

THE EDUCATION FUNCTION OF GIKUYU
RITES OF PASSAGE: A CASE STUDY
OF CIRCUMCISION SONGS AND DANCES

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RESEARCH PROJECT FOR POSTGRADUATE
DIPLOMA IN CULTURAL STUDIES

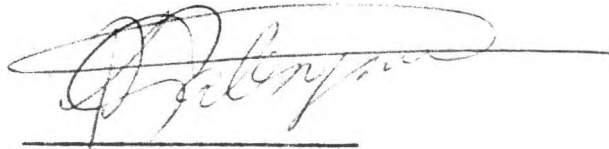
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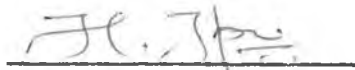
This project is my original work and has not been presented for an academic award at any other University.



K.N. GATENJWA

SUPERVISOR

This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as University supervisor.



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THE GIKUYU PEOPLE

The Gikuyu people (Agikuyu) traditional homes are Kiambu, Muranga, and Nyeri district. The Kirinyaga and Embu people are closely related to the Agikuyu.* Nyandarua district is now one of the Gikuyu districts but this was created just before Independence (1962) to absorb the landless Gikuyu people especially those who were displaced during the Mau Mau struggle for independence.

The Gikuyu are a bantu speaking people. Traditionally they are agriculturalists but today they are engaged in various economic activities. Among the Africans, they are leading in commerce.

Demographically (numerically) they are the largest single ethnic group in Kenya. Recent intercensal (population) survey indicate that they number well over two million (2.4 million).**

* Linguistically they are largely mutually intelligible and share many cultural features.

** Central Bureau of Statistics, 1985.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Rites of passage have been defined as traditional performances to which conventional meaning is attached by those who believe in them. They are those rites which accompany the passage of an individual from one social status to another in the course of his life and those which mark recognized points in the passage of time - new year, new moon. But the

term rites of passage has come to be restricted to the former type, sometimes called LIFE CRISIS rites.

Currently typical rites of passage are those which accompany birth, attainment of adulthood and death. In other words they are rituals or performances marking changes in social status or social position undergone as a person passes through culturally recognized phases of his life or society.

Rites of passage give dramatic expression to the supreme power and value of tradition of a particular society or community. Initiation rites serve to impress this power and value upon the mind of each generation and age while at the same time serving as an extremely efficient means of transmitting ethnic lore and maintaining ethnic cohesion.

According to Van Gennep (1909), rites of passage usher individuals through the crucial crises of their lives - birth, puberty, marriage, parenthood, attainment

of higher social status, death. The rituals accompanying these rites illustrate successively each of the phases of the social metamorphosis - separation of the individual concerned from the group to which he first belonged; his marginal place as someone who no longer belongs to one group without having as yet been incorporated in the other; and his final reintegration in a new capacity in adult society.

The Gikuyu rites of passage are here given the foregoing meaning - the LIFE CRISIS rites. These rites were very important in the life of the Gikuyu especially in indigenous education. They were basic cultural fundamentals of their life. It was through these rites that an individual was ushered into the next social status by being taught his role with respect to that social status.

For instance, when a Gikuyu child was about three to five years old he was returned into his mother's womb ^{ucokia mwana ihuini.} This was a symbolic second birth. A goat was killed and the intestines put around mother and child, the latter being placed between the mother's legs. The mother would then feign labour pains. The attending women would then cut off the intestines symbolizing the cutting of the umbilical cord in real birth. The child would then be told to feign the crying of a newly born infant symbolizing that he has come out of his mother's womb alive. The women

of higher social status, death. The rituals accompanying these rites illustrate successively each of the phases of the social metamorphosis - separation of the individual concerned from the group to which he first belonged; his marginal place as someone who no longer belongs to one group without having as yet been incorporated in the other; and his final reintegration in a new capacity in adult society.

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would ululate four or five times if the child was a girl or a boy respectively, to welcome the new baby.

In brief, the meaning and importance of this symbolic second birth was to impart and impress upon the child the fact that he was no longer a baby. He was being weaned completely from the mother. The mother was now ready for another baby. More was now expected from the weaned child for by this age a traditional Gikuyu boy or girl was already looking after goats and sheep in the company of bigger boys or girls, they could cultivate miniature shambas, while girls fetched water in small calabshes and accompanied their mothers and elder sisters in the collection of firewood or food crops from the shambas.

Today most of these rites of passage have been abandoned due to the effects of westernization and christianity. Those most affected were circumcision rites including the accompanying songs and dances. They were condemned wholly as devilish and heathen by the missionaries who never bothered to understand their cultural and educational function in the life of the Gikuyu people. Indeed from the available literature including that of authoritative authors on Gikuyu culture like Kenyatta (1938 - Facing Mount Kenya), it is evident that no one has ever analysed their education function. This paper seeks to fill this gap.

Circumcision and the accompanying ceremonies was the very essence of an institution which had enormous and far reaching educational, social, moral and religious implications for the Gikuyu although the physical operation was for the most part purely symbolic. Circumcision was the prerequisite factor of giving a boy or a girl the status of manhood or womanhood in the community. The shedding of blood (and the accompanying songs and dances) was symbolically dying and being born again as a new grown up person. For the Gikuyu nobody uncircumcised could ever be considered a grown up man or woman. He/she was always a child and a child had no social status in Gikuyu community. Such a person could never get married. In opposite sex and matrimonial relations circumcision was the deciding factor. It was unthinkable and unspeakable taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with the uncircumcised. If it happened, and this was almost next to impossible a special purifying and cleansing ritual (GUTAHIKIO) was a must.

In view of the above, to abolish circumcision was to the Gikuyu, the death of an institution which was regarded the *CONDITIO SINE QUA NON* of the whole teaching of Gikuyu law, sex education, religion and morality. The Gikuyu moral code and all matters

pertaining to sex, manhood and womanhood were bound up with circumcision rites. It symbolized the unification of the whole ethnic organization.

Circumcision (IRUA) marked the commencement of participation in various groups in the ethnic administration. This was because the real age-groups began from the day of circumcision. Important historical events and legends were explained and remembered according to the names given to various age-groups at the time of circumcision.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

While other aspects of Gikuyu circumcision rites have been analysed and documented especially by Jomo Kenyatta in his book Facing Mount Kenya, the educational function of Gikuyu circumcision songs and dances have not been documented and where analysed, this has not been in any meaningful detail. Kenyatta, Leakey and others have limited themselves to surface analysis.

The objectives of this study therefore is to analyse and document some of these songs - this aspect of Gikuyu culture - in greater detail than has been done before. Both surface and deeper (inferred) message will be analysed in the context of Gikuyu total culture. The analysis will be limited to songs rather than dances. This is because it is the songs that inform and educate those being initiated; it is in the songs that the message/information is contained. The dances are performed to make things lively and dramatic while ^{at the same time} exhausting the initiates ready for circumcision. It was believed that exhaustion would lessen pain. The dances also ensured that the initiates would not fall asleep for they were not supposed to sleep prior to circumcision.

This study will not deal with the musical aspects of the songs; rather it will deal with word meaning only - both surface and inferred.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. The investigator is a member of the Gikuyu community and has gone through circumcision rites. He thus knows some of these songs which he will transcribe and analyse.
2. Key authoritative informants will be interviewed through open-free-discussion for inferred and any other meaning of the songs.
3. Any other social function of these songs will be analysed with the help of the key authoritative informants.
4. Pertinent literature will be reviewed.

The second chapter, which forms the main body of this study, will deal with actual analysis and documentation of these songs. The songs will be in Gikuyu language but their English translation will appear in the appendix. The third chapter will deal with other social functions of these songs and also carry the concluding remarks.

References/bibliography will be found at the end of the study.

CHAPTER 2

SONG I

translate

1. Wathii Kurira, ihahihuu,
Wathii Kurira cugucugu tuguikirie ihii
Wathii Kurira, ihahihuu.
2. Kiino kinene, ihahihuu,
Kiino kinene niki ngurata mburi yahako,
Kiino kinene, ihahihuu.
3. Ngagamba tubu! ihahihuu
Ngagamba tubu!, munju wambate nauikurukei
Ngagamba tubu, ihahihuu.
4. Muhiki niyu, ihahihuu,
Muhiki niyu mui ru mukahuku giti,
Muhiki niyu, ihahihuu.

Each verse (stanza) has a special message to the initiates and the future potential, ^{SP} initiates. Bravery during the circumcision operation was a prerequisite for one to be called a man or woman. The uncircumcised had no status or right in traditional Kikuyu society. The first verse is warning the initiates what would befall him/her if he fails to show bravery while being cut (circumstance). If a girl, she will be given to the ihii, the uncircumcised boys. Among the traditional Kikuyus an uncircumcised boy or girl could not have any sexual relationship with a circumcised girl or boy. This

was a taboo of the worst order. The uncircumcised boy or girl would be severely punished. But the worst would befall the circumcised boy or girl who engaged in sexual relationship with uncircumcised. The boy would be ostracised by his age mates, would be fined by the elders and would find it almost impossible to get a girl to marry. The same fate befell the circumcised girl who befriended an uncircumcised boy.

The first verse then is warning the initiate to be firm so that he does not become a worthless person only fit to befriend by the statusless uncircumcised.

Further inference ^{from} the verse is that the circumcised boys would soon be junior warriors and were expected to join the senior warriors in the defence of their community. It was therefore inconceivable how a young man who could not stand circumcision pain could face the battlefield. He was a coward who could not stand blood and battlefield spears and swords. He was useless and a liability to the community. And a great shame to his family. As for a girl she was to go through greater pain than that of circumcision during child birth. If she cannot stand circumcision pain how could she go through child birth labour? It was believed that such a girl would kill her baby if she went into labour alone since she would not part her legs and push enough because of fear of pain.

Sexual life and sexual relations were highly regulated among the Kikuyu. For every male child a special goat was given to the elders. This was Mburi ya Hako or "an appeasing goat." This was really a "license" goat so that when the boy grew up he could talk to, play with and befriend girls.

By giving the elders that goat the father of the boy was taking all and sundry he had a potential destroyer of women for "unless the penis dies young it will surely eat the bearded meat (Chinua Achebe, 1958, Things Fall Apart). The second verse has this message and it was a reminder to the initiates' parents to make arrangements to give mburi cia hako - appeasing goats to the elders if they had not already done so for soon their sons would be of marriagable age.

In fact if a boy courted a girl for marriage before this appeasing goat was given to the elders the parents would heavily be fined before the marriage could be sealed. The parents were fined five goats. The same fate befell the parents of a boy who had impregnated a girl.

Water had a symbolic function during the circumcision rites. Apart from deadening the nerves, lessening pain and bleeding, it was a

symbolic cleanser and ushering the neophyte into a new status. It has been pointed out that only through circumcision could a Kikuyu become a man or woman (Kenya). Bathing during circumcision was symbolic washing all childishness and past social sins. One became a new clean individual — a man or woman. That is why in the third verse the initiates sing boastfully how they will plunge into the river and how the muddied water will go up and down the stream/river. The inference here is that all their childishness and childish social ^{behaviour} will be washed off them and be scattered to the four corners of the earth; leaving them clean new adults.

The fourth verse is both mocking and welcoming the girl initiate who is a prospective bride. Singers know a lot of goats will be paid for her when she gets married. That is why ^{they are} ^{her} referring to as big and broken.

Is this the bride, ihahihuu,

Is this the bride, black with a broken vagina,

Is this the bride, ihahihuu.

They even ostensibly described her as black and ugly.

SONG II

1. Nguruithio nuu, nguruithio nuu,
Haiyaihu,
Na Kanau niathicite mburi,
Hui, Wambugu kindu kia munai
Mututu

2. Ndiakuheyaga, ndiakuheyaga,
Haiyahu,
Ndakorire ugithica mwatuka,
Hii Wambugu, kindukia munai mututu.

3. Thicwo nokome, thicwo nokome
Haiyahu,
Kiino ni muramba gitiaragia,
Hii, Wambugu, kindu kiamunai mututu.

4. Njuguma ndungu, njuguma ndungu,
Haiyahi,
Yagukura kiino rukambucu,
Hui Wambugu kindu kia munai mututu.

The Gikuyu people detested bestiality - that is sexual intercourse between man and an animal. Severe punishment was meted^{out}/to a person who committed it. Special rites were carried out before the affected individual could be rehabilitated in the community. According to one of this investigator's informants, Mr. Kibera wa Kabira, 76, of Kangemi, Nairobi, such

an individual was never fully rehabilitated. People always looked at him with suspicion; he was shunned by girls everywhere and found it very difficult to find a marriage partner. If he was lucky to find one, it was a female scum - a loose woman who often than not had an illegitimate child/or children.

This was a punishment meant to serve as a deterrence to others and thus tuning them to the moral codes of the society and live acceptable sexual lives as upright individuals in the community.

In the song above, the first verse is warning the initiates of the seriousness of this sexual perversion. A person who committed bestiality could never take ^{part} in any council of elders whether of men or women; he could never conduct any ceremony/or rites for he was unclean throughout his life. He was a social outcast worse than a madman.

Discussing this verse with Kibera wa Kabira some more deeper meaning emerged. According to him the Gikuyu people advocated normal sex and only one method of sexual intercourse - the face to face method whether the man was on top of the woman or both were lying sideways. It was a taboo to have intercourse with a woman from the back position. Graphically this was the animals' style and it was therefore symbolically bestiality.

Women usually pretend they do not want sex. And when they give in they further pretend that they are sympathizing with, and doing men a great favour. But once in bed they behave otherwise. In the very act they become wild. They wail calling the names of their mothers and the gods of their ancestors. For instance, in the second verse the female singers mock men by saying that they were not giving in to them but only sympathized with them (men) because they were fucking cracks - they had no women for real sex. And the men retort that the women really wanted to be made love to otherwise why were they whining with pleasure! A more hidden subtle meaning of this verse is that for sex to take place there must be a woman and a man. Both must strive and make sure that they satisfy each other. However, the real burden lay with the man for a typical Gikuyu/^{woman} other than clasping the man, opening her legs properly and lying in the right position (gukoma wega) she was not expected to do anything else during sexual intercourse. Her job was to let the man enter her to do the job. She was not supposed to make any pelvic movements (kuiniria). If she did that she was considered too sexy as to compete with the man. Symbolically it would be taken that it was she who was making love to the man. This was unheard of. Even today many Gikuyu/^{women} are shy to make

any pelvic movements during intercourse for they have been culturally conditioned against this.

As for the man, he was considered a real virile man if he made love to a woman until she cried, cursed or whined with pleasure because she could not take anymore from such a man. Another of the investigator's informant, Mr. Njuguna wa Hinga, 80, from Muranga, had this to say:-

"You think sex education (mataaro matoro)* began yesterday? No! It began long before our great grandparents were born. We were taught to hold back ejaculation until your woman whined or cried with pleasure. Then you knew it was over for her. Such ^a woman would always seek you out. In fact many would, because the same woman would spread your reputation to her girlfriends that you are a great lover. We were taught not to be selfish during love making. You see, a man can have his good moment (orgasm) in a few minutes. Not a woman. And there is nothing worse than a sexually unsatisfied woman."

Sex is a private affair and the Gikuyu considered ^{who} a person/went abroad boasting of his sexual exploits as immature. The third verse has this message to the initiates and all present. Here the message is being passed through a woman who is being advised to be made love to, keep quiet and sleep. For

* Literally it means sleeping advice.

unless she says it with her own mouth her vagina cannot reveal what has been done to it. It does not talk.

The initiates were taught that sex was always engaged in secrecy and one should not brag about it. However, one could confide in his close friends about his sexual exploits. The initiates were further advised that when they got married they should engage in sexual intercourse when all, especially the children, were fast asleep. The Gikuyu people knew that exposing young children to sex would be harmful to them for they were not old enough to know about sex. And in any case to expose them to sex so early would result in immorality and they would have nothing to look forward to when they came of age in respect to sexual life. They would already have abused and misused the procreation and pleasurable function of sex.

Young people are usually worried about the sizes and shapes of their genitals. Boys may worry because they consider their penises as either too big or too small; too long or too short. If too small or short they fear that they will not be able to satisfy a woman. If too big or long they fear that there may be no woman who can accommodate them and as such they

would have no marriage partners. As for the girls, they may fear that their vaginas are too wide that no man's prick can fit in and thus will be rejected by men. On the other hand, they may fear that their ^{are} genitals/too narrow and shallow that no man can penetrate them and if they do, then they (girls) will be torn apart.

The final verse is therefore trying to allay these adolescent fears. Here the singers sing about a club for breaking the vagina's jaw. This is symbolic. The big club symbolizes a big strong penis that can subdue and cool any woman's hot vulva. This metaphorical language is referring to masculinity - man's virility. The male neophytes are being assured that for a sexually normal and mature person the size of his genitals does not affect his sexual performance. The same message is being ^{passed} to female neophytes. They are being told that nature has taken care of this and this they will prove for themselves soon or later. They are being goaded indirectly to recall the Gikuyu proverb:-

"A man brags about the size of his penis, however small." - meaning that we cannot undo what nature has done or rendered unto us. We must make the best of it as given.

SONG III

1. Ndathicire cucu, ndathicire cucu, aciaririre baba,
Ui! giki kiino ngurukia muti
Ndige kibeke.
2. Ndathicire kiura, ndathicire kiura, kiaruga
ngaruga,
Ui! giki kiino ngurukia muti,
Ndige kibeke.
3. Ndathicire ngari, ndathicire ngari, yahiuha
ngahiuha,
Ui! giki kiino ngurukia muti
Ndige kibeke.
4. Kiino nikirwaru, kiino nikirwaru, muthita nduthii ugo.
Ui! giki kiino ngurukia muti,
Ndige kibeke.
5. Kiino kia muciaire, kiino kia muciaire,
Ti kiino ni mwatu,
Ui! giki kiino ngurukia muti
Ndige kibeke.
6. Kiino kia muiritu, kiino kia muiritu,
Gitucegu tuingi,
Ui! giki kiino ngurukia muti,
Ndige kibeke.

Incest is a sexual perversion condemned in all societies. The Kikuyu are not exceptional. They prohibit sexual relations between relatives of any degree of kinship and even between those who have been brought together by marriage ties.

They also knew some people had other sexual perversions like bestiality that we have already discussed earlier. Cognisance was also taken to those who had sexual obsession with inanimate things.

To have sex with a menstruating woman or a woman who has recently given birth was also considered a sexual perversion and was strictly prohibited among the Gikuyu. It was especially bad in the later case because if such a woman conceived the health and even the life of the infant would be endangered as a result of malnutrition and emotional starvation. It's a medical fact that if a woman conceives before weaning the other child, her milk supply would stop or reduce and the infant's health would be affected because it could not be effectively fed on other foods. Also the strains and other problems associated with pregnancy would render the woman concerned incapable of effectively nurturing and nursing the other child.

The above circumcision song is dealing with these problems through sexual irony, symbolism and jokes.

In the first verse the singer is telling all that he made love to his grandmother to beget his father's follower (uncle). Of course the irony is that how could he? No one would sleep with his grandmother unless he was a sexual pervert on the extreme or is mentally ill. This verse is meant to emphasize the seriousness of incest. While the following verse emphasizes the seriousness of bestiality. Here the singer is saying that he made love to a frog, and hesitated when the frog hesitated. The sexual humour comes from the fact that the frog is too small a creature to be made love to. But the lesson being taught is one against having sexual relations with animals.

In the next verse (3rd) the element of sexual perversion is continued but this time it concerns sexual attraction to objects. For instance, Professor Ndeti in Daily Nation, 5th August, 1988 p. 18; talks of one famous documented case of a man who went into orgasmic spasms every time he saw a pin! By singing about these sexual problems the Gikuyus were informing and teaching the initiates of the sexual problems that exist in society and they encouraged them to report such problems to the elders if they encountered them so that the right steps could be taken to help the victims. Special rituals and cleansing ceremonies were performed on the victims by expert medicinemen

- this was traditional psychiatric treatment and as is well known most sexual problems are psychological in nature.

In the third ^{verse,} / the singer is telling people that he made love to a motor vehicle and speeded when it speeded. And this is where the sexual humour lies. But the deeper hidden inference is the problem of people who get sexual orgasm at the very sight or handling of certain objects. This kind of sexual release is of course abnormal and an individual with it was a sick person.

In the fourth verse the singer is saying that the vagina is very sick and is therefore advising the penis to go for the medicineman. This is symbolic. What is really being said is what we pointed out earlier__ that a man was prohibited from having sexual intercourse with a woman who is menstruating. Such a woman was considered unclean and to sleep with her was a taboo. A man who forced himself unto such woman was greatly despised if known. He was a sexual weakling who could not restrain himself and would give free reign to his biological instincts. The same fate befell a woman who gave in while having her menses. It was even worse for her because men never wanted such a woman for marriage. She was a loose woman who would not be faithful to her husband.

The social control implications of giving free reign to our biological instincts are obvious. Social chaos would be the consequence.

Typically a Gikuyu woman was not expected to resume sexual relations until her child was old enough to be sent on small errands. This was natural family planning. The health implications of conceiving before weaning the other child have already been discussed.

At the sexual enjoyment level such a woman was not considered sweet. And that is why in the song it is being said that her vagina is as hollow as a beehive. Men are being advised to keep away from such a woman until her genitals assume their normal size when she can comfortably accommodate a man's penis for normal sexual intercourse.

On the other hand the good qualities of young maiden's genitals are being sung about. It is being said that a young woman's vagina has many compartments. Men therefore should go after such a woman and leave nursing mothers alone. Traditional Gikuyu society was typically polygynous and a man had no problem in meeting his sexual needs for they would be catered for by the other wife or wives. In fact there was a tacit rule that a reasonable man should not impregnate two

of his wives at the same time. For other than meeting the sexual needs of her husband while a co-wife was nursing, the other wife (or wives) was expected to cook for a co-wife and her children if any for a period of one month or two until she regained her strength after childbirth. The latter was expected to concentrate all her energies and attention to the newly born infant. Furthermore during this period she was considered to be unclean and she couldn't cook for herself, her husband and her children.

SONG IV

1. Giki nitaki, ihahihuu, giki nitaki,
Nigigiria thii na kiagiria ngome i,
Giki nitaki ihahihuu.
2. Nguigua ndirua, ihahihuu,
Nguigua ndirua ngaikarira mwaki, nandingihiai,
Nguigua ndirua ihahihuu.
3. Wona ndirui, ihahihuu, wona ndirui
Mucarica nginyite na ikinyai,
Wona ndirui ihahihuu.
4. Ngaruma thano, ihahahuu,
Ngaruma thano kirumukia ndi mundu murume,
Ngaruma than ihahihuu.
5. Kiino na igoto, ihahihuu,
Kiino na igoto, githi kiino niunyuaga mbakii,
Kiino na igoto, ihahahuu.

Every adolescent looks forward to the day he will become an adult and all privileges and responsibilities that go with adulthood. For the Gikuyu one became an adult through circumcision. In the above song the initiate is singing about his determination to become an adult.

In the first verse he is asking what is this that prevents him from going anywhere or sleeping.

The thing which is preventing him from going anywhere or sleeping is the imminent circumcision. It is all important and everything else is now nothing. That is why he cannot go anywhere or sleep until it is all over for at whatever cost he must become a man. This great determination is further emphasized in the second verse where the initiate is saying that any suggestion that he won't be circumcised makes him sit on fire and he cannot get burnt! In other words he prefers death to remaining^{an} uncircumcised, a child.

He is telling all and sundry, especially his family that he is ready to be a man, a defender of his home, his village and the whole community. He will not flinch while being circumcised; he will shed his blood (through circumcision) and in future he will shed it while defending his community as a warrior.

This strong mood takes him ahead of the circumcision. In the third and fourth verse, he is psychologically already being circumcised. He sees himself already in the river washing away his childishness and all that is associated with childhood and adolescence.

During the circumcision operation the initiates were required to clench their fists firmly, This was to instill bravery. The initiates only unclenched their fists after the operation and in the case of girls

until they were given presents because they did not flinch.

In the fourth verse the initiate is therefore boasting how he will clench his fists and when he unclenches them he will already be a man. The doubting Thomasses will be left to shame. This verse was normally addressed to women; those women who may harbour doubts as to whether he will go through it as a man or not. By implication he is telling them that they will be proved ^{wrong}very/and they will have to kneel before him pleading to be accepted as his girlfriends for he will be a man above and before men.

Clitoritectomy involved the severing of the clitoris and the removal of some parts of labia minora. Some special leaves - maigoya or mathakwa - were folded and cut to size. These were then inserted between the raw labia minora so that the two would not fuse together when they healed thereby closing and sealing up the man's path, (i.e. the vagina). The leaves used for this purpose looked like dried banana leaves into which Gikuyu oldmen kept their snuff.

In the last verse therefore the cunt is holding snuff leaves - symbolically that is. And that is why it is being sung:-

Cunt with bahanas leaves,
Cunt with bananas leaves,
So cunt you take snuff?

The deeper inference here is that a girl who has these leaves in her genitals has become a woman (an adult) for only elderly, and therefore grown up men and women took snuff.

What the initiate is really singing about is that she was now, through circumcision, ready to join the ranks of maidens and there after become a wife and a mother which would qualify her for higher female status. She is telling the candid world that her family and clan have fully prepared and educated her for all these roles and statuses.

SONG V

1. Nengera ciringi,
Nengera ciringi,
Ndagumbeire muico.
2. Kiino nikia mbeca,
Kiino nikia mbeca,
Njara ruhi mwikunje.
3. Matiri ngemi,
Matiri ngemi,
Ngemi ciao no makiria nyama.
4. Wathii kurira,
Wathii kurira,
Icere riaku no kiino kia nyukwa.

In the traditional Gikuyu society there was no prostitution. Paying for female sexual favours was unheard of. But with the coming of the Europeans this state of affairs changed. Prostitution set in. My informants found it difficult to pin point the exact period that prostitution set in among the Gikuyu. Mr. Thairu Kamau 71, a second world War veteran says the watershed for prostitution among the Gikuyu was during the First World War (1914-1918) when there were thousands of single Italian prisoners of War and other European allied forces in Kenya.

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Somehow these people's sexual needs had to be met. Since they were foreigners it was difficult for most to get sex through seduction. And coming from countries where prostitution was more or less acknowledged and tacitly accepted, they had to induce African women with money and other presents. And thus women in no time became inducted into offering their sexual favours either for hard^{cash}/or other gifts. It is held that a woman became a prostitute when she discovered^{that}/she was sitting on a goldmine.

In the first three verses of the song above the selling of sexual favours by women is being admitted for the first time. For instance, in the first verse a woman singer is demanding to be paid for the sexual favours she rendered to a man the other month when he was broke and yet was in dire need of sex. Female sexual favours have become a commodity with bargainable price tag.

In the second stanza the woman becomes very candid and direct when she tells men that the vagina is for money and begger should curl off their hands. The notion of beggers curling off their hands is symbolic. In begging they stretch their hands towards their likely benefactors and of course if you do not want to give the beggar anything you will ignore him and go your own way or bluntly tell him keep off his dirty

begging hands. The deeper inference from this symbolism is that the woman is telling the men who cannot afford to pay for her sexual favours to go elsewhere and stop bothering her with their lusty advances. No money, no sex.

The lesson for the initiates is that they are being warned to be aware of and keep from such women. Such women are dangerous and can ruin one physically (through disease) economically and morally. The exploitation by these women, that is prostitutes, is emphasized further in the third verse where it is being said that such women are a thankless lot, they only show a semblance of thankfulness when they are eating meat - meaning only when they have something to gain from men. The initiates are being advised to resist such immoral sex at whatever cost. The right and honourable sex is through the institution of marriage that ensured legitimate procreation, enjoyment and the society's morals and social order. They must therefore stand firm when confronted by such luscious women as they will stand firm, not showing fear of pain during circumcision operation. The initiates are being warned that if they will prove weak in either case their companions will be nobody but their mothers' vagina. To the Gikuyu reference to one's parents genitals is one of the greatest taboos and being associated with their genitals is a very serious insult.

SONG VI

1. Hui tuma rwagai,
Hui tuma rwagai,
Tuma narume megucunaga kiino thakame.

2. Giceru yuke,
Kibogo yuke,
Namwire Kamau ndemetwo nraigua uguo.

This short song was sung after the initiates have been circumcised and were being escorted home. It marked the end of the circumcision singing and dancing. It was mostly sung by women who were now rejoicing that all had gone well with ^{the} initiates; that all stood firm, that is none flinched or showed any fear when being cut.

In the first verse the women are insulting men with a sexual joke - that they have been a place of life death (rwagai), that all went well except some men who were licking the blood off the vagina. Of course what men, especially youngmen, are being told is that they now ^{have} additional maidens whom they can now court and marry. These are the newly circumcised girls who have gone the circumcision without a hitch. They are worth of them even if it means licking off the blood they have shed while being circumcised. Such are the maidens to be married and any reasonable

men can do anything to win them for marriage. To the Gikuyu a woman who went through the operation without fear would make a very good brave wife, who could even defend the home when the men's folk were not around. Furthermore she would stand childbirth pain (labour pain) and could therefore deliver a child if alone. On the other hand a girl who flinches at the pain of just the removal of a small part of ^{her} body was a coward and would kill her child during childbirth because she would not push hard enough or adequately open up her legs for the child to pass because she cannot stand any amount of pain.

The final verse was sung with great joy for the benefit of both the initiates and their parents but especially ^{for} the initiates. The initiate who went through the circumcision without flinching was greatly honoured by his parents and family and was given whatever he demanded as presents for he had brought great honour and prestige to his family by proving himself. Both boys and girls were given livestock as presents but girls in addition were usually given other gifts like ornaments and clothes.

In the verse the singers therefore are telling Kamau, the father of the initiate to bring out the white and the brown rams to be given to the initiate who has thoroughly proved himself - he has been cut

(circumcised) felt so much pain and has shed so much blood and yet stood very firmly and unfeeling as if nothing was happening to him. A man he is indeed. A man who can be depended on in the future to stand however trying situation and circumstance in the service of his family, clan and community.

For the parents and the rest of the family they readily offer their initiate whatever was within their means as gifts and presents in appreciation of the honour and prestige he/she had brought the family and the expected future brave service the initiate would render them in whatever capacity.

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CHAPTER THREE

OTHER FUNCTIONS OF THE CIRCUMCISION

SONGS AND DANCES

In the last chapter we have shown through the analysis of the songs that the main educational function of the songs was sex education for the initiates; that through the message contained in these songs all aspects of sex education was imparted upon the initiates. While this was the most important function of the circumcision songs and dances they also served other functions as well. In this chapter we shall examine these other functions.

According to my informants, Kibera wa Kibira, Thairu wa Karanja, Njuguna wa Hinga, and Mary Nguo, 69, songs and dances have always been a very important form of entertainment among the Gikuyu people. In fact this can be said to be true of any community. Thus apart from the sex education function of the circumcision songs and dances, one of the other functions of these songs was to entertain. Both young and old looked forward to the entertainment and feasting that accompanied the circumcision ceremonies. The circumcision period was also looked upon as a great leisure time.

It provided an opportunity for people with singing and dancing talents to develop and display them to

*The circumcision ceremony was held at the end of the harvest when people had plenty of food and were relatively unoccupied.

the great appreciation and praise of the spectator - participants. Special treatment was given to the singers and dancers who excelled - they were given choicy foods and drinks and even token gifts of various types.

Through singing and dancing all participants had physical exercise and this was important from a health aspect - people kept fit.

Another function of these songs was early sex education for the young girls and boys who would be the initiates of tomorrow. It was pointed out earlier that during the circumcision ceremonies everybody, both young and old participated in the singing and dancing. For the young they were given an opportunity to see what to look forward to when their time came to be initiated into adulthood. By the very fact that all sexual matters was sang about in their presence, and they themselves participated, they were being introduced to sex education. And in view of this, it can be safely said that sex education among the Gikuyu people began very early in life through the circumcision ceremonies.

Of course the finer details of sex education were given to the initiates during seclusion healing periods (Kiganda) when initiates of the respective sexes were kept apart and taught their respective roles

and responsibilities, in society.

At the psychological level, the most important other function of circumcision songs and dances was the venting of built up sexual emotions and feelings. According to my informants, the Gikuyu recognized the importance of letting off sexual steam. Since physical sex was highly restricted to married life, people had to be given an alternative means of letting off bottled up sexual energy, feelings, and emotions. This was achieved through circumcision songs and dances which have been shown to have purely dealt with matters sexual. People could say anything concerning sex; in dancing they could make any sexually suggestive movements towards the opposite sex. In fact often they paired off in the singing and dancing arena and went through the actual sexual movements although there was no real sex. This gave the participants satisfaction psychologically for symbolically they were believed to have had real sex with their desired lovers. In psychological terms this was sexual catharsis - the venting or letting off of sexual energy.

It was therapeutic. The Gikuyu recognised that bottled up feeling and emotions unless properly sublimated (diverted) could lead to social deviance and perversions like rape, bestiality. Thus circumcision songs and dances also served as a means of social

control with respect to sexual matters and morality. During the circumcision period then, it was a time when all hell looked let loose but it was an institutionalized practice restricted to only that period for the reasons given above.

If anyone, old or young, man or woman ever sang or danced a circumcision song or dance out of season he/she was severely punished and reprimanded. In fact he/she was considered to be mentally ill. This is what gave these songs and dances an aura of sacredness. After it all the whole community was refreshed, emotionally and psychologically purged until the next circumcision period (after two or three years) when again they would have another opportunity to let off the steam.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the circumcision songs and dances had a very important function in sex education for the initiates who were being ushered into adulthood.

It has also shown the other functions of these songs and dance namely entertainment, psychological and physical catharsis and early sex education for the young.

The body of the songs has not been exhaustive because there is a large number of these songs, but those analysed have shown the fundamental function of these songs. The author hopes that the study can serve as a starting point for further investigation by other scholars. If this becomes the case, the author will be more than rewarded.

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Appendix

SONG I

1. If you cry, ihahihuu,
If you cry,
We shall throw away to the uncricumcised.
If you cry ihahihuu.

2. A big cunt, ihahihuu
A big cunt, that is why I have to give the
appeasing goat,
A big cunt, ihahihuu.

3. I'll plunge into the water, ihahihuu
I'll plunge into the water,
The muddied water will go up and down the stream,
I'll plunge into the water ihahihuu

4. Is this the bride, ihahihuu,
Is this the bride, black with a broken vagina,
Is this the bride, ihahihuu.

SONG II

1. Who will circumcise me,
Who will circumcise me,
Haiyaihu,
For Kamau has fucked a goat
Hui Wambugu Munai's thing
Mututu (powder).

2. I was not giving it to you,
I was not giving it to you,
Haiyahu,
I found you fucking a crack,
Hui Wambugu Munai's thing
Mututu!
3. You were giving it to me,
You were giving it to me,
Why were you whining with pleasure
Hui Wambugu Munai's thing
Mututu.
4. Be made love to and sleep,
Be made love to and sleep,
Vagina is a dead log it does not speak,
Hui Wambugu Munai's thing,
Mututu.
5. A big club, a big club,
Haiyahu,
To break vagina's jaw,
Hui Wambugu Munai's thing,
Mututu.

SONG III

1. I made love to my grandmother,
I made love to my grandmother,
To beget my father's follower,
Ui! from this cunt I'll pull out the stick but
leave the dregs.

2. I made love to the frog,
I made love to the frog,
And jumped when it jumped,
Ui! from this cunt I'll pull out the stick but
leave the dregs.
3. I made love to a lorry,
I made love to a lorry,
And speeded when it speeded,
Ui! from this cunt I'll pull out the stick but
leave the dregs.
4. The vagina is sick,
The vagina is sick,
Mr. Penis go to the medicineman!
Ui! from this cunt I'll pull out the stick but
leave the dregs.
5. The cunt of a woman with a new born baby,
The cunt of a woman with a new born baby,
Is not a cunt but a hollow beehive,
Ui! from this cunt I'll pull out the stick but
leave the dregs.

SONG IV

1. What is this, Ihahihuu, what is this
Preventing me from going or sleeping?
What is this, ihahihuu.

2. I understand I won't get circumcised
Ihahihuu, I understand I won't get circumcised,
I sit on fire and can't get burnt,
I understand I won't get circumcised, Ihahihuu.
3. I'll close up my fingers, ihahihuu,
I'll close up my fingers,
And when I open them up
I'll be a man!
I'll close up my fingers, ihahihuu.
4. Cunt with banana leaves, ihahihuu,
Cunt with banana leaves,
So cunt you take snuff,
Cunt with banana leaves, ihahihuu.
5. As you see me now, ihahihuu
As you see me now, I don't differentiate life
and death,
As you see me now, ihahihuu.

SONG V

1. Give me back my shilling (money)
Give me back my shilling,
That I lent you at the end of the month!
2. Vagina is for money,
Vagina is for money,
Beggars curl off your hands!

3. They can't ululate,
They can't ululate,
They only ululate, when eating meat!
4. If you cry*,
If you cry,
You company will be your mother's cunt!

SONG VI

1. We have been at rwagai!
We have been at rwagai!
We were with men who were licking blood off
the vagina!
2. Bring the white ram,
Bring the brown ram,
And tell Kamau I have been cut and felt so!

* Cry ≠ is used here to mean showing fear or
flinching when being circumcised.