

**EXAMINING FEMALE CIRCUMCISION AMONG THE SABINYS FROM AN
ORAL LITERATURE'S PERSPECTIVE.**

BY

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE AND
FILM STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER
OF ARTS IN LITERATURE
OF KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY**

MARCH, 2023

DECLARATION

I, **Norah Chebet**, do declare that this research report titled “Examining Female Circumcision among the Sabiny from an Oral Literature’s Perspective”, is my original work and is as a result of my own efforts. The information herein has not been submitted to an institution of learning or any other for any academic award; degree, certificate or otherwise. In the event that any sort of information was deemed necessary in one way or the other in the course of compiling this work, the source(s) have duly been acknowledged or cited.

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APPROVAL

I certify that this research dissertation entitled “Examining Female Circumcision among the Sabinys from an Oral Literature’s Perspective” satisfies the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Literature of Kyambogo University.

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(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my children; Tracy, Haggai Rhyan and Trevor, my parents and siblings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am more than grateful to God for enabling me to complete my research. It wasn't easy but by His grace, all was possible. My children, Tracy, Haggai, Ryan and Trevor; young as you were dears, you understood that mother had to study and you did not only do me good by staying alone but earnestly praying for me, one prayer that each one of you made and will forever sit at the bottom of my heart is, 'Oh God, remember my mother and give her money so that she may take good care of us and make her complete her studies well'. Continue fearing God all your lives. I thank my parents, Mr. Siwa Mogosu and mum, Grace Mogosu- mommy, you answered my every call, in regard to this research study and I was hopeful that we would all enjoy its success, but you had to go too soon, however, your memory will live in this piece of work for eternity. My siblings cannot go unmentioned for their Tremendable role in my academic career. My cousin, Job and your wife, every single thing that you did to ensure that this work is complete is registered in the table of God, I believe- you will surely be rewarded

With much pleasure, I wish to thank my supervisor, Dr. Atuhura Dorothy for her guidance and tireless support during the writing of this research paper, Dr. dear, no words will be big enough to relay my gratitude for your patience, there were times that you became not my supervisor but a sister, friend and confidante. When I was about giving up, you encouraged me on. I will forever be indebted to you.

Sincere appreciation goes to my lecturers and the entire staff of the Department of Literature, Graduate School, Kyambogo University for the support offered to me during the process of conducting this academic research paper.

I also appreciate my course mates, Bridget, Sam and Sharlon for their support and best wishes to see I completed my research writing.

May the Almighty God reward all in good measure.

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ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

AIC:	Inter-African Committee
CEHURD:	Center for Health, Human Rights and Development
DHS:	Demographic Health Survey
FGC:	Female Genital Cutting/Circumcision
FGM:	Female Genital Mutilation
REACH:	Reproductive Education and Community Health
RHU:	Reproductive Health Uganda
SEA:	Sebei Elders' Association
TBAs:	Traditional Birth Attendants
UDHS:	Uganda Demographic Health Survey
UHRC:	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
WHO:	World Health Organization

ABSTRACT

The study examined female circumcision among the Sabiny from an Oral literature perspective. The objectives of the study were; to examine how the Sabiny myths illustrate the centrality of female circumcision, to analyze how Sebei oral poetry glorifies and justifies the circumcision of girls and women and to find out how rituals facilitate the thinking that everything Sabiny girls and women need to know about their culture is through circumcision. The population of study was gotten from people of the communities of Kapchorwa, Kween and Bukwo districts and it comprised of both Sabiny males and females aged 15 years and above, local surgeons and representatives of community Based Organizations. The study employed an exploratory qualitative research design. This design was used because little or nothing has been studied in relation to how important oral literature is in cementing the process of female circumcision in Sebei Sub region, thus filling the gap. Being a literature research, qualitative approach was used. Data was collected using Focus Group Discussion (FGD's) and Interviews. The findings indicated that Sabiny myths are a core and central in issues of female circumcision. Sebei oral poetry not only glorifies but also justifies the circumcision of girls and women in areas of instilling courage, the feel of identity, pride, rewarding the initiates and asserting the compulsoriness of FGC. It further found that there are a number of rituals performed on candidates throughout the circumcision process. It is these rituals that facilitate the thinking that Sabiny women and girls need to be circumcised if they should know anything about themselves and their culture. The myths continue to guide and shape the Sabiny women and girls in their day-to-day life. The Sabiny poems /songs have ethical and aesthetic aspects of the tribe in their meaning and performance and so still remain important and of value to people. Thus, they can still be used to glorify other aspects of tradition in general in areas of soothing the gods and ancestors on matters related to life, identity as a tribe, honor and continuity of culture.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the entire thesis. The topic of the dissertation is 'Examining Female Circumcision among the Sabinys from an Oral Literature's Perspective'. The study was geared at establishing the position of Literature and especially oral literature in the birth, growth and sustenance of the social cultural practice of female circumcision among the Sebei, also known as the Sabinys in Eastern Uganda. The study studied myths, songs and the rituals performed alongside these oral literature forms during the process of female circumcision. Being a practice that has faced a lot of harassment from the world over, this study paid more attention to the role of oral literature in the continued survival of female circumcision.

1.1 Background to the study

The phrase Female Genital Cutting has had different perspectives from many scholars. World Health Organization started to use the term female circumcision following the reports that this practice was referred to as a social issue as opposed to a medical one. However, in 2005 in its 6th General Assembly of the Inter-African Community in Bamako Mali, WHO agreed to use Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) to cover all forms of female genital cutting and circumcision. FGM involves the part or whole removal of all the external female genitalia, or other injurious act to the female genital organs for reasons that are not medical related, and so it can either be cutting or pulling or elongating (Refugee Tribunal, 2005) .

The definition of FGM has had numerous variations. According to (Ellen, 2005), he wrote that WHO adopted to use the term female circumcision because this practice was referred to as a social and cultural issue as opposed to a medical issue. Female genital mutilation is an ancient-long practice which has been outlawed by governments across Africa, because it is seen as a violation of human rights of girls and women. On the contrary, communities that practice it justify its importance as a practice inherited from the fore fathers and ancestors of the tribe (p. 50)

It is postulated that the term Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was adopted at the Third Conference of the Inter African Committee on Traditional Practices

Affecting the Health of Women and Children in 1990 and is now used in the World Health Organization and other United Nations documents to emphasis the violation of human

rights involved. On the contrary, the locals in Sebei find the term “Mutilation” offensive because to them, it does not fully embody the idea behind circumcision. To mutilate, according to the Sabiny, is one way to misrepresent their traditions which have lived from time immemorial. Female Circumcision is used by practicing communities because it is a close literal translation from their own languages (Nalaaki, 2014). In 1996, the Reproductive Educative and Community Health Program (REACH), a United Nations Population Fund program, opted to use female genital cutting (FGC) instead of female genital mutilation which was thought to imply excessive judgment by outsiders as well as insensitivity towards individuals who have undergone the procedure (Ni Mhordha, 2007)

. It is therefore important that as we advance this paper, the two terms shall be used concurrently; that is Female Genital Circumcision and Female Genital Mutilation.

According to (Ayeko, 2019), female Genital Mutilation also referred to as female circumcision is globally seen as a violating the rights of any human being and rules to prohibit the practice have been established in various nations. The government of Uganda, for example, in 2010 came up with the anti FGM Act 2010, a comprehensive legislation that set out the offences and punishment for carrying out FGM in Uganda. However, in reality the Sabiny who practice it, attach so much value to it, as a command from the forefathers and ancestors thus making its eradication difficult in their society. For instance, in 2018, there was an upsurge in the number of girls and women who were circumcised, to a percentage that left everyone who has been in the fight against female circumcision shocked. It rose from 13% in 2016 to 19% in 2018% (WHO, 2018). It is assumed that the overwhelming increase of girls and women being circumcised in Sebei is attributed to the strong attachment that they have towards their traditional values. (p. 21)

The Ugandan government outlawed the practice of Female Genital Mutilation in the year 2010 through an act of parliament. According to Part II of the act, penalties for carrying out FGM range from conviction to imprisonment of up to 10 years to life imprisonment (Refugee Tribunal, 2005). Despite government’s declaration and its short comings, this practice has continued and its performance presents rich oral literature forms. In Africa, there are many different ethnic groups with different languages, cultures and traditions. The culture is passed on from generation to generation through many ways for example through songs, myths, folktales, proverbs and panegyrics. The Africans use many aspects of oral literature, like songs, myths and they perform rituals as a way of carrying on with

their culture. They used these songs in solidarity as they participate in the (Finnegan, 2012).

Globally, the estimates picture that between 100-140 million girls and women have gone through the practice of Female Genital Circumcision, and at least 2-3 million girls in a year are likely to undertake one or some other form of female genital circumcision worldwide (Momoh, 2005). As a result of people migrating, the practice is also common in the African immigrant communities in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Certain ethnic groups in Asian countries practice FGM, including communities in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In the Middle East, the practice occurs in Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, as well as in Iraq, Iran and the State of Palestine.

In Africa female genital circumcision is practiced across 29 countries. These are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria. This has a significant measure on how the world should view FGM. The biggest question people should be asking is, do all these people, from various walks of life, have a physical disorder? This is because 29 countries have signified that it is not just a vice but an acceptable practice among the people who still see sense in FGM.

Many of the African communities that practice female Genital circumcision and circumcision of the male believe in the practice as both a traditional and religious binding to the gods and ancestors of the tribe. In some instances, failure to perform the practice has resulted into intra community conflicts and violence. The East Africa Standard Newspaper (2002) for example, reported that Meru initiates from Kigumene village burnt down the houses of parents who circumcised their boys in hospitals instead of fulfilling the traditional circumcision rite of passage where the initiates would be involved in the performance of songs, dances and drama associated with the traditional ceremony. The News Paper reported that the angry boys grouped themselves and sang the traditional circumcision songs as they castigated those who opted for hospital circumcision, referring to them as cowards and betrayers of the tribe. Such a reaction explains the extent to which circumcision as a rite of passage is indispensable with the beliefs of the people (UNFPA, 2007)

In Uganda, the Sabiny practice Female Genital Circumcision as a means of initiating girls into adulthood and womanhood. It is as well seen as an expression of cultural identity and a sacred ritual sanctioned by ancestors and protected by cultural beliefs (WHO, 2018). The people who do not fulfill it are socially ostracized. Believing that every person has a sense of belonging and culture to cling to, a number of people have continued with it. Female Genital Mutilation among the Sabiny is in itself initiation, which is a sacramental channel and a designed entrance accepted into a group or society. It can be a formal kind of admission to adulthood in a community or one of its formal components. In an extended sense, it can also signify a transformation in which the initiate (*chemeriandet*) is reborn into a new role.

Initiation is also defined as a basic change in existential condition, "which liberates man from profane time and history. "Initiation recapitulates the sacred history of the world. And through this recapitulation, the whole world is sanctified new (the initiate) can perceive the world as a sacred work, a creation of the gods".

The Sabiny belong to the ethnic group of Nilotics and particularly to the sub group of Highland Nilotes. A large group also referred to as the Kalenjin is found in Kenya. Kalenjin is a word that means 'I tell you' and it groups together the Nandi, Kipsigis, Tuken, Pokot, Marakwet and the Sabaot. The Sabiny also referred to as the Sabaot, Sabiny or the Sebei occupy the slopes of Mt. Elgon in Eastern Uganda, an area that was originally characterized by thick forests and fast flowing rivers including Sipi River with its famous and prestigious three water falls. They occupy the three districts of Kapchorwa, Kween and Bukwo bordering the districts of Bulambuli, Nakapiripirit, Amudat and the republic of Kenya. They are estimated to number up to 3,490,000 and speak the Kalenjin dialect known as Kupsapiiny (Kupsabiny).s

The Sabiny, like all other Kalenjins, circumcise both boys and girls of 15 years of age and above. The circumcision is done in the December of every even year though preparations start as early as the beginning of the year with parents of potential candidates planting enough food especially maize and millet. The cutting is done by experienced local surgeons who are believed traditionally and culturally among the Sabiny to be commissioned by the gods. The practice has its origin in a myth that regards an uncircumcised woman to be dirty and immoral and so forbidden by the gods of the land to exist in the community, to be married or to have any social intercourse or interaction in the community (WHO, 2018).

In fulfilling the practice of circumcision among the Sabiny, oral literature forms such as poetry (songs), ululations, utterances, myths and legends are the cornerstone. Oral literature forms like songs are the greatest comforters of the heart and are also widely used means of communicating messages and feelings towards the initiates. On these occasions, oral literature forms like songs, sayings and ululations make people excited, enthusiastic and courageous. Songs are known to be sung poetry (Finnegan, 2012). Poetic forms such as songs, recitations, panegyrics are part of African life because they are widely used in initiations, births, marriages, deaths, royal courts, cattle keeping and farming. Musical as well as verbal elements are played in enhancing every performance in society. Some songs are accompanied by drums and the drummers provide both music and the drum-beats or notes of the horn 'heard' as actual words, praising or enhancing the performance. The performances are public with the emphasis on the ceremonial functions rather than their entertainment value. The audiences being primarily those who attended; such as the public, the clan members, elders and members of the old lineage. This kind of poetry filters down from generation to generation in society.

The style of the songs used is both natural and original. It communicates all the sense that ever existed in the plains of the Sabiny. It is rich in language and has figurative form of expression. The sort of sentiments and phraseology involved, elevate the traditions as the center and ideal of society as it is in the Sabiny society. The poems are clearly the conscious product of a learned and specialist intellectual tradition. Certain kinds of poetry are typically delivered or sung by women, particularly dirges, lullabies, mocking verses, and songs to accompany women's ceremonies or work (Finnegan, 2012)

The Sabiny culture has certain genres considered especially suitable for women and women are at the centre of performance. However, references to men seem to occur even more often and, with a few striking exceptions, men rather than women tend to be the bearers of the poetic tradition. Among the Sebei, circumcision songs and ululations accompanying the process of FGC, are used to make the initiates strong, courageous, and brave and understand what it really means to move from one stage of life to another, which is from child hood to adulthood.

Oral literature forms such as songs have existed since time immemorial in all African communities, there is no communal activity that is not accompanied by songs and dances. There are work songs, war songs, initiation songs, marriage, birth, burial or funeral songs, praise and love songs.

Similarly, ululations, utterances, recitations and lamentations excite the spirit of the participants and makes them heroic and energized to heroic composure. The Africans use songs to perform many rituals as a way of showing solidarity since everyone has to participate in the singing. It is asserted that the importance of songs as part of oral literature form used in FGM in that, “the messages and meaning embodied in the texts of these songs are meant to contextualize virtues such as courage, integrity, responsibility and maturity among the initiates who are prepared for their entry into adulthood”. These songs use an abusive and obscene language which is very important to the initiates as a signal for their transformation from childhood to adulthood.

Despite the Government of Uganda ban on female genital mutilation by an act of parliament in 2010, the practice has still continued. The reason for illegalizing Female Genital Cutting (FGC), has not paid off fully because of the strong belief that the Sabiny attach to it. In (p. 6), the socio-cultural dynamics of the practice such as belief in the declaration and oath of the ancestors of the tribe, the legends and myths associated with it such as a rite of passage, the wrath of the gods and the general stigmatization of those who do not fulfil it by society, are deeply ingrained in the minds of the people (Ellen, 2005).

The oral literature forms that accompany the practice have a lot of aesthetic values. For this reason, this study focused on Sebei oral literary forms particularly songs and dances, myths and rituals and the role they play in female circumcision ceremonies.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Although FGC is viewed a violent act of mutilation and abuse of female human rights, the role of Sabiny oral literature has not been given a place and taken to consideration in relation to societal attitude, the government of Uganda decisions taken in outlawing the practice, the civic society and non-Governmental attitude towards the practice. Oral forms of literature that accompany the Female Circumcision, are very paramount in the continuity of the Sabiny traditions. They play a big role, including painting a wonderful picture of the traditional ceremonies. Given that literature is a reflection of society, this belief acknowledges that female circumcision among the Sabiny, though outlawed is still paramount-(looking at the upsurge of circumcised women and girls in 2018). Little is known and documented about the role that oral literature plays in the practice of Female Circumcision, yet it is the very soul of the Sabiny society. It blends and provides another picture of what female circumcision is. The different picture is seen in the songs and

dances, myths and rituals that are used to accompany the exercise of circumcision. Whereas female circumcision is viewed as an act of cruelty, behind the scenes is the role and importance of forms of oral literature that are worth of study. This study thus, examined the aspects of Sabiny oral literature, specifically songs, dances, myths and rituals, that are used in the circumcision ceremony, with a view to understanding the other side as painted by Sebei oral literature in the outlawed and controversial practice of female circumcision.

1.3 Study Objectives

To examine the influence of Sebei oral literature on female circumcision

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

- i) To examine how the Sabiny myths and legends illustrate the centrality of female circumcision in the Sebei culture.
- ii) To analyze how Sebei oral poetry glorifies and justifies the circumcision of girls and women in the region.
- iii) To find how rituals facilitate the thinking that everything Sabiny girls and women need to know about their culture and themselves through circumcision.

1.4 Research Questions

- i) How do myths and legends illustrate the centrality of female circumcision in the in the Sebei culture?
- ii) How does Sebei oral poetry glorify and justify the circumcision of girls and women in the region?
- iii) Is there a possibility that rituals plant the idea everything the Sabiny girls and women need to know about their culture and themselves is through circumcision?

1.5 Purpose of the study

Despite the outlawed practice of female circumcision among the Sabiny, the community still practices it, though stealthily. The researcher found this to be problematic and, in the quest, to answer this problem, this study was conducted in a field that had not yet been explored in relation to female circumcision and so the purpose of the study was to examine the oral literature perspective of female circumcision among the Sabinys; the role that Sebei orature plays in the existence and sustenance of the practice.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The research was conducted in Sebei region which covers the districts of; Kapchorwa, Kween and Bukwo. It is found in the slopes of Mount Elgon in Eastern Uganda. It is bounded by the districts of Bulambuli in the West and South, Nakapiripirt and Amudat districts in the North and the Republic of Kenya in the East and South. It is the ancestral

home to the Sabiny, a subgroup of people belonging to the Kalenjin ethnic tribes, majorly found and live in Kenya. The Sabiny people in the three districts number about 349, 000 living in a sparse area of approximately 1730.9 Square kilometers. The Sabiny constitute three Sebei tribes in Uganda and their sister tribes on the Kenya side of the border, Bok, Kony, and Bongom. Their society is organized in kin-based organizational units, clan and lineage; the kinship terminology and the patterning of interpersonal relationship based on consanguinity, marriage; and the age-set structure. The main structures of their lives are centered on rearing of animals, farming, and socializing through making beer. They are generally cattle, donkey keepers and farmers. Female Genital circumcision has been viewed by society, Non-Governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organization and the Government of Uganda as a primitive, inhuman act and violation of human rights, however the oral literature dimension may be of value, thus necessitating this study.

This area was chosen for study because, it is where the Sabiny live in and much as other tribes of Uganda practice circumcision ,it is limited to the males , and it is the Sabiny and their sister tribe, the pokot in Amudat district who are the only tribes in Uganda that practice female genital circumcision .Although the Sabiny have various forms of oral literature that society practices , such as circumcision rituals in general, myths, legends, songs, proverbs, sayings, ululations, panegyrics and others like dirges and placation of the gods and ancestors. This study focused on those outstanding aspects of oral literature that are used in the process of female circumcision ceremony. These are rituals, songs and myths. Other aspects like panegyrics, proverbs, dirges have not been considered here. Thus, this study mainly covered the forms of Sebei Orature related to female circumcision like songs, myths and rituals. The songs, myths and rituals include; “Mwa Rotwet Cacaca”,” Leta Raha”, “Seeroot Kumuganga”, “Angye Pook”, “Angurwo”, “Lai Kapulengung”, “Saa Mbaya”, “Kacoo Tabayandet”, “Yegoo”, “Kawacemuut”, “Tole Muket”, “Soneet Kiribo”

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Sociological Approach to Literature is an approach that intensively studies the social, political and economic contexts in which a piece of literature is produced. Sociological Approach critics look into the relationship between a produced work of literature and the environment or society in which it was created; they believe literature is not created in a vacuum. The approach emphasizes the status of literature as a cultural product of its time

and place, noting however that literature can go beyond a specific time and tells about generations long gone.

Sociological Approach to literary criticism as propounded by Kenneth Burke, a 20th century literary and critical theorist is the most suitable theory for this study. The theory is directed to understanding literature in its larger social context. It analyses both how the society functions in literature and how literature works in society. In his work 'Literature as an Equipment for Living', Kenneth Burke uses proverbs to illustrate that literature is part and parcel of its society, in that it is designed for consolation or vengeance, admonition or exhortation or for foretelling. He goes on to say that literature is used to name typical recurrent situations because when people find a certain social relationship recurring so frequently, they must find a name for it 'just like the Eskimos have many different names for the different snows. The names for typical recurrent social situations are not developed out of disinterested curiosity but because the names imply a command, what to look out for. If the role played by proverbs can be understood, appreciated and applied to literature as a whole, then important facts shall be discovered about literary organizations and such observation should apply beyond literature to life in general thus helping to take literature out of its separate bin and give it a place in general sociological picture. Burke states that the beauty of sociological approach is the fact that it 'gives definite insight into organization of literary works; and it automatically breaks down the barriers erected about literature as a specialized pursuit.' Regardless of how many categories people try to classify literature, the sociological approach derives its relevance from the fact that literature should not apply only to the art but also to the social situations outside the art.

Burke concludes by noting that sociological categories should consider works of art as strategies for addressing all the different issues in a given social setting like wading off an evil eye, consolation, vengeance, admonition, implicit commands or instructions among many other.

Isodere Okpehwo in his *The Oral Performance in Africa* posits that "without the context, it remains lifeless". The oral literature forms in this study emanates from the society and as Michael Meyer in *Critical Strategies for Reading; Critical Thinking*, states "The relationship between literature and the society are reciprocal. Literature is not only the effects of social forces; it is also the cause of social effects" (1995). By implication, the circumcision of women in Sebei in this study is not only embodiments of the people's

world views and way of life but also used to mirror and shape their lifestyle. Circumcision emanates from the society and is used in turn to give meaning to this society.

Finnegan in *Oral Poetry; its Nature Significance and Social Context*, concedes that “Oral Literature is the means through which the people’s culture, ideologies and belief systems are propagated with the purpose of teaching and maintenance of social control”. The sociological approach suits this study because female circumcision in harbor all these qualities and the focus of the sociological approach is to depict the culture, ideologies and belief systems of the people, in this case, the Sabinys.

The sociological approach is very relevant in this study because female circumcision is a combination of Sebei oral literature forms as Tala in *Orature in Africa* observes “Orature is socially conditioned. That is, it mirrors cultural values and expresses socially accepted ideas. Therefore, in order to understand and appreciate it fully, it must be seen within its cultural, historical and symbolic context. Any attempt to see it independently of the socio-historical situation in which it is embedded or in which it has emerged will inevitably lead to distortion and other absurdities. Studying female circumcision outside the context of the Sabinu tradition and culture gives a whole different meaning, it is important to understand the people and what they believe in relation to female circumcision and hence understanding female circumcision in relation to the people.

1.8 Literature Review

Female Circumcision, which to others Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and yet to others, female genital cutting (FGC), is practiced among the Sabinu tribe which occupies Kapchorwa, Kween and Bukwo districts. It has been a part of their culture for as long as no one can remember. The Sabinys circumcise both boys and girls. Among the Sabinu, the type of FGM practiced is excision, where the clitoris and labia minora are cut away (WHO,2018).

In Uganda, FGC is as old as its heritage from time immemorial. It is believed that the Sabinu in the Sebei region emanated from the Kalenjin heritage, a tribe that has been there from the time of creation, according to their myths. In as much as the origin of female circumcision is not so known to the contemporary generation, Sabinu orature indicate that Sabinu men used to go into places distant from their homes to graze cattle and or hunt, like their descendants (the Kalenjins). Consequently, a huge number of them kept away from their homes, wives and children for a long period of time. Most women and girls went on

rampage with sexual immorality whenever the men kept away from home grazing cattle and hunting.

To curb the vice of infidelity and promiscuity among married women and girls respectively and also to initiate girls into womanhood, Female Circumcision was introduced and adopted. It was not therefore to be expected and heard of among girls to engage in sexual affairs before circumcision. The practice eventually gradually grew and later became an accepted way of life (norm) that was and is associated with a range of cherished values. Presently, the Sabiny regard FGC as a sacred ritual put in place and blessed by ancestors, shielded by cultural beliefs and acts as the only rite of passage of girls into womanhood and adulthood. Therefore, a number of adults and young people often associate with it regardless of the mentioned and preached associated health risks. They prefer their identity and dignity over any other speculations

1.8.1 Centrality of Myths in FGM

Ruth Finnegan, defines a myth as a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. while a legend is a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but not authenticated. (Finnegan, 2016)

The Sebei group themselves according to clans that are of patrilineal descent, which are further sub-divided into family units (*korik*). Each clan is expected to have ancestral spirits (*oyik*) to oversee, monitor and mentor all activities of the clan; rebuking what is wrong and blessing what is acceptable, the *oyik* are represented by a totem (*tyongta*). The Sabiny men are polygamous in nature and the women who are initiated in their mid-teens are expected to be ripe for marriage as soon as they are through with the initiation process. Myths, proclaim that if a member of a clan does something to annoy the spirits, he/she has to content with them (spirits), it should be noted though that the spirits of the mother's clan may also affect the welfare of a person. There are quite a number of clans which are brought together by the one prophet they share a ceremony called *ntarastit*- which is founded on the belief that the sprits can be angry and can hurt or kill any member opposed to traditional circumcisions and practices is the herb behind the continuous practice of FGM by the Sabiny. The belief in such a myth is the drive towards Sabiny society practice of both male and female circumcision practices. This view pointed to what the Sabiny society practices and thus this study further went ahead to establish this reality belief in myth and legends in the context of the Sabiny living in Sebei Sub region. However, most

scholars have dwelt much on how to stop FGM and have taken little interest in knowing why, regardless of all the noise made by the government, it has been hard to stop the Sabiny. In this paper, there is more to songs and myths than meets the eyes of many scholars.

Among the Sabiny, both women and men may fall under a specific age-set. The prime role of an age-set among the Sabiny is to evoke “a measure of protocol in interpersonal relationships” between co initiates. Those boys and girls that are circumcised in the same or particular period form an age-set; a period that can span for six consecutive years. The circumcised girls and boys are all instilled with Sabiny values during the process of circumcision. Despite the fact that circumcision is not a legal institution but rather a cultural one, the only means by which one ‘legally’ gains an adult status is through circumcision.

The indoctrination is religiously lodged deep in the mind of every growing up Sabiny. The tuition given to young people and particularly the initiate is indoctrinative and associated with the fear of the malignant power of the gods, spirits and prophets of the clan and their wrath, if not fulfilled through circumcision. Therefore, to placate the gods early enough or keep their wrath at bay, the practice of circumcision is a vital. What Horsfall et al asserts clearly defines what the Sabiny in the areas of study practice in relation to the oral literature forms that are prevalent. Thus, the belief in the power of gods is a belief in the myth of the Sabiny society. Most scholars have come up asserting that it has been the tradition of the Sabiny that has hampered the progress of stopping FGM. This paper advances fundamental and practical theories that could be the limiting factor, among them being the role of oral literature.

Both myths and legends assert that once upon a time the male reproductive organ was attacked by a disease that made it start to rot. This was because, the Sabiny being pastoralists could move distances without keeping clean. It could not function normally in fulfilling the marital duty because of the pain associated with the rot. Sabiny community leaders met and suggested remedy of preventing the spread of the disease and also save the victim. They consulted the medicine men who in turn consulted the gods who suggested cutting the foreskin where the problem was. When this was done the male organ was saved hence the tradition of circumcision was carried out up to today. It also extended to women. That primarily explains why the Sabiny are so attached to circumcision (Ibid, 2012). The

literature points to the initial belief of agelong Sabiny, it does not however explain if the belief in this myth or legend is still the drive to the practice of FGC. This leaves a gap to be filled by the present study focused on the current Sabiny society.

Circumcision only takes place in the even years. So, in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018 and so on. There are also myths associated with whether the circumcision ceremony should be held or not. For example, in 2016, the circumcision ceremonies were cancelled and so, did not take place. This was because a plant at Mount Elgon – with a stem in the form of a penis – called *Nugut* – was flowering. Whenever the plant flowers, which is very rare, it is a sign to the Sabiny that is not safe to circumcise. Sabiny, initiation ceremonies and circumcision rituals involving FGC are carried out every 2 years which is an age-long traditional myth that dividable years illustrate ‘peace’. This has been a part of the cultural practice for as long as anyone can remember. Such belief explains some of the myths that explain why people in Sebei behave according to the dictates of their ancestors, myths and legends that guide the circumcision process in Sebei sub region (Ibid, 2012). In Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *‘The River Between’*, Muthoni cannot be restrained from being circumcised because, according to her, circumcision is the only way through which the gods can acknowledge her and make her belong to the tribe. The tribe to which the both of her parents, though staunch Christians, subscribe to. The gods are the only ones to determine one’s authenticity of being an original tribemate and the only ticket to attaining their approval is by getting circumcised. This is very much like what the Sabinys believe in- the gods are at the centre of the practice of circumcision and precisely female circumcision.

It is asserted by one scholar that the reasons for practicing female circumcision are closely related to perceived benefits that circumcision comes with for example, the uncircumcised woman was denied doing some duties like smearing or decorating the house with dung or fetching it from the kraal, and was not allowed to milk the cows. There is a myth that the Sabiny believe that she would set off a curse for the animals and they would die mysteriously. The Sabinys use cow dung to make the floors and walls of their houses smooth and also to help keep away insects like termites from damaging the house. This is done by women while men go to graze cattle. Since much of the domestic work is done by only the circumcised women, this helps in sustaining the necessity of female Circumcision for no woman wishes to be left out in such activities. Furthermore, an uncircumcised woman is denied picking food from the granary. It is only the woman who has undergone circumcision that is allowed to climb the granary to pick food. It is a

disgrace for a woman who is not circumcised to climb into a family granary; and a taboo as well whose consequences would cause drought, famine and low yields from crops. Part of the myth arising from the legends of the Sabiny is that female circumcision is done to make the spirits happy. The gods are believed to instruct the Sabinys not to abandon the age-long practice of female circumcision and so if one stubbornly decides not to undertake it, she is haunted until she accepts to 'pay the debt' which in this case is being circumcised.

Scholars argue that the custom of having the penalty for not practicing circumcision, is total social ostracism, and continues to make up reasons for female circumcision. He also adds that the lifestyle of most African communities is based on orature. This is the heartbeat of this research, the reason why the Sabiny practice and continue to uphold female circumcision. Thus, the guiding principle of female circumcision are based on oral literary tradition of the Sabiny.

Different rituals are performed in the process female circumcision; it is believed that such rituals play a big part in the continuation of this practice of Female Circumcision among the Sabiny tribe in Sebei sub-region. The initiation ceremonies literally known as rituals such as the three-week festival characterized by singing of various songs which reveal the poetry of society, beer drinking and merry making and later preceded by revealing of tribal secrets to the initiation candidates is believed to have an immense influence on the continuation of female circumcision since many girls and women crave to know the secrets of their tradition. Sebei poetry is rich in meaning in terms of glorifying circumcision and as well justifying its continuity (Refugee Tribunal, 2005)

The Center for Health, Human Rights and Development (CEHURD) in a 2015 report documented that FGM is practiced as a cultural rite of passage from childhood to womanhood by the Sabiny, Tepeth, Pokot and Kadama in Uganda. It is a belief in the fulfilment of the rituals is a tribal thinking guided by tribal myths and legends (CEHURD, 2015). While this report may not have mentioned the importance of Oral literature per-se, believing in the rite of passage in itself is a tradition practice that utilizes various form of oral literature. In such an occasion oral literature aspect like drumming, songs, rattles, flutes, ululations and utterances are part of the African rituals. Thus, the colour of the activities of the circumcision rituals among the Sabiny in Bukwo, is sustained by oral literature performances.

Female circumcision is not just a means into womanhood but also marks the start of civic and community responsibility. Before a woman is circumcised, she is accepted to stand

before real ‘men and women’ and make a speech for she is still ‘just a girl’, she is not even allowed to take part in pertinent tasks like milking cows and getting foodstuffs the granary (Ayeko, 2019). After being cut however, she is now a real woman and so has the right to enjoy privileges granted by the Sabiny, including full rights to leadership as an elder among the tribe. This literature explains why female genital mutilation is important and compulsory among Sabiny women. During the exercise Sabiny initiation songs (chekwoyet) are sang and performed. It is viewed that initiation songs are not merely the music heard in the rituals but also a process of creation, performance and consumption of the songs. The circumcision songs are used to make the initiates strong, courageous, and brave and understand what it really means to move from one stage of life to another which is adult hood. Songs give comfort to the heart and are also a widely used means of communication. Songs are sung poetic forms or genres of literature and also part of oral serenity. They are verbally relayed and so expressive in nature. Thus, oral literature plays a key part in circumcision among the Sabiny.

According to (Nalaaki, 2014), culture is an important aspect in the existence of the human being. From a cultural relativism perspective, it is a doctrine that holds that (at least some) such variations are exempt from legitimate criticism by outsiders, a doctrine that is strongly supported by notions of communal autonomy and self-determination. Culture shapes human beings; it provides them with values and principles which formulate their world view. Therefore, for a society to be holistic, culture becomes one of its foundational aspects. The rituals and values passed on through cultural rituals accompanied by various aspects of oral literature are believed among the Sabiny, to be a foundation for the growing young to adulthood. This perhaps explains the thinking of Sabiny girls and women in supporting genital mutilation. Among the Sabiny who are continuing to practice female circumcision, it is seen as a rite of passage for the girl child. This scenario could explain why the Sabiny have persisted with FGM and yet it has been criminalized by the government of Uganda.

Tradition plays a significant role in the justification and endorsement of the practice of female circumcision. In most cases, tradition or culture is looked at as the determinant of various aspects of how human beings carry on with their day-to-day activities. The following includes the social, cultural, religious and medical factors of *wonsetibik as* believed by the Sabiny. The ceremony is accompanied by various oral literature forms such as singing, drumming, ululations and poetic utterances. It is posited by Kakenya that

'Parents who continue with this practice have compassion and love for their culture'. These parents also believe that they are protecting their daughters from harm. One scholar from Kenya notes that, it's a tradition and rite of passage to womanhood it's done at puberty at age 12 to prepare a girl for marriage and if not done the society would look at her as a curse or stigmatized person in the society. It's the parent's responsibility to make sure the child has gone through the ritual to avoid conflicts with the elders. This means that the tradition has been in place for so long and helps to bring about harmony and socialization. The tradition has been defended by its practitioners, who have given like a source of employment for women in communities, a woman who is circumcised fetches more dowries for the family, and reduction of interference of other cultures through intermarriages and migrations. Therefore, one had to be circumcised in order to be identified as a true Sabiny (Momoh, 2005)

Furthermore, (Momoh, 2005) also noted female circumcision has a number of cultural elements. According to her, these elements include beliefs, rituals, customs, and behavioral norms, and social hierarchies, religious, political and economic systems. These are imparted through song, proverbs, tribal sayings, myths and legends of the tribe. In this case, female circumcision is a tradition that has been supported by centuries of traditions; deep culturally rooted practices that were started by the Sabiny ancestors that have strong customs attached to them. In other words, it is a deep-rooted practice which cannot be erased easily. To the Sabiny, it is a mindset. The Sabiny people practice it because it is in their cultural mind-set and it seems difficult to change such a mind-set. One notes that indigenous knowledge, rituals and belief take shape around the culture's unique understanding of the social and physical world. Therefore, there's need to understand people's beliefs and customs other than judging them. The continued existence of pro-culture groups accompanied with fear to lose self-identity is the thinking of every Sabiny girls and women about their culture and circumcision. It is through female circumcision that one is seen as a true Sabiny.

It is noted that these rituals are used to institute a change in social positions. When such a woman gets married, marriage would last longer. Therefore, the Sabiny have continued to practice female circumcision because they believe once it is destroyed, it means losing their identity, fear of social isolation for example during community festivals, community meetings and other community celebrations. Once a girl was not circumcised, she is denied many of the social benefits. For instance, she would be the last to draw water from

the well. Female circumcision is a requirement to social acceptance hence leading to the continuous practice (Ibid, 2012). This literature asserts the importance of rituals performed but does not clearly articulate the oral literary forms that accompany the rituals. The present study explored the oral literary forms used in the fulfillment of the circumcision rituals.

According to the WHO (2018) FGM qualifies one for adulthood because it is a “rite of passage from childhood to adulthood”. The practice is deeply rooted and becomes a mind-set to the individual’s psychology; a sense of loyalty to belief in a value system. There is also a belief that “as long as you’re not circumcised, you’re still a ‘girl’ even if you’re married with children” hence continuity. Reduce on immorality in the community, if one was not found a virgin at circumcision she would be cursed by the community and given severe punishments. For example, if one was found to have lost her virginity, the elders through rituals would get her an elderly man for marriage around the village who had failed to get a wife. This was important because it helped to keep girls from immoral behavior like indulging in underage sex. Therefore, female circumcision being an enhancement of women’s femininity by excising masculine traits, the marking of ethnic boundaries; the limitation of women’s excessive sexual desires and purity women, “readying” them for their overwhelmingly important reproductive role (Ni Mhordha, 2007). This literature mentions the importance of Sebei rituals and how they influence the mind-set of the community girls and women. Although oral literature forms accompany such practices it is not clearly mentioned. This is a gap that the present study filled by exploring the types oral literature forms that accompany such practices.

Female circumcision brings a sense of belongingness and togetherness. Once one goes through female circumcision, she feels being part of the society and is eligible to earn honor from the society where she is now fit to belong. Funding from fellow Sabiny members who want the ritual to continue. These may include those away from home, and there are those who are educated but support others to continue with the tradition so as not to fade away. This shows how culture is ingrained in the minds of the people such as it is among the Sabiny. These include drinks like beer which is locally brewed, food and other materials so that others can perform the ritual. Female circumcision is a socio-cultural norm which means that it affects a person life, his/her behavior and the person’s process of decision making. Generally, in the African world, the cultural and social beliefs and values are strongly in favor of Female Circumcision. The values herein are transmitted by

community and the family and all the guardians of such norms. It is through the family that the practice of female circumcision is maintained and upheld as a tradition from generation to generation. According to the Sabiny, female circumcision is an aspect of culture that one is born to and which one must fulfill. The procedure is traditionally carried out by elderly women who have been spiritually ordained to be surgeons and it runs in specified families. That very belief of the community in spiritually ordained surgeons in an oral literary belief, because there are myths that society believes in behind the choice of such persons. With the scholars that have illustrated possible ways to stop FGM. They have failed to look at the signs and dwelt much on the symptoms. They have looked at the stem before knowing how deep the roots are. FGM part of the culture and it would be difficult to end it without breaking down the Sabiny culture first. This paper provides evidence that oral literature has contributed much towards the continuity of FGC.

1.9.1 Methodology

This section presents the methods, tools and procedures that were used during the research process by the researcher during the process of data collection. It presents the research design, study population and selection of participants (sample), reflection on the fieldwork, and limitations during the fieldwork, data gathering process, reliability and validity of data, data analysis and ethical consideration.

1.9.2 Research design

The researcher used exploratory research design. This design was used because little or nothing has been studied in relation to how important oral literature is in cementing the process of female circumcision in Sebei Sub region. The design enabled the researcher to gain in depth inquiry and familiarity with the existing phenomenon in Female Genital Circumcision and particularly the part of oral literature in the process. The design employed a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach was adopted more for responses from interviews and FGDs in order to explain and analyze the importance of oral literature in producing, nourishing and promoting FGC.

1.9.3 Data collection method

The study employed the use of focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. Interview guides were designed to solicit information from both interviewees and respondents in focus group discussions. The two methods of data collection were chosen because the researcher needed a face to face interaction with the respondents because, aside from the

verbal communication, the non-verbal communication was also highly needed in this study.

A total of three hundred and eighty-four respondents were reached out to across the three districts of Kapchorwa, Kween and Bukwo. This number was vital for a fair representation and wider view. Interviews were used to get information from local surgeons and representatives from community based organizations because this group was small (fifty four), and yet they carried very sensitive information for the study (especially the surgeons). The rest of the respondents (three hundred and twenty-seven) were reached out to through focus group discussions. In every district, the researcher organized two focus group discussions and two interviews – one for surgeons and another of representatives from Community Based Organizations.

1.9.4 Data Processing and Analysis

The researcher took down necessary notes from the respondents' illustrations. Being a born of the study geographical scope, the language was not a big problem to the researcher. No pictures whatsoever were taken due to the fact that the respondents sought their identity to be protected. The respondents were coded with **F** standing for focus group discussions and **I** for interviews. The respondents acknowledged consent by either signing or thumb printing. No names were used anywhere for the sake of confidentiality. The information gathered on myths, songs and rituals were all transcribed. The notes were later checked for completeness, suitability and reliability in relation to the task. Special attention was paid to the non-verbal communication.

1.10. Challenges and limitations.

The researcher to encountered the following challenges;

Being oral literature, there was very little documented literature about the Sabinu and particularly from the oral literature perspective which greatly hampered the process of literature review and facts finding on the study.

Some of the very relevant participants were shy whereas others were inhibitive in their responses, thus necessitating, pleading and convincing or sometimes having some cooperative respondents prevail on them. This was time consuming. Before commencing on interviewing and setting focus group discussions, some knowledgeable people out rightly said the study was a waste of time and did not join the group of participants, they

completely declined taking part in the study pointing to the position of the government in regard to the subject under study. They argued that it was pointless to study what had already been banned. In such instances, the researcher had to look for more cooperative people. That also wasted time. The study was a bit costly in terms of travels and processing the gathered information. It was the researcher's first-time experience doing research and this made it a bit challenging to her, especially being on oral literature which involved data collection. All in all, the study was finally completed amidst very difficult situations

1.11 Significance of the study

- i) The study is hoped to sensitize people on the value of oral literature in the Sabiny society. Despite the public viewing circumcision of women negatively, from a violation of human rights perspective, this study points the fact that there is still something of value in it.
- ii) There is continued circumcision of girls and women despite efforts to eliminate the practice. This study is significant in exposing that the strong belief emanates from the songs, myths and rituals of the tribe that make the Sabiny to attach much value to it.
- iii) The study is also significant in exposing how Sebei oral literature forms are a major component that is indispensable with circumcision practice and thus show how it plays a major role.
- iv) The study is important in articulating the important forms of Sebei culture from an oral literature perspective that can be culturally used for sustenance of Sabiny cultural values, even in the absence of circumcision practice in the area.
- v) The study findings may be used by the Ministry of Labor Gender and Social development for understanding the Sabiny society and effectively plan or policy making on issuing related to the Sabiny traditions and culture.
- vi) The research findings may be used as reference by the Government of Uganda, academicians, scholars, the civil society and human rights activists who may be interested in understanding the Sabiny society and its values.

1.12 Purpose of the study

Despite the outlawed practice of female circumcision among the Sabiny, the community still practices it, though stealthily. The researcher found this to be problematic and, in the

quest, to answer this problem, this study was conducted in a field that had not yet been explored in relation to female circumcision and so the purpose of the study was to examine the oral literature perspective of female circumcision among the Sabinys. The study was eventually successfully conducted.

1.13 Definition of terms

- Cultural:** In this study refers to the way of life of Sabiny people
- Cultural context:** In this study is the situation that is relevant to the beliefs, values and practices of the Sabiny community.
- Culture:** In this study is defined as the ideas, customs and social behavior of the Sabiny community.
- Oral literature forms:** In this study refers to all the oral literature forms and cultural procedures, used by Sabiny during circumcision such as songs, myth, ululations, utterances, sayings, drumming conducted during and after the cutting of the girls or total cutting of the female external genitalia for cultural reasons.
- Female Genital Mutilation:** In this study refers to the removal of a section of the genital parts or female circumcision among the Sabinys.
- Female circumcision:** Here refers to all oral literature; songs, dances, myths, legends, rituals, etc.; all procedures involved in rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood in the Sabiny context
- Focus Group Discussions:** Is gathering people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest? In this study, questions about forms of Sebei oral literature and their role in FGC were discussed with the people referred to as Sabiny in their local context.
- Orature:** Is the collection of traditional folk songs, stories, myths, rituals and dances of particular culture? In this study, the Sabiny culture was studied in the context of FGC.
- Qualitative research:** Is the method of obtaining data through open ended and Conversational communication. Thus, refers to the approach that this study undertook.
- Traditional:** In this study refers to following or belonging to the customs or ways of behaviors that have continued in a group of people

or society for a long time without changing. In this context it is belonging to the Sabiny tradition.

Myths:

Myths, in this study is used to refer to all the foundational stories on which female circumcision stands, myths extend to those traditional beliefs and ideas that explain the existence and sustenance of female circumcision, including the role of the gods. They have to be passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth

Oral poetry:

Refers to the songs, chants and ululations that are sung and performed in the process of female circumcision.

Rituals:

Are the practices that are always performed in the context of the messages relayed in circumcision songs. The gods are at the center of all these practices

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROLE OF MYTHS

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, myths in relation to female circumcision are analyzed in detail. The chapter explains the position of Sebei myths in the general existence of female circumcision in Sebei.

2.1 The Centrality of Myths in FGM Practice

Through FGDs that were held with the various groups, the information got in relation to Sabiny circumcision and the value of myths today, indicated that the Sabiny attach a lot of sentimental value to female circumcision and often feel insulted when the practice is referred to as a barbaric and inhuman abuse. The respondents insisted that their identity is found in the myths that are propagated by the elders of society and have been in existence from time immemorial with regard to this, the Sabiny myth assert that they have been in existence before Christ was born, alluding themselves to the biblical Sabiny found in the book of Job, who raided and took away all of Job's animal '*...we were ploughing the fields with the donkeys and the donkeys were eating grass nearby when some Sabians attacked us and took our animals...!*' (Source; FGD 2021 alluding to the Holy Bible, Job 1:14-16). In relation to this, one respondent asked the researcher if it was not true that God referred to human beings by one sex, 'man'.

The question is evadingly surprising because it takes a logical thought rather than common sense for it is hard recalling how many times God referred to 'my sons and daughters'. This brings us to the fact that Sabiny attach a lot of faith to God and His capability but it does not deter the fact that they also have their other gods to whom they subscribe. Their belief that their gods intercede between them and the supreme god whom they have no right to approach directly. (Source:015 FGD)

This biblical myth gives a clear stand point to the Sabiny to identify themselves with the renowned history of Israelites. Whereas it is clear in the bible (Genesis 38:1) God tells Abraham to circumcise his children, the Sabiny took it that even the girl children could circumcise as a passage to adulthood. According to the Greek mythology, Girl children were never mentioned nor involved in any activity as their society can be arguably named

patriarchal. The Bible mentioning “children” was mistaken by the Sabiny to be meaning both male and female thus leading to FGM. The Sabiny identifying themselves with the great Myths of the bible has and will always be one of the reasons why some elders will always circumcise. The biblical myth comes after the missionaries had introduced Christianity in Africa and the Sabiny quickly found the bible contemporary as it mentioned a tribe that resembled theirs (the Sabiny who took Job’s cows) both in name and practice as both were cattle raiders. So, this is always justified even with the modern Sabiny since even Christianity talks about them. Perhaps this could be the reason why the government is finding it hard to stop FGC.

Coupled with above biblical myth, the study established that there is one other myth upon which the existence female circumcision is premised, which relates that long before one can trace a number sabiny women were faced with a terrible catastrophic incident. A strange disease attacked them, a disease that neither any one could explain nor could any have treated it. When the gods were consulted the instruction was for the suffering women to be circumcised. Indeed, when the victims were cut, they dramatically regained their health. The disease was then declared a communication from the gods that the culture of female circumcision should be adopted. It should be noted that though there is a central GOD the Sabinys subscribe to many other gods; the gods responsible for good harvest, rain, children and those for good health among others. The voice of the gods is so much adored and care is taken not annoy anyone of them. No single absurd situation is believed to be coincidence, all of them have an explanation in the gods and in the gods lie their solution as well.

It is upon the above background that female circumcision in the region may take ages to go into extension. There is loved in the minds and the hearts of every sabiny, young or old, the position of the gods in the practice and so is the fear of what may happen if one “dodge” it, either willingly or forcefully. Apart from fear of what they may do, the faith placed in the gods is also one drive that should be not undermined in the push behind the continuation of female circumcision. The position of women; their domestic responsibilities, transition into adulthood, marriage and other social events, are all affiliated to the above myth. Many of the beliefs on how women should behave and be treated also have their origin in this myth.

Similarly, elders in Sebei believe that myths are the centre for the god’s blessings and are supposed to be followed in order to achieve their earthly wealth and life. The myths in

Sabiny culture are the foundation of the society. As they grow up, the Sabiny are guided on how to behave, how to relate with the gods of the land, and that is why circumcision is a must. The myths tell it all and they have to follow them to the last letter. This comes with a conviction that they are guided by the super power and so human beings cannot influence them against their piety. It is therefore logical if one would set a question: God or man, whose instruction should a Sabiny take? The answer would definitely illustrate the power of Myths towards FGM. The Sabiny would rather follow “god” than listen to what man has to say. If one is to think objectively, the Sabiny have no traditional evidence that FGM is wrong. It is a tradition like any other passed to them by their great ancestors the way Christians receive their doctrines from generation to the other.

More to this, there is a major myth of how FGM came into existence. Ole kulet in *Blossoms of the Savannah* tells how FGM comes to existence. In this myth, a masculine man had conquered the Maasai and imposed heavy taxes alongside exploitation of the people. The Masai women were raped and men were not allowed to sleep with their women. One of the aggrieved women as a way of exploring cut her labia, the most sexual sensitive part. Realizing that she had lost her feelings for sex, she told every Masai woman to do the same so as not to feel anything when their oppressors sleep with them. This was welcomed by both women and men. Later, failing to be pleased sexually by the oppressed, the oppressors found no reason to sleep with Masai women. Long after the liberation of the Masai, the Masai elders agreed that all women should be circumcised in remembrance of their oppressors. This has been the trend up to date. The Masai are the closest neighbors of the Sabei region in the North they thus share the same traits and it is definite they share the same tradition. This Myths must have been transferred to the Sabiny in the old days. This explains why the Sabiny believe strongly that FGM should never be abolished because it is a symbol of liberation to them which should be passed on to all generation. When such a myth is told to youngsters, they will uphold to it and shall abide to its principles and doctrines. From the light of what the myth is to the Sabiny, it is crystal clear that FMG has been consciously and unconsciously been influenced by such myths.

This brings back the earlier biblical myth in the book of Job where Sabeans took all the cows. Sabiny are strong believers and are committee to their faith. To Christians who believed that the Israelites were liberated from the harsh hand of Pharaoh and since then celebrated the famous “pass over” should not find it had to believe that such an act of female mutilation was a sign to remember the days of their agony. The argument here is that in human history, people have always marked important days and events that liberated

them. It is asserted that Suffering as means to psychological effect, has been the reason why man must remember the sad days he goes through and would do anything possible to remember such moments, not to bring back memories but for future gains not to repeat the same phenomenon.

In light of the above myths, some of the respondents gave their own opinions that added on the narrative of this paper. One of the respondents argued that her reason for not circumcising was the fear to be imprisoned. She clearly implied that the Sabinian women and girls are trapped in between what they want to do and what others force them to do, 'others' refer to all the forces against female circumcision. Some women have attributed the circumcision to other factors other than the Myths. What they know however is the fact that it is cruel for their people to be arrested as we can see what another respondent had to say,

I am not circumcised and honestly I do not want to be cut. I feel hurt when I see other people dragged into prison for accepting to be circumcised, I mean, they found it in existence and many of those spearheading its downfall are circumcised or have wives who are, let us be sincere, the men in SEA, some of them have 2-3 wives all of whom are circumcised- let us just say people are eating from this whole thing. I believe people should be told what is wrong with the practice and allow them to proceed with the other procedures that are not harmful rather than doing away with everything, if cutting is harmful, what about other rituals that are performed, what happens to the education process that is embedded in it, what happens to the social aspects... to be open with you, the statistics that are always published are far from the truth on the ground. We have knowledge of a lot more girls and women who get circumcised by the day and for your information, some of the local leaders know this but they cannot tell anyone- why do you think that is?' (Source: I 09)

The interaction above created a bigger question on whether it is right for the Sabinian women to accept to go in for circumcision because they want to belong or is it right for other people who may not understand the implication of the practice to wipe it away. Standing by what the respondents had to say, one is obliged to believe that the Sabinians adore themselves and their culture is who they are, they may shy away in the eyes of the

perpetrators of their existence but it changes nothing. They may simply resign to the fact that they have been defeated yet still vigorously exist under the covers. Significantly for this study though, it established that there are myths so strongly attached to the practice of female circumcision among the Sabinys and for this reason, it is hard for the two; Sabinys and female circumcision to be detached from one another.

The study found that myths were very crucial in being a foundation of the circumcision practice among the Sabiny. It is for example believed that the clan ancestral spirits (*oyik*) emphasize on circumcision or FGC/FGM and those opposed to it are taken as outcasts. This view was endorsed by a majority of the respondents in FGDs and interviews.

A number of people were interviewed regarding the above and in their response, they totally agreed with the fact that myths in Sebei land emphasize and leave no option out for the Sabiny on circumcision. One respondent asserted;

'Every society has its own myths, legends and tales that are used to shape the behavior of its followers. For us, it is not just a question of what you School going children look for. It is an issue of total belief in our ancestors. We have continued with circumcision and believe in it as our fore fathers command' (**Source: F139**)

It is from the light of this that we can draw lines of understanding how myths shape the perception of most of the Sabiny to carry out FGM. To most of them, the myths are the irresistible beacon that invites them to the knife. Along with the above came a revelation that according to stories passed on from generation to generation, it is a huge taboo for Sabinys who are related to marry one another and one of the reasons as to why children have to move around inviting relatives is so that she may know who they are, interact with their children and they also get to know her. When these relatives come home, they sometimes come with the entire family just to interact with the host family so that messes don't occur. It is believed that when the children marry themselves either out of ignorance or stubbornness, they will not bear any children of their own or if they do, the children will die at birth. They will continue like this until they are separated and cleansed. It is the same for a girl who marries a man belonging to her father's age set, she will not also bear any child or they will all die at birth until she leaves that man. As soon as she is married, she will be advised by the age set men to leave and if she becomes adamant, a few rituals

are performed like they may choose to sit in the compound, put water in the pot and they start sipping it like they would sip the local brew using long straws, there after they tie leaves round their heads and run round the house like they would when chanting *wosho*, thereafter, they throw the leaves on top of the roof and march away without looking back, if they do or one of them looks back, it is believed that the curse will not work out. The sole purpose of female circumcision is to give an identity to the Sabiny. It defines who they are and sets them apart from the rest of the world, in fact it is their world. No woman will brag to be a typical Sabiny without being circumcised, how else can she truly be a sabiny when she does not know the ways of the tribe? When she has not been initiated to the ‘animals’ and gods of the tribe? It is impossible! (Source: 151 FGD)

This closely relates to Ngugi’s character, Muthoni, in *The River Between* who overly repeats that she wants to be beautiful and healthy in the ways of the tribe and making her father angry for a while is a very small price that she is more than willing to pay. She is determined to be a woman clean in the ways of the tribe, just like father and mother so that when Nyambura tells her that their father will be angry she says;

*Why! Are we fools?” she shook Nyambura “Father and mother are circumcised. Are they not Christians? Circumcision did not stop them from being Christians. I too have embraced the white man’s faith. However, I know it is beautiful, oh so beautiful to be initiated into womanhood. You learn the ways of the tribe. Yes, the white man’s God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more. My life and your life are here, in the hills, that you and I know.” She spoke now, looking beyond Nyambura as if to some other people. Then she lowered her voice and whispered secretly, “father said that at the mission there is that man- Livingstone and many women. Those are his wives. And do you think that he, a man, would marry a woman not circumcised? Surely there is no tribe that does not circumcise. Or how does a girl grow into a woman...? (Ngugi, *The River Between*, page 25)*

Muthoni’s concern is not far from the Sabiny. Men general believe that circumcision is grounded on a myth where uncircumcised woman cannot be separated with infidelity and as such, getting a husband is so hard for this category of women. Those who cannot handle being circumcised have ended up getting married outside the tribe and the majority of those who marry within the tribe end up being second wives, to men who already have

circumcised women. Others cannot see themselves doomed by taking the above options and so they choose to be clean in the tribe by undertaking circumcision. Besides being immoral, uncircumcised women are also believed to be too unhygienic because of the fact that the clitoris is the dirtiest part of a woman's body and becomes smellier as a woman grows older. For this reason, a woman who is not cut is unclean and cannot be allowed to sit among elders and neither can she cook food and the elders eat it.

2.1.1 The Mythical Tribal Secrets

Ngugi's *The River Between*, when Waiyaki asks Muthoni why she did it-why she accepted to run away from her home and accept to be circumcised despite her Christian family she, without hesitating, says;

*No one will understand. I say I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe. How can I possibly remain as I am now? I knew that my father would not let me so I came...I want to be a woman. Father and mother are circumcised. But why are they stopping me, why do they deny me this? How could I be outside the tribe when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me?... I want to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe; a husband for my bed; children to play around the hearth.... Yes- I want to be a woman made beautiful in the manner of the tribe..." For once Muthoni never believed that there was anything wrong she had done for she reassures her sister that '...I am still a Christian, see, a Christian in the tribe. Look I am a woman and will grow big and healthy in the tribe' and on her death bed at Siriana, she turns to Waiyaki and tells him 'Waiyaki, tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe...' (Source: Ngugi, *The River Between*, page 25)*

Muthoni's thought is equally shared by the Sabinys whose other belief is founded on the generational stories that the circumcised know a lot of secrets of the tribe since they have had a chance to interact with the gods which have empowered them to do a lot of things like they can speak a curse against someone and that person can go mad or anything happens to him or her. A person who is not circumcised can never abuse or insult the circumcised in any way for fear of being cursed. In a similar way, a circumcised woman,

with an age set can never make a mistake of marrying or having a sexual affair with a son of a fellow age set mate, who is her sister, sealed by blood, she will encounter something bad which may even be death. On the same line, if one makes a mistake of mentioning the secrets imparted to them by the gods to the uncircumcised in any way, they must go mad or eventually die unless she is cleansed. In this way, circumcision commands uttermost respect for the women and no one wishes to miss out on this, the exact reason Muthoni does not wish to be left out by her friends.

Information from FGDs revealed that it was part and parcel of the community because it explains the existence of the entire Sabiny being and they had a religious attachment to the very myths of the tribe as indicated by an elder who spoke in one of the focus group discussions

'In our society we have strong myths which explain the existence of everything we do. You either choose to follow and practice them, or you are not part of us' (Source 300 FGD).

With the above assertion, it is clear to believe that the myths have been dissolved among the Sabiny and cannot be separated from them. The findings further show how the people of Sebei attach so much value to Oral tradition emphasized and expressed through myths. The findings also showed that certain practices of the Sabiny are passed on through generations in reference to the myths that assert that the ancestral spirits can harm, kill or be not happy with those opposed to circumcision. This inspiration among the people shows the value of Oral literature in the attitude of the society on circumcision practices.

2.1.2 Sabiny Myths and adulthood

As earlier stated in this paper, the Sabiny myths regarding initiation into adulthood are passed on from generation to generation. This justifies the influence of Oral literature in the practice of circumcision in the place. The details below affirm the general view of the respondents.

Most of the respondents agreed that the idea of passage to adulthood was part and parcel of Sabiny life and young children are constantly told about such values and beliefs through stories that are mythical in nature, hence showing the presence of Oral literature in the transmission of societal values enhanced by circumcision. Circumcision is a rite of passage to adulthood and womanhood and even if other things like rituals are left out of the way,

there are other virtues that are taught unto women during their visits to the relatives. One respondent explained that;

‘Girls are nurtured into being good wives and mothers. Whenever there is a misunderstanding between a husband and a wife who is not circumcised, the fault will always be directed to the wife for nothing better is expected from one who has not been groomed in preparation for marriage. No girl would want to wait for such a moment to be embarrassed before the entire community and so the best to do is complete the procedure before it gets too late.’ (Source: F330)

In one of the FGDs, respondents were asked where the genesis of female circumcision starts from and whether or not there are myths that explain its existence. One would easily wonder what these myths illustrate. Likewise, in the interviews, respondents were asked if myths play an important role in the continuation of female circumcision of girls and women in Sebei. The questions were intended at getting to the thoughts and hearts of the respondents on what their perception was on the topic under study.

2.1.3 Sabiny Myths and Cleanliness.

The other aspect this paper discusses is the aspect of the myths and cleanliness. Respondents said that the Sabiny myths emphasize on cleanliness and purification of the females through traditional circumcision. This is one of the attributes emphasized by the myths of the tribe. A majority of the respondents had such a feeling as shown in the responses to the guiding questions in both interviews and FGDs.

The result of the study shows the respondents’ views over circumcision instilling values of cleanliness. The response rate showed the extent to which all members of the community are aware of their values as passed on from generation to generation through Oral literature forms. Through the interviews conducted with the various groups that were designated for interviewing, they were asked to explain why they thought the Sabiny women must undergo circumcision. The responses from all of them had two similar reasons; fulfilling the traditional wish of the gods and ancestors as a way of life for the Sabiny so as to avert their wrath and that it was important even in the current times for enforcing cleanliness

among the women. Similarly, to assert the same points out that the reasons for practicing female circumcision are closely related to perceived benefits that circumcision comes with.

From time eternity, the Sabinys have grown up knowing that uncircumcised women should neither milk cows nor go to a kraal for cow dung, if one either unknowingly or stubbornly does so, she would set off a curse for the animals and they would die mysteriously. Among the Sabiny, cow dung is used as cement to smoothen the house walls and floors. It also helps to keep away insects like termites from damaging the house and this is done by women. This again asserts the importance of hygiene, which is cleanliness. According to the Sabiny, the Sabiny ancestral spirits order them to be circumcised since it is a practice that has been in place for so long and explain who they are. These views and findings assert the importance of myths in transmitting societal values. It is believed among the Sabinys that the gods instructed that the women to be circumcised after a serious abomination was committed.

'Generally, the Sabiny men were hunters and herdsmen and as it was in nature that they would have to move long distances to hunt good game and get good pasture and water for their animals, they would sometimes stay away from their families and especially wives. By the time they returned, they would find their wives pregnant or with children whose paternity was questionable. Being a patrilineal society, promiscuity among the women was an abominable act and highly condemned. When asked why they went ahead to indulge in such despite having knowledge of the consequences, the women were quick to extend the blame to the clitoris which itched a lot in the absence of their husbands forcing them to engage the services of the available men to rub and cool the itching clitoris. The intervention of the gods was sought and they advised that the cause of the mayhem should be gotten rid of before it caused other atrocities. Most people think it is easy to do away with female circumcision but they do not know that it will only take the intervention of the gods for such to happen since it was the gods that endorsed it' (Source I 05).

2.1.4 Sabiny Myths and Course of Action in Circumcision

It was established by the study that Sabiny myths are an important ingredient in the course of action in the procedures carried out during the circumcision period. The details are provided in the discussion below.

Majority of the respondents agreed that myths were a crucial component in the circumcision process and practices. They related that myths were vehicles of transmitting values while songs transmitted the messages. The responses from FGDs equally indicated so. They argued that myths and all traditional beliefs about circumcision were very important, because they carried messages for the people to understand. One of the respondents asserted;

Our orature have a lot that I cannot say everything. But the myth tells us a lot about our tribe, the fore fathers, the ancestors and that we are supposed to follow as a tribe. Every father, grand Parents have a duty to teach the young. They have important messages.' Speaking in a distant voice like she was addressing self and forgetting that there were some people within, she added; *'my daughter, other people usually think we women in Sebei are forced into circumcision and they go on to make a huge scene out of it. It is not the case but I may not blame them so much because they do not understand the role played by our own gods. When the gods visit you and instruct you to get circumcised there will be no dodging it. Will you believe if I tell you that right now women no longer wait for the circumcision season? They look for the surgeons any time they want since they have learnt that the government watchdogs are always on the look during circumcision periods. Most of these women are now circumcised during child birth by the TBAs. And by the way, a girl who wants to be circumcised will never be restrained by any possible means...because it is not her but the gods are in it!' she stopped with some sort of finality, with a tone that was almost indicating "why am I even telling you, you will not understand".* **Source: I 14)**

The above response shows the emphasis put on forms of Oral literature such as myths and the role they play in weaving the life style of the Sabiny and what they believe in as important (circumcision of girls inclusive). This implied that Oral literature forms are an integral part of the circumcision practices. The findings agree with the views of Klein (1991) who argued that most African societies are based on myths. That is why the Sabiny practice female circumcision, the guiding principle being grounded on orature. The woman's statement brought a vivid relation to what happens to Muthoni in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *The River Between*.

It was established that Sabiny myths give direction on the permissibility of women are participating in the domestic responsibility as a dictate from the gods and ancestors on FGC/FGM.

2.1.5 Sabiny Myths and domestic responsibility of women

The women who are not circumcised are restricted from carrying on with some domestic responsibilities liking milking of cows. This was as a result of believing in the myth that such a woman would set off a curse for the animals and they would die mysteriously. Furthermore, an uncircumcised woman is denied picking food from the granary. It is believed that if an uncircumcised woman climbed the granary, she would be a disgrace, cause drought; famine and low yields from crops would be consequential.

2.2 Conclusion

The faith that the Sabinys have in the message embedded in the myths as seen above cannot go without their impacts, very interestingly, according to analysis, instead of creating distaste for circumcision among the Sabiny women and girls like anyone would out rightly think. It, on the contrary, draws an attachment towards it. Ideally it is so bad for a woman to be belittled for eternity, for her food not to be eaten by the elders and for her not to be listened to whenever she speaks in public. It is so painful to be insulted even by small children, to be called all sorts of names and worse of all to be regarded a coward simply because she is not circumcised. One might need to ponder on this question; how would you feel if someone spits out when you pass by them indicating that you are smelly though you are just from taking your bath, simply because you are not circumcised? It makes a woman sick to be continually nagged by the man who married her on grounds of being uncircumcised, yet he knew it before he married her; for his family to always throw cold stares at her and for her dowry not to be paid because she is still 'a girl'. Every woman wants to command respect wherever she goes,

she wants to be noticed and above all, every woman wants to be showered with love. For this case, undergoing the process of circumcision is such a small price to pay in return for all the above privileges. No one will need to pull a woman in this situation to go to the circumcision arena, it is her instincts and the desire to belong, the desire to be treated as one, the desire to be one. At this point, no one will restrain her when the time comes that she makes up her mind, none, not even the law!

CHAPTER THREE

SEBEI ORAL POETRY AND FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

3.0 Introduction

Lori Bonintendi 2004 asserts that the Sebei of Uganda provide insight into the leaderless culture based on oral tradition of customary law. Their lives are fairly simple and are centered around cattle- keeping, simple crop growing, and beer. In general, their simplicity modes of production have limited the need for sophisticated legal processes, and their paranoia and fear of sorcery have promoted an adherence to tradition customs. In this Chapter reviewed the extensive oral poetry and how the latter influences female circumcision.

3.1. Organization of the circumcision process; and dress code

First, we appreciate that every culture has a language which is distinctive from other traditions. The language includes, not limited to, dress code, foods, dances and literature. Answering to the questions ‘is there a given procedure and process that the circumcision of girls in Sebei follow?’ Is there a significant connection between dress code and the people’s literature?

Usually, circumcision of both boys and girls is done in the December of every even year but preparations start at the beginning of the given year with parents of the candidates planting an appropriate amount of maize and millet for brewing alcohol and buying and or grooming the best of bulls to be slaughtered, sometimes more than one and a number of goats for enough soup. The next event up is the candidates beginning their singing and dancing rehearsals, which start as early as August. The candidates secure some of their costumes from those of the previous year and have them kept safely. The costumes that require early securing are; the whistle and ‘sayandet’ (a dancing instrument made from the tail of a colobus monkey), the two are mandatory for every candidate. Other costumes include; a belt, leso, head scarf (cap), bangles, dancing-shoes and safety pins. *‘The timing is perfect, December of an even year, meaning that if a parent had a candidate in the previous season, he got enough time to reorganize and be ready by the end of two years.’* The followers of those who were circumcised have time to mature and decide on whether to be circumcised as well. Sebei is a quite cold place, being on the slopes of Mt. Elgon, with only one planting season. Crops take long to mature and so December is an appropriate time since by this time, the food would be ready for harvests and consumption.

This should have been considered because the circumcision period requires a lot of food stuff.

Female circumcision in Sebei cannot be defined without songs; the cutting may be equated to the body but the songs are the soul and like we know that the body cannot do without the soul and the soul cannot do without the body either, the two; circumcision and songs cannot be identified in isolation. The songs and dancing in this context are almost one and the same thing. Different songs are sung at different stages of the circumcision cycle and are accompanied by different dance styles. These songs not only glorify, but also justify that the women should be circumcised.

3.1.2 The value of the Songs Sung

Similarly, when respondents were asked to generate ideas through FGD on the question, ‘what value is there in the songs sung during circumcision?’

The views that were received from the respondents in regard to the above question gave an insight into the role that songs play in the process of female circumcision in Sebei. It was revealed that there is an order in which the songs are done and according to the respondents, it is quite hard to separate circumcision songs from dancing because the two go hand in hand. A specific song determines the dance. The songs fall into two main categories, ‘*cekwooyeet*’ and ‘*kakwombet*’. *Cekwooyeet* engulfs all the songs sang in the primary stages and *kakwombet* consist of those songs sang at the climax of the preparations.

During *cekwooyeet*, that is from August to early November, the main purpose of the set of songs sang is to remind the candidates of the weight of the task they are about to embark on. Since no one is forced into being circumcised, a candidate is expected to be sure and ready for it. No one is deceived that the knife is ‘sweet’. In this period, one still has a chance of backing off or renounce her candidature, especially those who are still quite young. Some of them are encouraged by the songs and the company to decide to be circumcised even though she had not perceived the idea before. This is very much in line with what Muthoni tells us in Ngugi’s *The River Between* “...how could I be outside the tribe when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me?” this is a clear vindication that one feels good to be with her friends and what her friends are doing. The whistles are so loud and anyone in the same age bracket may not be able to resist the calling, which is also similar to what happens in *The River Between* ‘...above the beating

of the drums and jingles, shouts rose from hill to hill to keep awake those who might want to go to sleep...’ In this category are such songs as;

Mwa Rotwet Cacaca

sSoloist

Response

Eee mwaa rotwet cacaca

Eee mwaa rotwet cacaca

Mwaa rotwet cepoo ci naa

Eee mwaa rotwet cacaca

Biit catiit angu mwaa wei

Eee mwa rotwet cacaca Etc

English translation

Ee the knife is so painful:

Ee the knife is so painful

The knife is painful daughter of man

Ee the knife is so painful

Pinch your thigh and see if it hurts

Ee the knife is so painful

You know you are not ripe

Ee the knife is painful

The song *Mwa Rotwet Cacaca*, raises to the climax with great beats of crescendo where the initiates jump in great anticipation. Sabiny believe that a woman’s strength is only seen at this point where she exhibits courage to go through cutting. The song not only prepares her mind to undergo FGM but also arouses the pleasure of the sweet pain. The oxymoron of the “sweet pain” is much clear because the Sabiny believe that there is no success without sacrifice. They must sacrifice their pleasure to find the sweetness of the tribe’s blessing that comes with the cutting. This is in total agreement with the earlier myths we alluded to from Ole Kulet’s *Blossoms of the Savannah* where the Maas as commonly referred to in the text, decided to forego their sexual desires by cutting the clitoris to liberate themselves from the oppressors. The song reminds the candidates that the knife is so painful, the soloist keeps adding words as ‘pinch your thigh and if it hurts, know that you will not manage the knife. *Cacaca* is a strong expression to illustrate the extremity of

pain caused by something. Like many Sabinu words and phrases that we may encounter, finding its equivalent translation in English may prove hard.

The Sabinu believe that the songs are so important that the period of Cekwooyeet is so full of fun and excitement. The singing and dancing start from around 8:00 pm to midnight. The youth of an entire village join in and the real candidates are not clear yet. Apart from the whistles, no other costumes are essential here. Everyone's mood is very relaxed. In this season, the parents are not expected to be involved in what the children are doing so the whole organization is by the probable candidates of the year. August is just a good time because some parents may come to know that their children are interested in being circumcised, they may never have known and so they still have time to organize and catch up with the rest.

'The singing and dancing are only done in the night since it is still a trial program and those in it are not yet certain if they will actually stand the test or fail and also, their styles are still horrible and they would not want be laughed at. Parents are expected to pretend they do not know that their children are part of the group moving out in the night until the children gain the confidence, which means they are ready for the entire process.'

The views from the focus group discussions and interviews assert the value of Oral literature during circumcision as a way of glorifying the gods and coloring the circumcision ceremony.

The study showed that Sebei oral poetry is impactful to the candidates as a sense of belonging, honor and continuity of culture through circumcision. For example, the initiates are reminded through songs that they are not the first to be circumcised and they will not be the last in the song;

Leta Raha

Soloist

Response

Leta raa leta raa

Ah ha ya leta rahaa

Yeet kaanyoo matiir bei ya

ah ha ya leta rahaa

Kimee koko kuwonaat ya

Ah ha ya leta rahaa

English translation

Bring joy, bring joy

Ah ha ya bring joy

Guard our home that water may not go through

Ah ha ya bring joy

Grand ma died circumcised

Ah ha ya bring joy

Grand pa died circumcised ya

Ah ha ya bring joy

The song is a blend of Kiswahili and kupsabiny words urging the candidates to bring joy into the family and never allow its legacy to be destroyed. The song is a beacon to young girls to hid to the ways of the tradition. It reminds them to stay focused to the course of action of their traditions that have been passé on from generations to generations. This is in line with Austin Bukenya's *The Bride*. Namvua is considered an outcast and is not supposed to be initiated with her rage mates. Lekindo, the male leader, finds no reason as to why Namvua should not be initiated in the ways of the plains. Against all odds, Namvua dances the dance of the moon meaning she was ready to be initiated. The same figure the characters in the play, *The Bride*, is the same with which the Sabiny have. They believe that since the tradition has been transferred from forefathers to new generations, then everybody duly right, should be initiated. In the words added by the soloist, they are reminded that they are not the first to be circumcised because 'grandmother died when she was circumcised' and other fallen relatives are also referred to. The candidate should not think she is the first and so she should not bring shame to the lineage. Sebei is at the border of Uganda and Kenya where the majority of Kalenjins, a broader sub-ethnic group to which the Sabinys belong, live. This possibly explains the Kiswahili words in the song above and others that are yet to come.

'*Yeet kaanyoo matiir bei*' are words meaning 'guard our home so that water may not destroy it'. Water in this song is a symbol of destruction which draws us close to the biblical days of Noah when God used water to destroy mankind. The Sabinys believe in pride and they also believe that a child who does not stand firm through the knife brings not only shame but misfortune to the family and the entire lineage. The song is not just to be enjoyed but it is a caution that refers not to the contemporary alone but to many generations to come.

3.1.3 Sebei Poetry and Culture

It was a general opinion from respondents, 100% according to analysis agreed that the Sabiny Oral poetry had an impact on the people by instilling in them their identity and sense of belonging. This is usually achieved through the messages in the poems or songs. The songs sung by the candidates carried powerful messages that enhanced the transmission of tribal values. Every member or candidate would be touched by such songs and at the end of the day feel a sense of attachment to the tribe.

The candidate does not only feel attached to the tribe but to her family and relatives, especially the mother as brought out during an interview with one of the women who narrated that the real ceremony of circumcision starts with the smearing or rather pasting of the candidates' faces with a special kind of soil called 'woriondet' (details to be found under rituals). This is the first ritual to be performed on the candidates and after this, they are officially welcomed home with a special song. If seven families are circumcising and their children are singing and dancing together, they have to be ushered with this song into the seven homes. The candidates are decorated and lined up following a certain procedure and in a single file, they march into the homes blowing their whistles, the circumcised women, waving tiny bamboo made winnowing baskets (kiset) welcome them with a song. Upon request, the respondents in one FGD grouped themselves into two, one representing the candidates and the other representing the women, welcoming back the children. The costumes were very first improvised and the following song was presented;

Seeroot Kumuganga

Soloist

Response

Eee seeroot kumuganga

Ee ee eee seeroot kumuganga

Kekwer onu kot kikwimen ee

Ee ee eee seeroot kumuganga

Kacemece kule cekas ee

Ee ee eee seeroot kumuganga

English translation

Eee seeroot kumuganga

Ee ee eee seeroot kumuganga

Where did you take them until dusk ee

Ee ee eee seeroot kumuganga

We wanted to see them ee

Ee ee eee seeroot kumuganga

There has been direct translation of the song to English for basically one reason; to maintain the original meaning and the rhythm of the song without distorting its meaning. The song, is a declaration of hope of FGM among the Sabiny. The Woman, who is the soloist, asks where the children are kept. This woman is in the image of mothers representing gods of the plain. With her inquiry of where the girls are, makes it difficult for girls to escape the long arm of the knife. The performance is breathtaking and the soloist who, must be a woman even in the actual ceremony keeps asking the ‘matiriondet’ where she kept the children until it is late. The women sing as they move backwards and the candidates advance to the compound and line up in a place that their fore woman (matiriondet) will show them. They will then be given food after which they will sing and dance a little before going on to the next home where the same procedure is going to be repeated.

All along, the children have been singing and dancing but they had not been imparted traditionally, so now that they have been, they are welcomed in a special traditional way with the song above, which is not sang at any stage and not just by anybody. The song is quite rich in style for example it employs a good number of symbols, it is the women who welcome the children back home and with them, they are given winnowing baskets in which are a bit of every food stuff- maize, millet, milk, and many others. The winnowing basket in Sebei is a symbol of food and it is clear that we all know that a woman- a mother minds about her children and always wants them satisfied. The song is sung late in the evening around 6:00pm which is very significant to the rhetoric question the women ask ‘where did you take them until it is dusk?’ The whole song implies that the children had been lost in childhood, they did not know their way home and now that the forewoman has brought them home (through circumcision), the mother is happy and is going to prepare enough food for her child. Virtually, when a person is not circumcised, they are considered to be in the wilderness. Such a song is very valuable and it justifies the need for girls to be circumcised and not get lost in the wilderness.

Similarly, the songs were message carriers for the values of the tribe and they gave the initiates pride and courage. They also elaborated that the songs were intended at checking the emotions of the initiates to ensure that they are indeed ready for what they are doing. With several interjections from the rest of the discussants, the respondent narrated that;

From early November, the songs, activities and mood change. The candidates are sure, the excitement goes and reality picks up, nothing is no more being done for fun. Everyone begins to become serious and busy. The candidates start wearing full dancing costumes and during the day, they are busy visiting their relatives inviting them, since by this time, the circumcision date is already set. The visits are usually done in a group, comprising candidates from 3-4 homesteads in a neighbourhood. To announce their coming, they blow their whistles when they are a few meters away from the home they are visiting. The whistles are blown in an alternating manner in that when one set stops, the other picks up, the result being a very sweet musical sound, it is important to note that if the candidates are few, other friends of almost a similar age group though not necessarily in the queue may be adopted to move around with them in order for the effect of the whistles, singing and dancing to be felt. It should be noted that in as much as the whistles are to produce a musical effect, they also act as symbol of communication, to alert whoever can hear that initiation candidates are within the area and those willing may rush to see, bless and give them company. The members of the family being visited on hearing the whistles get ready to welcome the visitors with a befitting song. Before departing, the candidates again sing and dance a little. The songs and dances led by the candidates should motivate the relatives that their child is actually ready and they will be compelled to select the best gift for them. On the other hand, when the relatives lead the songs, they sing those that will encourage the candidates to be strong and not bring shame to the family.,

The song sung during the above moment is a clear vindication that the Sabiny have their souls embedded in the songs to carry out FGM.

Angye Pook

This song is more less a dialogue between the relative and the candidate, the candidate goes first;

Angu poo met angye pook oyee

Ahaa angye pook

Nte kimunapook cepoo keny oyee

Ahaa angye pook

Nte cacemtoy nkityonin oyee

Ahaa cacam

English translation

If it is death let me die oyee

Ahaa I die

Those of old didn't oyee

Ahaa I die

It is me who accepted alone oyee

Ahaa I die

With this song at play, a candidate is willing to die as a price for undergoing through the pain of the knife. The song ignites the spirit of determination and instills fearless hearts among the girls to think that even at the point of death, they will still face the knife. This explains why, even when things have not gone well with some girls, the rest will still undergo the same process. The song is in form of an oath or a vow declared by the candidates. At this point it is clear that a girl cannot resist because she has made the vow. The Sabiny that have strong faith in their gods, this kind of oath is believed to be made between candidates and gods that protect them. Failure to concede, a girl might bring calamity to her entire family. The candidate tells the relative that if it is death, she accepts to die after all those of the old did not and if anything, she accepted alone. The relative responds with the following lines

Yee kererwo kerira no wee

Ayaa owee hee

Ye wacamtoy ngalekuk kewangntee nowee

Ayaa owee hee

Cemacaceek rurwenyoo nowee

Ayaa owee hee

English translation

If you tell me, you make me cry nowee

Ayaa owee hee

I will accept when you are done nowee

Ayaa owee hee

The relative tells the candidate that 'your words will make me cry' (*ye kererwo kerira nowee*) but I will only accept after you complete the task, for all we want are our tents. At the end of the day, both parties are convinced. By the 'tents' they mean 'ceremony' since a ceremony or party is held only if the candidates all come out of the process successfully. There are quite a good number of stylistic techniques employed here. The lyrics are in form of a dialogue, one party talks and the other responds. The candidate promises and the relative hopes to prove her right when all is done. The candidate's tone is promising and

determined but that of the relative is uncertain. A tent is always raised in a compound when there is a function, sad or happy, in this case, the tent has been used by the relative as a symbol of joy ‘... we want our tent...’ it is obvious from this statement that there will only be a ‘tent’- celebration if the candidate does not wince at the knife. It is not only the biological parents to whom the child belongs but to the relatives and the community as a whole. One of the most revered values of home visitation by the candidates is for them to know and interact with their relatives on a one on one in order to grow love and respect between themselves. Marriage between relatives, close or distant is a great taboo among the Sabinys and one of the biggest ways of preventing it is through such visits, one of the reasons they uphold the practice so much. On the same note, the candidate is ready to take on anything to show to the world that she is strong and nothing can put her down, in her own words, she confesses that ‘if it is death, I am ready to die’ (*angu po met angye pook...*) this displays a readiness beyond compare

Another respondent in the same group, with excitement related what happened back in the day during her time;

‘In my own time, I savored every moment of the visitations. In the first place, everyone’s attention was on me and I felt I was on top of the world. I also had a chance to interact with my own people; blood and neighbors and above all the gifts! Everyone was eager to gift me and for the first time in my life I got what I called my own- goats, chicken, money and even cows’. As she named the gifts, one would evidently see that she relived the times with such elation that only she understood. I do not know what I would do now if my daughter married my uncle’s son. Ever since they banned circumcision of girls, children do not know relatives because they do not get chances of moving round and visiting all of them. FGD 118

From the above, it is clear that the Sabinys will always take the pleasure of carrying out FGM. To them, it is not only a source of their peace of mind but also a channel through which values and virtues are transmitted from one generation to the other. The fighting of FGM brings a big question to them; what will happen to their ways if the only identity is flashed away? Another very illustrative song which the respondents said that it is very illustrative in imparting social value to the initiates and the belief in their culture and themselves is;

Angurwo

“Angurwo” yee yee!!!

Yeeh eeh amace ani anngurwenyu Angurwo yee yeee!!

Yeeh eeh amace ani angurwenyu Ye suku kwisto ngarakwek eee!

Yeey eee amace ani angurwenyu Sukupit pewut tat sabiny eeh

Yeey eeh amace ani angurwenyu

Ye sucepar surayek eeh eeh

Yeee ceee amace ani angurwenyu

Ye sukuco lologyet kotap sabiny

Yeeh eeh amace ani angurwenyu

Ye suce ropta puntap magate

Eeeh eee amace ani anngurwenyu

One of the FGD lead translated this song into to English language and the information obtained gave the following meaning that are in line with the value of oral literature in the circumcision process;

Angurwo

Angurwo” yee eee yeee!! Yeee eeh I want my “angurwo” ”Angurwo” yee yee eee!!

Yeee eeh I want my angurwo

For the kraal of the Sabiny to grow

Yeee eeh I want my “angurwo” For us to defeat our enemies Yeee yeee I want my “angurwo”

For the Sabiny family to retain warmth

Yeee eeeh I want my “angurwo”

Ror the endless generation prosper

Yeee eeh I want my “angurwo”

(Source:201 FGD)

As argued by several respondents that this was an incitation anthem and the interpretation in it indicated that it is one of the songs which play a very great impact on the candidates and it is the first to be sung after all the initiates have been cut and none of them has winced at the knife and then followed by several other songs, of verifying emotional intensity and recitation through the night. Similarly, the FGD leader said that a candidate, by singing this anthem would feel a sense of belonging and honor. He said that

"Angurwo", a plant with soft hairy leaves used to wipe or clean a child after a long call symbolizes childhood stage that the initiates are now coming out through circumcision into adulthood. It also symbolizes continuity of the tribe through child production and a growth into parenthood. 'angurwo' is also a symbol of cleanliness expressing the fact that the home and initiate are going to be made clean by getting rid of the dirty part of the body.

Similarly, the study found that Sebei oral poetry glorifies transition from childhood to adulthood as expressed in the below details obtained through questionnaires.

3.1.4 Sebei Poetry and change into adulthood

Among the Sabiny, one has to graduate from childhood to adulthood and this is emphasized in the songs that are sung. As indicated in the above song and as expressed by the respondents during the study, the findings show how oral poetry focuses on sensitizing the initiates on the value of change to adulthood hence asserting on the importance of Oral literature in the Sabiny circumcision ceremony. There are also Songs Sung to emphasize the transition process. The song "*Cheyi towenyo*" or translated as 'We Give Birth to Our Last Born', lays emphasis on change from one stage(childhood) into (adulthood). Thus, the process of circumcision is about giving birth to someone mature. The boys and girls are initiated and they are born into men and women or adults.

It was found out during the study that Sebei oral poetry glorified and justified circumcision as a compulsory, inherited practice for all Sabinys, male and female alike. The message in the songs indicated that nobody could escape it, because it is a debt to be paid by every member of society, as long as he or she is a Sabiny. One of the surgeons when asked to shed more light on the above finding said

'it is true, I was born to family in which both parents were circumcised and so were the grandparents and great grandparents. I was made to know from childhood that that is who we were, it was a debt that I had to pay and until I did so, the spirits of all my departed relatives would never rest in peace and as such, I would not be given peace as well. No one had ever died because of circumcision and there were songs which communicated so'

To demonstrate the point, respondents from the FGD sang the following song;

Soloist

*Yakte pasendapic no cemynyo
pasenapic no cekwam
pasenapic nyekupo keny
Yakte pasendapic semutishe*

*Aahaa yakte pasendapic Yakete
Aahaa yakte pasendapic Yakte
Aahaa yakte pasendapic
Aahaa yakte pasenapic*

English translation

Pay the people's debt you girl

yes yes yes pay the debt

Pay the people's debt my sister

yes yes yes pay the debt

Pay the generational debt

yes yes yes pay the debt

Pay the debt so that they marry you

yes yes yes pay the debt

(Source: 005FGD)

Members of the focus Group discussion emphasized that, among the Sabiny circumcision was a 'debt' that every Sabiny owed society. This illustrates the idea that oral literature is used to glorify and justify circumcision. The findings support the fact that sabiny oral poetry play a huge role reminding the initiates of the task ahead of them, which is paying the people's debt by undergoing circumcision in order to become real women, and as well integrate into the pattern of society,

3.1.5 Sebei Poetry and psychological preparation of initiates

Similarly, the study found that some Sebei oral poems are intended to prepare the initiates psychologically and instill courage and valor for the painful circumcision rite. These views were arrived at because of the details below;

The study found out from the respondents who agreed that the purpose of singing songs during circumcision was to prepare the initiates psychologically to undergo pain but at the same time instilling them with courage. Society was built in such a way that whoever undergoes circumcision ought to display courage in order to be seen as a man or woman. From their view, the songs are also meant to give initiates chance to display valor so as to overcome the painful exercise. For example, one respondent explained that;

'on the first of December, the elders officially declare cutting open and so a new season begins in which everything is done with vigor. Tension among the candidates' parents heightens and the candidates become more determined.'

Most of the distant visits have been made and now it is time to invite the neighbors, who though they know, they will not feel good if the candidates do not step, sing and dance from their compounds, in fact, a neighbor who is not officially invited ‘confirms’ a hatred that never existed. The candidates do not have time to sit and relax and they are believed to have gathered enough courage and so are ready for the ‘knife’. The songs here carry less pity and mercy. The lyrics command rather than encourage, they are rude and, in some instances, vulgar, indeed, very vulgar. They also indicate that the candidate is now on her own and the times are bad. For example,

Lai Kapulengung

Sandiso

Eee sandiso lai kapulengung

Loketo

Eee loketo lai kapulengung

Kawakunamung naa

Aha lai kapulenung

English translation

(Lai Kapulengung)

Burn On Your Own

Sandiso

ehh Sandiso you are burning on own

Laketo

ehh Laketo you are burning on own

You are finally caught up

ehh you are burning on own

The song is in Pokot and Kupsabiny. Pokots also belong to the Kalinjin sub ethnic group and they have a lot in common with the Sabinys. The song is usually led by a non-candidate reminding the candidate that she is in it alone and so should not look at or think she is going to be helped, she will ‘burn her own way’. ‘Laikapulenung’ is a Kupsabiny word translating to ‘burn on your own!’ someone who has not been circumcised cannot make a mistake of leading this kind of song because she does not know how one ‘burns’. This stimulates the strength of the candidate to think they must be tested by fire for them to become women.

The diction is quite straight forward, the candidate has had support in all the previous stages, company has been readily available for her and the soothing has been well done. Now the time is come when no one can bear her mantle for her, she needs to carry it alone, she will 'burn on her own', one respondent added.

Another song in this category is a;

Saa Mbaya

Soloist

Response

Saa mbaya saa mbaya

aha saa mbaya naa

Kapundo saawet aa

aha saa mbaya naa

Kawakunamung ciito nyiin

aha saa mbaya naa

English translation

The time is bad the time is bad

yes yes the time is bad

The time has arrived

yes yes the time is bad

Somebody is going to be cut

yes yes the time is bad

From the vigorous beats, which is almost the climax of the circumcision, girls are alert, their bodies poised to face the challenge which other women before them have faced. The song would remind them that even where they are going things are not easy, so if they can pass through this “bad” time, it will be definite they will go through other “bad” times in future. The question in the girls minds is certainly one; why can't I go through this bad time to prepare myself for the future? ‘saa mbaya’ are Kiswahili words meaning the time is bad or the hour is slim. The leader of the song keeps adding words such as ‘kawakunamung ciito nyiin’ which is personifying the knife to be someone who is finally

catching a culprit who cannot do anything but give in this time round. The candidate is expected to get strong and brace up for what lies ahead of her.

The first two weeks of December mark the climax of the circumcision period, almost all the relatives of the family start reporting and preparing whatever there is to be prepared; getting the firewood ready, utensils, water, among other things including brewing of alcohol. It is not only the relatives who are involved in the preparation process but the whole community as well. Activities crisscross every compound with a child on the line and no one wants to be left out, all strive at least to be useful in one way or another, the agility with which the work is done is what is most fascinating.

The candidates begin adorning themselves with full circumcision attire, some of which are taken from women within the area who, in future will have to pay a fee before taking them back, regardless of their condition (of the items).

‘ It should be noted that some of these items are taken from women not because the candidate may not afford to buy them but it is one way of showing love and the women feel most honored if asked to give this or that item.’ One of the respondents said. Gomezi belts (sash) are tied up diagonally from one shoulder to the waist and another belt is used to tie it tightly so that even if a vigorous dance comes up, it does not have to come out. The width of the lesos is tied round the necks and the length is left to hang so that during the dancing, they uniformly sway from one side to the other. The candidates in their attire become such a beauty that everyone will admire to look at. *‘Towards morning, the mood of everyone automatically changes, people begin crying, and fear begins to creep into everyone’s heart,’* he added.

The Sabinys, just like many other African societies do not have watches but they had and still have specific ways of telling time. There is a star which appears very early in the morning which the Sabinys use to indicate time around 4-5:00 am. Once the star appears, the children /candidates are taken to ‘kapchwai’, a sacred place especially in a hidden area of a large water body within and around the neighboring villages. The candidates are made ready in this place by their fore women (matirenik). As they are going, they sing such songs as,

Kacoo Tabayandet

Ma kacoo tabayandet

Eee wei

Makakiec eewei

Eee wei

Makakurur koreet eewei

Eee wei

English translation

The morning star has come

Eee wei

It's morning my folk

Eee wei

It is dawn eewei

Eee wei

The lyrics of the song indicate that it is dawn since the morning star has come and time for our children to be circumcised. Another song is,

Yegoo

Yegoo Yegoo noo weye

Yegoo Yegoo kayec koreet

Yegoo Yegoo noo weye

kayec koreet kulepat

This one is reminding the children that it is morning and the darkness have gone away so that everyone is going to see them now. Inasmuch as the candidates dance the whole night, they are not expected to be sluggish; they even dance more vigorously than ever.

When the rituals to be performed on them in 'kapchai are over they are taken to the circumcision ground and the songs here include;

Kawacemuut

Eee kawacemuut

Aha kawecemuut

Kawacemuut koben koot naa

Aha kawacemuut

English translation

Eee they're going to cut

yes they're going to cut

They're going to cut so that it bleeds a lot

yes they're going to cut

‘Kawacemuut’ means they are going to cut. The candidate must know that is time for her to face the real knife. Other words added are ‘they will cut and it is going to bleed profusely. This prepares them psychologically for the truth ahead of them. The Sabinys insist it is not good for the girls to be deceived and sweet talked so that they find the opposite when they reach there, rather it is good for them to have the worst image so that they gather all the courage they may and when they find it not as bad, it is to their advantage.

The song ‘*Leta raha*’ is brought back here as well to urge the child to stand firm and bring joy to the family. After kapchwai, no candidate is allowed to back out and if one tries to, they will run after her until she is cut from wherever.

It is evident therefore through the above observations that the circumcision songs in Sebei put a lot of glory in the cultural practice, every step is made beautiful by the lyrics of the songs, the dances even make them more beautiful. The words tell the girls that they have taken the best choice and to those out, they learn that they are missing out on a lot, this justification makes every young girl crave to be circumcised.

The findings are in line with (Nalaaki, 2014) & (Finnegan, 2012) who argued that initiation was a trying moment for initiates because they had to undergo pain and to soothe the expectations of pain, songs and sacred recitations are sang or made to instill courage to the initiates. Therefore, it is justifiable to assert that Oral literature among the Sabiny is core contributor and ingredient in FGM.

The study also established that Sabiny oral poetry functions to prepare the initiates for adult life, like marriage and domestic responsibility as it is the way of life among the Sabiny and that is how songs with vulgar words become justifiable since the initiates’ only time to know the truth is during circumcision. The strangers are the ones with the liberty of leading songs with vulgar words like;

Tole Muket

Tole muket tol

Ahaa

Kisamusit koot naa

Ahaa

English translation

The lid pops and pops *yes*

It has become so smelly *yes*

The song refers to the clitoris as a lid that is going to pop out and the smelly vagina will finally be clean. Mentioning of the private parts of a man or woman by name is a serious abomination among the Sabinys but in this season and especially on the circumcision eve, they are addressed by their real names. This is a call to the girl reminding her to clean up herself. Having been initiated earlier into how she can be a good woman, she now awaits the cutting as the final stage of her transition from childhood to adulthood. This is what Nyambura in Ngugi's *The River Between* emphasized when she asserted that she must undergo through the rituals of her people. She was sure that the ritual would not take away her faith as a Christian. With her determination, we can easily understand why at this point girls cannot backoff from being circumcised. One respondent defended this when she said;

'The children have known through their lives that the private parts of a woman are called by other names like "book, tobacco, e t c." but it is now time they knew the truth. That is the essence of "transitioning". If they do not go through circumcision, no one will sit them down and tell them such truth.'

There are other songs whose language to a common eye, are really bad but the Sabinys insist all of them are vital for the brains of the young to grow into adulthood, words like *'love is made in the night...'*. They insist that if they are not taken through this, they may devote their whole time to making love when they get married and forget to provide for the family or do other house responsibilities. The Sabinys are not like other tribes in Uganda especially the Bantu whose aunties (Ssenga) play a huge role in preparing a girl to be a good wife, so their only chance is during the circumcision process.

3.1.6 Sebei Poetry and preparation of initiates to adulthood

After finishing with the initiation, they would be taken as adult members of the Sabiny society capable of carrying on with all the roles, adults were associated with.

The information got during the study reveals that circumcision was emphasized as a rite of passage to adulthood and there were songs; in this context that were sang by the Sabiny to emphasize that. The findings helped to bring to the light the role of oral literature in the enhancement of female circumcision. It was established that Sebei oral poetry glorifies and justifies the circumcision of girls and women by sending messages that stigmatize uncircumcised women and emphasize that they are exempted from revered cultural tasks such as picking food from traditional stores (locally known as *cookey*), decorating houses and milking cows. This is because the society is founded on believes that if an uncircumcised woman milks a cow, apart from exposing the cows to the risk of dying, the milk is culturally viewed as contaminated and not fit for human consumption, hence emphasizing on the initiates getting ready for marriage and domestic responsibility. This 'law' is passed on to society through orality. The message is echoed to the very young females who then get it sunk in their heads and hearts early enough. In this case, the women go through the process of female circumcision in order to fit in the society and perform the cultural tasks without any sort of limitations from society.

Similarly, through FGD the same information was obtained, the respondents explained that the song "*Angurwo*" symbolically represents a change of initiates to adulthood and be able to undertake family responsibilities as the next parents and generation. Therefore, songs and oral poetry glorify and justify the circumcision of girls and women in the region.

3.1.3 Sebei Poetry and rewards and blessings

Some other function that Oral poetry plays in as far as female circumcision among the Sabiny females is to emphasize on rewards and blessings from the gods and ancestors for those who have fulfilled the circumcision rite. It was noted that there were specific songs that emphasize that female circumcision was a means through which the women of the tribe interacted with the gods of the land who would in turn bless with all that they needed in life, including bearing children. When respondents were asked to suggest if this was true, the following responses were given.

Circumcision was taken as cultural reward from the gods and ancestors. songs of blessing and of victory are sang immediately after circumcision to praise the initiates for becoming women and adults. During the occasion, people are called upon to come and bless the initiates with gifts for their bravery and success in life and hence showing and exposing the value of Oral literature in the circumcision process. The practice is a reward from the

gods and to the gods; it is a medium through which the gods can be able to bless the women and so any woman who does not give herself in to the gods cannot receive from them.

Information obtained from FGD justified the above when respondents sang the song that the Sabiny community uses for presentation of gifts, prayer for rewards from the gods and ancestors. The song was entitled ‘Sonet Kiribo’ as shown below;

“Soneet Kiribo”

Soneetweikipoo

Haaha

Mwuchimomokuchsung

Haah ha

Chookutuwansarameek

Haaaha

Mwuchimomokuraat moo

Haaaha

Mwuchimomokuraat

Haaha*2

The following translation was given from Sabiny language to English language;

“The Barren Kiribo”

The barren is for who?

Haaha

It is for kiribo who cannot produce

Haaha

Ask the great mother to come out

Haaha

To present gifts to twins

Haaha

Tell the mother to be brawny

Haaha*2

(Source: FGD respondents)

The members of the FGDs explained that this song is performed to acknowledge the courage of the initiates and wish them to be rewarded by members of the tribe, gods and the ancestors. The findings point out that the initiates are praised by society for having fulfilled the circumcision. No one wants to be left out when others and especially friends are being praised and blessed and for this reason, many girls decide to be one among the initiates, even on the last minute.

On the eve of the circumcision, the homes of candidates are filled with all sorts of people since every caring person is now around. Almost everyone wants to lead a song, the uncles, when leading will add words that encourage the candidates not to put them in shame, the aunts, brothers, sisters and neighbors will do the same. The parents seldom appear at the dancing arenas, mostly because of the tension caused by the fear of whether their child will bring pride or shame to their home. The dancing is really vigorous. On this last night, many more girls 'jump into the line', especially those whose parents stopped from being circumcised for this or that reason and also those who were not initially very decided. It may not however be clear if they decide because of the sweetness of the singing and dancing or because their friends are leaving them behind or because the gods have instructed them to. One thing that is clear though is that the parents whose child jumps onto the line suffers great shame and may as well face the wrath of his age group unless he agrees to perform all the necessary procedures to appease the gods.

Conclusion

This chapter presented that data that was collected, analyzed and interpreted in line with the objective two of the study; how Sebei oral poetry glorifies and justifies the circumcision of girls and women. The chapter delved into the oral poetry within circumcision especially the songs; the kinds of songs sang at the different stages of the circumcision process, the messages embedded in them, how they are performed and by whom. It also looked into how these songs give praise to female circumcision and in the process justify that female circumcision should indeed be carried out.

CHAPTER FOUR

RITUALS AND ORAL LITERATURE FORMS

4.0 Introduction

The Sabiny are traditional people that treasure their traditional heritage. It has been tested overtime that the Sabiny and their traditions are intertwined to make one being. Looking closely at how they carry out most rites, one can easily conclude that the Sabiny have a strong will to protect what was given to them by their fore fathers. Inasmuch other scholars have gone ahead to look for the rightness or correctness of these rites, it has been clear all through that the Sabiny will not cease fire. Oral literature has been the vehicle through which FGM has succeeded for many years. It has thus been a soothing agent to which the candidates about to be initiated find their strength. People cannot be separated from their literature or history as well as their rituals. The latter is seen as a passage to communicating with gods. This chapter therefore presents the data that was collected, analyzed and interpreted in line with the objective three of the study; How rituals facilitate the thinking that Sabiny girls and what women need to know about their culture and themselves through circumcision. There are a number of rituals performed on candidates throughout the circumcision process. Some of them are known only to the circumcised people and others highly classified only to *matirenik*. In this chapter we shall have a look at some of these rituals, how they are performed and the role they play in making girls and women in Sebei believe that they are nothing without circumcision. Women and girls must undergo FGC as a cultural rite of passage from childhood to womanhood. It is then that they feel they are part of their society. According to Wikipedia, a ritual is a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of action performed according to a prescribed order. Or it can be a sequence of activities involving words, gestures or objects performed according to a set of sequence. There is no ritual therefore that is not performed with the art of oral literature. The words spoken therein embellish the excitement of the girls to carry out FGM.

Like it was in the previous chapter, the oral literature forms that this chapter explores is mostly performed. Rituals are a rich component that accompany the circumcision songs. They nourish the performances of orature discussed herein.

The study found that the circumcision rituals embedded in the songs express the prerogatives of a Sabiny woman, uncircumcised girls and women who are stigmatized and exempted from domestic responsibility and societal intercourse. Thus, by fulfilling and undertaking the rituals they are admitted to Sabiny society. The details solicited from the field are discussed below;

4.1 Rituals and dictates of Sabiny society

The emphasis of the rituals is to pass the messages that every woman or girl ought to undergo circumcision in order to be proud as a member of the Sabiny society and as well to be accepted by the immediate community and Sabiny society in general. It provides them with values and principles which formulate their world view. Therefore, for a woman to be whole immersed in society, participating in her cultural rituals becomes one of her foundational aspects. Thus, participation in the rituals and their phases show not only the commitment of the Sabiny as a tribe, but also that of the individual female candidate as part of her society and culture.

It was found that the rituals set the stage for Sabiny women and girls to be exposed to the secrets of the tribe and a number of cultural beliefs, rituals, customs, and behavioral norms, and social hierarchies and traditional religious beliefs of the Sabiny people.

4.2 Exposure to tribal Secrets

The responses showed that 86% of the respondents were in agreement that women or girls were required to undergo circumcision first before they were told the secrets of the tribe. A small number of respondents; 11% remained neutral. This could have been because they were a little young to understand all details of the tribe or because they lacked what to say. The findings agree with the views of Chilisa (2012 who said that indigenous knowledge, rituals and belief take shape each female candidate as unique individual, understanding their social and physical world.) The continued existence of circumcision among the Sabiny is a true revelation of attachment to their values and rituals that emphasize on their identity. The fear of losing identity is the thinking of every Sabiny girls and women within the confines of their culture, which is only fulfilled by every female participating in circumcision. Parents who continue with this practice have compassion and love for their culture. They also believe that they are protecting their daughters from harm that is emphasized though through oral traditional forms. Hence showing the importance of Oral literature in the circumcision practices (Kakenya, 2017). This very reasoning is what inspires every female to take part in the rite of passage.

Respondents confirmed that participating in circumcision rituals gave chance for the initiates to be seen by members of the public as having accomplished the task of circumcision. When asked if this was true, members emphasized so, and added that it also saved the parents from

societal criticism which was aimed at renegade girls which consequently caused disharmony to the members of the family. The table below gives details.

4.3 Rituals and exposure to public acceptance

The responses showed that all respondents, 86% agreed that by women or girls participating in circumcision rituals, it gave chance for the initiates to be seen by members of the public as having accomplished the rituals of circumcision and thus reduced chances of them being exposed to societal criticism, which could be a cause of disharmony to the members of the community or family. The findings reflect the views of (Ayeko, 2019) and (Kirya S, 2008) who posited that uncircumcised women are sometimes stigmatized and exempted from cultural tasks such as picking food from traditional stores (locally known as granaries), decorating houses and milking cows and often lead a life of isolation ...If an uncircumcised woman milked a cow, the milk is culturally viewed as contaminated and not fit for human consumption. Thus to avoid such restrictions among members of the community, they had to undergo specific rituals that were time immemorial used by the Sabiny for initiating the females to womanhood. The rituals are community contagious indoctrinative sentiments put in the mind set of every Sabiny woman and girl, for example they belief that one who is not circumcised remains a girl.

4.4 Rituals and identity sentiments

The study found that the respondents agreed that the rituals performed when circumcision songs are sung are indoctrinated into the lives of every participant and thus are effective in making every Sabiny female candidate feel the aura of tribal identity. The rituals are effective in putting some thinking in their minds to this effect. They are the determinant of various aspects of how the Sabinys carry on with their day-to-day activities that are cultural and religious. The ceremonial rituals are accompanied by various oral literature forms such as singing, drumming, ululations and poetic utterances to drive the messages about culture home.

According to the study, respondents in both FGDs and interviews said that there are a number of rituals performed on candidates throughout the circumcision process. Every song has at least a ritual or more accompanying it and the messages they carry is always relevant in the context in which they are being performed. Some of them are known only to the circumcised people and others highly classified only to *matirenik*. In this chapter we shall have a look at some of these rituals, in which context and how they are performed and the role they play in

making girls and women in Sebei believe that they are nothing without circumcision. The following information was given by some group leaders of the FGD.

The first ritual to be performed on the circumcision eve is '*ngopseet*' which is the smearing or rather pasting of the candidates' open body parts with a special kind of soil called '*worionted*' which makes it almost impossible for one to recognize them. The pasting is done only by *matirenik* and not before the children are lined up according to their father's age sets. One whose father is of the oldest group is made to be the first, and the same order is followed except for children from the same father who must be separated by a different one. The paste is intended at camouflaging their identity so that if someone had evil intentions against a specific child, it would be hard to recognize her. Another reason is to make the candidates warrior-like so that they are instilled with courage. The pasting is done near a water body for reasons that are best known to only the circumcised because they are never revealed to anyone else. Adorned in their full dancing attire, freshly pasted and matching in a single file, the candidates are such a beauty to be envied. They feel pride of associating with the initiation to the tribe. As

The first ritual to be performed on the candidates involves the pasting of their open body parts. The material used for pasting- a type of soil called '*woriondet*' leaves them with a war-like look. It is a signal unto them that they should brace up for the task that is ahead of them, the war of facing the knife. From the start, the candidates are not deceived that they are about to ride on a very smooth road, they are given a picture of the terrain they are headed for. This makes it very clear that nobody is forced into circumcision but it is a choice. As the pasting is being done, the candidates are singing war-like songs which are led by their leaders. One of the songs performed here '*mwa rotwet cacaca*'.

Like it was discussed in chapter three, the song reminds the candidates that they are entering a war zone and things are not going to be anymore easy, they should be ready to fight, that is why they are given a war-like appearance.

The initiates have a fore woman who always goes ahead of them and this fore woman is a symbol of maturity and must dress like an old woman however young she may be; an old cloth, old head scarf, an old reed or skin made bag and an old walking stick. From the time the children are pasted, their safety is in the hands of the fore woman who is always very kin on the welfare of the children and has a right to chase away or beat up anybody whom she deems holds bad intentions against the children. She carries a lit lamp throughout the

circumcision eve until the circumcision is completed. The lamp is symbolizing the fact the children are still in the dark' their vision is not very good yet and they are being helped by the mature to find a way out, light has to be lit and carried in front of them to show them the way. The lamp is only extinguished after circumcision since the children now have their vision working and they see and use the light without having to be guided.

The pasting of the candidates' bodies is done in the evening just before the sun sets because they need to dry up before the sun sets or else the whole paste will get off when they dance and sweat. The fore person chooses an appropriate place by a water body that is not so open. It is here that that candidates are guided on which clothes they will not be needing. It is not only pasting but there are also other sacred rituals that are performed. The timing is also intended at making them reach home when it is a little late so that the women would suitably ask where they have been until it was late for it would make no sense if they came home in the morning. The unknown rituals performed gives one the desire to know what it is hence encouraging those uncircumcised to go in.

Next up is *karootishet*- the welcoming or ushering of the children into their homesteads. After they have been pasted, the candidates march in a single file to visit all their homes. It should be noted that families within the same village can agree to have their children sing and dance together and separate them after *kapchai* or even circumcise them from the same compound. Regardless of where they are going to be cut from, they have to make a round visit to each home before dawn. According to their line-up, the homes are visited in the same order. As they approach the home(s), circumcised women welcome them with the song '*ee seroot kumukanga*'. As they carry mingling sticks with a patch of posho on them, a winnowing basket with some little millet or maize, a gourd with some milk in it and other items that all indicate a mother ready to feed her long-lost child and make them healthy again. The procedure accompanies the song which the women sing as they move backwards and the children proceed into the compound, the women swing the items they are carrying in a musical way according to the song being sung. It should be noted that it is only the women expected to perform this ritual while the men watch from a distance or sing other songs inside the house. After a little singing and dancing, the candidates are made to sit down and the mothers give them food to eat. In the process of eating, no candidate is allowed to put her dancing equipment down. After eating, they sing out into the next home. The candidates will not enter any house except those selected by their forewomen, which, as tradition demands should be empty; the candidates enter and are made to sit down as they are taught the ways of

the tribe, they are taught about the ‘animals’, teachings that can never be told to the uncircumcised, as they are ushered into these houses, they must be singing a befitting song. Should someone try to eavesdrop on what is being done or said inside the house, they may be cursed into madness or even death by the *matirenik*.

By dawn, all the homes whose children are in the queue are supposed to have been visited and the necessary procedures repeated. If there is a child whose father is dead, her father’s grave is visited before dawn and the girl is made to pick a little soil by the grave and she is made to repeat some words which are communicated in the words of a song, in so doing, the father’s spirit is invoked and his blessing upon the child sought. So similar to what happens in Matthew Bukenya’s ‘The Bride’ in which Namvua cannot be initiated because there are no spirits to be invoked. Among the Sabinys, it is believed that if the girl is circumcised without the knowledge of the father’s spirit, if dead, could lead to anything bad happening to her. When asked, one respondent answered ‘*it is not possible that that girl will live without the blessing of her father’s spirit*’.

When the children come back from being pasted, it is the mothers/women who welcome them back home. They await their return at the entrance to the homestead, carrying different items like a winnowing basket in which there is some little millet, a mingling stick with a small patch of posho on it and a guard in which there is some milk etc. All these are a symbol of motherhood, a mother who is happy to receive home her long lost child, a child who has been in the wilderness of childhood, the mother is ready to feed her now that she has come where she belongs. The women in the song keep asking the forewoman where she had taken them until it was dark, it is a rhetoric question which is meant rather for aesthetic beauty and emphasis than seeking an answer.

From the time the children are pasted, the fore woman is expected to go ahead of them carrying a lit lamp even though it could still be day. The lamp is expected to go off only after the cutting of all the initiates. The lamp is to illustrate the fact that the children are in the dark and may get lost so they need an elderly person to show them the way out until the day comes. When they are circumcised, they may now go alone since they are able to see and they also know the way.

The third ritual to be performed is the visit to ‘*kapchwai*’, a hidden and sacred place usually in a water body. As soon as the morning star (*tabayandet*) is noticed, the songs and mood

automatically change to those which indicate that the time has come and everything is now in the hands of the gods. Led by their forewoman who is the only person who knows which place they are going to, the team goes to *kapchwai*. The knowledge of where they are going is restricted only to *matirenik* because it is believed that some evil intentioned people like witches and sorcerers can do something bad in that place so that by the time the candidates reach there the place is already polluted which might make them to wince or bleed to death. In other words, the Sabiny's do not believe that cutting is a reason for someone to bleed to death, rather it is the work of an evil person. The forewomen may choose a very long way to the place in a bit to confuse the enemies who may want to put charms along the way in order to make the children wince at the knife.

The children visit *kapchwai* at dawn, before many people wake up. The reason for choosing this time is because the forewoman wants to avoid any instances of evil people doing anything dirty. Another reason is that the children have to reach the place when it is still early and cold because they have to interact with the gods when they are still fresh, and the water should be cold to numb their bodies so as to lessen the pain of the knife. The location is well selected; by a water body, inside a bush, very secret so that no one would obviously guess and the uncircumcised would not have a chance to see even from a far what will be taking place. One of the songs goes to *kapchwai* with the candidates is, '*yego yego*' whose lyrics remind them that the morning star is up and time is completely gone.

Everyone may accompany the children as far as the edge of the bushes surrounding the grove but the uncircumcised are not allowed to proceed beyond. What is done there can never be revealed to any uncircumcised person. The only thing that can be said is that the parts to be cut are put into contact with the cold water to numb them so as to reduce the pain caused by the cutting, but when asked why the uncircumcised are not allowed to go there, they say there are animals that will make them to run mad. Any candidate could back out at any other stage but not after the visit to *kapchwai*, even if one runs away, they will always catch up with her and circumcise her wherever she is caught; not after seeing the tribal 'animals'. Although other rituals are valued, this is the most sensitive one, it marks the climax, the commitment point after which there is no turning back. After *kapchwai*, the forewoman passes the children through a different path to the circumcision ground, they can never go back through the same route. On their way back, they sing the song '*saa mbaya*' which is to remind them that the time is now really bad. They are also reminded to bring joy and not shame to the entire family and so another song that is led in this context is '*leta raha*'.

As the candidates go to *kapchwai*, a lamb without blemish is slaughtered and the remnants of food in the stomach are removed to be used for cleansing the children before they enter the circumcision arena. After being cleansed, the children go through a 'gate' made of spears that are held by two elderly men standing on either side, they keep making the spears to touch themselves at the top and back. At the arena, sacks are spread in front of where every candidate is going to lie and some soil is put on them so as to sock the blood; all the cut the cut parts fall on the sacks and are later thrown away by the forewomen into places that they alone know. It is believed that the wicked can use the body parts to bewitch the just circumcised so that the wounds may not heal or they bleed to death. It should be noted that as the children are being brought from *kapchwai*, '*kaboret*' who is the first on the line is rushed a head of the others and she is cut as the others are being brought in. The other candidates wait outside the gate and are only taken in when the other is done. No ululation is made until all the candidates have been successfully cut. The surgeon is expected to be so swift, jump off soon after completing lest the candidate grabs her hand or garment. If such a thing should ever happen, the candidate will not pay anything to the surgeon. The surgeon's prize may not be something so big but if she is grabbed, she will have to pay the candidate in question.

In an African setting, a spear is a symbol of manhood, here the girls go through a gate improvised by making sort of a bow where below is the entrance to the circumcision arena and on the top are two spears crossing each other. The spears in this case symbolize the maturity into which the girls are entering

The lamb that is slaughtered and some its contents put by the gate to the circumcision arena is a sign of purity. The Sabiny's believe that a sheep is the cleanest and innocent animal and so is used for most of the cleansing rituals. The girls are cleansed and made pure of their sins before they enter the arena, they are dedicated to the gods so that they find no fault with them and hence protect them through the entire process. In the same note, *basiben* brings a sheep as a gift still as a sign of purity, the relationship they share is pure and likewise, it acts as a thanks giving gifts for what the gods have done.

The cutting of the children is done in an open ground where everyone present is able to view and this is because they do not want the surgeon to do anything if she is left alone, they also want to witness the girls being firm and not moving her body, let alone her eyes. The joy is heavier when one witnesses other than being told, the ululations and the songs that follow are

sung from the heart. Food stuffs are only cooked after every single girl has been successfully cut because of fear that a cow may be slaughtered and one of the girls may not be firm enough and so ends up bringing shame to the family, thus is based on a Sabinian proverb 'do not prepare the gourd before the cow calves', since the cow may die in the process of giving birth and you will not only be ashamed but also feel the pain whenever you see the gourd. On the same note, no one is allowed to ululate before the whole queue is done because one could bring shame after people have celebrated. The sheep that basiben gives as gift is handed over in the afternoon of the circumcision day, after all turned out successful, since it is a gift for a work well done.

A specific candidate may refuse to sit down after being cut and she orders for anyone to be brought before her; her father, mother, aunt, friend, grand parent, etc., and when the person has been brought before her, she demands for anything ranging from animals, money or land, the initiate is free to demand for a specific cow, goat or piece of land of her choice. The one to give the item demanded for may bargain but will not have a choice of refusing to give and once he or she accepts, the item in question must be given or the person will have the gods to content with. As soon as the gift is given, there is a song expressing joy. A stubborn initiate may summon two, three or more people before she accepts to sit down. Something very important to note here is that if there is a twin to be circumcised and the other is not in, he or she will have to stand by the sister until they complete cutting her. This they say will stop the girl from bleeding to death which would happen if part of her was not within, it is believed that twins are indeed one child and for this reason it is an abomination for one to refer to twins as children for it is a child.

Immediately the cutting of all candidates is completed, the surgeon blows a whistle to communicate that there is no candidate who winced at the knife. Initially, a gun was fired instead of a whistle but with the Ugandan government disarmament policy, whistles were brought in. As soon as the whistle is blown, the women ululate and that marks the beginning of the celebrations. The beating of the drums kicks off and the women whose husbands belong to the same age set as that of the host get a specific creeping plant (*snendet*) and they tie it around their heads and those of their husbands, throw others on the roof top of the main house and they start chanting as they run round the same house three times. The chant is soloed by the women while the men respond.

Wosho ee wosho

aa wosho

Pangoo kayi

aa wosho

Nyinyo kayi

aa wosho

In the chant, the women are asking whose home they are in and the men respond 'it is ours'. If the mother of the home is not circumcised, she will not join the others in chanting and running round the house, it is a taboo for her to do so and if any uncircumcised should go round the house, she will run mad. When the three rounds are done, the chief guest (*basiben*) tastes alcohol from the seven drums and selects the best for himself, giving out the rest. The drums are to cater for; *basiben*, the members of the age set, the uncles, two for the clan and the last one for the public. It should be noted that no one opens the door to the brewing room and takes any alcohol out until the *basiben* does or says so. He is also the one who orders for the bull to be slaughtered and for food preparations to start.

After circumcision, the members of the age set and their wives run round the house, chanting 'wosho', but they will not do so unless a specific and special plant, *senendet* is tied around their heads. The plant they use is very special in the Sabiny culture and is a sign of honour, when they tie it on you or a gift one gives you, know that you have been accorded utter respect and love. These people have gained honour before the eyes of society because their child has faced the knife with bravery. The same plant is tied around the sheep that *basiben* offers, showing that he is giving it with love and honour. Note that 'wosho' is only chanted if all the children circumcised in the same homestead were firm.

The chief guest (*basiben*) is chosen by the father of the home from among his age set 'brothers', it should be someone he is close to, free with. *Basiben* is not a one day's friend, he is one whose friendship can and will never be lost through thick and thin just like *Mutummo* and the friend,

Mwamba, in Karooro's *Curse of the Sacred Cow*; whose friendship is sealed by blood and Mwamba cannot allow Mutummo to die alone, Mutummo and Mwamba cut themselves and each take the other's blood whereas the Basibens and Sebei shed blood on the same day and almost at the same time. Basibens is highly respected and is given his own room in which he sits with other high-class guests, he and his company is expected not sleep through the night but sing and dance. The songs they sing reminisce the days back in their time. *Basiben* is regarded the man of the home and is never expected to sleep on the circumcision eve, until the children are successfully cut. *Basiben* should be in the company of his wife, however, a

situation where his wife is not 'clean' in the ways of the tribe, he will adopt or hire another 'wife' for the period. *Basiben* comes along with a female sheep. The sheep is hidden elsewhere until the evening of the circumcision day when it is smeared with a lot of oil and covered with a blanket and once at the compound, the *basiben* and the host, together with other elders gather around it and joyously sing and dance to a special song '*ka ngany ke tarit*' which when directly interpreted to English translates to 'The bird has opened its wings' the song is sang as they throw away the blanket from the sheep, revealing its oily body, meaning that they have opened the wings of an ever flowing oily relationship, full of love, unity and many other good things.

We have seen what happens with the wife of the guest of honor but we should not forget that on the other end is the host's wife, who is the mother of the girl being circumcised. If she is still a 'girl', she will do any other thing but she will not be allowed to take part in any sacred act and the most painful of all is the fact that as other women are running round the house and chanting '*wosho...this is our home*', she will be observing from a distance for she will not be allowed to go close to the 'owners of the home'. If the members of the age set are stubborn, they will ask her to go to her mother's home until the circumcision period is over because her presence will only make their home smelly, and whatever command the age set of the husband headed by *basiben* says, she is not expected to complain or refute. Many of the women would want to wait for a time when they to go through such an ordeal and so they strife in good books with the gods of the tribe.

The *basiben* sits in his own room because he is a high-class visitor who must not be mixed up with everyone else. He is set apart so that when it is time to feed, he can easily be given the best unlike when he sits in the company of many people. There are also other rituals to be performed by him alone, perhaps in the company of his fellow age set and so he has to be in a private setting. The houses in which the children enter in the night are also well selected by the fore persons, they should be a bit isolated so that when they are inside no one will over hear them.

Lepcinet

The just circumcised, now referred to as '*cemerik*' are expected to stay without bathing in the same clothes for two days and on the third day, water is warmed for them and they can now wash away all the dirt and put on clean clothes. On this day they are free to eat the food

prepared by their mothers. The *cemerik* stay in the same place for a period of three weeks to one month and all they are expected to do is eat, bath, rest and share experiences. No one will accept to eat any food prepared by *cemerik*, instead someone, especially the mother is expected to always remain around to see to it that they are fed at the right time with the right food, mostly sour milk and chicken or beef; the hens they were given as gifts will be slaughtered in this period. It is expected that the then girls now transitioning into women will be blossoming by the time they heal. The girls, though cut are not yet ushered into womanhood until all the rituals are performed. After *lepcinet*, those who had lent out some dancing items to the initiates can now begin taking them back but they will not do so without paying some small money. It is mandatory that they pick their items since the whole thing was intended at leaving the initiate with some money and not because she would not afford to buy one of her own.

Kacenget

The next ritual to be performed is another of those that the uncircumcised world will remain bleak unto. All the initiates are taken into a secret sacred grove in the dead of the night to meet the ‘animal’, specifically a leopard which they purportedly are expected to fight with until dawn. ‘*All that is heard over the night are shouts and outburst of song*’ said one uncircumcised female respondent. The initiates return with four marks that look like scratches or hot metal marks on the centre of their right arms which they claim was a result of the fight with the leopard. Although the process is not yet over, the initiates are now free to mix with their other family members and even carry out some house chores. The place where they take the initiates to meet and fight with the ‘animal’ is also chosen very carefully, it should be a secret place and away in the deep of a bush. The timing is another that should not be left unanalysed, it is done in the dead of the night. The significance of this is that no one should know where the animal is found and which direction to take, and also, the rituals performed are only done at that hour of the night.

Ngotunet

After one to two weeks, depending on the fore woman, from the time they meet and fight with the ‘animal’, they are now ready to be initiated into their age set which they are told beforehand. Age set names are changed after a period of 3-4 circumcision years for example those people circumcised in 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004 may belong to a given age set. The

name cuts across the entire region, not for a specific group. If all the members of a given age set are dead, their name is given to a generation ahead of them, for example if the *kaplalach* age set goes into extinction by 2000, those people circumcised in the next season will be given the name *kaplalach*. This fulfills the belief that the dead regenerate and come back as new beings. When they are to be initiated, they are subjected to some pain and discomfort. They are smeared or rather pasted with too much oil on their faces, covered with blankets and made to crawl or move like animals on a rough surface. With their bodies covered, their fore person will ask rhetorically, 'who are these people?' He then goes ahead to address them by two names of other age sets to which the initiates will respond by shaking their heads, and he mentions their name, all of them will respond in unison ...'ummmmm'. Their response seals their initiation and so they will be allowed to sing and jubilate their newly born identity. It is after this procedure that they are made to grind much millet and the evening of the same day, they move in a group singing, dancing and throwing wild egg plants at the neighbors' compounds and whichever neighbor finds them on their compounds will get the signal that maize is needed from them and so they take it to the initiate's home without question. All the maize brought in is ground and brewed to make local alcohol which when it gets ready, the entire neighborhood is invited to make merry. It is their first food for the public and hence the beginning of civic responsibility. The place where they take the initiates to meet and fight with the 'animal' is also chosen very carefully, it should be a secret place and away in the deep of a bush. The timing is another that should not be left unanalyzed, it is done in the dead of the night. The significance of this is that no one should know where the animal is found and which direction to take, and also, the rituals performed are only done at that hour of the night.

It is after the above that a Sabiny girl is no longer a girl, she is eventually a woman, very clean and rich in the ways of the tribe, she then deserves all the respect and her arguments will be listened to in public. She is now ready for marriage and motherhood. After circumcision, the members of the age set and their wives run round the house, chanting 'wosho', but they will not do so unless a specific and special plant, *senendet* is tied around their heads. The plant they use is very special in the Sabiny culture and is a sign of honor, when they tie it on you or a gift one gives you, know that you have been accorded utter respect and love. These people have gained honor before the eyes of society because their child has faced the knife with bravery. The same plant is tied around the sheep that *basiben* offers, showing that he is giving it with love and honor. Note that 'wosho' is only chanted if all the children circumcised in the same homestead were firm.

All the above rituals that are performed in the context of the songs and the involvement of the candidates are geared at indoctrinating in them the feeling that gives them pride, confidence and a feeling that they are true members of the Sabiny tribe. In Africa, like among the Sabiny, the social and cultural norms remain strongly in favor of female circumcision and the family and community are the most significant transmitters and guardians of norms, they are able to execute this duty through oral literature forms like songs. According to the Sabiny, female circumcision is an aspect of culture that one is born to and which one must fulfill. The procedure is traditionally carried out by elderly women who have been spiritually ordained to be surgeons. These are beliefs that are transmitted using oral tradition.

Most of the rituals performed are done so secretly, always keeping the uncircumcised in the dark but songs must always be sung in every instance. The gap created by the imagination of what happens in the sacred places alone should not be underestimated, it carries enough power to trigger one to want to find out. Since there is none who has ever been there who is willing to open up, the only way is for one to look for the answer by herself for none will prevent them from doing so, not even the law. In literature, suspense is such a huge technique that makes the reader thirst for more- it sustains the reader and at times boosts the reasoning capacity of a reader in the quest to fill the gap. Likewise, in this case, rituals, especially those done in secret have hugely helped to sustain the circumcision of women among the Sabinys. You will be surprised to know that this researcher at one point during the study was as well filled with an agitation to find out what really transpires in those sacred places, especially *kapchwai* and in the bush where they go to meet and fight with the 'animal'. All that will be said is 'they are taught the names of the animals of the tribe. The question that will always go unanswered is, what kind of animals are these and why must it be done in secret? The pursuit of answers to the many questions that may go looming in the girls' brains will automatically force them to seek to be circumcised, not anyone! In the same course, the desire to come face to face and interact with the gods of the tribe could be an urge too huge for one to resist, I mean if it was said God of heaven was somewhere within, I would bet it on my life that not even a single Christian would want to be left out, they would pay whatever it would take to be allowed to interact with Him, others including the non-Christians would do it out of curiosity of finding out how He looks hence, rituals give a thirst to girls and women to find out what about their culture is hidden in circumcision.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter the conclusions generated by the study are stated, basing on the study's findings. The study set out to examine Female Circumcision among the Sabinys from an Oral Literature's Perspective. The conclusions are guided by the objectives of the study; to examine how the Sabiny myths illustrate the centrality of female circumcision in the Sebei culture; to analyse how Sebei oral poetry glorifies and justifies the circumcision of girls and women in the region and to establish how rituals facilitate the thinking that everything Sabiny girls and women need to know about their culture and themselves through circumcision. The conclusions are as follows;

5.1 General key research findings

The study findings revealed that; Female circumcision is still being practiced in Sebei, though the rate is dwindling. Most of the population though highly uphold the practice in their minds and hearts. The reason for this is rooted in the kind of messages that is embedded in the orature that female circumcision comes along with. This study found out that the adoration given to female circumcision finds its secret in oral literature and so if one needed to know more, they would need to delve deep into this field.

The study also found that, if viewed from the perspective of oral literature, female circumcision is not that cruel, harmful and inhuman act that it may have been manifested to be, rather it is only one of the steps in the procedure, the cutting of the clitoris that may be condemned if anything. Circumcision in Sebei culture is broad, it engulfs all the procedures from singing and dancing, myths to the rituals that accompany the songs and to the cutting.

Another finding that was drawn from this study is that unless other alternative rites of passage are put in place, female circumcision may not die altogether. As it is, female circumcision is the only one in place that transitions a girl to a woman; girls are taught what they should as responsible women of the community. The looming marriage instabilities in the region is a constant reminder to the Sabinys that something has been taken away from them.

The Sabiny myths are a vehicle of the Sabiny tribe for transmitting the values of society and particularly about circumcision in general and female circumcision in particular. They emphasize that ancestors and spirits are dangerous and can harm the belligerents and cultural

renegades. Such beliefs, makes the Sabiny to take circumcision with religious faith. Since myths are sub forms of Oral literature, then they are an integral part of the beliefs of the Sabiny.

The myths express a lot of sentiments that touch the lives of each individual Sabiny woman or girl and they are a foundation of oral transmission. They put forward the power of clan ancestral spirits (oyik) and their dictates about FGC/FGM. In so doing, they shape the behaviour of every Sabiny man, woman, boy or girl from generation to generation. This has been possible from generation to generation because they are indoctrinative. For example, they emphasize allegiance to tribal values, cleanliness and purification of the female through traditional circumcision and instill specific ingredients of course of action and practices, prior to and during the circumcision period.

They give direction on what women should be and what limits or extents of domestic responsibility they are exposed to. For example, there are taboos passed on through the myths and legends that the uncircumcised woman is not allowed to milk cows because it is believed she would cause bad omen to animals and they would die mysteriously. The uncircumcised woman was denied picking food from the granary or have social intercourse or interaction with community members.

Sabiny Oral tradition is a complex of various songs that are sang by members of the tribe and the initiates in the acknowledgement of the circumcision practice and celebration of it. This study noted that the poetic forms glorify and as well justify that the women(females) should be circumcised. They serve various purposes such as soothing the gods and ancestors and vowing before them on the Sabiny tribe's allegiance to circumcision. In this case Sabiny poetry is an integral part of the circumcision process.

The poetry has an indoctrinative effect of instilling the candidates with a sense of belonging, honor and continuity of culture through circumcision. The poetry in form of songs sang during the rituals carry message on the values of the tribe such as giving the initiates pride and courage.

They instill a sense of graduation from childhood to adulthood.

The songs also glorify and justify the continuity of circumcision as a compulsory and an inherited practice from generation to generation, thus leaving little or no room for every female to renege. They emphasize that circumcision is a 'debt' to be fulfilled by every

member of the Sabiny tribe. Stipulating circumcision as a compulsory practice, the poetry prepares the initiates psychologically and instill courage and valour for the painful circumcision rite. Once the circumcision is done, part of the poetry is tailored at preparing the initiates for adult life, like marriage and domestic responsibility as a way of life among the Sabiny. As fully blown-up members of the Sabiny community, they are now rewardable and some of the songs emphasize on reward and blessings for the initiates. Reward is not only from the members of the Sabiny society but the tribe believes that it comes from the ancestors, spirits and the gods of the tribe.

FGC is an inborn belief, thinking and conscience among the Sabiny and particularly the women and girls that the circumcision rituals and finality must undergone by every girl or woman as rite of passage from childhood to womanhood. It is perceived as a command from the gods. The females, thus feel that fulfilling this rite of passage cushions them from stigmatization, being treated as outcasts, and the fear of that impels them to take part in it and be associated with the Sabiny society if they are to be full members of the Sabiny tribe. Every Sabiny young strives to know about their culture, the procedures to be under taken, prior, while and after circumcision.

The thinking of every girl and woman is enhanced by the belief that they only become full members of the tribe, they understand the procedures to be undertaken and the process of transmission of values that every Sabiny woman or girl must know. Such values are exposure to the secrets of the tribe and a number of cultural beliefs, rituals, customs, and behavioral norms, social hierarchies, traditional and religious beliefs of the Sabiny people. They are also publicly seen as accomplished members of the tribe so that their parents are saved from societal criticism. The rituals involve the girls in singing and dancing in the night and as well during the occasion of circumcision. Their involvement gives them pride of being associated with the Sabiny tribe.

The ritual songs, activities take the initiates through various moods; excitement, seriousness, business, dancing costumes, visitation of relatives, whistle blowing and movement in an alternating manner. All the rituals are accompanied by songs and dances. The rituals are community indoctrinative tools of sentiments put in the mind set of every Sabiny woman and girl.

The other part of rituals is performed on the circumcision eve '*ngopseet*' which is the smearing or rather pasting of the candidates' open body parts with a special kind of soil called

'worionted' to hide the identity of candidates. This is done to save candidates from evil intentions of some malicious people who may hurt some candidates during the cutting.

Concluding further, the exposure of candidates to rituals like visiting sacred places 'kapchwai', or viewing the morning star (*tabayandet*) show that time for circumcision is ripe enough and it becomes part of every girl or woman, the demands they make as rewards from relatives, parents and aunts are all part of the ritual. Every girl or woman after circumcision now feels that she is now part of the tribe; very clean and rich in the ways of the tribe, she then deserves all the respect and her arguments will be listened to in public. She is now ready for marriage and motherhood. Every girl or woman involvement gives them pride, confidence and a feeling that they are true members of the Sabinu tribe

5.2 Conclusion

This research one mega conclusion to draw. Although literature may be ridiculed in society as having no capacity to 'hold water', this study concludes otherwise. Literature is part and parcel of the society and society lives inside literature. Literature indeed has the capacity to 'remove any floating islands or repair any kind of dams. It has eyes that transcend time into generations long gone and even into those yet to come. Horrible as a situation could be, literature- oral literature in this case, has the capacity to paint it so beautiful. It soothes hearts of men and women to see no pain such an item as the 'knife'. Just like it is impossible to do away with society, it is equally impossible to do away with literature. In the Sebei sub-region, female circumcision is birthed by oral literature, nurtured by oral literature and sustained by oral literature.

5.3 Recommendations

The study recommends that further studies into the orature that fuels female circumcision. It may be found out that it is not the person they should deal with, but that which is lodged in her mind. Before endorsing any form of criticism, positive or negative and especially a negative one. One should seek to find out what inspires the heart, thus answering Kenneth Burke's argument that literature explains the people just as the people explain the literature in the context.

The study also recommends further that individuals and institutional departments who and which have the zeal for oral literature have a virgin field to explore in the Sebei orature. The oral literature in female circumcision is just but a glimpse into the icebag. The value of literature should be left in relation to the lifestyle of the community, literature being almost

the only field that analyses situations and find a suitable answer from within the analysis. Literature has eyes that sees beyond the natural sciences, social sciences and other humanities.

The study recommends that the Sabiny myths are still a very important oral traditional media of passing values to the tribe despite the on-going implementation on the ban on circumcision practices. Oral literary forms such as myths are a vehicle for transmitting the values of society in general, and circumcision being part of the cultural practice. Whether with or without circumcision the myths are an integral part of Sabiny culture. They emphasize on the adherence to various cultural practices, and circumcision in particular. Adherence and practicing them is what make every Sabiny woman or girl recognize the value of the messages transmitted, whether they will practice circumcision or not. The myths should continue to guide and shape the Sabiny women and girls in their day-to-day life. With their strong nature, and since every tribe needs identity, the myth should continue to survive and guide the Sabiny tribe.

The study also recommends that the since the Sabiny Oral tradition, particularly poems /songs have ethical and aesthetic aspects of the Sabiny tribe as indicated in their meaning and performance, they still remain important and of value to people. Much as the rituals studied in this research are used to glorify and justify circumcision practice and celebration, with its outlawed status, the oral poetry can still exist and be used to glorify and justify other traditional practices of the Sabiny tribe. Such practices, will still remain focused on soothing the gods and ancestors on matters related to life, identity as a tribe, a sense of belonging, honour and continuity of culture. Besides that, oral poetry (songs sang) during the rituals can still be modified to suit the current times, for serving other traditional purposes such as instilling courage to the people, tribal identity, preparing the initiates for adult life, like marriage and domestic responsibility as a way of life among the Sabiny and the related rewards and blessings from ancestors, spirits and the gods of the tribe. Similarly the rituals should be modified to suit the current times by using an alternative ways or rites of passage from childhood to adulthood.

It is recommended that since rituals that accompany the songs are part and parcel of a tribe's culture and the Sabiny people have it in their conscience, the Sabiny society should explore alternative rites of passage, from childhood to womanhood, where such rituals can still be utilized and be undergone by every girl or woman. This alternative rite of passage and the

rituals accompanying them can still be used to communicate commands from the gods on other aspects of culture that are not focused on circumcision. Sabiny women and girls can still be involved in them as part of their culture. They can still participate, understand the procedures to be undertaken and the process of transmission of values. They can still maintain the cultural beliefs, rituals, customs, and behavioral norms, social hierarchies, traditional and religious beliefs of the Sabiny people.

Thus, they can still maintain and continue to guard their cultural heritage.

5.4 Areas for further research

This study may inspire further research in the following areas;

- (1) Aspects of Oral literature in Sabiny culture in general other than circumcision in particular.
- (2) Perceptions of the current attitudes of Sabiny towards female circumcision.
- (3) How all genres of oral literature influence the continuity of female circumcision, not just songs, myths and rituals

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

Dear Respondent, I am Ms. Norah Chebet, a master's student from Kyambogo University and I am kindly seeking your consent to take part in the study that I am carrying out for an academic purpose, focused on the topic, 'Examining Female Circumcision among the Sabiny from an oral Literature's Perspective'.

This study is for academic purpose. If you do agree to participate in the study, please kindly declare your willingness by signing here below in this consent form.

Respondent's Consent

I accept to participate in this study and hereby counter sign.

Sign Date

Respondent

APENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR RESPONDENTS

Place of Interview

Time of interview

Objective: to solicit information from respondents pertaining to oral literature and female circumcision.

- (1) Are there myths that explain the existence of female circumcision? Explain some of them.
- (2) What is the place of Sabiny gods in the process of female circumcision? Can one remain a Sabiny woman even without circumcision?
- (3) Which is more important, the cutting or the process involved in female circumcision? Give more details.
- (4) Is there a given procedure in which circumcision songs are presented?
- (5) Why are songs so important in the process of female circumcision?
- (6) In what context are rituals performed in the process of female circumcision? Why?

END

APENDIX IV: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction

This interface is intended to gather information from the Surgeons, representatives of the community-based organizations and respondents aged 15 years and above. It is hoped that respondents will discuss on aspects and yield information. Information provided through the FGD will be integrated in the interpretation process as additional information. Respondents will be guided on the procedures to be followed.

This tool should be used during small Focus Group Discussions of 10 people. The group should be made of people from similar age group or backgrounds and should have 10 participants (4 for Surgeons ,4 for persons of 15 years and above and 1 group for representatives of community-based organization). The groups will be separated by sex and age. The facilitators will lead the FGD and guide where necessary by introducing the aspects to be discussed and the notes to be recorded handling one group at a time. The facilitator will assure participants that all information shared will remain confidential and for academic purposes.

- (1) Thank the respondents for participating in the Focus Group Discussion
- (2) Explaining the objectives and expectations of the Focus Group Discussion.
- (3) Set ground rules and stick on the wall or on a raised surface seen by all participants
- (4) Outline the sessions and the amount of time the discussion will take and stick to the time schedule

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think the Sabinu circumcision songs, myths and rituals are of any value today to the Sabinys? How?
2. In your opinion, can female circumcision be viewed out of the context of oral literature?
3. Explain how central songs are in the execution and continuation of female circumcision in the region of Sebei.

4. Explain and give your own justification as a group that it is really true that disobedience to Sabiny oral tradition is consequentially disastrous to an individual. Illustrate some of these songs

5. Do you think female circumcision in Sebei sub region will ever go extinct?

6. What is the general take of the Sabinys on the outlawing of the practice of female circumcision?

Note: The researcher shall probe the respondents to seek detailed information depending on the responses provided. Participatory approaches shall be used during the FGD to allow for active and equal participation of all the respondents

END

**APPENDIX V: KUPSABINY WORDS AND THEIR NEAR
TRANSLATIONS**

- Basiben** A really close friend with whom one shares the knife
- Ceekwoyeet**.....The first set of songs in the early stages
- Kaboret**The first initiate to be circumcised
- Kacengoot**.....A ritual that involves smearing the initiates with a lot of oil
- Kakwombet**.....The set of songs sang in the climax of the process
- Kapchwai**.....A sacred and secret place by a water body where the initiates are taken at dawn, before circumcision
- Karootishet**.....Bringing home the initiates after pasting
- Matirenik**.....Fore women who direct the initiates from the time they are pasted
- Senendet**A plant that is a symbol of honor

APENDIX VI: THE SONGS FOUND FROM THE RESPONDENTS

1. *Eee mwa rotwet cacaca*.....Eee the knife is so painful
2. *Leta Raha*.....Bring joy
3. *Seerot Kumuganga*.....Seerot Kumuganga
4. *Angye pook*.....If its Death let me Die
5. *Angurwo*.....We want our hairy leaf
6. *Yakte Pasendapic*.....Pay the People's Debt
7. *Lai Kapulengung*.....Burn on your Own
8. *Saa Mbaya*.....The time is Bad
9. *Kacoo Tabayandet*.....The Morning Star has come
10. *Kawacemuut*.....They are going to Cut
11. *Tole Muket*.....The Lid will Pop
12. *Soneet Kiribo*.....The Barren Kiribo

APENDIX VII: MORGAN AND KREJCIES SAMPLE SIZE TABLE

Table 3.1									
<i>Table for Determining Sample Size of a Known Population</i>									
N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	80	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	86	290	165	850	265	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	346
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	354
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	191	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	170	118	400	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	180	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	190	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	200	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	370
65	56	210	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	220	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	230	144	550	226	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	240	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	250	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	260	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	254	2600	335	1000000	384
<i>Note: N is Population Size; S is Sample Size</i>					<i>Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970</i>				

Source: Krejcie and Morgan (1970)

APPENDIX VI: BUDGET

Item	Cost (Ugx)
Type Setting and printing services	1500,000
Stationery	1000,000
Transport Costs	1,300,000
Internet Services	500,000
Binding of Document	550,000
Air time for mobilization	150,000
Appreciation for key participants	1000,000
Total	6000,000s
