

The Untold Symbolic Significance of African Cultures, the Case of the Bukusu Circumcision Ritual in Kenya

Godfrey Banda Mayende^{1*}

¹Department of Social Studies, Laikipia University, P.O. 1100-20300, Nyahururu, Kenya

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*Corresponding author: Godfrey Banda Mayende

Department of Social Studies, Laikipia University, P.O. 1100-20300, Nyahururu, Kenya

Abstract

Review Article

Most African cultures were observed and practiced within the confines of their moral values that carried coded meaning which required more attention to understand hidden symbolism contained therein. Among the Bukusu people of Western Kenya for instance, circumcision was perhaps a cultural routine that was practiced with strict observance of several stages and rituals that indirectly communicated important messages to the initiates and the society at large. Hence, this paper examines key stages that are involved in order to successfully complete a Bukusu circumcision ritual. Such phases contained unique features and moral values that have not been told in many academic and scholarly writings since the inception of African leadership after colonialism. For the success in this objective, the tenets of the structural functionalism approach were very relevant in the illustration of the significance of the ritual itself and its key components that are deeply embedded and enshrined in the doctrines that dictated the operations of this rite. The study heavily relied on primary data which was corroborated by the existing secondary data to generate findings contained in this paper. Much of the primary data was collected through Oral Interviews (abbreviated as O.I in the entire text) and also through extensive readings from the Kenya National Archives (abbreviated as KNA in the text).

Keywords: Beer brewing, Maiden Uncle, the mudding place, the seclusion period, the graduation stage.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Makila (1978: 28), the Babukusu are one of the seventeen sub-nations that comprise the Baluhya cluster of the inter-lacustrine Bantu nations of East Africa. Today, the community largely occupies Bungoma and Trans-Nzoia Counties in western regions of Kenya (Wasambo, 2014: 4) but some other clans within the Bukusu community have relocated and settled in Kakamega and Busia Counties that are within the outskirts of Bungoma County. Other Luhya sub-groups include; Baragoli, Bamarama, Babedakho, Batiriki, Basamia, Bawanga, Batsotso, Babekisa, Babesukha, Banyore, Batiriki, Batachoni, Bakhayo, Bashisha, Batura and Bakabalas (KNA, DC/NN/3/1: 1902-1916). In the absence of the standard orthography for ethnonyms of sub-tribes constituting the Abaluyia, the researcher resolved to spell them according to the Bukusu phonetics. Thus 'the Maragoli' is spelt as 'Barakoli' while 'the Abamarachi' is spelt as 'Bamaraki.' Being a Bantu nation, the origin of Baluyha can be traced back from the cradle homeland of the Bantu at large.

Like any other African community, the Babukusu have a myriad of cultures that were strongly cemented in the way of life of this community. It is indeed true to reason that most of these cultures were exposed to unbearable shuffle and change during the colonial epoch in Africa. On this assertion, Hoogvelt (1976: 109) argues that no society can successfully dominate another without diffusing some of its cultural patterns and social institutions nor can any society successfully diffuse all or most of its cultural patterns without some degree of domination. Among other cultures of the Bukusu community, male circumcision has virtually been declared universal and a compulsory rite that has exhibited utmost resilience in its survival and existence.

The ritual takes place in the month of August, the harvesting season in Bukusu land. During this month, there is normally plenty of food for visitors, the initiate and his relatives. The ritual takes place every even year (for example, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 etc.). The Babukusu believe that even numbers are associated with good luck (Wanyama, 2005) hence no circumcision takes

place in odd years (*sikumanya*), as it is believed that this would lead to bad omens such as the initiates bleeding profusely or being cut wrongly and injured in the process which may eventually lead to death.

The adoption of conducting the ritual during even years is however, a very recent inclusion in this culture. By 1941, the Babukusu used to conduct the surgery annually. Jackson Nabiswa Walekhwa (O.I, 2014) claims to have undergone the surgery in 1941 while Gabriel Naulikha Kunusia (O.I, 2014) was circumcised in 1937. According to their claims, they were the few survivors because most of the youth who underwent the surgery in 1935, 1937, 1939 and 1941 died mysteriously while in the secluded houses.

This alarming occurrences compelled the then Bukusu elders under the leadership of the colonial chiefs Amutala Mayeku and Sudi Namachanja to outlaw conducting the circumcision rituals to boys during odd years (*sikumanya*). They even merged the above stated odd circumcision years as follows; 1935 with 1936, 1937 with 1938, 1939 with 1940 and 1941 with 1942. Therefore, nobody wanted to associate himself with these odd circumcision years that were deadly.

Main objective of the study

The main objective in this study was to interrogate significant phases of Bukusu circumcision and by so doing, our endeavour of examining the symbolic realities in the ritual was realized.

Research Methodology

This paper is a culmination of qualitative data analysis hence purposive sampling was significantly employed during data collection. It is therefore important to observe that data and information was obtained from primary sources through extensive interview of the informants selected using purposive and snowball sampling. However, it was also prudent to interrogate relevant secondary data to ascertain some historical facts and realities for the validity of the research findings.

Study Locale

The study locale was Kimilili Constituency which is situated in Bungoma County along the slopes of Mt. Elgon in the former Western province of Kenya. The locale is approximately 450 kilometers from Nairobi, Kenya's capital city. The local inhabitants in this region are majorly the Bukusu community who comprise the Baluyha cluster of the interlucustrine Bantu community. However, the region has also been inhabited by non-native communities such as the Agikuyu, the Iteso, and the Sabaot among others who have relocated here due to other important factors such as formal employment and business ventures.

Phases of Bukusu Circumcision

Bukusu circumcision is a very procedural cultural rite that follows systematic stages that are very significant and purposeful. Wanyama and Egesa (2014: 6) posits that Bukusu circumcision has three stages that include preparation for circumcision, the actual circumcision and the post-circumcision rites. Seemingly, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2009: 3) is in cognizant with Wanyama and Egesa by outlining three phases in conducting Bukusu circumcision. It is also agreed that these stages were engrossed by elaborate detail of rituals and ceremony that was laden within symbolism and rationale especially through music (Wanyama and Egesa, 2014: 6).

While appreciating the contributions made by Wanyama and Egesa and the WHO in this discourse, it important to observe that this study unraveled ten significant phases which are classified as follows; preparations, the invitations, beer brewing, the visit to the maiden uncle, the night singing, dancing and feasting, at the mudding place, from the mudding place, the real surgery, the seclusion period and the graduation phase. A keen interrogation of these stages reveals significant values, importance and symbolism that is yet to receive a deserving scholarly attention.

Preparations

According to Wagner (1949: 337 and Mugambi & Kirima, 1976: 40-43), preparation was the initial stage of circumcision which was very relevant. Prospective initiates started practicing the performance of Bukusu circumcision music – by using instruments improvised from dried maize leaves – as early as from about four years of age (Wanyama, 2005). One or two seasons before the candidate's season of circumcision, a fundamental operation, traditionally called *khukhwobia*, which involved literally peeling off the prepuce from the penis glans was performed. Alternatively, dust was put inside the foreskin, fondled several times and the prepuce peeled itself from the penis glans. The final approach that was also used was pre-marital sex but this approach was not encouraged and those who indulged in it developed an abnormality traditionally called *enkitole*. It was characterized by the prepuce not returning in its normal position after completing *khukhwobia* (Masika, O.I, 2014).

As the chief guest of the occasion, the candidate always psyched himself in readiness for the cut. He involved himself in activities suggesting and indicating that he was ready to face the knife. Nevertheless, it was mandatory for him to verbally inform the relevant concerned people like his parents and the maiden uncles, who played key roles in his circumcision (Wagner, 1949: 341). On this argument however, Wanyama (2005) posits that earlier on at the beginning of the year, between January and April, the initiate who decided to go for circumcision initially informed his mother about it. The

mother discussed with the father about their son's intention to be circumcised and she also informed close relatives such as the maternal uncles and aunts.

Whether an approval was given or not, the boy continued with his preparations of jingle bells (*chinyimba*). *Chinyimba*, the plural of *enyimba*, are metallophones made by curving a single thin piece of iron plate (of about 20 by 10 centimeters) into a bell shape (see photo no. 1, pictorial view of *chinyimba*). The two slits, each directly opposite the other, were not sealed. They were clapperless (without the centre rod) and closely resembled cowbells (Wanyama, 2017: 68). They produced a sharp sound when knocked on metal rings – *birere* the plural of *sirere* - worn on both of the initiate's wrists. The initiates started practicing how to play them as early as April. However, cowards (*siriambalu*) never showed any sign indicating that they were ready to face the knife. Such boys were ridiculed by girls in songs whenever they met them on the road

(Wagner, 1949: 339). If two subsequent circumcision seasons lapsed without giving any hint of accepting to be initiated, plans were instituted to forcefully circumcise them.

The father was expected to buy or raise a bullock that was to be slaughtered the night before the boy was to be cut. The mother on the other hand was expected to make adequate preparations for beer brewing. *Kamalwa ke kamaemba* (traditional liquor) was the main drink taken during the ceremony. She was also expected to fetch enough food that was to feed all visitors who would attend the ceremony. Otherwise, she was to be ridiculed and embarrassed for being mean by song composers and soloists in her son's party. It was also important for *khocha* (the maiden uncle) to have his house in order before the material day. He was expected to buy or raise a bull that was to be offered to the candidate. This was traditionally called *likhoni* (Mwambu, O.I, 2014).



Invitations

Khulanga (invitation) was the second significant stage of circumcision (see photo no. 2, candidates moving around the village to invite relatives to their circumcision ceremony). Like any other Bukusu ceremony, circumcision attracted people of all walks of life (Makokha, 1993: 73) and it was the sole mandate of the candidate to make formal invitations of such people. Once the circumcision date was set, the candidate was officially commissioned by his parents to invite very close relatives and friends for the ceremony (Wagner, 1949-342 and Makila, 1982: 125). This involved the mother of the boy coming out of the house, with ululation, followed by the father who slapped the candidate several times. Thereafter, the person leading the candidate's procession was instructed on which relatives to visit on that particular day.

Whenever the procession reached its destination, the hosts received them jubilantly with ululation from senior female members present. Visited families which gave dull receptions were always scorned through songs hence many people stopped doing whatever they were doing to attend to the visitors. Gifts including maize, domestic animals and even money were

given to the candidate (Cheloti, O.I, 2014). It should also be noted that under rare circumstances were the hosts if they had nothing significant to offer to the candidate hide (Masika, O.I, 2014). If this happened and was discovered by the *omusinde*'s procession, all manner of curses were pronounced against such a family by composing songs explaining how that family ran away from them.

After delivering the message, the candidate was escorted by the hosts up to a reasonable distance. During this time, it was mandatory for him to play *chinyimba* and his company sung jubilantly and joyfully. Being a circumcision season, it was not a surprise if two different candidates met on the way. If this happened, they gave their best shots of dancing and playing *chinyimba*. By the fact that both of them were to be initiated at the same time meant that they were *bakoki*. Hence it was important for them to salute one another (Kusimba, O.I, 2014). It was also a way of encouraging one another because the ultimate end to both of them was to face the painful knife. At the end of the day, the candidate and his procession returned home to give a report of the day's event. When they arrived home while singing melodically, everything was put to a standstill as they all turned their attention on

ushering their son back home from the day's visits (Mwambu, O.I, 2014).



Photo no. 2. Candidates moving around the village to invite relatives for their circumcision ceremony.

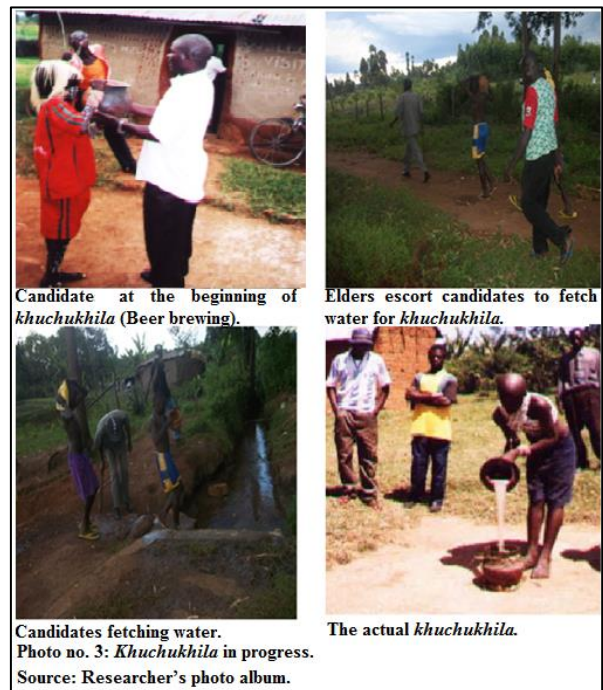
Source: Researcher's photo album

Beer brewing

Kamalwa ke kamaemba (traditional liquor) also called *busaa* was a mandatory requirement for any circumcision ceremony. As such, therefore, the candidate played a key cultural role in preparing this liquor (Wagner, 1949: 342 and Makila, 1982: 126). Traditionally, this role was called *khuchukhila*. Before then, enough maize and millet were collected and converted into maize flour and yeast (*limela*) respectively. Millet was dried in the sun and then spread on a piece of cloth or sack in the corner of the house. Conditions for germination were then exposed to the millet and after three to four days, the germinated millet was dried. It was then ground to produce a powdered substance which was traditionally called *limela* (Lusike, O.I, 2014). Thereafter, maize flour was fermented for two or three days. It was then fried to produce brown substances called *chimuma* or *kamakhalange* (Makila, 1982: 125). Part of these *chimuma* were normally mixed with water by the candidate, a process traditionally called *khuchukhila*. The boy fetched water from the river using a small pot. Another pot containing *chimuma* was placed outside his father's house or at the home of a very close paternal relative where he was to be circumcised (Khamalwa, 2004: 80).

While going to and coming from the river, the initiate was not supposed to look back. According to our informants, this was a symbol of transition from childhood to adulthood. He was reminded that after circumcision, he should never behave like a child anymore. The same symbolism applied to the fact that while coming from the river, he was to use a different route from the one he used while going to fetch water (Makila, 1982: 125). That aside, this was also done to escape evil, witchcraft traps and snares that might have been planted on that route. When the boy finally reached

home, he poured water into *chimuma* (see photo no. 3, Beer brewing in progress).



Candidate at the beginning of *khuchukhila* (Beer brewing).

Elders escort candidates to fetch water for *khuchukhila*.

Candidates fetching water.

The actual *khuchukhila*.

Photo no. 3: *Khuchukhila* in progress.

Source: Researcher's photo album.

After accomplishing this task, he played *chinyimba* and the famous *Bukusu sioyaye* (a peculiar historical song among the Babukusu which is majorly sung when escorting the candidate to the circumcision spot) chant was sung for the first time. By singing this song, nothing stopped the boy from being circumcised, even if he reversed his decision (Masika, O.I, 2014). Moreover, the song awakened the circumcision spirits which possessed some individuals in the society. The resultant mixture was partly eaten and the rest was mixed with water and this was the genesis of the whole process

of beer brewing, traditionally called *khukoya kamalwa*. Later on, *limela* was added into the concoction to change it into alcohol. However, some of the *limela* was also mixed with water and used to decorate the entire body of the boy (Khamalwa, 2004: 80). Thereafter, he was sent to invite his paternal aunt (*senge*) and the maiden uncle, *khocha* (Wagner, 1949: 342).

The visit to the maiden uncle

The visit to the maiden uncle (*khucha ebukhocha*) was another fundamental cultural stage in Bukusu circumcision which was accorded due respect it deserved. It was the climax moment of all invitations made earlier and the candidate was given *likhoni* to take home. *Likhoni* was expected to be a bullock, and it was either slaughtered or was given alive. Khamalwa (2004: 86) elucidates that it was a mandatory obligation for the uncle to comply with this rite because he was only returning some profits accrued from the cows he benefited that proceeded from the bride wealth of his sister. If the maiden uncle had nothing to offer, he tied *lukhafwa* (star grass) around the boy's neck as a sign of commitment to fulfilling his cultural obligation to his nephew sometimes later (Makila, 1982: 126).

Under normal circumstances however, a bull was slaughtered and the candidate was given a piece of the bullock's breast meat (*luliki*) to take home. It was hung around his neck like a collar (Wagner, 1949: 343 and Khamalwa, 2004: 87). Before then, cud (*busee*) was smeared on the chest and the face of the boy. This was a symbolic act of invoking the boy's ancestors to come and be with him as he began his adulthood life. It also instilled courage (*bunyindafu*) to the boy. While doing all these, wise counsels and moral words were told to the boy by the uncle (Makila, 1982: 126).

Economically, *busee* signified the material wealth the candidate was supposed accrue, especially from the rearing of animals. Performing this ritual, the uncle told the boy that if he showed signs of fear when being cut, he would have inherited the cowardice genes from his father. He would also brag to the boy how he showed courage and bravery when he was circumcised some years back. He would claim that his courage that morning made everything to stand still. Even birds

stopped singing and that the sun also stopped moving in honour of his courage (Wanyama, 2017: 69).

Thereafter, the *sioyaye* chant was sung for the second time before the boy was released to go back home. He was expected to carry home the piece of meat around his neck. Again, all the meat was ferried to the boy's home apart from *sinama* (one hind leg) which was left for the uncle (Makila, 1982: 126). If the boy was given a live animal, *sinama* was taken from his home to the uncle.

Culturally, *likhoni* signified the new birth which was symbolized by being dressed with a piece of meat which was fresh with dripping blood. This was a symbolic reality of a baby coming out of the mother's womb. The importance of this second birth was due to the fact that the individual was now shedding off a former self, a life of childhood and indifference and coming out into a different world of concern, procreation and responsibility (Makhanu, O.I, 2014). When *omusinde* (candidate) arrived home, the meat was removed and it was given to *senge* (paternal aunt) who made a delicious meal out of it (Lusike, O.I, 2014). The candidate was then given enough food to eat to ensure that he had physical stamina to face the operation the following morning.

The night dancing and feasting

Before we give an account of *khuminya* (night singing, dancing and feasting), perhaps, we should give a brief description of the preparations that were put in place at the boy's home on that day. The *namwima*, (shrine) where the bull was to be slaughtered was constructed (Makila, 1982: 127). It was a small thatched structure with a height of up to a maximum of one meter and with a radius of up to a maximum of 50cm. The structure was constructed barely three to five meters away from the spot where the boy would stand while being circumcised (see photo no. 4a, the structure of the *namwima* and the palm tree). The structure was supported using pillars, usually taken from *kumusola* (*Markhamia platycalyx*), *kumulaha* (*Cambretum bindranum*), *kumusunu* and *kumukomosi* (*Vangueria apiculata*) trees (Tabalia, O.I, 2015). Its roof was covered with the *nabuyeywe* grass and additional palm tree (*kumukhendu*) leaf was erected on it (KNA, DE/NN/10/1/5: 1948).

*Namwima**Namwima**Namwima**Kumukhendu (Palm tree)*

Photo no. 4a: The structure of *namwima* (shrine) and the palm trees (*Kumukhendu*)

Source: Researcher's photo album

These trees had social-cultural significance in the making of the *namwima*. The palm tree (*kumukhendu*) has many leaves and its use was meant to encourage the boy to bear many children. *Kumusola* (*Markhamia platycalyx*) on the other hand was meant to console the initiate during his difficult moments and when faced with problems. During such difficult moments, *kumusunu* would come in to help the initiate jump and evade the misfortunes and other challenges before him (Makila, 1982: 183-187). Again, *kumukomosi* (*Vangueria apiculata*) tree diverted away the misfortunes from the initiate, thus bringing success instead. *Kumulaha* (*Cambretum bindlranum*) would then cheer the initiate during his successful moments in life. The use of *kumulaha* is however, a recent additional tree in the making of the *namwima* (see photo no. 4b, trees that were used to make *namwima*).

Besides the trees, three stones were placed inside the *namwima* (Makila, 1982: 178). The stones were a symbolic representation of God among the Babukusu. They represented *Wele Mukhobe*, *Wele Mwana* and *Wele Murumwa* all of which formed the

completeness of God in the Bukusu traditional religion. Comparing this with the Trinitarian nature of Christianity, the above three aspects of God among the Babukusu can be equated to God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit respectively (Banda, O.I, 2014).

A bull was then slaughtered next to the structure and blood, cud and a piece of meat, normally from the rumen were placed in the structure. This was a share of God and by doing so, He would have been appeased. The *lisombo* (rumen) which contained cud was put next to the *namwima* as it awaited being used later in the evening. Note that the boy's father shared special meat with his age-sets (*bakoki*) to symbolically express his respect and honour to them. This enhanced social cohesion and unity in their relations in the community. This meat was referred to as *lubaka* and it was a cultural requirement to be observed by the age-set members whenever they initiated their sons (Wagner, 1949: 376). *Lubaka* symbolized how age-set members respected one another. The rest of the meat was preserved through smoking and it was to be the main source of vegetable to the *omufulu* (a boy nursing circumcision wound).



Before *khuminya* started, the boy was again ushered into the spiritual world. At the *namwima*, a piece of meat was extracted from the rumen which measured around 30cm long and 10cm width (Makila, 1982: 179). A cut was made in the middle of it such that the two ends of the longer parts of the meat were not separated. Cud was then smeared on the bear chest and the face of the boy before hanging that meat around the neck. Wise counsels and moral words were told to the boy after which the *sioyaye* chant was sung for the third time (See photo no. 5: application of cud to the *omusinde* and *khuminya*).

That marked the beginning of *khuminya*. The over excited and happy crowd sung all circumcision songs within their knowledge, making circular movements around the boy. Sometimes, the boy was made to join the circular movements. He was slapped, made to kneel, made to lie on the ground and he was under obligation to respond to all the demands that were expected from him. Occasionally, he was told to give his best dancing styles and if he did not satisfy the challenger, he was given all forms of insults (Nabisiolo, O.I, 2014). He was told how he was stupid like his father, how the soloist or any other person had sexual intercourse with his mother, how his father was found having sex with a sheep or any other animal, how he was

to have sex with his mother or sister among other vulgar words that were appropriately used (Wanyama and Egesa 2015: 11). Such claims were always lies and they were only meant to orient the boy to the sexual life that followed after he was circumcised (Parrinder, 1976: 94-95).

The boy's father was sometimes fetched from the house and he was sarcastically told to assist his son to play *chinyimba*. At times, the boy was taken to the house where elders were taking their favourite drink, *busaa*. They also insulted the boy using wise words and the use of vulgar words was applied within the context of their age and wisdom. However, a time came when the *omusinde* was allowed to have some sleep. But many candidates rarely got the sleep because they were thinking about the painful knife the following morning. While sleeping, tight security was given to the boy lest he decided to run away (Musikiti, O.I, 2014). As the night grew old, most of the people retired to their beds only to return early the following morning to finish the incomplete business. They had to witness how the boy faced the knife.

At the mudding place

The journey to the mudding place (*esitosi/syotosi*) began shortly after the appearance of the

eng'aniesi ya sulwe (The morning star). If the candidate was either the first or the last born and that his paternal grandfather was dead, a sacrifice was offered at the cemetery that morning (Naulikha, O.I, 2014). Thereafter, the candidate was taken to the river. Normally, *bitosi/ebitosi* (plural for *sitosi*) were always located along permanent river banks or at a natural water source which never dried (Makila, 1982: 127). It is claimed that

if *sitosi* dried up, all people who were smeared mud from it died also. However, a clear and correct assertion as to why *bitosi* never dried up was an indication that the initiate and his generation shall forever flourish and remain significant in the community. It should also be known that not any place along the river was *sitosi*. There were specific places along river banks which were designated as *bitosi* by elders (Khamalwa, 2004: 88).



Twins were normally taken to the river as early as 3:00 a.m. and circumcised by 5:00 a.m. According to Naulikha (O.I, 2014), twins were not supposed to be exposed anyhow to the public during daytime. This belief enhanced the fact that they were a rare phenomenon and they were feared and respected. For this reason, they were acknowledged and treated as special in all respects. They were always circumcised on the same day unlike normal brothers who were not allowed to face the surgery the same year, leave alone the same day (Wanyama, 2005). The elder of the two, that is, the one who was born first (*Mukhwana*), was circumcised first, followed by the second one (*Mulongo*). Traditionally, the circumciser was to use the same knife to circumcise both of them so as to justify the fact that they shared the same womb, were born on the same day and always lived in mutual agreement. However, the emergence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic made this impossible because circumcisers were advised by the government health officers to use separate knives to circumcise twins.

In the case of the twins being male and female, the female twin always followed the male one everywhere he went during the period of inviting relatives. Although she occasionally danced with her male counterpart, she did not play *chinyimba*. On the circumcision day, she accompanied her brother to the river where she was tied with banana leaves around the waist. Unlike her twin brother, she did not strip naked and only her face was smeared with mud. It was believed that her presence gave moral support to the real initiate who may psychologically feel confident; that after all he was not facing the ordeal alone (Wambani, O.I, 2014). This factor is pertinent since in many cases, twins, especially identical ones, are affected by whatever that happens to either of them.

On arrival at home from the river, the female twin was the first to be initiated by symbolically cutting part of the banana leaves tied around her waist. The knife used to circumcise the twins was not used to circumcise any other initiate on the same day. It was supposed to be

ritually cleansed before being used again on another day. After circumcision, the female twin continued to accompany her male twin and provided him with basic needs like serving him with food and drinks (Wanyama, 2005).

Bitosi among the Babukusu formed part of the sacred places and they were treated with utmost respect in the community. Being a place with permanent water, they were equated to the amniotic fluid found in the uterus of a woman during pregnancy (Wanyama, 2017: 69). That is why the candidate was taken there to be smeared with mud and walked naked to his home as an illustration of how a baby is born naked after the discharge of the amniotic fluid. Moreover, they were no-go zones to some individuals especially girls and women. They were out of bounds during periods when there was no circumcision (Makila, 1982: 128) and those who contravened this rule were liable for punishment from elders or sometimes ancestors. If further interrogated, the sacredness bestowed to the *bitosi* by these cultured people is very important for the environmental conservation. The ritual should, therefore, be upheld in today's Bukusu world in order to enhance the environmental management and conservation, being one of the contemporary issues that is of great concern by Kenya as country and the world at large. For this to be realized, all the *bitosi* among the Babukusu should be earmarked and be declared public lands. They should be guarded in a manner similar to what is done to other national heritages in Kenya.

It should also be observed that land was communally owned among the Babukusu (Wafula, 2003: 66). Therefore, nobody claimed ownership of any place designated for *sitosi* and in most cases *bitosi* were owned by various clans. A good example is the researcher's clan *sitosi* which is located along the Kitale-Bungoma road via Kimilili town that is located near Maeni Girls High School which is in the backyard of the famous Bukusu prophet and anti-colonial crusader, Elijah Masinde Okhwa Nameme (Kunusia, O.I, 2014). The *sitosi* is largely dominated by the Babichachi which is the second largest clan in Maeni ward after the Bakwangwa clan. Other clans which use this *sitosi* include Basonge, Batilu, Baechalo, Bakitang'a, Bakhanywinywi, Banang'anda, Balako, Basiyende, Basefu, Bamweya, Bakhubili, Basioya, Bang'ale, Bayemba and Bachemwile.

While going to *esitosi*, the candidate played his *chinyimba* while the crowd accompanying him sung a very peculiar song meant to escort candidates to the river (Wagner, 1949: 343). Among the Babukusu, there is a saying which states that "*kenda mbola kola ebuyumbo.*" *Ebuyumbo* refers to a community which was thought to be the Bwara by the Babukusu but later on, *Kitimule* (a Bukusu spy) found out that it was the Bayumbo, another name of the Batachoni (KNA, DC/EN/3/2/4: 1929-1935). The saying also has meaning similar to "hurry

hurry has no blessings" or other, "better late than never." Therefore, the movement of the candidate at this moment was always at a slow pace because it was traditionally wrong for him to fall down whether accidentally or intentionally while going to and coming from the river (Makila, 1982: 128).

As the procession neared the mudding place, the candidate was instructed to strip naked. He was also told to throw away *chinyimba*. This was a sign of denying childhood completely and accepting to become a man. It also symbolized new birth that the boy acquired after the surgery. It was equivalent to the natural birth where a child is always born naked. Note that care was always taken on the candidate's pants to avoid being stolen by *omulosi* (wizard or sorcerer) who always had malicious and evil intentions against the boy (Mwambu, O.I, 2014). In this regard, therefore, a very close and trusted relative to the boy was assigned the duty of collecting them once the boy stripped naked.

At the mudding place, the candidate was told to jump into the river (Wagner, 1949: 343). This initiated the vasoconstriction of the veins thus reducing the speed at which blood flowed. Meanwhile, one of the boy's uncles collected a lump of soil for *khulonga*. He also gathered a small grass traditionally called *ututu* or *lusinyande* whose use will be explained in a short while. Thereafter, *khulonga omusinde* (smearing the candidate with mud) started and it was always done away from the place where the mud was collected. The spot at which the boy stood while being smeared with mud was to be a new one. It was not to be a place where another *omusinde* stood few minutes ago while being smeared with mud as well (Khamalwa, 2004: 88-89).

Normally, *khulonga* involved throwing a lump of soil on the boy's chest and then smearing mud on the nude body of the initiate. During this moment, the candidate was expected to be alert with his head tilted at an angle of elevation. A lump of soil was always mounted on his head and the grass collected was erected in it (Makila, 1982: 128). The grass (*kwa ututu*) played a significant role of measuring the alertness, courageousness and the bravery of the boy while being cut. When being cut and the boy made a slight movement, it was easily noticed through the grass on the mounted on the head (Masika, O.I, 2014). Other people argue that *ututu* acted as the communication link between the mother and the boy before he reached home. That aside, it is also claimed that *ututu* signified the leadership crown the initiate was to be given upon the successful completion of the circumcision rituals (See photo no. 6: At the mudding place and *khulonga*).

Wanyama (2005) on the other hand argues that the mud and the single grass together symbolized a new home for the initiate, that is, after undergoing circumcision, the initiate was mandated by the

community to build or start his own home. It may be argued that these symbols signified, grass and mud, materials used by the Babukusu in building traditional huts. Wanyama (ibid) argues that *kwa ututu* was also

associated with a wild dark bird whose feathers were very poisonous. This particular bird was called *ututu*. The poison in its feathers symbolized the bitterness of the Bukusu circumcision rite called *emba*.



Being a sacred place, very few people were allowed to reach the mudding place (Makila, 1982: 128). Always, the boy's uncles, his elder brothers and cousins and the person carrying his pants and *chinyimba* were privileged to reach the mudding place. The rest of the people waited for the candidate at a place designated for them near the shrine of the river. Before the procession began the journey back home, the boy played his *chinyimba* for the last time in his entire life. Note that *chinyimba* was not played in *musitosi* (in the mudding place) hence the candidate was carefully escorted out of the mudding place and upon reaching an appropriate place not very far, he played *chinyimba* for the last time in the rest of his life. That marked the beginning of the final journey of the boy in search of manhood. The only journey that a man walked naked while going home. In this journey, the route that was used when going to the mudding place was avoided (Makila, 1982: 128). This

was meant to confuse witches who might have planned to plant harmful charms to harm the candidate.

From the mudding place

The *sioyaye* chant was the only song that was sung while escorting the candidate home (Khamalwa, 2004: 91). Whenever the chant was heard that morning, people possessed with the circumcision spirits traditionally called *kimisambwa kie bukhebi* were easily noticed. They always trembled and shivered and they rarely calmed down. They ran here and there in search of something that could appease the spirits but it was of no success. Young men who had these spirits eventually became circumcisers while women with the spirits of *bukhebi* gave birth to boys who eventually became traditional circumcisers as well (Wambani, O.I, 2014). Occasionally, some candidates were also affected by the spirits of *bukhebi*. To appease the spirit, the affected persons did two things; they were supposed to run and

meet the candidate who was heading home by then. Once they saw him, the spirits were appeased. Alternatively, they were given circumcision knives to hold in their hands until they calmed down. *Omusinde* possessed with these spirits was also given a circumcision knife (*lukembe*) to carry while going home (Wambani, O.I, 2014).

Meanwhile, those who remained at home put everything in order to receive the boy. The most important of all was the preparation of *etiang'i*. This was the spot where the candidate was to stand while being

circumcised. This duty was culturally reserved for senior elders of the family (Makila, 1982: 130). *Etiang'i* was made at the exact place where the pot which had *chimuma* was placed during *khuchukhila*. Traditionally, *etiang'i* was made by making a shallow cut on the ground (Naulikha, O.I, 2014). After the candidate was circumcised, the place was covered with cow dung to evade any chances of witchcraft. But in recent past, the Babukusu adopted the use newspapers in preparing *chitiang'i* (plural for *etiang'i*) (See photo no. 7: Circumcision spots, *chitiang'i*).



An elder prepares *chitiang'i*.
Photo no. 7: Circumcision spots, *chitiang'i*.
Source: Researcher's photo album.



Elders keep vigil of *chitiang'i* just before candidates arrive.

It has to be observed that if there were more than two candidates from the same family; step brothers and cousins, each of them was allocated his own *etiang'i* depending on their seniority. The eldest son or cousin was the first one to be circumcised and he also led the others from *esitosi* (Banda, O.I, 2014). In an event that someone was initiated at the same time with his nephew, he was circumcised before his nephew faced the cut (Wagner, 1949: 349). Normally, *etiang'i* that was close to the door that entered the main house was reserved for the first boy to be circumcised. It must also be clearly stated that biological brothers were never circumcised on the same year. However, twin brothers were circumcised together but the one who was born first (*Mukhwana*) was the first one to face the knife.

Before the candidate arrived home, a delegation comprising the father, the aunt (*senge*) and other elders was sent to welcome the boy home. The paternal aunt was the first to meet the boy. She dipped the cooking stick into the residue of *busaa*. She was also expected to hang a piece of meat on her right earlobe to enhance courage to the boy. She also blackened her face with soot and this was supposed to ward off evil spirits (Makila,

1982: 128). The father on the other hand was tied with a blanket in such a way that one end of the blanket passed under the armpit of one hand and the other end of the blanket passed on the shoulder of another hand. He had a walking stick or spear in his hand. Traditionally, animal skins were used instead of the blanket. The skin or the blanket won by the father that morning represented the blanket or the skin the boy's parents' covered themselves the night when the boy was conceived (Masika, O.I, 2014). Again, this signified the second birth of the boy in which the father played a key role.

Just before the boy entered his home, *senge* was dispatched to meet the boy. While running and holding the cooking stick in her right arm, she went straight and brushed the residue of *busaa* on the left cheek of the boy. This action was traditionally referred to as *khukhombia omusinde kumukango* (Lusike, O.I, 2014). However, brave boys blocked this action using their right hands and if this happened, the aunt was fined a goat which was given to the candidate. Once she accomplished her duty, she rushed back to join her sister-in-law (the boy's mother), who by now was seated in the kitchen holding a sickle (*engeso*) in her right hand, spreading her limbs

in front of her (Makila, 1982: 130). This sitting posture is called *khulambisia*. They were expected to sit in that posture without any movement until a whistle signaling the end of the cut was heard. Any slightest movement from any of them would lead to the movement of the boy standing outside while being cut and this was regarded as signs of cowardice hence the mother and the aunt remained in that rigid position to avoid any eventuality that would otherwise make their son to be seen as a coward (Nandabi, O.I, 2014) (See photo no. 8: From the mudding place to the circumcision ground).

The second delegation, led by the boy's father, then met the candidate shortly after *senge*. This process is traditionally called *khukhwakanila omwana*. Final wise and moral counsels were told to the boy at this meeting. The father then held one of the boy's hands and another senior elder did the same to the remaining hand, sandwiching the candidate. They then led the boy to the *etiang'i* where the circumciser was eagerly waiting for the arrival of his client. The main entrance into the homestead was avoided (Musikiti, O.I, 2014). By now, people had hurriedly entered the homestead to take good positions which enabled them to observe keenly as the operation was done.

The real surgery

Just before the candidate arrived on the circumcision ground, an announcement was always

made instructing people of a particular age-group (*embaka*) to stand at a particular point in line with the position the candidate would face (Khalaba, O.I, 2014). Normally, all people who belonged to the same *embaka* with the circumciser were always told to stand behind the candidate. It was a taboo if a member of the same age-group with the circumciser stood behind him while performing such an important cultural assignment. Again, all circumcisers present were required to identify themselves by publicly exposing their circumcision knives. Others put their knives on roof tops of any thatched structures present in the homestead. If any knife was hidden or more than two knives tied together, the five to ten seconds circumcision surgery was not completed successful.

With everybody standing in his or her rightful position, the candidate was led to the circumcision spot and he was instructed to relax and be composed. The circumciser, who was impatient to perform the surgery, was also advised to relax and to be composed as well. All circumcisers were always possessed with *bukhebi* spirits during these moments and sometimes, they performed the surgery in a hurry causing damage and sometimes death of the candidate (Khalaba, O.I, 2014). Therefore, elders who were present guided them to avoid such negative eventualities.



The candidate beats *chinyimba* for the last time in the rest of his life.



The candidate is escorted back home from the mudding place.



***Senge* runs back to join the boy's mother after performing a mandatory cultural duty to her nephew.**



The boy's mother, *senge* and other senior female members seated few minutes before the boy is circumcised.

**Photo no. 8: From the mudding place to the circumcision ground.
Source: Researcher's photo album.**

The much anticipated moment in the entire process of circumcision ceremony then took centre stage. This was the moment of truth that was highly charged with excitement and expectations (Khamalwa, 2004: 92). When the *omusinde* finally stood on the *etiang'i*, silence engulfed the homestead (Wanyama and Egesa, 2015: 13). Depending on the clan and its peculiar culture, the candidate was instructed on where to face (Makila, 1982: 128-129). It is worth noting that some clans instructed candidates to stand with arms akimbo while others told their boys to stand straight like a scout in an alert posture. Other clans gave their candidates walking sticks to cross them over their shoulders stretching hands on them (Musikiti, O.I, 2014). One or two elders stood in front of the boy, instructing him to focus his eyes on a club raised above him.

Eventually, a seemingly excited and impatient circumciser emerged, holding the knife in his right hand (The Nation Newspaper of 11th August 2004). His assistant, traditionally referred to as *omutili* or *omubingilisi* swiftly put dust (*lipukhulu*) made from

baked brick into the boy's prepuce (Makila, 1982: 129). The dust enabled the circumciser to have a good grasp of the inner prepuce, which is always very slippery. The foreskin (*lifunga*) was then pulled back into its normal position leaving the dust inside. This is where the initial process of *khukhwobia* was important. A candidate who had already accomplished *khukhwobia* gave no hard time to the initiator. Otherwise, those who had not completed this process got more pain because the circumciser pulled back the prepuce without any sympathy, before putting dust inside.

With dust inside, the foreskin was chopped off and depending on the expertise and the experience of the *omukhebi*, one cut was enough if he was a guru in his profession (Wagner, 1949: 350). However, young professions made two or three cuts which were very painful. The cut prepuce in most cases was stuck on one side of the boy's hips or it was dropped down and the initiator stepped on it. This was done to ensure that malicious people who wanted to use it to bewitch the boy did not steal it (see photo no. 9: The actual operation).



Elders lead the candidate to the *etiang'i*.

Photo no. 9: The actual operation.

Source: Researcher's photo album.



A five to ten seconds circumcision surgery in progress.

Upon accomplishing his work, the circumciser blew his whistle to announce the completion of circumcision after which he ran away (Wanyama and Egesa, 2015: 13). That marked both the climax and the anticlimax moment as the completely high drama of weeks and months ended within seconds. The mother and the aunt burst into ululation upon hearing the whistle (Makila, 1982: 130). They hurriedly rushed outside to see the nude boy standing firmly as if nothing had happened. Blood dropped down which united him with his ancestors. The jubilant and excited crowd then sang a song explaining how they had killed *omurwa* (singular of *Barwa*). The mention of the Barwa in this song reminds the Babukusu how Mango reformed their circumcision at Mwiala. It also reminds them how they eventually triumphed over the Barwa in the subsequent years following the Mwiala incident. Gifts and congratulatory messages were then given to the boy and he was saluted for having shown exemplary courage during the cut.

He was later covered with a blanket or a sheet of cloth. Traditionally, newly initiated boys were covered using animal's skins. The candidate was very feeble and tired by now and he was supported to seat. Normally, the boy's aunt, sister or elder brothers did this. Traditionally, this process is called *khukhwikhasia omwana*. However, brave boys refused to sit down until they were given a desirable gift. The gift was always demanded from the father and such gifts included cows, money or sometimes he was assigned his younger sister or lady cousin and should this be the case, he got the

largest share of the dowry which proceeded after she was married.

Once the boy sat down, a basket traditionally called *lutelu* was put besides him. It contained maize, millet and other farm produce and this was meant to usher the boy into adulthood life where he was expected to be the bread winner of his new family to be established soon (Masika, O.I, 2014). When all these were being done, people present were very vigilant on the boy, lest a wizard got a chance of stealing something from the neophyte to use it to bewitch him (Mwambu, O.I, 2014). Within ten minutes after the cut, the boy was taken into a hut where he nursed the circumcision wound (See photo no. 10: Few minutes after the surgery).

Before this was done however, the piece of meat around his neck was removed. The heap of soil on his head with *lusinyande* grass was also removed. Also, the heap of soil mounted between his eyes was scrapped off. All these paraphernalia were wrapped together with the prepuce and were disposed on the third day after the cut (Makila, 1982: 131). By now, *namakhala/namachengeche* (assistant to the circumcised candidate) had been appointed from the younger siblings of the candidate. The boy was then directed into the house where he was to stay until the passing out ceremony was conducted. However, the boy made a reverse movement around the house guided and supported by his father or elder brother. This symbolized the backward entry into the cave of the *khuruwe ya bebe*, the snake Mango killed at Mwiala (Nabisiolo, O.I, 2014).



The boy is congratulated for having shown exemplary courage during the surgery.

The boy's mother looks at her newly circumcised son.

Senge removes *kwa ututu*, soil and *lisombo* from the boy's body.

A basket full of gifts from relatives, friends and neighbours to the boy.

Photo no. 10: Few minutes after the surgery.
Source: Researcher's photo album.

The seclusion period

At this juncture, the boy was ushered into a period of seclusion (Wagner, 1949: 353) traditionally called *mwikombe* and it was characterized, mainly by the separation of the novice from the rest of the people. During this time, the wound was nursed by a traditional herbalist using leaves from the *enguu* herb (*Microglossa pyrifolia*). The leaves were plucked, dried and then crushed to form a black powdered substance that was used to treat the wound (Makila, 1982: 131). Apart from treating the circumcision wound, *enguu* had other functions whose interpretation may be misunderstood to imply actions related to witchcraft. Lusike (O.I, 2014) observes that the herb was very relevant in treating a breastfeeding child affected by the oxytocin hormone which is occasioned by the conception of another pregnancy by the mother. It is noted that fresh leaves from this plant were crushed and mixed with bathing water. While bathing using this treated water, the expectant mother was supposed to ensure that the after-bathing water dripped to the young child under the effect of the mother's oxytocin hormone. Further still, the affected child was made to drink part of this water to ensure complete healing.

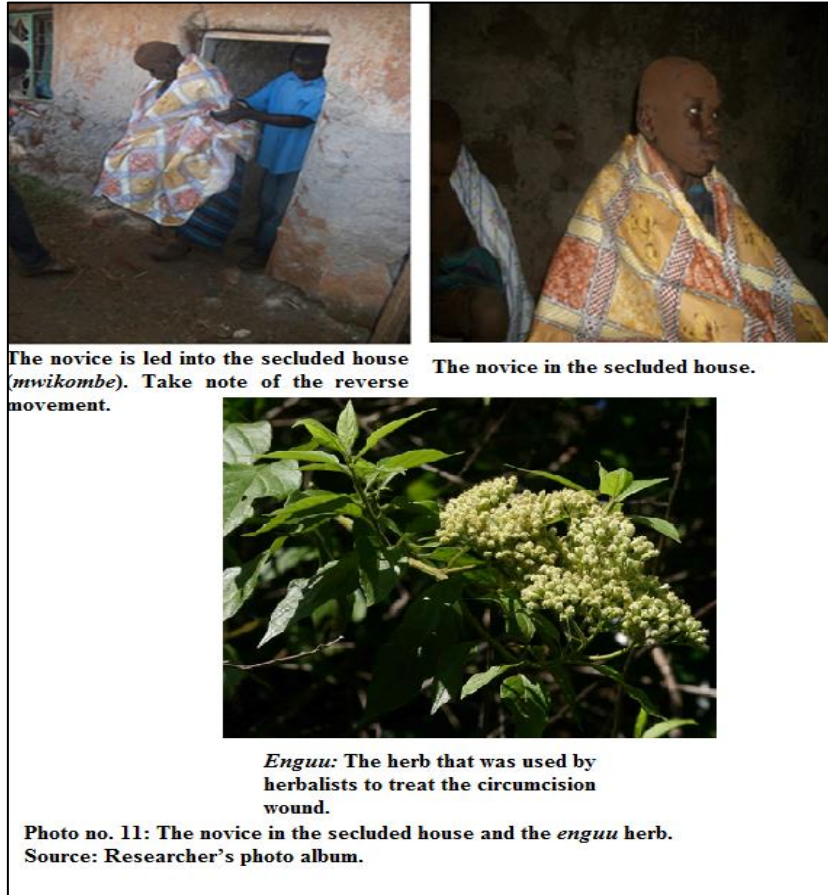
Three days after being circumcised, the novice was officially commissioned to walk around the village

but caution was taken lest he became a victim of witchcraft and sorcery (See photo no. 11: The novice in the secluded house and the *enguu* herb, *Microglossa pyrifolia*). To be elusive on such snares, he was culturally forbidden from shaking hands with anybody while exchanging greetings. However, he was required to make a walking stick meant for greetings. Elderly people used the stick to knock the boy's shin-bones as a way of greeting him (Wagner, 1949: 359). But children and girls were tapped on their ankles as an indication of being greeted by the *omufulu* (neophyte or novice nursing circumcision wound). He was fed on special diet often comprising of meat and sorghum ugali. No bathing was allowed for the boy during this period and special soil taken from the river banks or swamps was normally applied on the boy's body (Nabisiolo, O.I, 2014). When it dried and fell off, it came out with dirty from the body. Again, the boy was not allowed to cut his hair until the passing out day which occurred four months after the cut.

Note that a very significant cultural rite, traditionally called *khubita* (Moral counseling), was always conducted during this period (Makokha, 1993: 76-78). This rite was characterized by the boy being told words of wisdom by his circumciser. Other senior members of the family also revealed various family secrets and norms to the boy. Wafula (2003: 84) likens

this to modern formal education where lessons are taught to students. This rite was observed in totality hence feasting was not exempted on this day. *Busaa* played a key role in this rite but the advent of Christianity and Western mode of government in Kenya illegalized the

liquor. In turn, other beverages like tea, soft drinks and industrially manufactured alcoholic drinks were sometimes incorporated into this ceremony (Cheloti, O.I, 2014).



The graduation stage

Four months later, the boy went through the very last stage of becoming a real man. This was the passing out stage traditionally called *khukhwiyalula* (Wagner, 1949: 363-365). The circumcised wound would have been healed by this time and on this occasion, the novice officially graduated from childhood to adulthood (Makila, 1982: 134-136). As usual, *busaa* always featured on the menu of the day. Nevertheless, other foodstuffs were also prepared for many anticipated guests. On the night before the passing out ceremony, the novice together with other friends and relatives prepared a bonfire where they roasted green bananas to eat. During all this time the neophyte was spending in a temporary structure constructed in the nearby banana plantation (Wagner, 1949: 364). At the crack of dawn the following day, the entire crew which spent the night in a banana plantation proceeded to the river. The novice then took a shower in anticipation of the new clothes that were to be sent to him. At around midday, a delegation of two or three people from home delivered the new clothes to the novice. Traditionally, new skins were used to signify new beginning (Makhanu, O.I, 2015). Thereafter, the

procession went straight home and like any other circumcision journey, another route was followed. Full of joy and happiness, the neophyte burst into a song explaining how his parents used to insult and lough at him. However, he was now dressed in a new cloth, a cloth of adulthood (Makila, 1982: 135). Culturally, this implied that from that time henceforth, the boy's parents were expected to give him due respect because he was no longer a child.

On arriving home, the crew was served with boiled banana. However, eating eventually turned into a mock fight and the leftover bananas were used as weapons. The main culprit in this fight was the novice, and all participants threw their best shots at him. Culturally, this was meant to usher the boy into adult life that required him to gather enough food for his family and even neighbours. It should however, be noted that during the pre-colonial period, a wrestling contest was always staged and the novice was the main character (Khamalwa, 2004: 189). He was always given a shield and a spear. This contest was meant to orient the newly inaugurated man into cattle raiding sprees that were

expected to follow soon. The spear and the shield also meant that it was his duty to always take arms and attack an enemy as well as shielding his community against external aggressions. After the wrestling contest, a group of selected senior elders summoned the boy for further instructions and lessons on adulthood life. He was cautioned against engaging in sexual affairs with married women but he was permitted to have sex with any unmarried women including widows (Wasilwa, 2014: 2). He was also prohibited from going into his mother's kitchen because, having become an adult, it was unlawful if he found his mother seated in an awkward manner in the kitchen.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the foregoing discussion, it is plausible to conclude that Bukusu circumcision is a cultural rite which follows systematic stages that are very significant and purposeful. Each of these phases has symbolic significance which illustrates peculiar meanings and value that does not explicitly come out to those who have very little knowledge regarding this idea. The symbolism and the significance attached to the circumcision phases in this community contain pertinent information to the initiate and the community at large. The essence of unity in the community is enhanced through the night singing and dancing while the value of generosity is engrossed in the community through adequate food provisions during the entire circumcision ceremony. It is also factual to assert that Bukusu circumcision contains numerous lessons to the initiates which are very fundamental in his future life. Such claims are rarely told by those that have attempted to downplay the legitimacy of this culture and it is the desire of many Afro-centric authors and scholars to bring these facts in the academic field.

1.1. Glossary of Bukusu words

Babukusu: One of the seventeen sub-nations that comprise the Baluyha cluster of the inter-lacustrine Bantu nations of East Africa.

Bakoki: The age mates of the initiate's father.

Barwa: A tribe which used to be perennial enemies of the Babukusu.

Busee: Contents from a goat's/bull's stomach with which the initiate is smeared on the night of *khuminya*.

Chinyimba: Bells which the initiate strikes on metal rings worn on both of his wrists.

Enguu: A traditional herb that was used in the treatment of the circumcised wound.

Etiang'i: The spot at which the initiate is circumcised.

Kamakhalange/chimuma: Brown subsistence that was produced after frying fermented maize flour. It was the main ingredient during *busaa* brewing.

Kamalwa ke kamaemba: Traditional liquor that was made using sorghum and millet.

Khuchukhila: Preparation of ceremonial traditional brew by the initiate.

Khukhwiyalula: A ceremony organized in the month of December, in which the initiates spent a night together roasting bananas around a bon-fire to mark the end their healing period.

Khuminya: The activities related to the performance of vocal and instrumental music during the Bukusu circumcision ritual.

Kwa ututu: A heap of mud put on the initiate's head on which a piece of grass (*lusinyande*) is pinned.

Likhoni: The meat cut from the chest of a bull (*luliki*) and put around the initiate's neck as a gift from his uncle. Sometimes, a live bull may be given.

Mwikombe: A resting room for the initiate/ secluded house.

Limela: Millet flour with which the initiate was smeared on the face, hands and sometimes the whole body. It was also an ingredient that was used as yeast during the brewing of *busaa*.

Lipukhulu: Fine dry soil dust that reduces slipperiness of the fingers of the circumciser's helper.

Lubaka: A gift in form of meat offered by the initiate's father to his *bakoki*.

Khubita: The advising and commissioning of the initiate that is usually administered by his circumciser or his elderly male relative.

Lukembe: circumcision knife.

Embalu: A term used by the Bukusu to refer to the circumcision ritual or the double-edged sword/knife used for circumcision.

Lukhafwa: Special type of grass tied around the neck of the candidate by the maiden uncle as sign of committing himself to accomplish the *likhoni* ritual in future.

Luliki: The central part of the chest of animals such as cattle, sheep and goats.

Lusinyande: A special type of grass pinned in the mud on the initiate's head during the *khulonga* process.

Lusola/Lusyola: A type of tree whose branches are hard to break and are used for the construction of the shrine (*namwima*).

Mango: The courageous man who is believed to have reformed the circumcision ritual among the Bukusu after killing the *khuruwe ya bebe*.

Mukhwana: The elder of the twins who is always the first to be circumcised.

Mulongo: The younger of the twins who is always circumcised after *Mukhwana*.

Mwiala: A place believed to be where *Mango* was circumcised.

Nabuyeywe: A rare species of grass used for thatching the roof of the shrine (*namwima*).

Namachengeche: The initiate's young sister who works as his assistant.

Namakhala: The initiate's younger brother who works as his assistant.

Namwima: A shrine built in front of the house belonging to the initiate's father.

Omukhebi: Traditional circumciser.

Omusinde: Terms used interchangeably in reference to an uncircumcised person.

Sikhebo: The Bukusu circumcision ritual

Sikumenya: Odd years in which circumcision among the Bukusu is not conducted/administered.

Siriambalu: a coward who may run away from the surgery.

Sioyaye: A song that is always sang when the initiate is being escorted from the river on his circumcision day.

Syetosi/Esitosi: A place at a nearby river where the initiate is smeared with cold mud early in the morning on his circumcision day.

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Oral Evidence

(Ages are estimated)

- Alex Tabalia Wekesa, 63 years old, interviewed on 29th August 2015 at Lumuli village, Kamusinde location, Kimilili constituency. He is a retired forester.
- Gabriel Naulikha Kunusia, 93 years, interviewed on 9th August 2014 at Matoma village, Kamasielo Sub-location, Kimilili constituency. He is a retired Primary School teacher.
- Gabriel Wamalwa Murutu, 64 years old, interviewed on 13th December 2014 at Buko village, Sikhendu sub-location, Maeni Location, Kimilili constituency. He is a retired Primary School teacher.
- Godwin Masika Makokha, 49 years old, interviewed on 17th November 2014 at Kaptola village, Kibingei location, Kimilili constituency. He is a teacher at Bituyu FYM Primary School and also holds a B.Ed. (arts) degree from Kenyatta University.

- Henry Mwambu Murutu, 61 years old, interviewed on 13th December 2014 at Buko village, Sikhendu sub-location, Maeni Location, Kimilili constituency.
- Jackson Nabiswa Walekhwa, 91 years old, interviewed on 16th August 2014 at Kamusinde village, Nasusi Sub-location, Kimilili constituency. He is a retired primary school teacher.
- James Khalaba, 72 years old, interviewed on 3rd August 2014 at Bituyu village, Kimilili Division, Kimilili constituency. He is a traditional circumciser and also chairs the association of Lukembe circumcisers.
- Joseph Nyongesa Cheloti, 65 years old, interviewed on 18th November 2014 at Matoma village, Kamasielo Sub-location, Kimilili constituency. He is a member of the Bukusu council of elders' board based in Bungoma town.
- Moses Banda Wafula, 77 years old, interviewed on 2nd August 2014 at Kibisi Village, Sikhendu Sub-location, Kimilili constituency. A former member of Kenya National Farmers Union (KNFU) and currently a peasant farmer.
- Musikiti Kusimba, 56 years old, interviewed on 23rd August 2014 at Chetambe estate, Kimilili Town, Kimilili constituency. He formerly worked with the National Intelligence Service of Kenya.
- Patrick Nabisiolo Kituyi, 77 years old, interviewed on 16th November 2014 at Matoma Village, Kamasielo Sub-location, Kimilili constituency. A student of renowned Bukusu orator, Manguliechi.
- Priscilla Lusike Namwenya, 63 years old, interviewed on 2nd August 2014 at Kibisi Village, Sikhendu Sub-location, Kimilili constituency. Practices farming.
- Richard Makhanu Wafula, 55 years old, interviewed on 12th July 2015 at Kahawa Wendani estate, Kasarani constituency, Nairobi. He holds a PhD (Kiswahili) from Kenyatta University and he currently chairs the Kiswahili department at the same University.
- Roseline Nelima Nandabi, 45 years old, interviewed on 17th August 2014 at Kaptola village, Kibingei location, Kimilili constituency. She is a teacher at Khwiroro AC primary school and currently pursuing a B.Ed. (arts) degree at Kenyatta University.
- Willington Wambani Wafula, 69 years old, interviewed on 19th August 2014 at Matoma village, Nasusi Sub-location, Kimilili constituency. He is a traditional circumciser.
- Zipporah Naulikha Kunusia, 66 years old, interviewed on 9th August 2014 at Matoma village, Nasusi Sub-location, Kimilili constituency.