo.*

(Do you want a vagina? Take it! My vagina is thirsty for a sharp and big penis, with big testicles and a lot of semen. (*Lifting her dress*) See, there's no pubic hair! Come touch my fleshy and soft vagina. The clitoris is sharp it will pierce your penis!)

The above conversation depicts the apparent use of vulgarity in the Bukusu circumcision ritual, the age or sex notwithstanding of the participants notwithstanding. The participants,

triggered by the scandalous and eccentric behaviour, utilise the arena to openly express their repressed sexual wishes and desires of lust and sex. There is also a reversal of the violence of the sexual encounter. The woman's desire for "a sharp" and big penis implies the role the Bukusu circumcision ritual plays in its intent to make men sexually robust as compared to the uncircumcised boys. The frequency at which taboo subjects were tackled and sexually aggressive discourses were permitted during the circumcision ritual made the initiates aware of their bodies and sexuality, though in ordinary interactions, the words characteristically arouse feelings of disgust and excitement.

Several issues are apparent. First, the abuses, profanity and improprieties represent the unofficial elements of discourse in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The circumcision ritual liberates participants from the official norms and prohibitions creating a distinct collectivity where a group of people became open and free in expressing themselves. Secondly, the crowd at the Bukusu circumcision ritual context can be understood as a kind of collective experience. The two are part of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The free atmosphere and speech created during the circumcision ritual, the relationship between sex, manhood and vulgarity explain the peculiar references on the body during the ritual. In as much as some elements look non-serious, they convey deep Bukusu values that inform their worldview.

### **5.2.3 Disarray, Inanity and Mutuality of Intimate Social Life**

The Bukusu circumcision ritual presents a scenario characterised by elements of disarray and mutuality of intimate relations among the ritual participants. This section highlights the site of "madness" or abnormality and excessive freedom as some of the most outstanding elements where body significations become manifest in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. This section is informed by the works of Babcock (1974), Bakhtin (1994: 231), Fiske (1989) and Jackson (1983) who see rituals as presenting participants with a world where the common man is offered the platform to enjoy the illusion of freedom brought by the celebration. They also posit that festivals provide a unique opportunity for the development of intimate relations, the freedom to express oneself and act as avenues for society to realize and experience its potential. The section operates on the premise that the Bukusu circumcision ritual effectively recreates a world envisaged as free and that augments participation as well as disseminates information allowing individuals to discover, in their psyche, a way of producing, out of the temporary "inaneities," something which imparts to a renewal of an individual and the social order.

The experience of the Bukusu circumcision ritual reveals a community immersed in unlimited freedom replete with “inanity.” The observed episodes significantly fronted the body as a site of meaning within the disarrays. Singers-cum-dancers freely indulged in explicit mock sexual and non-sexual behaviours that seemed unacceptable in their normal day-to-day lives. For instance, the actions of grabbing of the people’s private parts, seizing people’s farm produce, destroying property, mounting on each other, and the exposure of nakedness was rampant. Notably, it is worth noting that the theft, the assault and damage done during the circumcision ritual went unpunished.

Most circumcision rituals have been observed to be tainted by cases of moral decay and violence. Among the Xhosa, this comprises, among other things, a growing number of criminal happenings, drug abuse and inhumane behaviour involving the newly emerged men (Mcotheli, 2006; Myemana, 2004; Ntombana, 2011). Ratele (2008) observes that in various cultures, violence is fundamental to being a man and it is habitually men who enact violence. On this basis, men are believed to be in a better position to effect the needed change. The common occurrence observed in the Bukusu circumcision ritual was the participants’ acts of storming of people’s homes by the participants, destroying property and forcefully seizing of food stuffs and farm produces. In addition, as part of their performance, revellers, both male and female, undressed each other as they massaged their private parts and rolled on the ground. Women chased men, groped their genitals as they gyrated about in ecstasy. The participants freely engaged in excessive orgies and expressed the desire to engage in the normally forbidden behaviours such as promiscuity. Other incidences included the singing of ribald songs and performances mostly targeting or involving the body.

The ritual celebrates the coming of age of their son, hence, the reason for the circumcision ritual participants to sing, dance and engage in whatever “madness” they feel. This is because the Bukusu regard the circumcision ritual as a wedding. In the process, the expulsion of fear becomes equal to the creation of strength which like “madness,” impacts the lives of the participants outside of the circumcision ritual. These observations reverberate with the interpretations of Gluckman (1959) and Leach (1961) of festivals as a kind of “safety valve.” Babcock (1974), Fernandez (1986) and Jackson (1983) show that the “madness” evident in initiation ceremonies as an artefact by which groups reconstruct moments to avoid actual conflicts that might threaten the society. The actions portrayed by the bodies in the circumcision ritual (as depicted in plate 19), thematize issues of copulation and discipline

within the Bukusu community. Ambivalently, through the acts of same-sex partners having mock sex, publicly uttering taboo expressions, stealing and destroying of property, certain vices like same-sex relations, theft, rape and hooliganism are discouraged.

Through the configuration of the free interactions of participants as manifest in their engagements in the elements of disarray and inanity, issues of relationships and virtue are articulated. It is on the firmness of these unique possibilities of free expression that the Bukusu rebuild their world and their mode of life. The views by Babcock (1974) and Jackson (1983) regarded the excessive freedom and the commotions apparent in rituals as a mode of life in which participants are allowed to act and express themselves in a manner they would not on normal days. In the process, the dreaded and unspoken issues get a chance to be voiced and articulated. Therefore, the Bukusu circumcision ritual with its festive mode, expressions of chaos or topsy-turvydom provides an arena in which issues of sex, identity, relationships and virtue are channeled. It also provides the possibilities in which bodies represent issues such as enhancement of sexual potency and manhood, status, responsibility and discipline that are circumcision context-specific. Such practices demonstrate the Bukusu way of understanding, a positivity, a cultural interpretation and also a joyful affirmation of becoming of a renewed society.

The way of the Bukusu circumcision ritual opens up and allows the enactment of possibilities in a lighter way as entertainment can also be viewed from an existential standpoint as a means of enabling the Bukusu to recreate their world and mode of life. Borrowing cues from Bakhtin (1994: 198) on the carnival clowns and fools as the “accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of the carnival season,” it is through the harmony and reciprocity of participants as created by the feast that the initiate in the Bukusu circumcision ritual achieves a sense of self and the external world. To the Bukusu, the act of the carnivalesque as evident in the circumcision ritual allows the community to act “abnormally” but only for a while and enable the change of status, entrenchment of masculinity and cultivation of character.

### **5.3 Antipathies and Crossing Gender Margins**

Participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual naturally manipulate different aspects of their bodily praxis including their bodies, excessive verbal lewdness and widespread transvestism to perform gender roles and antagonisms. For instance, during the dances, a few men wear women’s attire while some women wear men’s clothes, each clownishly mimicking the

others gender's roles and mannerisms (see plates 11, 19 and 20) to express their resentments about each other, to represent the society's understanding of their way of life and as a joyful affirmation of becoming. Leach (1961: 132-6) and Stallybrass and White (2002) observed that there are instances of role reversals in rituals whereby the conventional structure of the societal norms does not constrain behaviour during rituals. The Bukusu circumcision ritual presents a scenario characterised by a shift of roles and dramatization of antagonism sometimes through parody. For instance, the participants' actions depict a scenario where men take over duties such as cooking, cleaning and serving visitors, which among the Bukusu culture are customarily considered for females. What is thematised from sharing of roles is the need to cultivate unity between men and women. In the process, a sense of harmonious living, hard work and being responsible is cultivated.

Rigby (1968: 172-3) in studying the Gogo of Tanzania, viewed transvestism, often accompanied by exaggerated and comical parodies of the opposite sexes, as a more practical way of regarding the multifaceted nature of the Gogo's culture. According to Rigby, calamities such as drought, barrenness in women, crop failure, and cattle diseases are regarded as reversals in fortune, which can be mitigated by manipulating gender categories during the ritual time. A similar trend is observed in the Bukusu circumcision ritual where women dress as men, mimic men's demeanour, perform male tasks, and vice-versa to induce a reversal in correlative domains of the ordinary way of doing things while men vice versa (see plate 20). Crocker (1982:80) argues that by donning masks, masquerading as other people and utilizing the license present in the ritual, people do things or become what they could never be in real-life. Below is on a discussion of issues of affirming and blurring gender boundaries and the antagonisms between the young and the elderly, and between females and males.

### **5.3.1 Males Versus Females**

The issue of antagonisms is a convenient point of departure for introducing the body and the ritual conversations as fundamental to the understanding of this section. The performances by the Bukusu circumcision participants surface nuanced contests mostly revolving around, first, the issue of affirming and blurring the normative boundaries between masculinity and femininity, and secondly, the rebellion between genders. The antagonisms are evident through songs (see Song Appendix 5) and cross-dressing (see plates 11, 19 and 20), women wear clothes regarded to be for men while men put on clothes viewed as feminine as they

mimic each other's behaviour. Gluckman (1954) and Taaffe (1993) provide an appropriate frame within which we can read such deviations whereby females and males contrast sharply with that of their ordinary lives.

Quite often women would deride men, especially on matters copulation while men also try to hit back. By making fun of men who sexually inept, women are in a position to effect the needed change concerning masculinity and fecundity. The circumcision ritual events demonstrate how, in a nuanced way, women aspire to be like men and play those roles they deem men have failed in undertaking without any offense. Women, and sometimes men, feminize men as shown in plate 19. Nadel (1954: 113) observed that among the Nupe initiation ritual, boys wear a piece of woman's cloth to emulate and caricature women's movements and mannerisms as a way to elucidate the strategies the opposite gender adopts to reveal the gender antagonisms. The song *Kumunie Epombo* exemplifies the way the antagonisms between men and women manifest in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. In the song, men deride female terming them as having extremely insatiable appetites for sex. Thus:

***Kumunie Epombo* (English translation "Vagina is a Hollow Pipe")**

**Soloist Response**

Pipe Vagina is a pipe

Pipe Vagina is a pipe

In the song, the vagina is referred to as "wide" and it is figuratively compared to a pipe. The opposition is depicted through men expressing their concealed emotions regarding women who engage in sex with numerous men or who seem to overwhelm them in bed. The song dramatizes the continuous contest between men and women by depicting the normal patriarchal and masculine script of denigrating the women's sexual organ. Arguably, the men also express their emasculation in the hands of a sexually demanding woman.

Apart from the songs and conversations, the male-female antagonism is expressed toward women through men wearing females' clothes (see plate 11, 19 and 20). Crossdressing was a common trend in the Bukusu circumcision ritual depicting men in wigs and weaves, female garments, affected breasts and buttocks. In most cases, the scenes (as depicted in plates 11, 19 and 20) assume the comic roles of women overwhelmed by excessive sexual urges that need to be tamed. In this context, male maskers improvise massive breasts and hips made from rugs and plant materials, as they wantonly chase, dance with, and even kiss onlookers,

passers-by and trees. For example, Leathem (1994:58) and Ware (2001) observed that gender inversive disguises filter the characteristics of the opposite sex for humorous effect. The scenes (see plate 20) in the Bukusu circumcision ritual elicit humour which serves a cathartic role for the ritual participants. The typical symbolic themes emanating from these actions include complementary opposition between women and men, the celebration of masculine virility and preparation of the boys for marriage.



Plate 20 (Picture taken on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2018): A male reveller dressed in a woman's attire with semi-naked men.

The swapping of garments and aping of the opposite gender's mannerisms is also viewed as ritual manipulation meant to satirize certain behaviours and reveal much about how each gender sees itself and the other whose face they temporarily assume through ritual drama. The comic gender reversals of the Bukusu circumcision ritual are parodied. How different comic actors or masquerades exaggeratingly perform these inversions is significant to the Bukusu. By exaggerating aspects pertaining dress code, especially through men disguising as women by using palpable features of breasts and pregnant bellies, laughter is provoked. This laughter distances the disguised and the clownish performer from his or her role and in the process, dramatize the often-undesirable sexual behaviours like homosexuality which is detested among the Bukusu on the one hand. On the other hand, they express a type of masculinity linked to sexual violence.

Ware (2001) observes that gender reversals and roleplaying act as ways of asserting the power of masculinity while attempting to lessen the power of femininity. When females in the Bukusu circumcision ritual cross-dress, they too focus on predictable male features such as facial hair, comic costumes, and affect the possession of penises and testes. Generally, women's roleplaying seemed less aggressively sexual as compared to those of men. Unlike males, women acting like men do not exaggerate too much of their body attires but all in all, they at times chase spectators and passers-by, kiss them as they grope their genitals. The foreskin of a boy is regarded as a woman's cloth and by "cutting" it off, the initiate, still regarded as a child, is believed to be undressing from the woman's "attire" and putting on a man's "attire." Frederick Kiberenge, a circumciser (Interviewed, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018) claims that the usage of the male garments by women denotes the end of the boy's identification with the social realm of children and women. Thus, the acts of antagonisms dramatize the restlessness over separation-individuation through imagery that sustains yet distorts the usual margins between motherhood and masculinity.

### **5.3.2 The Young Versus the Elderly**

This subsection explores ways through which the body in the Bukusu circumcision ritual acts as a site of antagonism between the young and the elderly. Sub-section 5.3.1 of this chapter has indicated that the Bukusu circumcision ritual provides an arena for a general airing of grievances and settling of scores. Through the Bukusu circumcision ritual, songs, performances and conversations, the young get the opportunity to chastise the senior members of society that have engaged in undesirable behaviour like corruption and promiscuity. Campbell (1922: 41) provides an appropriate framework for reading such performances encompassing deviations whereby the young chastise the elderly in a ritual context as channels that give participants chances to iron out their problems and seek help. For instance, those who feel threatened by "losing" young girls to the old and economically viable men, reprimand them through songs. The song, *Mboro ya Mzee Haina Moto* (see Song Appendix 6), literally translated, "An old man's penis has no fire" implies the lack of sexual potency in old men. The song dramatizes the conflict emerging between the old men and the young.

The age conflict projected by the young suggests a possible way of understanding the participants' narrative through embodied texts where the initiate's sexual vigour quashes

those of the old. For instance, the elderly men's penises in the song below are considered to be weak:

***Mboro ya Mzee haina Moto***

*Mboro ya mzee haina moto* (an older man's penis has no fire)

*Mboro ya mzee haina moto* (an older man's penis has no fire)

The song is sung by the youth who express their resentment toward the older men for taking the young girls. The song is about the old man's penis which is said to be frail and lacking "fire." It is a ridicule of old men's sexual inadequacies and, consequently, an attack on old men who are alleged to "steal" young girls from young men. Perhaps a recent phenomenon whereby young girls are going for the rich old men, but who are sexually weak instead of the financially poor young males who have great sexual vigour. "Fire" symbolically refers to sexual potency. So, the young males are alerting young girls that the old men do not have sexual strength needed to satisfy them. This song, referring to body parts, exemplifies a dramatized conflict between different figures of established hierarchies, particularly between the youth and the elderly in the Bukusu community.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the conventions of festivity, elements of inanity and body discourses as a way of demonstrating how meanings derived from the Bukusu circumcision ritual inform the Bukusu concept of life. It was observed that the Bukusu circumcision ritual, as seen through its festivity, is a cultural event that brings all the people together regardless of their sex, age, profession or status. The study established that feasting with its euphoria and merriment, provides room for free bonding of participants, which in the process facilitates a number of factors primarily the entrenchment of masculinity and character development. The consequence is the representation of a particular form of being that is both factual and ideal where the participants express the somewhat dreaded but revered subjects like copulation. This chapter has also explored the different modes of communication, conduct and behaviour depicted during the Bukusu circumcision ritual as abounding in language and imagery that evokes togetherness, equality (though temporary) and prosperity. The language is carnivalized to express the celebratory nature of the circumcision ritual and to play essential roles in the making of a man out of a boy. A notable fact is that the utterances directed toward the bodies, the emphasis on copulation and the frequent comic humiliations become fundamentals of a multiplex communal understanding of the Bukusu way of life. The ritual

performances saturated with sexual innuendos, obscene jokes and the indulgence in sexual liberties, all of which ordinarily would be considered as severe breaches of social conduct, are interpreted as simulating sexual virility and fecundity. Even though taboo subjects such as penis, vagina and sex are openly sung and talked about, there is some degree of ambivalence because beneath those jokes and vulgarity lie highly moralistic instructions. Largely, the deviations in behaviour are attributed to some aspect of the expression of hostility, as a way to blur and affirm the gender boundaries between motherhood and masculinity, to dramatize the antagonisms between men and women, the young and the old, as an intention to rid the community of vice, and as a compensation for a usually submissive role in ordinary life. In any case, the Bukusu believe the harsh language, “violence” and disarray as central to the making of a man.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Overview**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter One forms the background and general introduction of the study. Chapter Two contextualizes the Bukusu circumcision ritual by introducing the setting in which the socio-cultural events at the core of the study take place. Chapter Three is about the conventions of body practices in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Chapter Four maps the different body relationships within the Bukusu circumcision ritual with the aim of identifying their cultural significations. Chapter Five examines the body's discourses as they manifest themselves in the feasting, and the eccentric conduct of the ritual participants in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. In this final chapter, an overview of the whole study is drawn, notably, explicating and demonstrating how the objectives were tackled and the extent to which these objectives were achieved. Lastly, the researcher outlines the study's recommendations. As making a general response to what has been discussed in the previous chapters, it examines the implications of the fieldwork to draw conclusions as well as possibilities for future research.

#### **6.2 Summary**

The study was an attempt to discuss the body in the context of the Bukusu circumcision ritual and the cultural meanings it signifies. Due to the nature of the study, data was collected ethnographically from performances drawn from the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The data (collected from July to December 2018) presented bodies as significant sites for the symbolic location of Bukusu concepts. The Bukusu community utilizes the physical body to create the sense of the circumcision ritual's relationship to history and identity for both the individual, and the community within the Bukusu cultural context.

The study is based on the assumptions that; there are cultural signs and meanings emitted from bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual; that there is a figurative relationship and interaction between initiates' bodies and those of other participants; and that the meanings derived from the body significations in the Bukusu circumcision ritual inform the Bukusu way of life and the world. The Bukusu circumcision ritual is primarily about the Bukusu culture, a symbolic message regarding personhood, status, gender, cosmology, enhancing fecundity and community emblazoned in the body. The study established that bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual are figuratively expressive to serve roles such as formation of

social identity, entrenchment of masculinity and fecundity, overabundance, virtue, equality, freedom and renewal. The body becomes inevitable in the understanding of and construction of masculinity.

The literature reviewed encompassed research that discussed the socio-cultural significance of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. Some scholars pointed out that the ritual is a medium of learning and that the cutting off of the foreskin is just an aspect. Unlike formal learning, circumcision provides education through involvement and demonstration, where body significations and practices become manifest. The carnival ambivalence theory the study utilizes adequately guided the researcher through the study with minimal deficiencies.

The Bukusu circumcision acquaints the society with the environment in which the initiates, through play and dance, “learn” about their environment. The requirements for learning include the body, the mind and the feeling. The circumcision ritual provides adequate experience to the initiate so that by the time he comes out of seclusion, he has mastered the vital life lessons and philosophies that inform the Bukusu worldview. Many of the elements are derived from ordinary life and shared by the society as a whole as exhibited through body practices. For instance, the gestures and postures are vastly charged with social meaning and principles. The Bukusu circumcision ritual embodies a pragmatic understanding of the society as the ritual practices have a role in restoring and protecting order. The power of the Bukusu circumcision ritual to establish order and contribute to social stability stems partly from their ability to tap into the deeper corporeal foundation of human subjectivity.

In summary, the first chapter conceptualized the study and the second one contextualized *sikhebo* within the Bukusu traditions. The third chapter sought to identify the cultural signs emitted by independent individual and a collection of bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. In achieving this objective, the study has painted a concise formula encompassing the ritual process where the body is key. The chapter has also analysed the roles of various participants, the objects used and the participants’ bodily activities in the circumcision ritual, and demonstrated that the Bukusu circumcision ritual is strongly hinged on their collectivity, conduct and desires. The study finds out that most of the participants' bodily practices, whether humans or animals, and the objects used symbolically convey the Bukusu concept of life and worldview. Certain body practices, primarily the imitation of copulation movements and the singing of obscene songs, portray the psychic forces, drives, sexual impulses, and repressed wishes concerning the Bukusu people.

The third and fourth chapters have demonstrated that bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual manipulate symbols that are abstract and require the knowledge of the community's collectiveness, language, culture, history, and the environment whose meaning can only be interpreted from the community's point of view. These bodies and their relationships are didactic, tackling different themes ranging from communalism, family, responsibility, masculinity, incest and sexual education. The study has painted a descriptive picture of the intricate relationship between the carnivalesque festivities and the bodies in the circumcision ritual. The meanings emitted from bodily praxis, the prominence of eating and drinking, the recurrent ordeals and abuse in the form of beatings, and the comic humiliations are all elements of a complex communal perception of the Bukusu life.

With attention to the body conventions of ritual participants analysed in Chapter Three, it was established that individual and group body practices became a means through which the Bukusu socio-cultural and spiritual needs are satisfied. For example, sexual abstinence, nakedness, keeping eye contact, and finally, dressing in new clothes are body practices aimed at emphasizing the sacredness of the ritual, the need for ritual purity and the recognition of the ever changing life cycle of the body.

The initiates' body adornments draw attention to the initiate as the focal point and the prime character in the ritual. The body of the initiate painted with mud symbolise courage just as the courage exhibited by Mango when he killed the serpent and thus, performing the history of the origin of the Bukusu circumcision. Circumcisers also mark their bodies to parody *yabebe* or leopards during the day of the "cut." The allegory of *yabebe* and the leopard heightens the events of the "cut" and, thus, aids in enhancing the aspect of masculinity and celebration of victory. The apparent running away of the circumciser from the circumcision ground (*etianga'i*) after the "cut" symbolizes the triumph over cosmic fear of the initiate and the community. Thus, the exaggerated caricaturing of the revered *yabebe*, leopard or enemy is a way to make them look less powerful and defeatable.

The singers-cum-dancers body praxes express the need to enhance fecundity, foster unity, happiness and hospitality. The dances are directed at cultivating the involvement of benevolent spirits in the ritual so that the initiates' fecundity is enhanced. The swapping of garments depicts the crossing of gender roles and the related antagonisms. The chapter also established that aspects of body disguise, adornment, body painting, stripping and shaming are also a means of conveying the Bukusu cultural worldview. The mudded body of the

initiate is meant to confuse malevolent spirits that might jeopardize the circumcision process and consequently, reproduction.

Chapter Four established that there are relationships that exist between initiates, parents, singers-cum-dancers, circumcisers and age sets. For instance, through the body praxes of the encounters between initiates and the circumcisers, the history of the Bukusu circumcision ritual also comes into play, virtues are enhanced, togetherness is fostered and freedom is experienced. The mother's sitting posture during the "cut" also symbolizes the rebirth of a new member. Elements of collectivity and unity are depicted through the presence and participation of the community members through feasting and the singers-cum-dancers' interactions with the initiates. The ritual's common symbolic themes deriving from the participants' interactions include enhancement of potency and fecundity, entrenchment of masculinity, preparation of the initiates for adult responsibilities and marriage, complementary opposition between women and men, creation of high culture, victory, and arboreal fertility in the women, crops and livestock.

The fifth chapter sought to examine how the ritual discourses regarding the body and the elements of temporary "madness," eccentric conduct and festivity inform the Bukusu way of life. Here, the study focused on the conduct of the ritual participants, the carnivalesque features of the circumcision ritual and their connection to the ritual body. The study established that the Bukusu circumcision ritual comprises elements of prescribed obscenity, "wild" desires, sexual and spirited, which the Bukusu believe offer essential lessons to the community and "strengthen" the social fibre of togetherness. The "demented" conduct is compressed into the service of the utmost objective of the circumcision ritual, especially the transformation of boys to men. As evident in the embodied and verbal aspects of disarray and excessive "madness," humour is created, but they are also a means of social sanction. Though the circumcision ritual may appear as if it is bordered on an excessiveness in alcohol consumption, the origins and means are very serious. Hence all these elements expressing "disarray" as evident in erotic conduct and jokes on bodies lose their literal meanings as mere parodies and comedies and convey meanings of serious matters such as, disease, life and death, marriage, unity and care.

### **6.3 Conclusions**

The Bukusu circumcision ritual is very important as it is considered to reproduce the Bukusu history, provide able citizens who will protect the community, offer labour and perpetuate the

Bukusu lineage and culture. The circumcision ritual is marked by a number of factors among them sacredness, secrecy, character development, ritual ordeals and challenges, enhancement of masculinity, identity formation and conferment of power. The transition from boyhood to adulthood begins with an act of practices meted on the body largely the removal of a foreskin from the boy's penis. The absence of the foreskin is considered as a mark of manhood, a conduit through which the circumcised assert their power over the uncircumcised. Therefore, it is prudent to say evidently that the body is key in the process of making men out of boys as it is considered to be the most effective avenue for entrenching masculinity among the Bukusu community.

The current study shows that the aspects of body significations within the Bukusu circumcision ritual embody messages which are pertinent to the Bukusu community. The meanings which the bodies bring forth, thus, represent existent and emergent issues that are of great significance to the initiates and the Bukusu community within the contemporary socio-cultural setting. The ritual participants and their interactions contain messages on general education matters, especially on physical and psychological aspects not only to the initiates but also to the broader Bukusu community.

For instance, by using the body imagery of not "entering the closed-door" and "entering the opened door" proclaimed by the circumciser towards the initiate during the coming out of seclusion period, crucial life lessons are imparted on the initiates regarding respect. Such a call is essential in maintaining discipline and respect especially the institution of marriage. Hence, the significance of the Bukusu circumcision ritual is the education that goes with it. This education, as established by the findings of this study, paves the way for character development, policing of the society, and articulating grave issues affecting the community.

The physical bodies of the slaughtered animals are just a few of the items that are considered to signify the Bukusu values and aspirations. The choice of animals that are healthy and young, and the fitting together of the bull's testicles to the initiate's genitals highlights the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the society, emphasizing fecundity, prosperity and overabundance. It is worth noting that the Bukusu are concerned with the preparations of their boys into men to perpetuate the Bukusu lineage and culture.

Most circumcision ritual practices emphasise the significance of resilience, endurance, aggressiveness, respect, determination, humility and etiquette, elements that are regarded as

epitomising masculinity. The circumcision ritual significance can be observed from the content of the messages derived from body incidences like eating uncooked meat, bracing harsh weather while naked, withstanding physical violence inflicted on the initiate and withstanding “the knife” without flinching. The meanings emanating from the activities of the “uncanny” interactions between the ritual participants and the use of ritualised items like clubs, machetes and weapons used in the circumcision ritual enhance their communicative aspects. All the ritual events evident in the Bukusu circumcision serve a common function of the social occasions upon which the body practices are observed.

Most of the ritual participants' interactions emphasise the essence of unity, victory, peaceful coexistence and the need to entrench masculinity. The collectivity of participants becomes crucial in the circumcision ritual as a facilitator of masculinity. The carnivalesque feasting and the carefree nature of the occasion offers an escape from the strict dogmas of the Bukusu official life. As such, they create a carnivalesque setting that provides room for free bonding of the ritual participants. Here, the participants manipulate their bodies in different ways to express the somewhat taboo subjects like copulation and engage in what was considered as not appropriate, for instance, men putting on women's attire and women acting male roles among others. They also utilise drama involving mimicry, song and dance to express the defeat of time and death, dispel fear, mock terror, and entrench abundance and cohesion.

The permissiveness of the occasion to the participants to actively play a role in the ritual effectively recreates a world which allows individuals to discover in their psyche a way of producing, out of temporary chaos apparent in festivals, something which will impart to a renewal of the community. The temporal “inanity” and eroticism, especially as depicted by the women's emulations of men's stature and vice-versa, are a few moves intended to promote a sense of what it is to be a masculine Bukusu man.

The ritual performances saturated with sexual innuendos and obscene jokes between the sexes which would ordinarily be considered most severe breaches of the rules of social conduct, bawdiness, obscene dances, the indulgence in sexual liberties and indecent gestures could be interpreted as simulating copulation and sexual fecundity. For instance, the participants' circular body motions and repeated gyration of waists and jiggling of penises while naked in quick movements talk about matters copulation and fecundity. From another point of view, the events filled with humour demonstrate the switching of gender roles and antagonisms. The initiates are regarded as having no status in relation to those in “normal”

society. They wear masks, apply white clay, cover their bodies, get naked at some intervals and walk backward when they get into the house. In the process, the Bukusu circumcision ritual dramatises the boys' transformation from the maternal status to the society of men.

Circumcision as a traditional cultural practice of the Bukusu is gradually changing due to several factors such as western education, globalization, urbanization, intercultural marriages, rural to urban migrations, and Christianity. Changes in the organization and administration of the Bukusu circumcision ritual and the performances involving the body practices and significations are primarily impacted by external forces such as Christianity and formal education.

For instance, walking for long distances was considered an actual test for the would-be initiates in the past. Today, the initiates no longer trek on foot for distances that cover hours. Vehicles and motorbikes have made it easy for initiates to move from one place to another as they pay courtesy calls to their relatives. Also, the initiates no longer go around the villages and towns calling on all the relatives because of the expenses involved and considering that the age of circumcision is said to have reduced from the 18-24 years of the past to the current 12-15 years. Boys of the younger years who have been moving around in vehicles cannot be able to traverse villages on foot for long hours without food and water. They do not have the energy such walks entail. Therefore, the tests have been modified as far as walking for long hours and long distances are concerned.

Formal education has also impacted the traditional circumcision process. Schooling is regarded as more valuable than anything, including the circumcision ritual itself. During the father's and uncle's addresses to the initiates, they are no longer prompted to marry immediately after the cut. However, they are challenging them to focus more on education up to the university level and find white-collar jobs before thinking of marriage. For such reasons, the community requires that the boys use the minimal time possible during the ritual to head back to school. Most of those who have received formal education have tended to cut links that they have with the traditions of their communities, with circumcision being one of them. Such parents take their children to the hospital, which minimizes the number of those involved in the traditional circumcision process.

The community is spending less on food, *busaa*, and slaughtered animals in modern times. Some choose not to slaughter animals. Instead, the families preserve these animals for sale to

cater to the initiate's school fees. This is because of the value the community regards formal education.

In terms of timing, the Bukusu still have maintained the even year, but some choose to circumcise their sons as early as April or June or any time before August to pave the way for their sons to attend schooling without any hindrance. For this reason, some are opting for the modern ways of circumcision and treatment.

Also, fewer and fewer people seem to be collectively joining others. Many choose to do it privately, either by taking their sons to the hospitals or partly doing away with some traditional circumcision ritual processes such as *khubita* (traditional counselling). Instead, they invite local church leaders to preside over the ceremonies, pray for the boys and ask them to focus on education and deliver their services to the church. Such initiates, in most cases, do not participate in the traditional seclusion process.

Urbanization and rural to urban migration have led to mixing cultures and inter-borrowing from other cultures. Many Bukusu have migrated to urban centres in search of jobs and education. Those who have migrated to towns mainly choose to have their sons undergo the clinical way of circumcision. And due to the high numbers of the boys initiated in hospitals, the community is embracing them and no longer treating them as second or third-class citizens as it were in the past. So the perception of those who have not undergone the traditional circumcision process has changed.

Christianity is widely spread in Kenya. Christians call upon their congregants to take their sons to the hospital for circumcision instead of the traditional Bukusu circumcision process. For those who do not take their sons to hospitals, church leaders challenge them not to take them through traditional circumcision processes such as mudding, seclusion, and *khubita*. They also challenge the community members not to prepare *busaa* and avoid engaging in the carnivalesque activities such as dancing naked, disarray, profanity, and the jocular.

So these changes have modified the Bukusu circumcision ritual, which has impacted the way the community used to handle the ritual bodies. So the traditional context of the body significations of the Bukusu circumcision ritual has been compromised. In summary, circumcision has undergone drastic changes.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for the Circumcision Ritual Practitioner**

As depicted in this study, the Bukusu circumcision ritual cultural symbols and practice are rapidly espousing a new dimension in the contemporary context of modernity, primarily through education and urbanization aspects. Consequently, the Bukusu circumcision ritual is gradually losing some of its socio-cultural attributes and hence, a loss of certain body practices. This means the embodied practices are progressively becoming modified. The study recommends that the Bukusu put more effort into restoring their positions in the body practices within the circumcision ritual, which is almost waning. These body practices and gestures have some significant essentials of the Bukusu culture in them. The zeal once witnessed with the Bukusu circumcision performance could be reinstated to its longstanding splendor and appeal if all the Bukusu people all over could celebrate the Bukusu circumcision. The collective spirit will enhance its likelihood of endurance and sustenance as well as aid in recognizing the many corporeal essentials proliferating within the ritual.

The study found out that specific values attached to the original concepts of meanings regarding particular body practices and festive elements have somehow rendered certain messages in the Bukusu circumcision ritual irrelevant to the initiates, mainly due to their tender age at the time of their circumcision, influence of westernization and the change of culture. However, the lessons still prepare boys to fit into contemporary society and become responsible members. Recent human activities, decisions, and changes are based on records and experiences, which inform future achievements, ambitions, failures, and resolutions. The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism in Kenya should boost the conservation of the Bukusu circumcision rite by recording it in a scholarly way for posterity, reference, and supporting them in any other way.

Bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual emphasize messages perceived as taboos that initiates must undergo. The carnivalistic misalliances, free and familiar interaction, nudity, jokes, profanation, excesses, and jeers accompany these messages and are valuable tools for communicating the Bukusu cultural concepts. The body relations, body principle, and eccentric behaviour complement the propagation of socio-cultural and economic standards within the Bukusu community. Thus, they need to be embraced.

Intellectuals within the Bukusu community should be ready and enthusiastic to write about the circumcision ritual and be willing to champion it within the diverse communication systems through the different mass media to make it a universal carnival. This will help give

it broader coverage and draw more attention to the ritual and its significance. This will also assist the younger generation in knowing about the ritual so that the future Bukusu generations would embrace it and aid sustain its survival and help them to be able to identify and examine the embodied elements within the ritual.

## **6.5 Recommendations for further Studies**

The Bukusu circumcision ritual contains cultural symbols as depicted by the bodies of the ritual participants. There has been a growing focus on the study of the Bukusu traditional rituals and ceremonies because they are sites that are rich in cultural symbolism and meanings as espoused by the ritual performers. Based on the literature review of the first chapter, there is need to investigate the meanings fashioned by bodies within other cultural festivals such as weddings, naming/birth rites and burial rites among others. This is because the body practices and the symbols emerging from childbirth, marriage and funeral rites when tied to those from the circumcision ritual communicate essential values of a people's culture.

Bodies in the Bukusu circumcision ritual place more emphasis on messages perceived as taboos that initiates must undergo. This calls for an inquiry into the cultural meanings contained in rituals that utilise nudity, curses, jeers and praises in equal measure. The nudity and the perceived ordeals meted on the bodies within other ceremonies need to be examined to see how they complement the propagation of socio-cultural and economic aspects within a community.

From the field experience, the study recommends the need for literary scholars to conduct research on the Bukusu cultural practices, particularly within the realm of the body emphasising on whether globalization, urbanization, western religion and contemporary lifestyles have made any mark on these practices including the Bukusu circumcision ritual itself. For instance, are there variations in style in the way bodies are manipulated to signify the Bukusu way of life? The point is, in general, much remains to be done on culture as far as body significations in rituals and related oral literature are concerned.

The study is just a first step in the massive tasks of investigating culture and the body from a carnivalesque point of view in Kenya, and even as a first step probably may not be satisfactorily perfect. However, the researcher is profoundly persuaded of the significance of this undertaking. The study demonstrates that we cannot appreciate cultural and literary life and the struggle of humanity's history if we keep on ignoring that eccentric and peculiar

conventional humour that has always existed and has been impressed upon us to be hushed upon, never to be merged to the official culture of the ordinary days. Thus, researchers need to conduct literary studies of the folk humour and carnival experiences within the African rituals.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Bakoki** – Circumcision age sets in the Bukusu community. The Bukusu have a total of eight age set systems; *Bakikwameti*, *Bakolongolo*, *Bachuma*, *Basawa*, *Banyange*, *Bamaina*, *Bakinyikeu* and *Bakananachi*. The age sets attach a lot of respect to the events that go on in their gathering because of their symbolic nature and the powers they hold (Wanyama, 2006; Were, 2014).

**Bukhebi** – Circumciser’s spirit. Circumcisers and those believed to possess the spirit of circumcising enter into a trance whenever the moment of the “cut” approaches. The possession of the circumciser’s spirit is ritually invoked (Simon Simiyu Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018).

**Bukusuland** – The current location inhabited by a majority of the Bukusu people after they settled. In this case, I refer to a part of the larger area which is Bungoma County.

**Busaa** – The Bukusu traditional brew. According to the participants interviewed (Frederick Juma Kiberenge interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018; Simon Simiyu interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018; Yohana Namakelo interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018; Moses Barasa interviewed, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018), *busaa* (local brew) serves different functions ranging from celebration to the specific ritual purposes during the various phases of the circumcision process. In fact, it is believed that one of the first requirements of the circumcision ritual is plenty of alcohol. Those who do not prepare alcohol are derided and his compound is likely to be deserted during the *khuminya* session (held on the eve of the “cut”). The initiate’s participation in brewing the beer symbolizes commitment on his part.

**Busee** – A bull’s chyme/contents from a bull’s or goat’s stomach, which is smeared on the initiate’s body on eve of the “cut.” Ancestral spirits feast on the chyme and render a successful circumcision ritual because of their understanding of the Bukusu community’s aspirations (Merritt, 1976). The ancestral spirits are also meant to promote fertility in the initiate’s future (Simon Simiyu Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018).

**Carnival** – The inversion of power structures, the ludicrous and satirical debunking of all that a particular society takes seriously (Bakhtin, 1994). In this context, the term refers to the time of license, the depiction of elements of free and familiar relations between people and

which are real world experiences depicted in bodily forms of ritualistic practices that are enacted as being part of life itself.

**Chinyimba** – Bells used by the initiate. They comprise of metal rings worn on both of the initiate's hands.

**Embalu** – The term refers to the sword used by Mango when confronting the serpent at Mwiala wa Mango. It also refers to the Bukusu traditional circumcision. The circumcision ritual takes place in August of every even year. Circumcision for the Bukusu is an important part of the creation and perpetuation of social relationship rules in the community, and an indicator of gender and familial roles. It is said to have started around 1804 by Mango (Simon Simiyu Interview, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2017), while further interview with Pius Wekesa, on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, however, pointed out that Samba Sambaranengunyi was the first Bukusu man to be circumcised.

**Enyasi** – A pot containing *busaa* that is placed in the middle of the hut occupied by age sets. It derives the ritual sacred connotations as it ceases to be an ordinary pot of traditional brew (Simon Simiyu Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018).

**Ekutwa** – Head gear worn by circumcisers and initiates during the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The headgear conveys fundamental values such as representing mastery and containment of ritual power and their dynamic media vividly appeals to its spectacles to embrace the Bukusu worldview that it depicts (Frederick Juma Kiberenge interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018; Simon Simiyu interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018).

**Esitabicha** – A damp and bushy location where initiates and elders, gather to perform sacred rituals on initiates like wrestling/fighting with the “leopard.” Women, non-clan members and the uncircumcised are prohibited from accessing it.

**Etiang’i** – The Bukusu circumcision ground where the actual “cutting” takes place.

**Feasting** – Bakhtin (1994) interchangeably uses the words “feasting” and “carnival” to refer to the revelry and merriment evident in the carnivals, especially during the medieval Latin era. In this study, the term refers to how the Bukusu circumcision ritual participants engage in revelry, enjoy unusual pleasure necessitated by the ritual license, excessively eat and drink, sing, dance, and merry make.

**Initiate** – A boy who is being taken through the process of initiation ritual in the Bukusu society.

**Khubachukha** – A process where those who did not attend the circumcision ritual award gifts of all sorts to the initiates. It denotes good will between the parents of the initiate, the initiate and those presenting gifts (Frederick Juma Kiberenge interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018).

**Khubita** – The advising and commissioning of the initiate that is usually administered by the circumciser or an elderly relative (Khaemba, 2015).

**Khubita Lukembe** – A purification ceremony for the knives used by circumcisers during the circumcision operation. The assembly of circumcisers at shrines to cleanse the knives (*khubita lukembe*) before the onset of the circumcision period is one of the religious gestures (Simon Simiyu Interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018).

**Khuchukhila** – The initiate’s preparation of the *busaa* brew. The ritual is a rubber stamp of a circumcision. The ritual also involves ancestors (Merritt, 1976). At this stage, the initiate cannot escape the knife.

**Khukhupa kamechi** – Literal translation is “beating water,” meaning having sex. It is a mode of dance where initiates dance with emphasis on jiggling their waists and penis.

**Khulonga** – Applying mud on the initiate’s body. It serves a number of functions including numbing the body in readiness for the knife (Moses Barasa interviewed, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018).

**Khuuna** – Calling or chastising those who have transgressed the moral norms of the Bukusu community.

**Kumusambwa** – A spirit. In the Bukusu community, different clans have different spirits. These spirits are crucial in initiating of particular rituals. For instance, the circumciser’s spirit which is endowed for those who are supposed to be circumcisers.

**Kumusola** – A type of tree that is hard to break and which is used for the construction of a shrine.

**Kwa ututu** – A heap of mud put on the initiate’s head on which a piece of grass called *Lusinyande* is mounted. The grass and the mud symbolize a home (Simon Simiyu interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018).

**Likhoni/ luliki/lisombo** – The meat extracted from the underside of a bull (*luliki*) and worn around the initiate's neck. The piece of meat symbolizes the good relationship between the initiate's father and his in-laws (Moses Barasa Interviewed, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018).

**Likutu** – A dried animal hide worn by ritual elders when initiating specific ritual practices.

**Lisali** – A banana grove where initiates spend the night roasting bananas till the morning of the coming out of seclusion.

**Lukembe** – A term used by the Bukusu to refer to the circumcision ritual or the knife used for circumcision.

**Lukhafwa** – Star grass. It is worn around the initiate's neck if a bull/goat has not been slaughtered or awarded live to the initiate. It is also placed under the pot containing local brew at the hut where the father's age sets are seated. The grass is believed to harbour good luck (Yohana Namakelo interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018).

**Lulongo** – A chalk-clay soil. Initiates apply it on their bodies instead of bathing.

**Lusinyande** – Special type of grass called thatching grass pinned in the heap of the mud mounted on the initiate's head on his circumcision day. It has a phallic symbolism and also signify a home (Simon Simiyu interviewed, 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018).

**Lusuli** – An apex rod mounted on the Bukusu traditional hut and that signifies the presence of the father.

**Namwima** – A traditional shrine in homesteads where animals would be slaughtered. The shrine, symbolising the sacred, accentuates the circumciser's role and power in the circumcision ritual (Frederick Juma Kiberenge interviewed, 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018; Simon Simiyu interviewed, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018; and Yohana Namakelo interviewed, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018).

**Omubiti** – A counselor/advisor. One who advises initiates in the Bukusu circumcision ritual context. He can either be a circumciser or an elderly male relative.

**Omufulu** – An initiate after the “cut” but who is still in seclusion.

**Omurwa** – A singular term for *Barwa*. They are also called *Bayobo* or the Sabaot, which perennially engaged in tribal wars with the Bukusu over resources like land and livestock (Makila, 1978).

**Omutembete** – The initiate's young brother who works as his assistant and helps him in achieving certain tasks.

**Ritual** – A symbolic practice that is performed many times in an established manner to enhance certain values in a community (Turner, 1967). In this context, it refers to the Bukusu circumcision practice involving a series of rites and customs undertaken to transform youths to adults.

**Signification** – A symbolic process of interpretation and representation by signs to reflect different aspects of a community's worldview (Kreydlin, 2008). In this context, it refers to the process in which meanings exhibited by bodies are read and understood.

**Sikhebo** – the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

**Silongo/sietosi/sitosi** – The damp and swampy location of the river where the mudding takes place. Also refers to the mud used for smearing on the initiates' bodies.

**Sinama** – Part of the hind leg of a bull.

**Symbol** – A person, place, or thing that comes to represent an abstract idea, concept, material object, quantity: it is anything that stands for something beyond itself (Eliade, 1965). In this context, it refers to the meanings that the bodies and other aspects comprising the Bukusu circumcision ritual exhibit.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: Consent Form

I am guided by the consciousness that potential participants in my research may not be able to relate meaningfully to written texts. At the same time, because of the NGO influence, there is tendency for people to imagine that when you ask them to sign the document, you have been given money to compensate them. In other cases, when some participants are requested to sign the form, they mistrust the intentions of the researcher because they at times believe that their signature may be used against them. To navigate around the foregoing, every time I meet a participant, I will explain my purpose of the meeting and the content of the consent form and give them the freedom to decide whether or not to sign the consent form. I will reiterate the purpose of the study and the fact that what they tell me will be used for the stated purpose only. In each case, I will translate and explain out the following consent form in the local language:

I am interested in learning something about the Bukusu circumcision ritual. You have been identified as one of the experts on Bukusu culture and traditions. I will ask you a few questions to which you can answer to the best of your knowledge. My name is Japheth Kizito Chagalwa. I am a Master of Arts student in Literature in the Department of Literature, Languages & Linguistics at Egerton University, registration number AM18/11662/16. I am conducting research entitled, “Signifying Bodies: The Body in Bukusu Circumcision Ritual.” For this I need to conduct interviews in order to get information that will help me meet my goal. You have been identified to participate in my interviews because of your vast knowledge on the Bukusu traditions and culture. I would like to seek your permission to pose some questions so you can answer them to the best of your understanding, and to take photographs. Please note that all the information you provide will be used for the purpose of my research only and will not be shared with anyone else unless with your permission. I would like you to know that when I am writing the research report, I would like to use your name. However, should you feel uncomfortable with that, I will use a mode of identification that does not reveal your/child’s real identity. Should you have no objection to your name being used in the research report, I will give you a consent form to sign permitting me to use your real name. Please note that your participation in this exercise is voluntary, and should you feel uncomfortable and want to pull out, you are free to do so at any stage of the interview with absolutely no consequences.

Name: .....

Date:.....

## **APPENDIX B: Interview Guide**

On each occasion after introduction, and after the researcher has sought and been granted permission, he will start as follows with the exception of some questions on women:

- a) What is your name?
- b) When and where were you born?
- c) Did you go through the Bukusu circumcision ritual?
- d) If so, when were you circumcised? By whom? What is your age set?
- e) How many children do you have?
- f) Did you go school? If yes to what level?
- g) Where else have you lived apart from Bukusuland?
- h) What is memorable about your circumcision?
- i) How did the Bukusu circumcision begin?
- j) What is the significance of the Bukusu circumcision?
- k) What activities take place during circumcision and where do they take place?
- l) Who participates in these activities?
- m) Why do the initiates strip naked?
- n) What are the roles of the bodies, body parts and practices in the Bukusu circumcision ritual?
- o) Apart from the initiate, what role do the other participants play during the ritual?
- p) I have noted that after the cut, circumcisers seem to run away. Why do they run away after the surgery?
- q) Why do the people drink copious amounts of alcohol and feast during circumcision?
- r) Circumcision is supposed to be a serious event, but yet in these serious moments, why do the participants make light moments of the ritual?

### APPENDIX C: List of Informants

Name	Age	Sex	Date of Interview	Place of Birth
Augustine Lutukayi	67	Male	27 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Nalondo
Beatrice Naswa	50	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup> August 2018	Nalondo
Bernard Ndombi	43	Male	31 <sup>st</sup> July 2018	Manani
Charles Chenani	70	Male	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Mukhweya
Cleophas Barasa	43	Male	31 <sup>st</sup> July 2018	Manani
Chrisandus Masikini	50	Male	13 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	Nalondo
Daudi Teka Nalimae	98	Male	17 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	Nalondo
Eliphas Stephen	36	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup> August 2018	Nalondo
Elizabeth Changelwa	48	Female	15 <sup>th</sup> December 2018	Nalondo
Frederick Juma Kiberenge	54	Male	28 <sup>th</sup> and 30 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Nalondo
Frederick Khuteka	70	Male	16 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	Pongola
Joseph Baringo	30	Male	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Sirare
Jacob Wekesa	98	Male	29 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Nalondo
John Musoboi	80	Male	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Mukhweya
John Wekesa	73	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2017	Misikhu
Kundu Sitati	45	Male	31 <sup>st</sup> July 2018	Manani
Marystella Nangila	44	Female	18 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	Nalondo
Michael Chenani	84	Male	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Mukhweya
Mulongo Manea	51	Male	28 <sup>th</sup> & 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2018	Luyekhe
Moses Barasa	44	Male	20 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	Sosio
Nyongesa Sinino	61	Male	28 <sup>th</sup> and 30 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	Sirare
Simon Simiyu	48	Male	31 <sup>st</sup> July & 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2018	Manani
Susan Namakhuli	72	Female	18 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	Nalondo
Wafula Manea	50	Male	28 <sup>th</sup> & 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2018	Nalondo
Wamalwa David Walubengo	61	Male	14 <sup>th</sup> August 2018	Nalondo
Yohana Namakelo	85	Male	3 <sup>rd</sup> August 2018	Nalondo

## APPENDIX D: List of Songs

### Song 1: *Sioyaye*

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
<i>Ewe ewe ewe musindewe</i>	<i>hoo o</i>
<i>Ewe musindewe</i>	<i>ho o</i>
<i>Ewe musindewe</i>	<i>hoo oo</i>
<i>Ewe ewe ewe khwarakho</i>	<i>hoo o</i>
<i>E siboyo</i>	<i>ho o</i>
<i>Sye bakhale</i>	<i>hoo oo</i>
<i>Omusinde oteremaka acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>haa ho</i>
<i>Acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>haa ho</i>
<i>Acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>haa ho oo</i>
<i>Ewe ewe ewe sye bakhale</i>	<i>hoo o</i>
<i>Oh siboyo</i>	<i>ho o</i>
<i>Sye bakhale</i>	<i>hoo oo</i>
<i>Omusinde oteremaka acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>haa ho</i>
<i>Acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>ha ho</i>
<i>Acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>ha hoo</i>
<i>Ewe ewe ewe kumwana we</i>	<i>hoo ho</i>
<i>We kumwana we</i>	<i>hoo o</i>
<i>Ese ekhubolela</i>	<i>hoo oo</i>
<i>Omusinde oteremaka acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>haa ho</i>
<i>Acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>ha ho</i>
<i>Acha ebunyolo</i>	<i>ha hoo</i>

### ***Sioyaye* (English Translation)**

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
You, you, you, the uninitiated one	hoo o
You the uninitiated one	ho o
You the uninitiated one	hoo oo
You, you, you, we have started	hoo o
This song	ho o
The one of our forefathers	hoo oo
The initiate who fears should go to Luo-land	haa ho

Go to Ebunyolo	ha ho
Go to Ebunyolo	ha hoo
You, you, you, the song of our forefathers	hoo o
Oh, this song	ho o
Of our fore fathers	hoo oo
The uncircumcised one who fears the knife should go	
to Ebunyolo	haa ho
Should go to Ebunyolo	ha ho
Should go to Ebunyolo	ha hoo
You, you, you, child	hoo ho
You child	ho ho
I tell you	ho oo
The uncircumcised one who fears the	
knife should go to Ebunyolo	haa ho
He should go to Ebunyolo	ha ho
He should go to Ebunyolo	ha oo

**Song 2: Sekhwakhunyolile**

**Soloist**

*Ewee sekhwakhunyolile*  
*Ewee sekhwakhunyolile*  
*Okhunda likhese sekhwakhunyolile*  
*Okhwala bakhasi babene sekhwakhunyolile*  
*Onia mukawa sekhwakhutilile*  
*Wiba kamaindi kabene*  
*Nekaba khembeya*  
*Ese we munalondo*  
*Ewewe wekesa*  
*Okhwala babana*

**Response**

*ewee sekhwakhunyolile*  
*ewee sekhwakhunyolile*  
*ewee sekhwakhunyolile*  
*ewee sekhwakhunyolile*  
*ewee sekhwakhunyolile*  
*ewee sekhwakhunyolile*  
*sokukula*  
*sokukula*  
*sokukula*  
*sokukula*

***Sekhwakhunyolile* (English translation, “We have found you”)**

**Soloist**

You, we have found you  
You, we have found you

**Response**

You, we have found you  
You, we have found you

You fuck a sheep we have found you	You, we have found you
You fuck people's wives we have found you	You, we have found you
You excrete in coffee plantation we have found you	You, we have found you
You steal people's maize	You, we have found you
And if I'm lying	Why can't you cry?
We from Nalondo	Why can't you cry?
You Wekesa	Why can't you cry?
You fuck small children	Why can't you cry?

**Song 3: Luwaya**

**Soloist**

**Response**

<i>E luwaya</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Yaya oli luwaya</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>E luwaya</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Sande oli luwaya</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>Eluwaya</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Khembole ndi luwaya</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>Luwaya</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Luwaya lwasala omusinde</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>Luwaya</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Sobona lwasala omusinde</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>Sakieli Biketi</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Omuyayo 'khwama eTulweti</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>Ewe Tabalia</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Mukulima Wandabwa</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>Bana ba Kusimba</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Vincenti milembe kiolile</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>Bana ba Kusimba</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Wilisoni milembe kiolile</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>
<i>Muengele-munyala</i>	<i>Aa</i>
<i>Vincenti milembe kiolile</i>	<i>Luwaya</i>

***Luwaya* (English Translation “Wire”)**

**Soloist**

E the wire  
My beloved brother, the wire  
E, the wire  
My agemate, the wire  
E the wire  
Let me say, the wire  
The wire  
The wire gave birth to the initiate  
The wire  
You see, it gave birth to the initiate  
Ezekiel Biketi  
A man from *babayayo* clan of Tulweti market  
Tabalia  
A farmer called Wandabwa  
Kusimba’s children  
Vincent, receive greetings  
Kusimba’s children  
Wilson, receive greetings  
A man of *baengele-banyala* clan  
Vincent receive greetings

**Response**

Ah  
The wire  
Ah  
The wire  
Ah  
The wire  
Ah  
The wire  
Ah  
The wire  
Ah  
The wire  
Ah  
The wire  
Ah  
The wire  
Ah  
The wire

**Song 4: *Khwera Omurwa***

**Soloist**

*Yaya khwera omurwa*  
*Khwera omurwa yaya khwera omurwa*  
*Khwera omurwa papa khwera omurwa*  
*Khwera omurwa sande khwera omurwa*  
*Khwera omurwa chuma khwera omurwa*

**Response**

*Aah khwera omurwa*  
*Aah khwera omurwa*  
*Aah khwera omurwa*  
*Aah khwera omurwa*  
*Aah khwera omurwa*

***Khwera Omurwa* (English Translation “We have Killed *Omurwa*”)**

**Soloist**

My brother we have killed *Omurwa*

**Response**

Aah we have killed *Omurwa*

We have killed <i>Omurwa</i> my brother	Aah we have killed <i>Omurwa</i>
We have killed <i>Omurwa</i> my father	Aah we have killed <i>Omurwa</i>
We have killed <i>Omurwa</i> my age mate	Aah we have killed <i>Omurwa</i>
We have killed <i>Omurwa</i> my Chuma age group	Aah we have killed <i>Omurwa</i>

**Song 5: *Kumunie Epombo* in Bukusu Language**

**Soloist**

**Response**

*Epombo*

*Epombo kumunie epombo*

*Epombo*

*Kumunie epombo*

***Kumunie Epombo* (English translation “Vagina is a Pipe”)**

**Soloist**

**Response**

Pipe

Vagina is a pipe

Pipe

Vagina is a pipe

**Song 6: *Mboro ya Mzee Haina Moto***

*Mboro ya mzee haina moto* (an old man’s penis has no fire)

*Mboro ya mzee haina moto* (an old man’s penis has no fire)

## APPENDIX E: Samples of Conversations and Addresses

### Address 1

Recorded on December 16 2018 in the home of David Pepela.

#### In the Bukusu Language

**Father:** *Mwana wase, walekhile enyuma engubo ya mao nono sai bakhufwarire engubo ya raro! Nonyola enju enjikale, okhengilamo tawe! Kumuliango kumwikale sekuli kukwoo tawe. Kuli kumwikule nikwo kukwoo. Nonyola omukuka namwe omukhukhu wenya buyeti, muyete. Ne nonyola yesiyesi obakubenga, yeta bakhulu boo mala otimanie omusiku obanania. Balakhuwa chikhabi mala okhamenye bulayi. Omwana omusoleli oli nende kimima kimilayi akhanyole chikhabi nende chimbosi chili chindayi. Busale bukhila khuba nende bibindu bie kusibala bikali. Nono wabele omusecha. Lekhana khukhola biakoko nende bibindu bie lulwana. Okhecha wengila mumukhung'ano kwe bakhasi ne balomana tawe mala wesi wanje khuloma nabio bibindu bie bukhasikhasi. Enja niye basakhulu bekhale mala wikhale nabo! Ne nonyola babandu balomana, besaye bakhalomana tawe.*

#### English Translation

**Father:** My son, you have left behind the mother's cloth (prepuce), but now you're given the father's cloth! If you come to a house that is closed, do not open and enter! The closed door is not yours! The one that is open is yours. If you find an old man or woman who is in need, help them. If you find anyone troubling them, help the elderly people and fight the person troubling them. They will bless you, and you will live in peace. A well-disciplined man is always assured of eating the secret things. Friendship is better than having many material possessions. Now you have become a man. Stop engaging in the things you used to while still uncircumcised. Do not join the women when they gather together and talk about women's issues! Go where the old men are seated and join them. If you encounter people quarrelling, tell them not to quarrel.

### Address 3

An elder addressing an initiate on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at Esitabicha.

#### In the Bukusu language

*Eyino niyo engwe ekhuluma! Okhalila tawe! Ewe omusecha omukhebe!*

#### English Translation

This is the leopard that scratches you! Do not cry! You are a circumcised man!

## Address 5

A father addressing his son on as recorded on August 14 2018

### In the Bukusu language

**Father:** *Yakhaba bakhebi nebaba nebarema lifunga khumubili kwoo, okharengarengakho namwe wisindukhekho tawe! Wime busa bureke nge Mango kema! Okhecha wautulakho esauti khwama mukhanwa mwoo tawe! Ese nema sirii baremwa chinyuni chakwa!*

### English Translation

**Father:** Even when they (circumcisers) are cutting the foreskin from your penis, you must not shake or even dare flinch! You have to stand stock still like how Mango did! You must not make a sound from the mouth. I stood the knife agnatically!

## Conversation 6

An address by an elder having climbed a tree at the market place as recorded on December 15 2018

### In the Bukusu language

**JM:** *Ndoboe namwe khabola tawe? Enje ebweni ndomalome namwe tawe? Omukhasi ali nende kiminie kinga? Khuli nende omukhasi khungo khuno bamulanga bali Marita mukha Wanjala! Omukhasi sali nende kumuliango khumunie kwewe tawe akhwalana busa nende omusecha yesiyesi wenya khungo khuno! Lwo khulala kakhwalana nende Juma! Lwo khabili kakhwalana nende Wekesa! Lwo khataru kakhwalana nende Wanyama! Lwo khane kakhwalana nende Wamalwa. Mala alota mungo nawelesa omusecha wewe kumunie chana. Khubola khuli nakhalekhile kukwima okwo tawe khulamutimania musirekere sino. Khumutimanie namwe tawe?*

### English Translation

(Should I say it or not? Should I go on and say it or not? How many vaginas does a woman have? There is a woman called Marita, the wife to Wanjala! The woman has no lock on her vagina, and she is always having sex with every man in the community! On Monday, she had sex with Juma! On Tuesday, she had sex with Wekesa! On Wednesday, she has sex with Wanyama! On Thursday, she had sex with Wamalwa! And she still feeds the same vagina to her husband. We are saying that if

she does not change, we will ban her from this village. Should we chase her out or not?)

### **Conversation 7**

On the way to the stream on December 12 2018

#### **In the Bukusu language**

**WM:** *Mbule lundi namwe tawe? Khuli nende omusoleli khungo khuno bamulanga bali Wasike! Omusoleli kaangale kolile khurera omukhasi mala abe nende lukoba lwewe. Badala yekhubeyisha omukhasi wewe owmene, omwana akwa ne akhwala likhese. Na khakhumobelesa khuli nakhalekha kukwima kuno tawe mala arere omukhasi khulamutimania musirekere! Khukhole khuriena nakhalekha kukwima okwo tawe?*

#### **English Translation**

(Should I spill it out again or not? There is a boy in this land called Wasike! The boy is old enough to marry and have a family of his own. Instead of marrying a wife for himself, the boy goes on to seduce and sleep with a sheep. We are asking him to stop this behaviour and marry, or we chase him out of the village! What should we do if he does not change?)

### **Conversation 11**

#### **In the Bukusu language**

Recorded on December 12 2018.

**Woman:** *(Gesturing to an energetic young man by her side oblivious of her husband's presence) Inja musecha wase we kumubili kwe sichuma. Newenya khukhombakho khubukhi bwase mala okonekho musifwa siase. Inja luno musilo.*

#### **English Translation**

(Come here, my man with a penis of steel. If you want to feast on my honey and sleep in my nest come tonight!)

**Man:** *Ewe waba orie mala endiano? Omusecha otamba endene keche akhwale omukhasi wase mali ndionao? Kaba kario khoche mukhasi. Basakhulu omukhasi yuno kukatapila ne kunie kwewe kwabalaaa.*

#### **English Translation**

(How is that while I'm here? A man with no penis to come and chew my woman while I'm here? Anyway, go on young man! That woman is a caterpillar and her vagina is hollow. You'll die on top of her. Don't say I didn't warn you!)

## **Conversation 12**

### **In the Bukusu Language**

Recorded on December 16 2018.

**Man:** *Okheinga nende bali bakhakonakho nawe tawe. Kumunie kwo sekuli nende chisipring'ita. Buli nge bwilabulanga ne oambilwa. Ofulanga chingubo, osuta bikele mungaki obalaisha neunganakana! Ese niyeoyu ano icha ekhuninekho.*

### **English Translation**

(Don't brag about your chastity! Your vagina has no springs! The moment the night strikes, you all over sudden become horny. You strip naked, lift your legs and open them ajar and think of me! I'm here. Come I mount you)!

## **Conversation 13**

### **In the Bukusu language and English Translation**

Recorded on December 12 2018, below is an exchange of a teenage male addressing a widow of about 50s;

**Teenage:** *Ewe mukha marehemu ndecha ekhwekeshe bunulu bwe endene. Basakhulu, luno mukha marehemu alalenyanya khu sitanda. Namanyile nandi emalwo eyo bufumbo bwong'ene.* (You widower, I will come to show you the pleasure of the penis! Gentlemen, today, the widow will moan and groan on bed. I know down there is just a bush of pubic hair).

**Widow:** *Yicha wukhwale oulushe kumubili. Lola khumunie kumutoratore. Okuno kulakhuwa bunulu bwosi.* (Come and copulate to relieve my body! See, have a look at my wet vulva! That will give you much pleasure).

**Teenage:** *Okhekalayo tawe butiu bwarura! Kumunie! Kumunie!* (Do not close I'm ejaculating! Vagina! Vagina)!

**Widow:** *Kamafuli kamanefu, kharene khatiti. Lola likanda lileyi. Ese nenyanya omusecha omuangafu. Ese mukha marehemu otambile endene. Ese khwira mwanawe!* (I have a

large vulva, yours is a small penis. Look, a long clitoris! I want a real man. I, the widow who has missed the good penis. I can kill you in bed. Who wants the vagina)?

### **Conversation 15**

#### **In the Bukusu Language and English Translation**

The following address from an uncle to the initiate as witnessed and recorded on August 13 2018 in the home of Chrisandus Masikini;

**Uncle:** *(Slaps the initiate twice) Chisaaa cholile ewe mwanawe. Sewikana sai tawe. Chisuku chawe! Ndolele mumoni! Ese sendi kumunie kwa mao tawe. Namwe wenya ese nifule mala khufulamile? Ewe mwanawe, ese ekhulama!*

(The time has come you boy! You can't change your mind now. Days are over! Look at me in the eyes! Your mother's buttocks! Your mothers' vagina! Whom do you want to show fear? You dare and I will beat you (*the uncle slaps him again*)! Here we do not fear the knife)!

### **Conversation 16**

#### **In the Bukusu Language and English Translation**

The following conversation recorded ensued on December 11 2018 in the home of George Wanyonyi;

**Man 1:** *Ewe Wanyonyi! Omukhasi oyusi ano omukhwale. Namwe Sali nende kumunie tawe?*  
(Hey Wanyonyi! Here is a woman you fuck her. Or doesn't she have a vagina)?

**Man 2:** *Bolela kumunie nikwo olalomanga okwo kwicha ano kubone sichuma.* (Tell that vagina you're talking about to come here and have a taste of metal).

**Man 1:** *Ewe Nafuna! Lera kumunie kwoo ano basecha benya khukhwala.* (Hey Nafuna! Bring your vagina here men want to fuck it).

**Woman:** *Endene eli waye? Kumunie kwase kwakala nono kwenya bakukhwale. Ndolele endene yimile busa mala yoma busa nge sichuma.* (Where is that penis? My vagina is itching, and it wants to be fucked now. Get me an erect penis and as hard as steel).

**Man 1:** *Wanyonyi icha ano. Kumunie okusi. Muninekho.* (Wanyonyi come over. Here is the vagina. Mount her).

**Woman:** *Mbukule namwe ewe omukhasi namwe wakana sewengila tawe?* (Take this vagina, or are you a woman or an uncircumcised boy)?

**Man 1:** *Kwanza lekha endolekho. wefwarire esuruari? Newabikile bufumbo kweli?* (First, let me have a look at it. Are you putting in on an innerwear? What about shaving the same vagina)?

**Woman:** *(Lifting her dress for all to see) Lola, kumunie okusi. Senabikile tawe sewabone. Ndabeka muchuli asubuhi ne babana.* (Look, here is the vagina. I have not shaved it as you can see. I will shave it tomorrow in the morning with the initiates).

## Conversation 17

### In the Bukusu language and English Translation

The following conversation comprised boys, who were as young as twelve years engaging an elderly woman (recorded on December 12 2018):

**Boy 1:** *(Laughing uproariously) Kumunie kwo kwabalaa khumusecha mulala.* (That vagina of yours is too big for a man to handle)!

**Woman:** *Wenyile khukhwala mwanawe? Icha osokemo.* (Did you want to fuck me? Come and drown in it).

**Boy 2:** *Kumunie kwoo kwenyekhana eyeyi. Omusecha sakhunyala tawe.* (That vagina needs a bull. Not a man).

**Woman:** *Ata eyeyi seinyala tawe. Nenya epunda. Ndolele epunda.* (Even a bull can't satisfy me. I want a donkey. Get me a donkey)! That penis? My vagina is itching, and it wants to be fucked now. Get me an erect penis and as hard as steel).

**Man 1:** *Wanyonyi icha ano. Kumunie okusi. Muninekho.* (Wanyonyi come over. Here is the vagina. Mount her).

**Woman:** *Mbukule namwe ewe omukhasi namwe wakana sewengila tawe?* (Take this vagina, or are you a woman or an uncircumcised boy)?

**Man 1:** *Kwanza lekha endolekho. wefwarire esuruari? Newabikile bufumbo kweli?* (First, let me have a look at it. Are you putting in on an innerwear? What about shaving the same vagina)?

**Woman:** *(Lifting her dress for all to see) Lola, kumunie okusi. Senabikile tawe sewabone. Ndabeka muchuli asubuhi ne babana.* (Look, here is the vagina. I have not shaved it as you can see. I will shave it tomorrow in the morning with the initiates).

## APPENDIX F: Sample of Interviews

### Excerpt 1 (Lubukusu): Interview with Nyongesa Sinino (a circumciser), Wafula Manea and Mulongo Manea on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at Wafula Manea's home.

*Changalwa: Wengila mwaka sina?*

*Sinino: Ese nengila kumwaka kwa elfu moja na mia tisa sabina sita.*

*C: Oli nende babana benga?*

*S: Salasini khukhwama khubakhasi babili.*

*C: Wacha esukuli? Ne wasoma mpaka class sina?*

*S: Mpaka darasa la saba.*

*C: Wayimenyakho wayena aandi lundi nende mubabukusu?*

*S: Nasalwa bala nakhulila Esirare, Nalondo. Khamenyakho enje we Ebung'oma muda kumuleyi tawe.*

*C: Sina nisio okumbukho khulondekhana nende sisignilo sioo ngesiaba?*

*S: Sisingilo siase sesili tofauti sana nge bialelo tawe. Nekhali khwise samwene, nanyoa khumayi namusaba eruhusa ne mayi kacha kabolela baba liliyenya liase lie khukhwingila.*

*C: Sina sikila mayi kwanza?*

*S: Khubela omusakhulu kama umurafu sana. Somanyile ba baba babechanga busa barafu. Ne khubela mayi nende baba barichana, ne lundi ese nekhengila tawe naba very close na mama kuliko baba. Sasa ilikuwa rahisi khunyoa khubirira khumayi. Lundi kakhaba kario, eli kimila yefwe. Nono finally, bambelesha enyafasi. Niendelee?*

*C: Yee, endelea.*

*S: Chinyimba nanyola khukhwama khu my elder brother wanyoa kengila ebweni kumwaka kukwawa okwo. Ese ne babasiange khwanja practice kumwesi kwa khane ne kuwa. Seli nga sai babana banja practise late sana. Nono khwakhola practise mpaka kumwesi kwa saba nekucha khuwa nenanja khulanga. Bali nanja khulanga nanyoela wa senge, lurakho we balebe, lumalilisi yaba ebukhocha. Senge kambelesha advice mala kambolela ali lukembe lurafu. Khocha naye kambakila eunwa. Nabukula likhoni nenjukha engo. Bise bino nono khwecha ne khwimba ne khukhina kimienya kie sikhoyo mpaka mungo. Nyumbani nako nikakaribishwa na nikapumzika mpaka around saa mbili ivi. Bise bienebio bafwarisha khasombo ne khukhwimba sioyaye. After that, sasa ikakuwa ni kuimba na kucheza, yaani khuminya mpaka late night. Nakona muda mtiti sana, in fact ata nakonakho waye nelundi bandusia khuminya*

*mpaka kitu saa kumi na mbili ivi nebambila esitosi. Bakheba exactly saa moja asubuhi. After that, nebambila mwikombe. Nono noli mwikombe Maisha kali tofauti; sokhesiana ne babandu tawe, sokenda nabo tawe, ne sokhola chi kazi tawe. Biakhulia biase nende bindu biosibiosi nibo nenyanga, namachengeche nende namakhala bakholelanga. So, tukakaa namna iyo mpaka December nio khweyalulila nebabasiange.*

*C: Nono khekhubekho baba. Sikhebo sie babukusu sino sianja siriena?*

*S: Sikhebo siefwe sino baba khekhubolele sianja nende omundu bali Mango Omukhurarwa khumiaka mbulila bali kia 1800 nio kerera endemu bali yabebe yeranga ne elia bibindu bie babandu. Nono lumalilisi yera babana babili ba Mango ne Mango aloma ali tawe. Sasa, akachukua hatua na akapanga kuiua mahali panaitwa Muyala wa Mango.*

*C: Ne koo baba, sikhebo sie babukusu sino silikho nende bukhala namwe manufaa sina khubabukusu?*

*S: Baba sikhebo sino eli kimila yefwe ndiyo tunaheshimu na kuipenda sana. Sikhola umundu akuwe anaheshimiwam mature na tena strong ne bibindu bikali sana. Lundi siana kamasomo ka muhimu sana. Sekunyala khwalekha kimila yefwe tawe kuka. Ne lundi omusecha yesiyesi oloba khukhebwa musibukusu is likely to fail in life. Omundu enge oyo mumutila ne kamani mwamkheba. Na omundu alafwa bamukheba ne bamusikhe.*

*C: Ne nono baba, musingilo sina, bindu sina bikholekhangakho?*

*S: Apart from yenye nimekwambia yenye nilipitia mwenyewe, khuli nende bibindi nge khuchukhila yenye mtoto anatengeneza pombe inaitwa busaa yenye wageni na wote watajumuika mu khuminya bakhanywe. Omanyeli baba omwana nacha eluchi khutaya kamechi, wandaye wengila khale anyoa ebweni kuhakikisha hakuna warogi ama adui yesiyesi ebweni tawe. Omusinde salomalomakho nende omundu ta, sakhesiana ta, sekekhebukha ta ne sewimakho osi osi tawe. Mao nende rarao bali involved khukhuyeta mukhong'ona kamalwa. Ne esuku ye khukhwing'ila nayo, baba we omusinde kakanana omwana wewe ne amudairekta mutyang'i. omusinde bamukheba busa ebweni we babandu. Nibilile khukhobolela nandi before omwana kole mutyang'i, sengewe alekha mawe wo omwana ne balambishe munju na atima akhombia omwana kumukango ne lundi ayukha munju khulambishe na bakhasi basie. Ngene sikhebo siwa sili pap, ne bakhebi basimukha chimbilo balayukha busa badae khulumia omwana. Omukhebi lundi ali very important December bise bie khukhwiyalulila khubela kecha khuwa omwana advice.*

C: *Baba mbolelekho khu bibiayu nibio babakanga musikhebo.*

S: *Sio kila mnyama yoyote anachinjwa. Hapana. Likhese serirumikhwa tawe. Likhese lilirumikhwanga mumisango kie bibindu bibi nende lifwa. Sikhebo ni mambo ya Maisha. Ne kumbuka oli yakhaba neli embusi or ekhafu, chili chindwale, chingumu, chimbofu, nicho balata nende chingofu hazitumiki. Chinyala chionaka omwana. Yenyekhana orumikhira busa chili nende afya and young. Ziko na maana zake za undani. Kwa mfano, ne babakile ekhafu, bakuka ende efwe bakhebi khulol busa kamala ne khubola kaba omwana alaria namwe kaba akhabe eunuch, yaani omukumba.*

C: *Ne nanu baba babechanga nende participation musikhebo sino?*

S: *Basasi bo omwana, basenge, bakhocha, kukhu nende kuka, bakhebi nende baminya. Khembole busa nandi ekomiunite emufu. Bosi bano seyenyekhana bakhwalane tawe. Basasi bakhwalana barisika khukhwonaka babana babwe.*

C: *Ne koo baba, sina sili khubechanga nende sichula sikali musikhebo?*

S: *So that omwana sekheche khubakho nende lifunga tawe ne lundi sikila omwana kaba strong. Eli busa nge ne wenya khucha muliye ne khukhupana nende omusiku sasa lazima wekeshane seriousness kuka. Ne lundi kakhaba kario, eli ngene fwesi khwengile mu bise bie sichula mara khura busa buli sindu waziwazi.*

C: *Sina sikila bakhebi ne baruranga chimbilo after khukheba omusinde?*

S: *Khubela abundu we etyang'i eli busa enge abundu we liye. Sonyala wacha muliye ne wimamo busa tawe.*

C: *Ne sina sikila babandu ne banywechanga kamalwa kamali ne khulia biakhulia bikali, ne khukhwonakaka bibindu?*

S: *Ni kwa sababu tunasherehekea na kufurahia kuona mtoto anakuwa mkubwa. Eli ekhoywo kuka, yaani nge harusi. Ni kama harusi tu lakini hii ni yam toto. Ne wakhonaka omundu sakhusitaka tawe. Ata wakhakwala umukhasi wo omundu mbao nio bakhuyila tawe bora kawele aao*

**Excerpt 1 (English): Interview with Nyongesa Sinino (a circumciser), Wafula Manea and Mulongo Manea on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at Wafula Manea's home.**

Changalwa: When were you circumcised?

Sinino: I was circumcised in the year 1976.

C: How many children do you have?

S: Thirty children from two wives.

C: Did you go to school? If yes, to what level?

S: Up to class seven.

C: Where else have you lived apart from Bukusuland?

S: I was born and raised in Sirare, Nalondo. I have never stayed outside Bungoma for a significant time that I can tell.

C: What is memorable about your circumcision?

S: Not much that can remember that is of big difference from the current one. However, individually, I asked permission from my mother who then informed my father of my intention to get circumcised.

C: Why mother first?

S: Because the father was strict and fierce. You know fathers are always very harsh. Since the mother and the father tend to respect each other and as an uncircumcised boy I was close to my mother, so it was easy to go through her. Besides, it's tradition. Then I was given permission to go on. Should I continue?

C: Yes, go on.

S: I accessed *chinyimba* from my elder brother who had been circumcised in the previous season. I joined my fellow candidates for practice as early as May, something that no longer happens these days. We practiced till late July. When my moment came, I paid a courtesy call, first to my aunt, then to my neighbours, followed by my uncles before being circumcised the following day. At the aunt's place, I was cautioned, warned and given advice regarding the circumcision ritual and the future life I was about to enter. The uncle slaughtered a bull for me. I took *likhoni* and came back home with a procession singing songs of happiness and dancing all the way. At home, I was welcomed and allowed a few hours to rest. At around 8:00 pm, I was dressed with *luliki* by my father, where the song *sioyaye* was sung. After that, it was a moment of dancing and singing by members till late night. I was accorded less than an hour to sleep, then taken out again for *khuminya* till around 6:00am when I was taken to the river. I was circumcised at 7:00 pm in the morning. After that, I was taken into my special place of stay. Here, I was curtailed from accessing other rooms, greeting people, mingling with them and working. My food was prepared by my youngest sister who also doubled up as my errand person. So, we stayed that way till December when we came out of seclusion in the company of other boys.

C: How did the Bukusu circumcision begin?

S: Circumcision begun with Mango Omukhurarwa in the years around 1800 after he killed a snake called *yabebe* that was ravaging people's property and killing his two children. So, he staged to kill it at a place called Muyala wa Mango.

C: What is the significance of the Bukusu circumcision ritual?

S: Bukusu circumcision is our tradition and culture that we value and respect a lot. It makes one respected, mature and strong among many things. It also teaches. We can't abandon our culture no matter what. Again, any man who refused to be circumcised was bound to fail in fulfilling his assignable obligations to his clan and society. Such a man, in the traditional point of view, had to be circumcised by force to enable him to fulfill his obligations. If he dies, he must be circumcised before being buried.

C: What activities take place during the circumcision ritual?

S: Apart from what I already told you that I experienced, there are a few like *khuchukhila* which an initiate prepares *busaa* for those members that will be visiting. When going to fetch water from the stream, the initiate is led in front by his elder brother who ensures that there's no harm. The initiate doesn't talk, greet, look back or stop on the way. The mother and the father are involved in this process. On the day of the circumcision, the father takes the initiate to where there is *etyang'i* as he is later operated on by the circumcisers before a crowd. However, before the cut, the aunt leaves mothers seated in the house to go meet the boy, pat a cooking pestle on his cheek and then rush back to join mothers. Circumcisers leave after the cut and only return later during the day to allow the boy eat. He also shows up in December during the coming out of seclusion to advise the boy.

C: What about the animals that are slaughtered?

S: Not any animal is used. For example, a sheep is not used. It's because a sheep is related to sacrifices of bad things and funerals. Circumcision is a matter of life. However, even if it's a goat or a bull, the sickly ones, those without horns, the blind, the castrated and old ones are not used. They can mess the future of the boy. Only pick the healthy ones. So, these animals are symbolic. For example, the old people and we circumcisers can analyse the intestines and tell whether the boy will fear the knife or not; whether he will be barren or he will be fertile.

C: Who participates in these activities?

S: parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, circumcisers and singers and dancers and generally the whole community. They should abstain from sex. Parents who acted contrary to the sexual rule risked jeopardizing their son's future.

C: Why do the participants strip naked?

S: So that they don't put on the foreskin again and also to harden the body. It is like you're preparing for a war with an enemy so you have to show your seriousness. Again, it's like we all want to participate in the process and undress and lay bare all that is there.

C: Why do the circumcisers seem to run away from after the cut?

S: This is because the circumcision scene and arena are regarded as war-torn areas. You can't stand in war before your enemy.

C: Why do the people drink copious amounts of alcohol and feast during the circumcision events?

S: This is because people are celebrating and enjoying moments of the transitional stage of their son. It's like a wedding. Even if you do the destruction, none will report you. It ends there.

**Excerpt 2 (Lubukusu): Interview with Simon Simiyu, Bernard Ndombi, Cleophas Barasa and Kundu Sitati all who are circumcisers on 31<sup>st</sup> July and later extended to 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 at Simon Simiyu's home.**

Changalwa: *Wasalwa lina nende wayena?*

Simon: *Ese nasalwa 1974 abundu bali emanani lubeka lwe Emiskhu.*

Bernard: *Kumwaka kwa 1973 emanani, emisikhu.*

Cleophas: *1975 emanani, emisikhu.*

Kundu: *1973 emanani, emisikhu.*

C: *Mwengila mwaka sina? Ne sikhebo sio silala sina?*

S: *Ese nengila kumwaka kwa 1990. Ese omusawa number mbili.*

B: *1988. Omusawa osimikha.*

CL: *1990. Omusawa number two*

K: *1988. Omusawa osimikha.*

C: *Muli nende babana benga buli mundu?*

S: *Babana ese bali sita khukhwama khubakhasi babili.*

B: *Babana sita nende omukhasi mulala.*

CL: *Babana sita nende omukhasi mulala.*

K: *Babana bane nende omukhasi mulala.*

C: *Mwacha esukuli? Ne mpaka class sina?*

S: *Yee, mpaka form one lakini senamala tawe khubela natamba esukuli fees. Lakini nakhaka nasomelakho chikosi chinyimbi utalii nge cook nende nasomakho kisiwa polytechnic.*

*B: Nasoma ematili Roman Catholic school mpaka class seven.*

*CL: Yee, sesi mpaka standard seven emanani primary school.*

*K: Mpaka form one.*

*C: Ne mwaimenyakho wayena apart from mubabukusu?*

*S: Naimenyakho Kisumu khumiaka kine nende kericho khumiaka khumiaka kibili. Naimenyakho nende Isinya khumiaka kitaru. Lakini nechangakho engo nembabona nenilayo.*

*B: Khamenyakho enje we ebung'oma tawe.*

*CL: Naimenyakho Trans-Nzoia khumiaka kumi.*

*K: Ese namenyile busa mubung'oma.*

*C: Sisingilo sienye siaba sirie?*

*S: Khwanja khukhupa practise around kumwesi kwa sita nekhwakhanyola permission khukhwama khubasasi befwe kwanza mayi ne acha khubolela baba. Nanyola chinyimba khukhwama khu omuchuma (referring to his father) abele wachibikha busa buklayi. In fact, babandi bakali abele bachirumikhira khale. Abele bachibika busa muchikoni bulayi. Wakati ya practice ngeneyola, nabukula chifufu nende bukoko nenjiboa bulayi.*

*B: Chifufu nende bukoko chirera maridadi kwanza nechimacha nende bitundi.*

*S: Yee, halafu ngechola kumwesi kwa saba mwisho mwisho, nekhwanja khulanga ebalebe. Kwanza khwanyoela wa wandayefwe baba*

*K: Ne wandayo wa baba oyo lazima abe omuraborwa nende we lusae lulayi. Eli khubela ali nende impact khu musinde. Nali we kukwima kubii namwe natamba lusae, akhakhole omwana konekhe mala sebuli bulayi tawe. Omusinde acha wa wandaye rarawe khubela aakita nge ekholo. Nono omwana nganjanga nende ekholo emwakanisha musibala nono.*

*S: Esafari ye khabili khwacha khulangwa wa senge. Basenge bali nende kimima kimibi, bakumba nende balaya sochayo tawe. Abo bali nende kimima kimilayi kiong'ene nio muchayo. Wa senge bakhukaribisha ne sikalakala nend ekhoywo ye kamakana. Senge kapa kumukango musiakhulia nekecha khukhukhomba. Eyino eli nende maana mbo omwana nekengile keche abe we khuyeta babandu, alishe babandu mala ata abe ne lusae lulayi.*

*CL: Basenge bosi bamaanisha lituru lilala nilio banuna nende baba.*

- S: *Nge khwama wa senge nekhuyukha busa mungo. The following day khwanja busa khulanganga randomly mulabelebe nge bakoki ba baba, basale ba basasi ne babandi. Ne esuku ye khuchukhila nayo....*
- C: *Khuchukhila eli nende maana mbo solikholakho kumusango okwo lundi tawe. Eli nge khulia kiapo. Eyino eli khubela solila lundi enyuma tawe. Sikila no okhalola enyuma ne wama eluchi tawe. Kwanza sewilila khungila endala tawe.*
- K: *Namwe ata wikhebukhe tawe sikhila aba kholola sehemu nyeti.*
- S: *Sasa khuchukhila eli nende khung'ona kamalwa ke kamaemba. Kamechi niko khwacha eluchi niko khwarumikhira. Sekhubaliwa khulolelela enyuma ta khubela enyuma bisiono ne bakuka bafwa baliyo. Bali noloyao nebikhupa ofwa. Eli busa nge babengile nebachichanga mwikombe. Babechanga bacha khubawa kamakhuwa ke bakuka. Nono nocha eluchi solola enyuma tawe khubela bisieno biliyo.*
- B: *Ne maana yayo eli mbo khebakhupuripea khu majukumu ke ebweni nende bakhukhola khube ne lusae.*
- S: *Bung'ali. Nge khwama eluchi, bamikisa kamechi nende limela ne babukulakho matiti bakhukha. Nochukhila kumbuka solomaloma, okhesiane, namwe omwate chimoni eyi ne neyi tawe. Yenyekhana wekeshie courage oli olema siririi. Khunikina tawe. Wima nge omusecha bikele ne chimoni abwene. Nokhola ori okhabe successful mumaisha.*
- K: *Nono aba khwalolekhana busa nga Mango kalolekhana nekapana nende endemu ya yabebe.*
- B: *Ne lundi epungusiakho harufu embi ne khukhupripea khu lukembe. Khubise bino bakhukheba nio wakhakhola orie. Sewikana klundi tawe. Bakhukheba nio!*
- S: *Sioyaye sie ebweni siembwa basi nebakhulekhula khucha ebukhocha.*
- CL: *Ne enge senge, khocha yuno lazima abe omuraborwa we lusae lulayi, heshima nende generally kimima kimilayi.*
- S: *Ne eli nende maana mbo omwana khe konga khumiandu kia rarawe nio kakhwa. In short, omwana khacha likhoni. Basinja eunwa ne bakhufwara likhoni ne bahakikisha mbo kamakusi ke eunwa keamba khu makusi kefwe. Eli yaba nende maana mbo khebakhwenyela lusae lulayi.*
- K: *Khendomekho sindu. Ngene khwengila ebukhocha, bakhwakanana nende sikalakala. Bikalala biekasha ekhoywo ye khuba nenafwe khwingile khube basecha. Before bakhufwarishe likhoni, khwaulukhakho kwanza babandu nebanywa kamalwa ne*

*biakhulia bikali sana. Babandi baba bamba ne bakhina kimiinya kiwa kila ainasanasana khu sitendo sia ngono, private parts, khusala nakadhalika.*

*B: Lakini kumbuka oli, sebukhonyela busa esang'i yosiyosi tawe.*

*S: Yee, nekhali eunwa tawe bera embusi. Yosiyosi bora ebe enamu nende ekhaba endwale tawe. Engumu, endwale, engofu, niyo balata nende eng'enda tawe. Khocha kakhufwara likhoni, kakhusaya. Ngene kakhupa chimbi naola ali, "Efwe be ekholo yino sekhurichnga tawe lukembe tawe. Noria aba kwe burarao. Efwe be kholo yino khwimanga busa siririi! Ese sesi nengila. Nama eluchi nge omusecha nema ebweni wabwe. Bakheba mara senarengakho tawe na mwe khupakilishekho chimoni tawe. Newama eluchi wichechmbilo, wiche nge omusecha mala wime siririi! Newingile kumbuka oli ewe wakhulile. Ori babandu. Nebakhurma, otima chimbilo. Nochile esukuli, osome ne kamani." Ngene kamala nebakhufwara likhoni nekhwila nego.*

*B: Khubise bino, chinyimbo che ekhoywo chong'ene chimbwa ne likhino lie engeye mpaka engo. Nende kimiinya kie khukhukhola khube courageous.*

*S: Engo bakhwakanana nende sikalakala mala bakhulekha khwaulukha kiasi. Baminya babawa kamalwa nende biakhulia bikali sana.*

*K: Khulia nende khunywa eli khubela engobe chili nende ekhoywo, eli harusi ye kimpango. Eli sherehe ye khubona omwana kengila.*

*S: Ngene chola kitu saa mbili, bakhulanga bache bakhafware lisombo. Bakhuakha busee chise echo nebakuwa advice nende warning in case khurie. After that nebakhulekhula khu baminya.*

*B: Nge baba nakuwa advice, kakhupa chimbi naloma, "Nakhufwarire khayama khano mara solikhafwarakho lundi tawe. Efwe be kholo yiono sekhurichanga kumubano tawe. Noria, aba kwe ebumao. Ese nise okhurerekho kweli? Kumunie kwa mao! Wamwene wenyile embalu nono wime siririi okecha wambambia chisoni tawe! Newama eluchi wiche chimbilo mala wiche busa nge omusecha. Khurengarenga, khukhupakilisha chimoni namwe khulila tawe! Wima busa embalu nge omusecha. Nge bamala khukhukheba, welesha basakhulu liria, khola ekasi ne kamani mala okhenya wengila mumaya tawe...." Advice eyino nende chimbi chikhukhola obe strong nende omwana omulayi in future.*

*S: Nono nekaba ario aba bakhuminya busa mpaka musilo nio khwacha khwalia ne khukonakho. Nge chola saa tisa asubuhi nebakhwinyosha khukhuminya lundi mpaka saa around saa kumi na mbili nio bakhuyila eluchi. Bakhulonga nende khocha ne khuyukha mungo khwechela engila ekindi. Ne khuli syetosi, bakhura kwa ututu*

*khumurwe. Eli nende ye lukoba. Bali wesi newolile orere omukhasi mala wanje lukoba lwoo. Lundi yosi yarumikhanga nge aerial balola kaba onikina namwe tawe. Neyisindukkha aba warire embalu.*

*K: Kwa ututu yosi eli nende maana ye endene.*

*S: ne khurumikhira chigila tofauti yosi yieksha eli omusecha sabeiyisha omusecha omukundi tawe.*

*B: Ne yenyekhana okumbuke nekhuli chi mita nditi chri khukhwola mungo, balekha khukhwimba sioyaye. Khubela khwolile abundu dangerous. Bamayi chisa echo aba balambishe munju mpaka bamale khukheba nio. After bakhebi khumala nebasimukha chimbilo mpaka kumusi nebayukhe khukhulumia. Naba baramo kumwenya bali khwera omurwa. Bise kiasi biri naba bakhuyila mwikombe. Bamayi khulambisha yeksha tendo ye khukhwibula. Yaani nge omusinde khakebulwa lundi.*

*S: na nekhuli mwikombe lazima khufuatilie chiseria fulani nge sewanja khukhwalana, khukhesia babandu kama kawaida tawe khubela yonaka lisae lioo.*

*C: Ne sikhebo sie babukusu sianja siriena?*

*S: Mango niye waba we ebweni khukhwingila. Kera endemu bali yabebe yalichanga ne yonaka bibindu biabene. Nono nge kakira, ne bayobo bamulaka omukhasi lakini on one condition that lazima kengile. Ne kamua khukhwingila.*

*C: Sikhebo sie babukusu sili nende maana sina?*

*S: Sili nende maana ten asana. Eli kimila yefwe niyo. Kwanza lole, babandu babengila bali mature, bali nende heshima, bali nende uwezo we khuba nende kimiandu, khubeisha nende khudifenda ekomiuniti.*

*C: Sina sisindi sikholekhangakho wakati wa sikhebo ne sikholenga waye nende nanu?*

*S: Basasi bo omwana, basenge, bakuka and ekholo yoosi. Khocha kerera omwana ekhafu, basasi nende kuka nende kukhu bahakikisha bindu biachile sawasawa. Boosi bano seyekhana bakhwalanekho tawe. Hata bakhebi bosu seyenyekhana bakhwalane tawe. Bakoki ba baba bosu ba maan sana. Musikhasio siabwe, bololesha chisaria fulani na kuhakikisha kila kitu inaenda sasawa. Enyama yosiyosi nio bosha sebaramo chumbe tawe khubela chumbe ekila webena lukali. Elibwa enyomu khubela bali endene yenyekhana ebe yema ne kamani ne erundure kiminie kie bakhasi bebule babandu. Enyema eyo nge ye babakoki eli lituru lia mawe. Nebakhukheba aba wefwara ya raro.*

*C: Sina sikila basinde ne babechanga nende sichula?*

*B: Khubela asili omwana ne mbao nisio akisa tawe ne akana khuba omusecha. Se alibakho sichula lundi in public tawe. Na pia inamfanya kuwa strong.*

*K: Kumbuka oli norura musichula embala eyo eli emark yekhukhwekesha eli ewe omusecha ne ludni eba enjoki sana khuuna kiminee. Ne lundi ebombia bulwale bwe endwasi. Nono embala eyo yekesha eli soli omwana lundi tawe. Omanyenokhengila tawe khukhubukilila nge omwana lundi omuchafu namwe omukhasi sikila lifunga eli nge engubo ya mao.*

*C: Nabone nandi after khukheba omusinde, bakhebi basimukhanga chimbilo. Sina sikila?*

*S: Khubela eli nge muliye? Onyala wema muliye kweli mala olekhe omusiku akhwire? Sekanyalikhana ta! Lazima wilukhe nebakhurisishe mala nomanyile soli sokhila tawe.*

*C: Embalu yenyekhana khuba nga serious sana. Lakini no olola obona bise bibindi bikali baminya bakhola bifwabakani. Khubela sina?*

*S: Eyo eli ekhoyo wandase. Sikhebo siosi sili nge harisu yo omwana. Yosi erera ekhoyo mumaisha kwo omwana baadae mala abe nende babana nende chikhabi. Ne bema endene buli saa eli khubela ekholo yenya wibule babandu mala obe nende kimiandu.*

*C: Nabona nandi munju ye babakoki, kabao kamalaka kamakali sana khulondekhana nende kimibili san asana ngene omundu kenyakhana khukhwikhala asi, khukwikhala silo simufu ne okhakonakho tawe ne kamalaka kakandi kamakali. Ne lundi babakoki baba nende e-treatment special. Khubela sina?*

*S: Bakoki ali omundu oli very important sana ne lundi anyala kaba omundu very dangerous. Ne akhayana nende rarawe omusinde khusiosiosi, anyala kamuwa khulipisha kisasi ne kuumisha omwami.*

*C: Anyala kamuumisha ariena?*

*S: Ne kamua khuboa bikele namwe afumbe kamakhona namwe keme lubeka lubi wakati we khukheba, anyala konake omwana. Namwe ata omukhebi anyala by mistake karema omwana kumubili kwosi. Namwe omukhebi kakhakheba omwana bulai, bakoki banyala bamwonaka mala abe useless in the future; sakebula tawe namwe se abeyisha tawe namwe omwana atongoyane. Nono khufumba bikele bibiranemo and kemakhono nekehale eli ngene khufunga lulwibulo lwo omwana. Sanyala kaana enda tawe. Namwe omwana abe busa masikini sana. Namwe wakati we khukhebwa omwana arie mala aloba khukhebwa.*

**Excerpt 2 (English): interview with Simon Simiyu, Bernard Ndombi, Cleophas Barasa and Kundu Sitati all who are circumcisers on 31<sup>st</sup> July and later extended to 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018.**

Changalwa: When and where were you born?

Simon: I was born in 1974 in a place called Manani, those sides of Misikhu.

Bernard: In 1973 in Manani, Misikhu.

Cleophas: In 1975 in Manani, Misikhu.

Kundu: In 1973 in Manani, Misikhu.

C: When were you circumcised? What is your age set?

S: In 1990. I'm *omusawa* number two.

B: 1988. *Omusawa osimikha* (number one)

CL: 1990. I'm also *Omusawa* number two

K: 1988. *Omusawa Osimikha*

C: How many children do you have?

S: Six children from two wives.

B: Six children from one wife.

CL: Six children from one wife.

K: Four children from one wife.

C: Did you go school? If yes to what level?

S: Yes, up to form one but never completed because of school fees. However, I managed to undertake short courses at utalii as a chef and studied another course at Kisiwa polytechnic.

B: I studied at Matili Roman Catholic school till class seven.

CL: Yes, up to standard seven at Manani primary school.

K: Up to form one.

C: Where else have you lived apart from Bukusuland?

S: I have lived in Kisumu, for four years and in Kericho for two years. I have also stayed in Isinya for three years. However, I was always coming home to see my parents and family and then back.

B: I've never stayed outside Bungoma County.

CL: I've been in Trans-Nzoia for about ten years.

K: I've always stayed in Bungoma County.

C: What is memorable about your circumcision?

S: We started with practice in around June having sought permission from my mother who later went on to relay the information to my father. I got *chinyimba* from *Omuchuma* (referring to his father) who had kept them. In fact, many others from the family had used them (*chinyimba*). They were well kept at the kitchen. When the time for practise approached, I used *chifufu* and *bukoko* to hold the clappers and metals together.

B: They (*chifufu* and *bukoko*) also acted as beauty especially when matched with beads we wore around our chests.

S: Yes. Then in late July, we started paying courtesy calls to our relatives. First, it was our dad's brother.

K: And that brother to the father must be well mannered and with a good lineage. This is because that father has an impact on the initiate. If he is a bad one, and doesn't have any lineage of his, then he may transmit the same to the initiate which is not good. The initiate also visits this father who also acts as a representative of the clan. So, the initiate starts with the clan which releases him to the world.

S: The second destination we paid a courtesy call was at the aunt's place. Promiscuous, ill-mannered, barren and generally bad aunts are avoided. Only those with a good reputation are consulted. We were received with ululations as a sign of happiness and songs of all kinds were sung. The aunt dipped a cooking pestle in cooked food and patted it on our cheeks. This meant that the initiate is being prepared to turn into a generous person, feed the society, to have plenty of food to feed the society and even be fertile.

CL: The aunts also symbolises the same breast she and the initiate's father shared by suckling the same woman.

S: After that, we headed back home. The following day, we started paying courtesy calls to random relatives like age sets of the father and friends of our father among others. Then we went back home. On the day of *khuchukhila*...

CL: *Khuchukhila* meant it's something you will never do again. It's like taking an oath. This is because you're supposed to look forward ever. You don't look back to and from the river. You don't even use the same route.

S: Yes. so, my parents put a small pot on the open yard in front of our house. The other pot, I carried it to the stream to fetch water, being placed on the left shoulder. The reason why it's the left according to what I've heard from the elderly people is because the

pot and the left shoulder are related to the mother. It's also like being told that you'll never go back to your mother's clothes ever.

K: Or even never look back to see the private parts.

S: So, *khuchukhila* entailed preparing millet local brew called *busaa*. The water we had to fetch was used to prepare it. We were not supposed to look over our shoulders as behind him were his ancestors who would strike him dead if he dared steal glances at them. On the same note, initiates were traditionally secluded for up to six months, a point during their separation, which, initiates are spiritually incorporated into the sacredness of the ritual. When initiates go to the river to fetch water during the *khuchukhila* ritual, the spirits are attracted. An initiate is not allowed to look back for fear he will see an evil spirit and displease it thus draw evil on himself.

B: And the significance also is it to prepare the initiate for the future responsibilities and also for fertility.

S: Sure. When we were back, the water was mixed with millet flour. Then the resultant dough was applied on our bodies. During the *khuchukhila* event, inhibitions on speech, exchanging greetings and sight on the sight of the initiate are emphasised. The initiate portrays extreme bodily signs which is also replicated during the process of dressing *lisombo* (stomach lining). We were to show a straight, rigid posture; open arms with straightened fingers; open legs; and eye contact are displayed. The meanings derived from the initiate's body disposition signify courage and are believed to enhance a successful future.

K: This made us look like how Mango was looking like when he went to kill the serpent, *yabebe*.

B: It prevented any bad smell and also prepared him for the "knife." This is because at that juncture, an initiate can't say no to the process. He had to be circumcised whichever way!

S: The first *sioyaye* song was sung and we were ushered to pay a courtesy call to our uncle.

CL: Just like the aunt, this uncle must be a successful one with many children, respectable and generally well-mannered and successful.

S: And it signified that the son was following the wealth the father paid as dowry to the mother. In short, the son is going for *likhoni*. The bull was slaughtered and we were dressed with *likhoni* by ensuring that the testicles of the bull touch on my groin. This was a symbol of wishing me good copulation and fertility.

K: Let me say something about it. When we entered the uncle's home, we were welcome with ululations. The ululations signified the happiness for having us undertake this process and of wanting to become men. Before we were dressed with *likhoni*, we rested a period at which excessive alcohol and food were served to the procession that had accompanied me. People danced, sung all sorts of songs especially on sex, private parts, giving birth, name them.

B: But remember, not just any animal is slaughtered.

S: Yes. it's either a bull or a goat. Either of which must be in good shape and health. A hornless bull, the sickly, the old ones, or a castrated one is not used. The *luliki* was put in our necks by the uncle. He advised, cautioned and warned us against fearing the knife. After slapping us twice on our cheeks, he said, "We from our clan we don't fear the knife. If you fear, then it's from your father's side. We from this clan we always face the knife with zeal and courage. I was also circumcised. I came from the river as a man and stood before them. They circumcised me and I didn't falter, shake or even blink my eyes. When you come from the river come running, come as a man and face the knife. When you're circumcised, remember that you're a grown up. Respect people. When send by someone to the market, run. When you go to the school, learn." After that, the uncle dressed us and released us to head back home.

B: At this time, merry songs are sung, exotic dances chaos and shouting of obscene words was the norm from the uncle's home all the way to our father's compound. Songs of calling upon us to be brave were also sung.

S: Back at home, we were allowed to sit and relax for a while. Meanwhile, the procession and visitors were served with copious amounts of food and alcohol.

K: The feasting on copious amounts of alcohol and food is because of happiness that has engulfed the home and community. It's a wedding of its kind. A celebration of them seeing the initiate coming of age and becoming more useful.

S: At around 8: 00pm, we were called upon to be dressed with *lisombo*. *Busee* was smeared on our bodies and after an advice and a warning from our father, we were left for the singers-cum-dancers the whole night for *khuminya* session.

B: As the father dressed us, slapped us and said, "I've put this meat in your neck once and you'll never wear it again. We from this clan don't fear the knife. If you fear, then it's from your mother's clan. Am I the one who put you through this? Your mother's vagina! You asked for it yourself and so you must face the knife and don't shame me. When you come from the river, come as a man and face the knife and come running.

No shaking, no crying and no blinking. Face the knife as a man. After the cut, respect elders, work hard in life and don't engage in conflicts with people....” The advice was meant to make us face the knife with courage, be responsible people in society and be successful.

S: *Khuminya* then took over till midnight when we were asked to eat and sleep. At around 3:00am, we asked out for another *khuminya* session till 6:00 am when were taken to the river. We were mudded by our uncle and taking a different route, we came back home for the “knife.” At the mudding scene, a heap of soil was put on our where and *lusinyande* grass or *kwa ututu* place in the mud. This symbolised a home. It called upon us to later on in future marry and sire children. And it was also used to gauge our disposition during the cut. If it shakes, then it shows that you had feared the knife.

K: The grass also signified a strong penis.

S: The use of different routes symbolised the societal position on an individual's sexual orientation and a call on the initiates to take note that a man should marry a woman but not a man going for another man.

B: Remember that when we were a few meters from home, silence was maintained. This is because we were now treading on a dangerous ground. The mothers stayed in the house until when the cut was over. After the cut, the circumciser left in a rush only to resurface later. The song *khwera omurwa* was then sung. A few minutes later, we were taken to our room. The mother's sitting posture replicates the gesture of giving birth. Perhaps a symbol of a rebirth for the initiate as he attains new status.

S: While in seclusion, we observed different rules and regulations like sex abstinence, greetings as using normal greetings and names could endanger the initiate's fertility and sanity.

C: How did the Bukusu circumcision begin?

S: Mango was the one who started it. He killed a serpent that was ravaging people's property. Then, the Sabaot promised him a present but before taking it, he had to be circumcised. So, he did it.

C: What is the significance of the Bukusu circumcision?

S: It is very important. It is our culture and you see; circumcised people are mature, respected and are able to own property, marry and defend their community.

C: What activities take place during circumcision and where do they take place and who participates in these activities?

S: Parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents and community members. The uncle slaughters a bull for the boy, the parents and grandparents ensure success of the ritual. They should all abstain from sex. Even the circumciser should also abstain from sex. Sisters and young brothers help the initiate while in seclusion. Age sets also are important. During their gathering, they observe rules that ensure the success of the ritual. Any meat roasted by them is not salted or spiced. Spices and salt are prohibited as they might cause excessive bleeding during the cut. It was roasted and eaten dry because the dry meat is hard, hence symbolising a rigid penis efficient enough to pierce women's vaginas and sire many healthy children. The first person to taste the meat immediately after it is roasted is the mother. The meat symbolises the mother's breast and her partaking in it is symbolical of wishing the initiate a better sexual life and fertility.

C: Why do the initiates strip naked?

B: The initiate is regarded as a child and he's about to become a man. He will never be naked again in public. It also makes him strong enough to face the knife. When cut, both these marks are used for identity, to display courage as manifest of the initiates, for easy copulation and avoidance of venereal diseases. It is expected that the initiate's body should go through a total transformation and these markings and piercings are just but a few that are used as symbols of this transformation. Besides, without that mark of a removed prepuce, the Bukusu will always regard you as dirty and outcast. Or you will like a woman because the prepuce is a woman's clothing that the initiate needs to discard as he transitions from childhood to adulthood, that is, the father's cloth respectively

C: I've noted that after the cut, circumcisers seem to run away. Why do they run away after the surgery?

S: This is because the scene is considered as a war zone. Can you stand in a war zone and have your enemy kill you? You can't. You have to run away when defeated if you know well you can't win.

C: Circumcision is supposed to be a serious event, but yet in these serious moments, why do the participants make light moments of the ritual?

S: That is an expression of happiness my brother. Circumcision ritual is also a wedding of a child to be circumcised. It also brings happiness in the future life of the kid and grants him success. The strong emphasis on the penis, in this case, depicts the societal

aspirations of a fertile individual who will enhance the property and the continuity of the community.

C: I noted that in the house by the *bakoki* (age sets), there were many rules regarding the way one handles his body like sitting straight, keeping vigil, among other rules and the *bakoki* had some kind of special treatment. Why was that the case?

S: A *bakoki* is a very important person but also a very dangerous one. If he happens to disagree with the initiate's father over a matter, he can decide to settle his scores by punishing the son.

C: How can he punish him?

S: If he decides to cross the legs or the hands or even stand on a wrong side during the "cut," he can "spoil" the boy. Even the circumciser may unintentionally chop off the initiate's penis. Or if the circumcision goes on successful, he may render the boy useless - can't sire or even marry or the boy may go mad. Crossing legs and folding hands while seated in like closing the boy's reproductive system. He won't make a woman pregnant in future. Again, he may be poor. Or the boy might all over a sudden show fear and refuse to get circumcised amid way the process.

**Excerpt 3 (Lubukusu): Interview with Frederick Kiberenge, a circumciser and also a diviner on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018 at Wafula Manea's home.**

C: *Wasalwa lina nende wayena?*

F: *Nasalwa tarehe nane kwa kumi na mbili 1964 enalondo, bwake sub-location.*

C: *Wengila lina? Sisingilo sioo silala sina?*

F: *Ese omuchuma. Nengila 1980.*

C: *Oli nende babana benga?*

F: *About thirty-five nende bakhasi tisa.*

C: *Ne kamasomo koo?*

F: *Nasoma mpaka class five Marobo primary school nende Kibagenge primary school.*

C: *Waimenyakho wayena lundi nekhali mubabukusu tawe?*

F: *Ese namenyile busa Bungoma County.*

C: *Mbolelekho kuhusu sikhebo sioo.*

F: *Ese nanja practice kumwesi kwasita nenyolile eruhusa. Kwanza, nanjila khulanga wasenge, ebasale ba baba nende mayi, balebe nemalilisha nende wa khocha. Khocha kakhonyela eunwa. Kumbuka oli likhese nende echo chili chindwale sechirumikha tawe. Chili nende ekhabi embi. Engumu nende niyo balata eli nge omusecha*

*umukumba. Omusecha nge oyo ali useless. Ekhafu ye chinjika chefumba chikhola omwana limenya liewe libe libi ne chi kona kona. Chimbofu nacho, chindeme nende chindwale sechirumikha tawe. Nekwhila engo, basuta chinyama choosi. Ne buli sipande sie khafu sili nende emaana yayo. Bikele bie ebweni bibili nibio basuta mawe omusinde nacha khukhwalikha. Sienyuma silala nisio siarumikha kkhukhwala mawe kebula omwana. Sili nge sibuno sio omusecha. Ngene khwola engo, bachinja ekhafu ekindi. Baba kambelesha advice busa nge khocha kamba. Ngene kamala khufwara lisombo nebandekhula mubaminyo mpaka midnight. Banjinyosha saa kumi baminyo nebambila eluchi. Bakheba tarehe tisa kwa munane at exactly saa moja.*

*C: Mbolelekho sisingilo sie babukusu sianja siriena?*

*F: Omundu we ebweni khukhwignila bamulanganga bali Samba Sambaranengunyi. Lakini khubela bulwale bwecha bwera basecha bakali be sibukusu sana liabida bemesha sisingilo kwanza. Kimiaka kiabira kimikali sana, ne Mango kanjisha lundi around 1800 ngene kera endemu yabebe. Mbara waulila estori ng'eneyo.*

*C: Ne sina sikholekhanga mu nyakati che khukhwingilila na nanu okholanga sina?*

*F: Good question! Nono wecha bulayi. Balebe bosi nende ekholo ehusikananga mungila fulani. Mawe wo omwana, rarawe nende omwana wenya khukhwingila bang'onanga lukoba, mayi akaribishe bageni ne khubatenda, baba ahakikisha mbo biakhulia bilio enough ne lundi niye ochagua ne khulipa omukhebi. Bakhocha nende basenge bosi bayetananga. Khocha wo omwana kerera omwana ekhafu ne likhoni. Senge naye akhombia omwana kumukango ne khumukambila. Nono khekhubolelekho sindu fulani about what happens at the uncle's home. Omwana ne kecha, ne bakhamwirira embusi namwe ekhafu tawe, bamuambila enamu. Sometimes baananga chisendi. Ne kaba khocha sali nende ekhafu namwe embusi tawe, aboa omwana lukhafwa mwikosi khukhwekesha mbo it's a promise he will pay later. ne a case where baba wo omwana sekakhwa tawe, nothing may be given.*

*C: Ne sina sikila nebakherera omwana likhese tawe?*

*F: likhese lifunga babandu. Likhola omwana kaba umukumba mala ata katoya se alifanikiwa tawe. Likhese lili libi! Lirumikha khu misango kimibi somanyile baba.*

*C: Sawa. Endelea baba.*

*F: Nebakhera eunwa, babukula busee ne ngene khochaalomaloma, ne kapa omwana busee ne amuakha. Kumbuka oli khocha arumikhira kumukhono kumukhasi. Omanyi sikila kumukhono kumukhasi kweli?*

*C: Semanya tawe. Mbolele.*

*F: Eli khubela khocha kama lubeka lwo omukhasi. Baba arumikhira kumusecha. Yaani we associate left nende bakhasi. And the reson ye khuakha omwana buse ne khumufwara likhoni eli mbo anyole chikhabi khukhwama khubikuka mala abe ne lusae lulayi. Ne mala khubolele nandi seyenyekhana ekhafu emolole tawe before bakibake?*

*C: Tawe.*

*F: Ekhafu ne emolola kabula bakibake yenyekhana babukule ekindi. Khumolola eli esaini embi. Na nebakhala khufwara omwana likhoni, ne bamba sioyaye. Chinyama chisikale choosi basutakana ne bayile engo wo omwana. Bise bino niosi kumbuka oli omwana sarumikhira sichiriba tawe. Alekhana nasio na achukhila. Eli khubela sichiriba sili nge lifunga nende nge omwana. Haiya, engo nayo bera ekhafu ekindi nebafwara omwana kisombo. After that, nono aba khuminya mpaka subuhi. Ne silo esiesio bakhebi bachekanga omwana nali nende engitole ne bamanye buchusi bwe khutila.*

*C: Ne sina sikila basinde ne babechenga sichula?*

*F: Eli khubela he is a nobody. Omwana omuchafu. Ali nge omukhasi. Nono bamukukkbusha busa balibalarema lifunga liewe. Ne lundi buli mundu lazima abone. Ne khuba sichula lundi khukhola kaba strong keme embalu nende mumaisa. Yenyekhana abe nge ocha khukhupana liye.*

*C: Ne sina sikila babandu bali baminya babechanga banywa kamala wa kamakali sana nende biakhulia excess?*

*F: Khubela biakhulia nende kamalwa kamakali kakhola babandu nebenjoya sana. Ne lundi kakila babandu nebaloma chilomo che kamakhuwa. Halafu lundi eli kimila niyo lazima kamalwa kabeo. In short, eli harusi nende furaha ya omwana. Omwana khasalwa nono lazima khusangale.*

*C: Ne nabone nandi after khukheba omwana, bakhebi baruranga chimbilo. Khubela sina?*

*F: In fact, wakati niyo omwana kamilanga eluchi nekolile karibu mungo, efwe nge bakhebi khwibananga. Babandi banja busa khunikina ngenebaulilanga busa sioyaye. Khwibananga khubela sekhwenya omwana arie tawe. Akunduanga busa nekhumumalile nekhuchile. Namwe eli nocha mwiye. Lazima wipange baya. Omusiku akhebulile busa omulikho. After khumukheba, khutimanga khubela omusinde nono kabele omukhulu khwifwe. Kakhurisishe.*

*C: Ne sina sikila nolola obona bibindu bikali bia vituko ne chingacho nende chinjekho mala sikhebo sisindu serious.*

*F: Ekhooyo kuka. Basecha obona befwalile nge bakhasi ne besikhasi onyola befwalile nge besisecha. Babandu nabo befwara kimitasi nende, kamasafu, batabula chingubo nakadhalika. Eli nge basecha benya beulilekho nge bakhasi beulilanga ne bakhasi ne basecha. Lakini birera chinjakho. Eli nge khokhola chingacho. In fact, bise bino onyala wakhoma busa omundu yesiyesi mala mbao nisio akhukhola tawe ata wakhhaloma oli kumunie kwa mao. Bise bino biong'ene kuka! Okhoma ne akhukhoma namwe kare enjakho nabwao. Okhomakho omwana wo mundu waulukha. Ne babandu be kamani hata yakhaba umukasa omukhoma busa kaba ali nende kimima wakana achenja.*

*C: Ne basecha khukhwifwara nge bakhasi?*

*F: Eli khubela ekhooyo. Bakhuwele freedom wikhole kamakhuwa. Basecha khukhwifwara nge bakhasi eli ne bakhasi nge basecha. Babandi, ngene wabone befwara kamasafu, betabula chingubo ne befwara nge bitasi nakadhalika. Yaani basecha bekhola bakhasi ne bakhasi basecha. Ne babandu bara chinjakho. Bakholela babasie chingacho.*

*C: Bibindu ngene buse, likhoni nende birumikhanga musikhebeo bili nende maana sina sibukusu sana sana nabona kamakusi ke eyeyi nebakatilanisha nende kamakusi ke omwana?*

*K: Nekhuakha omwana buse khumubili kwo omwana, khekhukonekita esang'i niyo khubakile nende bibindu bikali ngene chikhafu nicho khwakhwa. Khemaanisha mahari khumawe omwana niye khekhukheba. Mahari kano kali nende uhusiano nende omwana khuba nende lusae lulayi. Lundi ekonekita efwe nende bikuka biefwe. Nono bikuka biefwe nebibona mbo khukhulonda kimila yefwe bulayi, biana chikhaba chindayi khusikhebo, khumusinde nende sibala siefwe. Eli khubela bikuka bili nende busangafu nende sianawa siefwe. Sewabona oli khochawe omwana arukhira kumukhono kukukhasi khuakha omwana buse? Wakana sewabona tawe lakini e-reason eli mbo khochawe omwana kama khulubeka lwa mawe omwana nono advice niyo aana omwana ali from the mother's side. Khochawe omwana se arumikhira kumukhono kumusecha tawe!*

*C: Fafanuakho lundi!*

*K: Lola, omusinde nacha ebukhocha, khulinganisha nende ebumayi ne ali bus ambo after sikhebo niyo omwana achenja from khukhwila nende bakhasi ne khuba ngene omukhasi khucha lubeka lwe basecha.*

*C: Ne oloma orienna khu binama bia nyuma nende bia mbele?*

*K: Khayo khubolele sindu kubienebio. Mala ndekereshe bwichufu. Binama bie mbele nibio biasuta mawe omwana mpaka niye kabela. Ne sinama silala sie nyuma nisio siebula omwana. Nisio siapa esekete. Sili ngene kumubili kwe omusecha. Ne sinama siramire nisio baananga omusinde kebule omwana ewewe.*

**Excerpt 3 (English): Interview with Frederick Kiberenge, a circumciser and also a diviner on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2018.**

C: When and where were you born?

F: I was born on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1964 in Nalondo, Bwake sub-location.

C: When were you circumcised? What is your age set?

F: I'm *Omuchuma* number five, being circumcised in 1980.

C: How many children do you have?

F: I have about thirty-five children from nine wives.

C: Did you go school? If yes to what level?

F: yes, up to class five in Marobo primary and Kibagenge primary schools.

C: Where else have you lived apart from Bukusuland?

F: I've always lived in Bungoma County.

C: What is memorable about your circumcision?

F: I started practicing in June, 1980 having been granted permission. First, I started with aunt, then friends to my father and mother, relatives and then finished with the uncle. The uncle slaughtered for me a bull. Remember, only a sheep and those animals whose sick isn't allowed. They come with bad luck. A hornless one, for example, is like a man with no penis or hands. So is a castrated one. Such a man is useless. A cow with crooked horns will have an initiate living a crooked unsuccessful life. Those that are blind, deformed and sick are prohibited for slaughter. I was addressed by the uncle and I left to home in company of singers-cum-dancers. While going back home, the procession carried the remaining meat. Each animal part of the meat has a significance. The first two front legs took the mother to where she married, that is, to the initiate's father's home; and the hind one was used by the father to make sex with the mother and then produce the initiate. At home, another bull was slaughtered. The father addressed me just like the uncle had done. Both asked me to denounce the process if I lacked the courage to go on. After being dressed with *lisombo* by my father, I was relinquished to the singers who sang and danced around me midnight. I

was woken up at around 4:00am for a short stint of *khuminya* before being let to the river for mudding. I was circumcised on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1980 at exactly 7:00 am.

C: How did the Bukusu circumcision begin?

F: The first Bukusu to be circumcised was called Samba Sambaranengunyi. However, it was stopped due to a severe disease that was killing the Bukusu people. Many years later, then Mango re-started it in around 1800 after killing *yabebe*. By now I hope you know the story.

C: What activities take place during circumcision and where do they take place?

F: Good question! Now you've come in a good way. All relatives and the community participate in one way or the other. The mother ensures the compound is prepared, welcomes visitors and he is helped by other women and even men to welcome visitors. All parents plus the kid partake in preparations of killing the compound and brewing local alcohol called *busaa*. The father ensures there is plenty of food and alcohol. He is helped by the uncle and his brothers. He chooses the circumciser and pays him. The uncle gets the initiate *likhoni*. Aunts help mothers, advise the initiate and pat the initiate with the cooking pestle. Age sets of the father help the father of the initiate too. Now, let me tell you something about what happens at the uncle's place. If a goat or a bull is not slaughtered, it may be given alive to the initiate. Sometimes money is given. If the uncle has no money or a goat or a bull, then he ties star grass around the neck of the initiate. This is a promise that he will pay. And in cases where the father didn't pay dowry, nothing may be given.

C: Why not sheep?

F: A sheep closes people. It will render the initiate to be sterile and he will never succeed in everything he does. A sheep is just bad for people! It's used for bad ceremonies and you know that.

C: Fine. Go on.

F: Having slaughtered the bull, they remove chyme and as the uncle addresses the initiate, he slaps the chyme on the initiate as he warns, cautions and advises. Remember, the uncle uses the left hand. Why the left hand?

C: I don't know. Tell me.

F: It is because he is from the mother's side. The father will use the right hand. We associate the left with women. And the reason for applying chyme and dressing the initiate with *luliki* is related with blessings, fertility and appeasing the ancestors. Had I told you that the bull had not moo before slaughtered?

C: No.

F: If the bull moo, then they're to get another one. Mooing is a bad sign. Now, having done with dressing the boy with *luliki*, *sioyaye* is sung. The remaining meat is taken to the home of the initiate. All this time, the initiate doesn't use the whistle. He had dropped the whistle after *khuchukhila*. This is because whistles were associated with childhood. It's also like foreskin. At home, another bull is slaughtered and the initiate is dressed with *lisombo*. After that, it's *khuminya* all the way. On that eve, the circumcisers come to check whether the initiate's penis has any problem so that they can equip themselves with proper techniques of handling it.

C: Why do the initiates strip naked?

F: This is because he is a nobody. A dirty child. A woman. Like he is being born. He is also reminded that they will cut the foreskin off him. Besides, everyone must witness the process as it happens on his body. It also makes him strong to face the knife and the harsh life. He is expected to be a warrior.

C: Why do the people drink copious amounts of alcohol and feast during circumcision?

F: This because food and a lot of alcohol makes people free to enjoy, say whatever they want and act in very funny ways. It's also our tradition to have alcohol in the circumcision process. In short, it is a celebration for the initiate. He is being born again so we must celebrate.

C: I've noted that after the cut, circumcisers seem to run away. Why do they run away after the surgery?

F: In fact, when the initiate is coming from the river, we hide. Some of us tremble whenever we hear the *sioyaye* song. We hide because we don't want to cover the initiate. He only notices when we have pounced on him and finished him and left. Or sometimes, it's like going to war. You have to scheme well before attacking so that the enemy realizes when you're already attacking him. After the cut, we runaway because the initiate has now become bigger than you. He has defeated you.

C: Why are there funny, light scenes and people behaving crazily during the circumcision ritual?

F: All is because of happiness. Remember what happens in celebrations. Again, people have eaten a lot and they're drunk. What do you expect? In fact, during this moment, you can easily insult, curse or abuse his mother's vagina and he will do nothing other than laugh as he also insults you. Only this time! This is the only time for you to insults, abuse and act like a madman without any reprimand. Perhaps insult someone and

relax. For example, you can insult a clan elder and a powerful person who is ill-mannered to change.

C: And what about men and women dressing in funny ways?

F: It is also because of happiness. You have freedom to do what you want. Men dress like women and women like women. Some, like what you saw, put on funny things like leaves, tear their clothes and put on rags among many other improvisations. It's like men pretend to be women and be mounted and feel how women feel while women like men to feel how men feel. But people laugh. As if you're mocking the other sex.

C: What are the Bukusu cultural meanings of some of these body parts of the slaughtered animals like *buse* (chyme), *likhoni* and others used in the ritual since that I saw the bull's testicles attached to the boy's private parts!

K: When we apply *buse* (chyme) on the body of the initiate, we are connecting the slaughtered animal with many things like the exchange of cattle. I mean dowry paid to the mother of the son we're circumcising. The dowry is related to the fecundity of the boy. It also connects us to our ancestors. So, when our ancestors see that we're following the traditions properly, they will bless the ritual, our son and our land. That's because they're happy with our offering. Did you notice that the uncle used the left-hand when applying chyme? Maybe you didn't but the reason is because he (the uncle) is from the mother's side and his advice to the boy is from the mother's side. He can't use the right hand!

C: Explain more on it please!

K: Look, when the initiate goes to the uncles' place, we connect that with motherhood and only after circumcision does the boy shift from identifying himself with women to fathers. Now he (initiate) becomes a man.

C: And what about the hindlegs and forelegs?

K: Let me tell you something about those ones. And listen to me keenly. The two *binama biambele* (forelegs) took the mother to where she got married. *Sinama sie takho* (one hindleg) gave birth to the boy. It was the one that pushed the penis into the vagina of the mother the way sex is done (*laughing*). It's like a penis. The remaining *sinama sie takho* (hindleg) is the one now given to the initiate to go make his own kids.

## APPENDIX G: Research Permit



### NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

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Date: **14<sup>th</sup> January, 2019**

Japheth Kizito Changalwa  
Egerton University  
P.O. Box 536-20115  
**NJORO**

#### **RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION**

Following your application for authority to carry out research on “*Signifying bodies: The body in Bukusu Circumcision Ritual*” I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in **Bungoma County** for the period ending **14<sup>th</sup> January, 2020**.

You are advised to report to **the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Bungoma County** before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit **a copy** of the final research report to the Commission within **one year** of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

**GODFREY P. KALERWA MSc., MBA, MKIM  
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO**

Copy to:

The County Commissioner  
Bungoma County.

The County Director of Education  
Bungoma County.

*National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation is ISO9001:2008 Certified*



## APPENDIX H: Publication Abstract



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### Performing Antagonisms and Crossing Gender Boundaries through Body Praxis in the Bukusu Circumcision Ritual.

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#### ABSTRACT:

The objective of this paper was to perform antagonisms and crossing gender boundaries through body praxis in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. During the Bukusu circumcision ritual, participants naturally engage in ritual banter, clownish impersonations, dances and widespread transvestism, which act as both the literal and symbolic facilitators for acts of “performative” gender roles, masculinity and antagonisms. In many respects, the Bukusu circumcision ritual presents a scenario whereby the participants’ behaviours reveal a deep performance of shift of gender roles and dramatisation of antagonisms and where the ritual conversations, jokes, dances, excessive lewdness and mimics permeate all aspects of the ritual. By employing ethnographic methods and using the Carnival Ambivalence Theory, this paper explores patterns of performative antagonisms and gender boundaries in the Bukusu circumcision ritual. The reason why the ritual is central to the entrenchment of masculinity and authority through their displays as being so pronounced is suggested by considering the performances containing the contradictions between the different sexes and ages. The paper concludes that the meanings manifest in these elements thematise issues concerning personhood, masculinity, gender, status and marriage life.

**Key Terms:** Antagonisms, boundaries, gender, circumcision, ritual, perform, masculinity.

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