

The Construction of Manhood through the Performance of the Bukusu Circumcision Songs

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ABSTRACT

Songs are part and parcel of the lives of many African communities as they carry values, norms, customs and aspirations of the communities. The Bukusu community, just like any other Kenyan community which adhere to the traditional customs has songs that are used in various rituals. Among the many rituals performed in Bukusu community is the traditional male circumcision, a rich theatre which is always accompanied by live tunes. The performance of these circumcision songs does not happen in a vacuum, it takes place within specified contexts which give rise to meaning. The Bukusu circumcision songs are socially significant as they have serious implications on the society's beliefs. These songs are cultural symbols used to construct manhood in the sense that the newly initiates transits from childhood to adulthood. Once they go through this process, they are expected to be responsible adults who observe righteousness. This necessitates a concerted effort to unearth the construction of manhood through the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs. The paper employed participant observation, oral interviews and open ended questionnaires in collecting songs. In sampling of the songs, the paper employed purposive sampling technique. This paper employed hermeneutics theory in examining how manhood is constructed through the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs. The overall purpose of this paper is to contribute towards the understanding of how the Bukusu perceive and construct manhood through the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs which will eventually contribute new knowledge to songs as a genre of oral literature.

Keywords: Manhood, construction, performance, Bukusu, circumcision, songs.

INTRODUCTION

The paper focuses on Bukusu circumcision songs. The Bukusu people form the Bukusu community. These people are mainly found in Bungoma and Transzoia Counties in Kenya. Songs are important in life as they are used to establish order and meaning. Bukusu circumcision songs carry the norms and values of the community. They tell us about the community's cultural values as they are used in transmitting people's philosophy, beliefs and some historical developments. The paper is anchored on the Bukusu circumcision songs because their performance provide an avenue for understanding of the Bukusu perception of manhood. The overall purpose of this paper is to contribute toward understanding of how the Bukusu perceive and construct manhood through performance of circumcision songs. As a general of oral literature, songs are important in relaying messages to the audience artistically without hurting anyone directly. Among the Bukusu community, circumcision songs play important roles in communicating messages pertaining various issues in the society as well as the society's perception towards certain things. For instance, during performance of the circumcision songs, the community's perception towards women, men, womanhood, manhood, neighbours among others is revealed. This paper took an initiative to discuss the Bukusu community's perception of manhood as portrayed in the performance of circumcision songs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Bukusu circumcision songs have been used for a long time to explain their cultural values as they are used as vehicles to transmit the Bukusu philosophy, beliefs, values and sometimes historical developments. These songs shape the adolescent boys into the expected responsible and respected male adults later in life since circumcision in Bukusu community is a transition from childhood to adulthood. Circumcision enables the boys cut off ties with a less honourable past, the uncircumcised past and begin a new life endowed with responsibilities and respect accorded to circumcised male adults. To validate this argument calls for a closer examination of Akivaga and Odaga (1982) when they assert that circumcision is a very important ceremony in communities that participate in it because it serves as one way of graduating non-circumcised adolescent boys from childhood to manhood. Akivaga and Odaga's study relates to this paper which sought to examine the construction of manhood through the Bukusu circumcision songs. In communities that practice circumcision, anybody who avoided it or who is circumcised in hospital is despised and rejected by the community for going against the cultural norms that direct and correct behaviour of the community members. Akivaga and Odaga argue that the virtues responsible for maintaining the community's social control and guidelines for future life of the initiates are embedded in the content of the songs. The opinions of the two are in agreement with the objective of this paper that sought to examine how manhood is constructed through the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs.

Makila (1986) asserts that the Bukusu circumcision ceremony marks the end of childhood and promotes the initiates into adulthood. This graduation gives them new responsibilities together with opportunities to benefit from the knowledge and wisdom within their culture. These teachings are passed on through the performance of circumcision songs. Makila's study relates to this paper which sought to unearth the construction of manhood through the Bukusu circumcision songs.

Orchardson (1961) says that among the Kipsigis, initiation is a very important period when puberty is over and children pass from irresponsible childhood to responsible adult membership of the community. By graduating from irresponsible childhood to responsible adult member of the community, the newly circumcised learns the community's secrets and assumes adulthood responsibility hence the reference 'a real man'. This reference in Bukusul and is only given to a male adult who underwent the Bukusu male traditional circumcision without showing any signs of cowardice. Orchardson's view is in agreement with the objective of this paper that sought to examine the construction of manhood through the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs.

Kipkorir and Welbourn (1973) assert that initiation makes a man or woman of the Marakwet and it is a rite for adulthood. According Kipkorir and Welbourn, initiation means the beginning of new life for each youth. Initiation is done through singing. The initiates are tutored that circumcision operation is extremely painful and marks a transition from childhood to adulthood. The whole process is executed alongside performances of initiation songs. This paper utilizes the messages provided by the Bukusu initiation songs to examine how manhood is constructed through the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs.

Mwaniki (1986) posits that ritual songs and dances among the Embu people of Kenya comprise the religious and social rites as need arise. Initiation rites are among these social rites. Through initiation, boys and girls are transformed into adulthood through circumcision and clitorrectomy respectively. This is done through singing and dancing. The song and dance are sexually oriented and the purpose of these songs is to give boys and girls sex education which they may not have had. Sex education in the Bukusu community is given to adults or young adults who are presumed to be ripe for the information. Mwaniki's study relates to this paper which sought to examine how manhood is constructed through performance of Bukusu circumcision songs.

Kenyatta (1965) asserts that the Agikuyu name for the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood is 'irua'. Before initiation, there is dancing and singing. During this performance, no boy or girl is allowed to go to bed as this is regarded as missing the opportunity of direct contact with their ancestral god and this can lead into a misfortune at the time of physical operation. The songs and dance performed normally pertain to sex education. This is an opportunity for initiates to acquaint themselves with norms governing relationship between men and women for harmonious existence. This study relates to this paper in the sense that it looks at social graduation of boys and girls through song and dance.

Nang'oli (2000) asserts that in most traditional societies, one has to go through the ritual of circumcision at a certain age in order to attain manhood. Similarly, in Bukusu culture, male members of the community must undergo traditional male circumcision. Until then, one is considered a child however old he may be. Even those who undergo clinical circumcision are considered not 'real men'. According to the Bukusu community, this clinical circumcision is not as tormenting as the traditional Bukusu male circumcision. Those who undergo clinical circumcision are considered as cowards and unclean. They would not be allowed to lead their sons to the circumcision podium, *etiangiin* future as they do not have the experience of the ordeal during their time. Those who undergo the process and still fear the knife are excommunicated from the community and are referred to seek refuge in non-circumcising Bukusu neighbours. Furthermore, those who fail to undergo traditional Bukusu male circumcision are considered unclean and cannot fully participate in the daily activities of life within the community. The views from Nang'oli's study stresses the need for circumcision in the respective communities that practice it. In the Bukusu circumcision rite, initiates are mentally prepared to face responsibilities and realities of adulthood through instructions embodied in the texts of the Bukusu circumcision songs. Nang'oli's observations are related closely to this paper as it set out to examine the construction of men through the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs.

Chesaina (1991) observes that initiation is a period during which initiates graduate into full membership of the adult Kalenjin community. Chesaina asserts that initiation is a period during which initiates graduate into full membership of the adult fraternity a key to marital life and sexual life. The songs, drama and dances performed during initiation period educate people about the norms. His observation relates is closely related to this paper as it sought to examine the construction of manhood through performance of Bukusu circumcision songs.

Wafula (2006) posits that male circumcision remains one of the most important rites of passage in traditional African societies. His study is concerned with how the Bukusu of western Kenya use male circumcision ritual as a major means by which the society create men out of boys so as to take up family responsibilities. The ritual, which is accompanied by songs and dances prepare adolescent boys for adulthood. This is closely related to this paper which endeavoured to examine the construction of men manhood through the circumcision songs of the Bukusu.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employed hermeneutics theory in examining the construction of 'manhood' through the performances of the Bukusu circumcision songs. Generally speaking, hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. It is aimed at discovering the meaning of a text. Hermeneutics construct reality by examining a range of evidence and situations that can lead to a better understanding of what was to be communicated. This theory has been used in this paper to probe the construction of manhood through the performance of Bukusu circumcision songs. Patton (1994:84) defines hermeneutics as a theoretical and philosophical perspective aimed at the interpretive understanding of meaning with special attention to context and original purpose. Hermeneutics is derived from a Greek word 'hermeneuin' meaning to interpret. Hermeneutics as a

discipline owes its origin to religion and it is closely related to philosophy. Besides this, hermeneutics is a methodology whose concern is with the nature of interpretation and understanding. Patton (1990:84) asserts that to meaningfully understand interpret a text and any other work of art calls for an understanding of the author's intentions, intended meanings and to place texts in their cultural and historical context. This has an implication that thorough search for possible meanings of the text or the work under investigation is imperative in order to unearth it. In this paper, an examination of Bukusu circumcision songs on construction of manhood entails an understanding of the songs in their context. Being a philosophical and analytical perspective, hermeneutics has the potential and flexibility of application in a range of disciplines especially oral literary studies where it is vital in the interpretation of oral texts.

According to Culler (2002), there are two accounts of hermeneutics: hermeneutics of recovery and hermeneutics of suspicion. The former examines the original context of production which include the intention of the author and the meaning a text might have had for its original readers. The latter seeks to unearth the unexamined assumption on which a text may rely, which may be political, philosophical, sexual or linguistic. The weaknesses of hermeneutics of suspicion lie in its stress on the deeper meaning. This paper overcomes this weakness by examining both specific and literary meanings of the songs under study based on the fact that some songs are more specific than symbolic in nature and analyzing such using hermeneutics of suspicion is bound to fail. However, the two accounts are useful in this paper as they supplement and complement each other in examining how manhood is constructed through the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs. Hermeneutics of recovery is important in situating the Bukusu circumcision songs in their original context of suspicion has been used in interpreting the construction of manhood through deeper analysis of these Bukusu circumcision songs as the songs are assumed to have a deeper meaning besides the normal surface meaning. Hermeneutics theory has therefore been used in this paper to examine the Bukusu construction of manhood.

METHODOLOGY

According to Ong'ondo and Jwan (2020), research methodology is the overall plan of the entire process in a particular research that explains the choice of a particular paradigm, justifies a particular approach, highlights specific methods(s) and describes the data generation techniques and analysis procedures. In examining the construction of manhood in Bukusu circumcision songs, we employed the following methods;

The study employed participant observation, interview schedules, and open ended questionnaires.

Observation involves collecting and recording data without changing or manipulating it. The researcher used participant observation while collecting circumcision songs. The purpose of participant observation while collecting data in the context of this study was to get full impact of the songs.

Through the use of interview schedules, the researcher conducted oral interviews with respondents from a pool of traditional surgeons, elders, young circumcised men, composers of traditional Bukusu circumcision songs and specialized in Bukusu culture, especially circumcision.

The researcher also used an open ended questionnaire to collect data for this paper. The tool was instrumental in this study because it is free from bias. It also gave respondents adequate time to give concrete and well thought out answers. The questionnaire was filled by respondents of mixed age across the seven sub-counties of Bungoma predominantly occupied by Bukusu community. The choice of the respondents was informed by the fact that they were literate and deeply rooted in the tradition of the Bukusu and understand well the cultural values of the community.

Bearing in mind that not all the Bukusu circumcision songs could not be examined, the researcher selected seven circumcision songs from the community through purposive sampling technique.

Mugenda and Mugenda(1999:50) define purposive sampling as a testing procedure that permits an analyst to utilize cases that have the necessary data concerning the objectives of the investigation. In line with this statement, subjects were handpicked in light that they had necessary qualities. The researcher identified respondents who could sing or perform circumcision songs. The respondents who were not in position to answer all questions were requested by the researcher to make referrals to other respondents who could possibly answer the questions. The researcher listened to the recorded live performances and selected songs relevant to the study. The songs were analyzed and examined with an aim of identifying the construction of manhood circumcision songs.

Seven songs were selected examined with an aim of establishing the construction of manhood through their performance. With the help of native speakers of *Lubukusu*, the researcher translated the songs trying to be as close to the original meaning of the song as possible. Furthermore, prior studies done on the Bukusu circumcision songs were consulted where the researcher and as well as his assistants were in doubt.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS.

The construction of manhood based on the time of performance

The Bukusu circumcision songs are performed at specified times of the circumcision season. Generally, circumcision songs in Bukusu culture are only performed during circumcision season unless in special and compelling circumstances when people do perform them. For instance, in times of war, some may be performed to encourage and psyche the men on battlefield. S1 is a very common circumcision song performed during external aggression. The time of performance entails when a particular song is performed. This is categorized into pre-circumcision, circumcision and post-circumcision period. For instance, pre-circumcision period ushers in the season of circumcision. This refers to the period just before the circumcision season begins officially. This stage is characterized by performance of songs that signify (declare) the onset of circumcision season such as S1 which ushers the season of circumcision. The season is earmarked by this song and it officially declares the candidate's intention to undergo circumcision. For instance, the first three lines are performed at the beginning of the season to announce the initiate's intention to get circumcised. The lines 'Eeh! Eeh! Eeh! The uncircumcised! Haaho! Haaho! Haahoeh!'. The rendition is meant to psyche the candidates for circumcision ritual. The performance of the song sets the mood for circumcision season. The choice is meant to ridicule and shame the uncircumcised candidate's status and psyche him to full-scale in order to brave for the 'knife' and be 'real man'. The initiate at this time is perceived as a woman and hence the need for him to undergo circumcision in order to be a 'real man'. Before the 'cut', the uncircumcised boy is perceived as a woman and is not entitled to community secrets and family responsibility. However, this is not the case currently as the community circumcises very young boys. The first three lines of the song are also repeated at maternal uncle's home where the uncle gives advice and encouragement as well as cultural swearing words. This is however, words and phrases which he is taught to use only when the situation demands swearing. For instance '*bakheba*' means 'I will be circumcised'. Similarly '*Nakhubea banjisia esitosi*' (If I am cheating, I should be taken back to the river and be smeared with mud). These are words and phrases used only by circumcised Bukusu men during swearing. The last time the whole song is performed in the morning just before the operation. The performance of S1 at this time marks the last occasion when the song is performed for the candidate. The S1 will at no time be performed to the newly circumcised again. At this time, the newly circumcised are regarded as 'real men' who are entitled to community secrets and other responsibilities, both family and communal.

The circumcision stage refers to the period just after pre-season when the season of circumcision has kicked off. The period ranges from the time when candidates invite relatives for the ritual, the eve of circumcision day and the D-day of circumcision. This stage involves performance of songs that promote values and scorn social deviants. For instance, in S4 *Babuya ekholo embi*, reveals that the Bukusu community is a society that

abhors witchcraft and other social evils. The community wants to produce honest people and therefore, detest witchcraft and food poisoning. For instance ‘...they cooked people chameleons’. This line depicts *Babuya* as a bad clan who cannot be trusted as they killed Protus’ son by feeding him on a chameleon. S4 brings to light that the vices aforementioned are not good. This song constructs the ‘real man’ to be as an honest and upright person who would not be involved in underhand deals meant to harm anyone in the community. By calling out *Babuya* clan a dishonest and a witch, S4 aims at developing an honest and just society free of witchcraft. The candidate should have a humane face hence the title ‘real man’. The song is performed mostly when the initiate is inviting relatives and during night vigil before D-day. Turning to S6 and S7 the songs call on the Bukusu community to uphold their traditions and customs. They songs urge the Bukusu men to courageously face their enemies and not to chicken out during times of animosity just the way they fought the Italians during world war 11. For instance, the line ‘...capture the Italians’ calls on the community to bravely fight any aggressors just the way they did with the Italians. In traditional Bukusu community, the newly circumcised would automatically become warriors to defend the community against any aggression. This requires one to be brave enough to face the enemy. Through performance of S6, men are perceived as warriors who should defend the community against any external aggression just like their forefathers who did exactly that during the Italian invasion. They should also not allow their rich culture to be eroded down the trench by Western culture. For instance ‘...hold on the tradition’. This line urges the Bukusu community to maintain their tradition and not to allow Western civilization to erode it down. According to Mzee Milimo, one of our informants, the song was composed during the Second World War when the British were fighting against the Germans and Italians. The war disrupted their way of life, Bukusu wanted to chase away the Italians and maintain their culture hence *amba mutalya* which means hold the spear, the spear symbolizes war with the foreigners. *Amba mutalya* also means to hold on the tradition and customs of the Bukusu community. The song calls on the community to preserve their culture. The community should not allow western civilization to erode their cultural practices. In S7, ‘real men’ are the ones who hold on their culture and are ready to defend it even through the spear hence ‘hold on the spear/tradition. In the recent past however, the song has changed to be a warning against immorality and HIV/Aids where young people are asked to be careful about their sex partners For example’...Alakhua Khaakhu kha muniafu Amba mutalya (She will give you HIV/Aids..hold on the tradition)

The flexibility of the song as a genre of oral literature enables it to enjoy a special freedom of taking new ideas or words and infusing them into the song without changing its structure, rhythm or body movements involved. The ideas infused normally touch on emerging issues in the society. Ndungo (2003:218) supports this statement when he advances that ‘song as a genre is responsive to the changes in everyday life of the community’.

A more recent one touches on the covid-19 pandemic where people are urged to observe covid-19 health protocols to remain safe. For instance ‘...Korona yolile..mwibaya’(Corona is here..keep distance) The infusion of emerging issues in S6 and S7, is meant to warn the initiates to be vigilant and adhere to their traditions and customs and shun western civilization that has led to some deadly pandemics such as HIV and AIDS, COVID-19 among many other pandemics. By keeping to their traditional culture, they would avoid infections such as the aforementioned. The inclusion of these emerging issues helps in constructing the intended newly circumcised man as a morally upright person committed to the values and customs of the community.

The post-circumcision time is the period immediately after the ‘cut’. The period is characterized by performance of songs meant to celebrate victory and bravery. For instance, examination of S2 *khwera omurwa*, reveals that it is performed at the climax of the ceremony to celebrate victory and braveness of the newly circumcised. The newly circumcised is celebrated for braving the knife, which is likened to killing *Omurwa*, who was and is still dreaded by the Bukusu community especially in matters pertaining war and external aggression. The process of circumcising adolescent boys in Bukusuland is likened to the act of

killing Omurwa and boys who withstand the pain of the knife in order to be circumcised traditionally are perceived as the 'real men' or rather warriors. The newly circumcised are thus perceived as the community's warriors who would defend the community against external aggression such as the invasion by *Barwa*. Similarly, S3 *Lelo mundubi embia* (Today, I eat from a new plate), is performed by the newly circumcised when they are coming out from seclusion. The song empowers the newly circumcised to eat from a new plate, a plate that is normally used by the community elders, after transition from childhood to adulthood. It signifies the transition from uncircumcised to circumcised status. This new plate symbolizes new roles and responsibilities after graduating from uncircumcised adolescents to circumcised men. The transition also signifies adoption of new responsibilities in the society. However, this is not the case currently as Bukusu society circumcises very young boys who cannot take up new responsibilities meant for adults.

The construction of manhood based on the place of performance

The place of performance refers to the physical surrounding within which the Bukusu circumcision songs are performed. The place of performance is important in suggesting meaning in the circumcision songs of the Bukusu. A close examination of S1 for instance reveals that the song is first performed at a traditional shrine, *Namwima* erected normally at one of the traditional surgeon's homestead. The performance of this song at this time ushers in circumcision season once the traditional circumcision knives, *chingembe* have been cleansed and sharpened, *khubita chingembe*. The lines *kwoloma... khaakho* (Is sounding!...Haaho!...Haaho!) is normally performed with vigour to declare the circumcision season officially and the candidates who may not have the expected courage to brave the knife should chicken out before it is too late. It is also meant to psyche the candidate to full-scale endurance in readiness for the tormenting and painful season of circumcision. Courage is a virtue among the Bukusu and having it is a sign of manhood in any male member of the community. For instance, the lines...Mangwe! The circumciser is waiting for you!...The uncircumcised who fears the knife goes to uncircumcising neighbours'. Once the candidate hears these lines and still goes ahead to face the knife, then he is regarded as a brave and courageous initiate for failing to surrender his candidature. In this light, he is perceived as a 'real man' after sticking to his decision.

The song is again performed at the candidate's parents' homestead on arrival from the well down the river. Once the initiate arrives at their homestead and puts the pot, *esachi* filled with water on the ground, the song is performed declaring the father's approval of the candidate's intention to be circumcised. According to Barasa Makokha, a veteran Bukusu circumcision surgeon, after this declaration, *khuchukhila* the initiate cannot withdraw his candidature from circumcision. Mzee Makokha says the candidate at this stage of the ceremony must be circumcised whether dead or live. This means once a declaration has been made, the candidate's foreskin must be cut even on his death bed before the body is interred. This excerpt constructs a 'real man' in Bukusuland as a man who is steadfast naturally and the one who cannot retract on his decision. By stating that one is not supposed to withdraw one's candidature after *khuchukhila*, manhood is perceived by the Bukusu community as being steadfast and firm once you make a decision.

The song is performed again at maternal uncle's place on the eve of circumcision after visitation by the initiate. This is after a special piece of fresh meat, *likhoni* that is cut from a specific part of the slaughtered bull has been put around the neck of the candidate. However, the bull is only slaughtered if the initiate's father had already paid dowry. This according to Mzee Milimo foreshadows blood that would be shed after the 'cut'. He further says that when an initiate braves for the knife without showing any signs of fear, then credit is given to the mother's clan. It is believed that the virtue of bravery in Bukusu community has its roots from the mother's clan and therefore, it is inherited from the mother. A candidate who fears the knife would be rendered an outcast in the clan and both the mother's clan and the father's clan would walk dejected while facing down and will never command any respect from the community. From Mzee Milimo's assertions, we can conclude that circumcision in Bukusu community is a family affair but an undertaking that

involves the whole community.

The song is again performed at the initiate's parents homestead home in the evening of the eve of circumcision day after a strap of fresh meat, *khasombo* popularly known as *namasisie*, special ovals in Bukusu community from a cow slaughtered at his father's homestead. The performance of the song ushers in the final night vigil by relatives and revelers before the candidate faces the knife, *embalu* on the D-day of the ritual.

The song is finally performed enroute the initiate's parents' homestead by the revelers while escorting the candidate from the river to the circumcision podium, *etiang'i*. The performance is meant to encourage and psyche the candidate to face the knife without fear.

A close look examination of S2 reveals that it is performed at the circumcision podium just after when the initiate has been circumcised. Mzee Milimo posits that Omurwa is symbolic to the act of legendary Mango, who killed the notorious python, *endemu yabebe* that Barwa, Bukusu neighbours had failed to kill. By killing the python and accepting to be circumcised, Mango's act of bravery had been likened to killing Barwa, the Bukusu formidable foes. The killing of the python was followed by celebrations by the ever terrified villagers who breathed a sigh of relief now that their dreaded cannibal had been eliminated by brave Mango. When an initiate braves the knife, the Bukusu likenes it to Mango's, courage a celebrated Bukusu legend. The relatives celebrate this act of bravery by performing 'Khwera omurwa'.

Audience and their role in the construction of manhood

Audience in this paper refers to all the people involved in circumcision process such as traditional surgeons, initiates, revelers, composers of songs, the onlookers, and relatives among others.

Rudock (2001:16) describes audience as prime movers responsible for the volume and pace of performance. From his argument, audience is an indispensable load in oral performances. In the present study, audience is categorized into two groups, the active and passive audience. The active audience participates in the performance of the songs by dancing, singing or even composing. They also encourage, ridicule and advise. The passive audience on the other side refers to the group that has very little to do in the performance of the songs and participate by observation or they are just but the on-lookers. In oral literature performance, the audience plays a key role in the sense that it influences the initiate as well as the oral performer's work. Finnegan (1970:335) advances that audience behaviour such as 'spontaneous exclamation, actual question and emotional to the development of yet another parallel and repetitious episode are sources of beauty in oral literature. Borrowing from Finnegan's comments on oral narrative tradition of some communities in of some communities in West Africa, the present study appreciates the role of audience in creating the circumcision mood among the initiates in Bukusu community. For instance in S1, the audience hurls insults to the initiate with a sole intention of provoking the initiate to face the 'cut' without showing any form of fear. For instance '...if you are a coward, give up!..The uncircumcised who fears the knife should go to Luoland!...Give up !' These words are meant to ridicule and drive fear out of the candidate. Those who fears to face the knife is threatened with excommunication from the community. From the excerpt, the perception of the Bukusu community about their non-circumcising neighbours has been revealed. From the excerpt, it is evident that the Bukusu community takes pride in male circumcision and according to Mzee Milimo, those who courageously brave the knife are regarded as 'real men' and non-circumcising community as cowards. This is however a misnomer. The audience in Bukusu circumcision songs psyche, the initiate through verbal and non-verbal cues. They do this by joining in the singing of the songs and offering verbal advance. They also influence the choice of songs to be performed. For instance, S1 performed at maternal uncle's place, the audience present influence the choice of words. The wording of the song would be advisory, to encourage unlike when it is performed last which is meant to drive fear out of the initiate. The audience plays a key role in psyching the initiate during circumcision through concerted

efforts in singing, advising, ridicule among others. The actions by the audience helps in constructing the Bukusu perception of manhood through agitating for the 'real man' who faces the knife without any fear. Turning to S3, the song is performed by newly circumcised who at this time of its performance are graduating from seclusion. They are now treated as adult members of the community and are entitled to community secrets and can be given responsibilities. They can now join elders in decision making table and even dine with them because they are now 'clean' after undergoing circumcision. This transformation comes with responsibilities and respect. Achebe (1958:16) posits '...as the elders said, if a child washed his hands, he could eat with kings. Okonkwo had washed his hands and so he could ate with kings and elders'. The newly circumcised inherent ability to redeem transform themselves through circumcision enables them start a new life, a life of responsibilities and respect by dining with elders. The newly circumcised are thus now regarded as men. They are no longer adolescent boys. Circumcision enables them cut off ties with a less honourable past, the uncircumcised past. However, this may not be the case as the Bukusu currently circumcises very young boys.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, it has emerged that during the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs, the society's beliefs, values and traditions are transmitted from one generation to the other. These songs are performed during circumcision ceremony that brings together relatives, friends and neighbours. The performance of these songs can be interpreted as a communal event as it brings together the groups aforementioned to feast and witness one of their own undergo this landmark transition from childhood to adulthood. During this transition, the perception of manhood by the Bukusu community is brought out through performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs. The paper examines the performance of the Bukusu circumcision songs as an avenue where the perception of manhood is revealed. The paper interrogates these oral texts in order to show how manhood is constructed through performance of the oral texts. Being works of art, it has emerged that the Bukusu circumcision songs are rich in Bukusu culture and are presented as cultural images symbolic representation that mirror the realities of the society. The songs are meant to enforce virtues and discourage vices. The assumption that guided the discussion in this paper is that these songs are created within a specific cultural context and they advocate for social values and ideologies beyond the spheres of the Bukusu community.

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APPENDIX

Songs

S1 : Sioyaye

Soloist: Eeeh! Eeeh! Eeeh!

Response: Eeeh! Eeeh! Eeeh!

Soloist :Musindewe!

Response :khaakho!

Soloist :Musindewe!

Response :Khaakho! Khaakho! Khaakhoee!

Soloist :Mangwe maalule khakonile!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Khakonile!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Khakonile!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Kwefwe kwebakhale kwoloma!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Kwoloma!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Kwoloma!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Noliomusiambalu webele!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist : Kumwanawe!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Webele!

Response : Khaakho!

Soloist :Omusinde oteremaka ache bunyolo!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Musindewe!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Webele!

Response :Khaakho!

Soloist :Webele!

Response :Khaakho

The English translation of the song :

Soloist :Eeh! Eeh! Eeh!

Response :Eeeh! Eeeh! Eeeh!

Soloist :The uncircumcised!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :The uncircumcised!

Response :Haaho! Haaho! Haahoe!

Soloist : Mangwe! The circumciser is waiting for you!

Soloist: Mangwe, the sharpener is waiting!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :Is waiting!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :Is waiting!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :Our ancestral chant is sounding!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :Is sounding!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :Is sounding!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :If you are a coward give up!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :Give up!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :The uncircumcised who fears the knife goes to Luoland!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :The uncircumcised!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :Give up!

Response :Haaho!

Soloist :Give up!

Response :Haahoe!

S2 Khwera Omurwa

Soloist: Khwera Omurwa

Response: Aaah khwera Omurwa

Soloist: Khwera Omurwa yaya

Response :Aaah khwera Omurwa

Soloist :Khwera Omurwa Sande,khwera Omurwa

Response :Aaah khwera Omurwa

Soloist :Khwera Omurwa chuma khwera Omurwa

Response :Aaah khwera Omurwa

The English translation

We have killed Omurwa

Aaah,we have killed Omurwa

We have killed Omurwa my brother

Aaah we have killed Omurwa

We have killed Omurwa ,age set,we have killed Omurwa

Aaah we have killed Omurwa

We have killed Omurwa age set ,we have killed Omurwa

Aaah,we have killed Omurwa.

S3: Lelo mundubi embia

Soloist: Lelo mundubi embia,

mayi wanjakhilenge

Response: Lelo mundubi embia

Soloist: Baba wanjakhilenge

Response: Lelo mundubi embia

Soloist: Senge wanjakhilenge !

Soloist: Kukhu wanjakhilenge

Response: Lelo mundubi embia

The English translation is as follows

Soloist: Ooh today!Mother laughed at me.

Response: Ooh today!I eat from a new plate.

Soloist: Ooh today!Father laughed at me.

Response:Ooh today! I eat from a new plate.

Soloist:Ooh today! Aunt laughed at me.

Response:Ooh today! I eat from a new plate.

Soloist:Ooh today! Grandmother laughed at me.

Response: Ooh today! I eat from a new plate.

Response: Ooh today! I am independent

Soloist: Ooh today! Aunt did not respect me

Response: Ooh today! I am independent

Soloist: Ooh today! Grandmother did not respect me

Response: Ooh today! I am independent

S4: Babuya

Soloist: E babuya ekholo embi eeh babuya

ekholo embi nalomile

Response: E babuya ekholo embi eh

Soloist: E babuya ekholo embi khembole

Response: E babuya ekholo embi eh

Soloist: E babuya ekholo embi nabo ekibuchari

Nebera omwana wa protasi

Response: E babuya ekholo embi khembole

batekhela bantu chikhaniafu.

Soloist: E basani khwechuba khwakhomba

liloba okhatima waila omukhana mubuya

Response: E babuya ekholo embi eh!

The English translation

Babuya is a bad clan, Babuya is a bad clan

I say

Babuya is a bad clan Eeh

Babuya is a bad clan I say babuya ekholo embi nalomile

Babuya is a bad clan Eeh

Babuya is a bad clan, they killed

ourson Protus

Babuya is a bad clan, they cooked people

Chameleons

We men, we swore and licked the soil

not to marry a daughter of Babuya

Babuya is a bad clan.

S5: khwaela

Soloist: khwaela ooh!

Response:khwaela

Soloist:Mayi khwaela

Reponse : khwaela

Soloist : yaya khwaela ta! Reponse: khwaela

Soloist :Eeeee khwaela ooh

Reponse : khwaela

Soloist :khocha khwaela aah!

Response : khwaela

Soloist : papa khwaela ta!

Response : khwaela

Soloist : kukhu khwaela eeh!

Response : khwaela

Soloist : kuka khwaela ta!

Response: khwaela

Soloist : basale khwaela lundi!

Response : khwaela

Soloist : Fwesi khwaela ta!

Response : khwaela

Response : khwaela

Soloist :Senge khwaela ooh!

Reponse : khwaela

Soloist : mayiwe khwaela ta

The English translation of the song

Soloist Response

We can now breathe! We are breathing

In the homestead We are breathing

Dear ones! We can now breath We are breathing

Aunt! We can now breathe We are breathing

Mum! We can now breathe We are breathing

Eeh! We can now breathe We are breathing

Uncle! We can now breathe We are breathing

Dad! We can now breathe We are breathing

Grand mum! We can now breathe We are breathing

Grandad! We can now breathe We are breathing

Friends! We can now breathe We are breathing

All of us !We can now breathe We are breathing

S6: Khwamba Omutalia

Soloist: Khwamba Omutalia

Response: khaah

Soloist:soleli khwambe omutalia

Reponse : khwambe omutalia

Soloist : soleli sibula khukende

Response : khaah

Soloist :soleli sibula khukende

Reponse : khwambe omutalia

The English translation of the song

Soloist Response

We captured the Italian Haah!

Tribesmen,we captured the Italian we captured the Italian

Allow us to go Haah!

Tribesmen, allow us to go We captured the Italian

S7: Khutile Kumutalia

Soloist: Khaah! khoweeh

Response: khaah! kwoweeh! khwambe omutalia

Soloist: Buchunju bali buchunju

Chanjalikha sobona bwola ne ngabo

Reponse : khwambe omutalia

Soloist : Enywe khureberesha babili muchalicha nga maayi wefwe wakhibula

Response : khamba omutalia

Soloist :Embalu yecha,eye babukusu mulwakhakha basuna mungaki ne bmao

Reponse : khwamba omutalia

Soloist: Ekindi yecha,eye bayobo eye mulukulu basuna mungaki ne biyula

Response: Khwamba omutalia

Soloist: Eyefwe ya milemba

Response: kha-kho weeh! Khamba omutalia

The English translation of the song

Soloist Response

Haah!, hoooh! weeh Haah! Hoo weeh Hold on the tradition

The pains, pains spreading you see reaching Hold on the tradition

Inside the clothes

Let us inquire from the two in chalicha if mother is the one who gave birth to us.

Hold on the tradition

Circumcision came of the Gisu from lwakhakha they jump up as theyface the operation

Hold on the tradition

Then came that of Sabaot from Mountain they jump up with skirts Hold on the tradition