

**THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AMONG THE CHUKA  
THROUGH CIRCUMCISION, 1906-2000.**

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UNIVERSITY**

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**DECLARATION**

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university or any other award.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my parents Rev. Festus Murangiri and Mrs. Christine Murangiri, my husband Justus Mwiti Kanga and my children Grace Karendi Mwiti and Victor Mwendwa Mwiti. It is also dedicated to all those who toil in pursuit of knowledge.

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**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

Candidates	Those who are about to be circumcised
Insiders	Circumcised men
Outsiders	Uncircumcised men/women
Patriarchal dividend	Benefits accrued to men
Real Men	The courageously circumcised men
To be cut or/ Face the knife	To be circumcised.

**ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

Aids	-	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.
Aug.	-	August.
B . C.	-	Before Christ.
C. P. E.	-	Certificate of Primary Education.
C. M. A.	-	Catholic Men Association.
Cm	-	Centimetres.
C.S.M.	-	Church of Scotland Ministry.
D.C.	-	District Commissioner
Dec	-	December
Dr.	-	Doctor.
F.G.M.	-	Female Genital Mutilation
Fr.	-	Father.
G.B.V	-	Gender Based Violence.
G.O.K.	-	Government of Kenya
HIV	-	Human Immunodeficiency Virus.
I.M.F	-	International Monetary Fund.
K. A. R	-	Kings African Rifles
K. A. U.	-	Kenya African Union
K. A. N. U.	-	Kenya African National Union
K. C. P. E	-	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
K. D. F.	-	Kenya Defense Forces
K. N. A.	-	Kenya National Archives
Ksh	-	Kenya Shillings
L. N. C.	-	Local Native Council.
M. Y. W.O.	-	Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Oraganisation.
NGO's	-	Non Governmental Organizations.
Oct.	-	October

P. A. T. H.	-	Program for Appropriate Technology in Health
P.C.E.A	-	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
P. C. M. F.	-	Presbyterian Church Men's Fellowship
Pl	-	Plural
R. I. P.	-	Rest in Peace.
Rev.	-	Reverend.
U.S.A.	-	United States of America.
U.K.	-	United Kingdom.
U. N.O./ U.N.	-	United Nations Organization.
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

## ABSTRACT

Masculinity denotes the attributes that a particular society judges to be ideally associated with men and boys. It is distinct from maleness, a biological and physiological classification concerned with male reproductive system. Masculinity entails socially constructed features, behaviour and secondary sex characteristics associated with men. Among the Chuka, the definition of manhood is not only complex but also embedded in the practice of circumcision. Thus circumcision is a process through which boys 'become' men after acquiring certain attributes, values and skills that have come to define a 'real man'. It is a rite through which boys become men and acquire certain attributes, values and skills that define a 'man'. It is a pubertal rite of passage which enacts a symbolic rebirth of boys into the domain of adulthood. This research has focused on the circumcision rite as a whole, its practice, importance and its role in creating a 'man' among the Chuka. It has therefore highlighted various rituals associated with this rite as boys strive to become 'men'. The research elaborates on the heavy price the male person had to pay for his masculine privilege and power. This study has utilized the concept of Hegemonic Masculinity advanced by Robert Connell, which theorizes that in any society, there is a form of masculinity which indirectly controls and dominates others without using any form of coercion. The concept has been used in this study to evaluate how some circumcised men occupy positions of power, control and influence over other men and women. Hegemonic masculinity not only enables us to understand how the ritual of circumcision embodies the most honoured way of being a Chuka man, but opens avenues for us to isolate and interrogate the escalation of subordinate and marginalized masculinities. The current study proposes that the rite of circumcision is of great value and importance to the individual as well as to the society. This is based on the assumption that during the colonial and post-colonial eras, the rite of circumcision underwent fundamental changes. The study also offers a challenge to old renditions of masculinity and opens possibilities of new ways of thinking and understanding 'masculinity' in Chuka. The study population was sampled using purposive and snowballing techniques and data was collected through use of interviews, field observations and questionnaires. Being a historical study, primary and secondary sources from the National Archives and libraries around the country were significantly used. The data was analyzed and presented using descriptive statistics.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter highlights the background to the study, the statement of the problem, objectives, research questions and premises, justification and significance, scope and limitations. Besides, it covers the literature review and the theoretical tools employed in this study. Lastly, it elaborates on the methodology used during the research, explaining the geo-political setting where this study was conducted as well as the data collection and analysis strategies.

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

What does it mean to be masculine or feminine? Are we born masculine and feminine or has society constructed a means of identifying people around these gendered categories? Are the resulting identities cast in stone or are they socially fluid? These were the core questions that necessitated and informed this research. The study focuses on the rite of circumcision in Chuka during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence eras. It also interrogates the influence that this rite of circumcision had in the construction of different versions of masculinities.

Thus, societal expectations of a man or a woman begin at a very young age, when boys and girls are led to believe in unwritten ‘rules’ of what is expected of them on the basis

of their biological and physiological makeup. As such, different ways in which women and men behave are linked to genes, though not necessarily determined by their X and Y<sup>1</sup>-chromosomes respectively. This categorization of male or female occurs at birth and it is the first step in the process of adducing and developing gender identity in society. Nature determines an individual's sex while culture influences the attitudes, character and behavior patterns appropriate for each sex. Historically, individuals have learned to adapt to these expectations as they shape their personal and professional lives. This has led to gender roles which outwardly manifest and express maleness and femaleness, though the expected attitudes, character and behavior of males and females are related to the environment where one lives. Therefore, masculinity is the gender-linked constellation of traits that have been traditionally associated with men while femininity entails the socially constructed traits associated with women.

Certain qualities of maleness are defined as masculine because of the societal view of what being male means. As a result of this, a 'real man' has behavioral characteristics of males which must conform to the culturally defined standards of maleness in that given society. Circumcision is a rite of passage which imparts attributes of manhood to

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<sup>1</sup> The sex chromosomes of the female are identical and are called X chromosomes thus the genotype of the female is XX. In males, the sex chromosomes differ in both shape and size. One male sex chromosome is identical to the X chromosome of the female while the other is generally smaller and is called and the Y chromosome, thus the genotype of the male is XY. XX for the females and XY for the males are the biological determinants of sex -linked traits in human beings (Kohlberg 1966).

initiates, during which the society prescribes panoply of values, behavior patterns, personalities, duties and roles associated with the male gender. It is this social-cultural institution of male circumcision that constructs the masculine attributes in males by imbuing a generic set of expectations on initiates, while depicting them as the owners of property, providers of basic necessities and protectors of society (Njoya, 2008).

Consequently, many of the Bantu speakers in Kenya practice circumcision for boys and, in some cases, clitoridectomy for girls, (Mbiti 1992, Wanyonyi 1992, Daniels 1970, Wagner 1949, Sangree 1966, Merritt 1976, Mwaniki 2004, 1976). In most of these communities, the boys are socially conditioned towards the development of masculinities which Lisa and Stephan (2003) describes as behavioral patterns, norms and values which explicitly and implicitly express expectations of how men should act and present themselves to others.

In the 'initiation schools', men are not only taught to demonstrate their virility in dealing with women, but are also encouraged to celebrate their actual physical strength evidenced in their roles as protectors, providers, while being made to understand that they own all property. In addition, traditional circumcision socialized and bonded men into their masculine gender roles and identity. For instance, among the Maasai, manhood was a prize to be wrestled for and won through cultural sanctions, rituals, trials of skill and endurance during circumcision (Ole-Kulet 1972). This practice is similar to that of

the Chuka who believe that real men must prevail in situations that require physical strength and fitness (Browne 1925, Mwaniki 2004, Fadiman 1994, Nyaga 1986).

In many pre-colonial African societies, the initiation period was a moment of ‘formal’ schooling during which the cultural expectations and responsibilities of the ‘men’ and ‘women’ were transmitted to the initiates. As such, men who had been taken through initiation rituals were distinguishable from the others by their conspicuous social behavior and peculiar use of vocabularies, which they learnt during their seclusion period. Circumcision was and still remains a permanent bodily alteration which signifies membership to a new group of ‘the real men’. For ‘real men’, any expression of weakness, emotion or sexual deficiency is a major blow to their virility, self-esteem as well as a betrayal to their manhood. To be content, these men must feel that they are decisive, self-assured and rational (Pype 2007), and the Chuka are not an exception to such principles governing the behavior of the circumcised as boys transit into manhood.

The male circumcision which involves the removal of all or part of the foreskin of the penis has been widely practiced as a religious, tribal and, most recently in the context of proliferation of HIV, as a medical rite (Marck 1997, Khanakwa 2011, Rizvi et al 1999, Bailey et al 2002, Kelly et al 1999). Although its origin is unknown, the earliest circumcision practice dates back to 2300 BC in Egypt where it is thought to have been used to mark slaves (Johnson 1993). By the time of the Roman takeover of Egypt in 30

BC, the practice had some ritual significance and only circumcised priests could perform certain religious offices (*Encyclopedia* 1973). In the Jewish religious tradition, infant male circumcision is required as part of Abraham's covenant with God (*Genesis* 17:11-12). Moreover, circumcision also appears widely among the indigenous people of Africa, the Malay Archipelago, New Guinea, Australia and Pacific Islands (Hastings 1971, Beidelman 1987) whereby the operation certified a subject's readiness for marriage and adulthood and attested to his ability to withstand pain as a 'real' man.

In addition, circumcision was and has been used to distinguish cultural groups from their uncircumcised neighbors and in this respect, the Chuka are not an exception to some of the cultural deployments to which circumcision is put (*Daily Nation* Feb.8; 2007:3, Feb.15; 2007: 37, Mwaniki 2004, 1982, *Saturday Nation* Feb.17; 2007:9, Orde 1915, Thomas1992). Precisely, circumcision among the Chuka is a transition from childhood into adulthood which imposes expectations, obligations, and responsibilities for the men. During the seclusion period, the Chuka initiates enter into a number of rituals, activities and teachings which emphasize specific attributes of manhood that are similar to those witnessed in some other African societies like the Babukusu of Western Kenya (Wagner 1949), Abatachoni of Western Kenya (Wanyonyi 1992), Tsonga of South Africa (Junod 1962) and Nyaneka-Nkumbi of South-Western Angola (Eastermann1979). Hence, the lessons inculcated into the new initiates during seclusion or in the 'initiation schools' formed the core of the 'Chuka masculinity'.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

This section is dedicated to the review of the available literature starting with those on the global scene, followed by African and Kenyan studies. Further, some efforts have been made to review specific related literature on the Chuka, in order to identify the knowledge gaps around which this study was justified. Reviewing literature from a world scale and delineating it to Africa and to the Chuka presents a variety of different configurations of masculinity based on differing social locations. This helps us to analyze different perspectives of masculinities and sheds the most revealing light on how the Chuka masculinity is constructed through circumcision.

Although numerous studies on masculinity have been carried out in the Western scholarship, very few of them deal with the non-Western societies. However, these studies raise fundamental theoretical and empirical perspectives that could be useful to our interrogation of the construction of the Chuka masculinity. Connell (2003) and Gilmore (1990) affirm that there are several studies of masculinity focusing on communities in the U.S.A., Europe and Asia. Such studies have been carried out in Germany and Canada by Kaufman (1993), in Japan by Roberson and Suzuki (2003), in Peru by Fuller (2001) and in Turkey by Sinclair (2000). Masculinity studies have also been done in India, Brazil, and Mexico (Connell 2003), while in U.S.A the studies are covered in (Baca 1982, Hooks 1992, Messner 1993). Most of these studies have taken

up debates on violence, fatherhood, sexuality, patriarchy, men's conduct and the social construction of men, which are insightful to this study of Chuka masculinity.

According to Hearn et al (2001), the first large-scale comparative study of men and gender relations has recently been completed in ten European Countries. Such studies give insights on the features associated with male gender and expressions of masculinities in Western rather than the African context. Kimmel et al (2005) records that there is a world handbook of research on men and masculinities, particularly on the concept of hegemonic masculinity that show how some circumcised men wield power and control over other men and women. However, none of the studies mentioned above gives any empirical data that is specific to the 'Chuka masculinity'.

Most of the literature on femininity pays special attention to the rights and position of women in the society (Foucault 1980, Butler 2007, Ruth and Marian 1978, Thomas and Gallagher 1987). They portray women's position as being unequal to that of men and examine how the society is structured to benefit men politically, economically and socially to the detriment of women. They critique the social system that relegates women to inferior positions while demanding for equal civil rights between men and women. Most of the feminist's literature focuses on theories that explain gender inequalities and advocate for different ways of redressing them. One such feminist is Simone de Beauvoir (1973:301) who asserts that 'one is not born a woman but rather

becomes one', a statement which implies that gender is culturally constructed and interpreted.

Such literature on femininity offers a way of rethinking gender as a cultural construct within the Eurocentric context. Most of the feminist literature unjustly neglects and ignores the ideology of masculinity but fruitfully examines the role of women in society. The feminist literature deals with the social-cultural dimension of maleness implicitly rather than explicitly. This is a departure point in this study since it seeks to explore masculinity as an equally important and problematic area of study which has been taken for granted in the feminist literature. Besides, the literature on femininity lacks empirical data for this study which is historicized in an Afro-centric setting in Chuka.

Most of the literature on gender reveals that the construction of femininity and masculinity in western culture begins early in life. This is with regard to basic issues such as the colour of the children's clothing, with pink going for girls, and blue being the preferred colour for boys. The nature of toys (such as dolls for girls and cars for boys), reinforce the masculine and feminine identities of children in future (Kohlberg 1966). The way people interact with children further solidifies the child's gender identity (Rice 1999:147). Thus, if a boy falls down, they are warned that boys don't cry while little girls are nurtured to belief that they should not get dirty while playing.

In the West, girls develop femininity and boys' masculinity by being exposed to scores of influences ranging from parents, the television and schools. Children are encouraged to accept the appropriate gender identity, being rewarded for 'normal' behavior and punished, criticized and pressurized to comply with it. At this point of 'normalizing' masculinities and femininities, the oppression and domination of one gender over the other begins. The society constantly constructs attributes of femininity and masculinity that appear normal and natural to each gender. This study seeks to explore how Chuka boys develop masculinity through successful participation in circumcision rituals rather than through the televisions, parents or schools.

It is important at this point to review the attributes of a real man in the Western literature in order to shed light on our understanding of the attributes of a real man in Chuka. Oslon et al (2000:238) and Brannon (1976) describe a real man in Western culture as a big wheel, successful, one with status and to be looked up to. This means, achieving wealth or fame or exhibiting symbols of success in the West is manly. Besides, a man is expected to be a sturdy rock, tough, confident and self-reliant, unemotional and one who never reveals his tenderness or weaknesses. Thus, 'big boys don't cry, they make others cry,' seems to be the overriding message to prove that one is manly. Most of the European parameters for masculinity are that real men should be aggressive, dominant, strong, forceful, and self-confident, rugged, virile, instrumental, logical, ambitious,

unemotional, direct, independent, courageous, adventurous, and to have a predisposition for mathematics and the sciences.

Lombard (2003:10) gives the qualities of manhood in New England as having rational control of emotions, virility for fatherhood, providing for the family, owning property as well as having financial autonomy. Messner (1993) has identified two contemporary forms of masculinity in the United States of America (U.S.A). On one hand is the 'new man', who is heavily involved in parenting and is emotionally expressive while on the other hand is the 'traditional man', who is inexpressive and hyper masculine. This classification of masculinity in U.S.A. is based on the parameters of dress, patterns of consumption, sexual orientation, vigor, speech, discourse, work, fatherhood and men's relations with women (Nye 2005).

Other western studies on masculinity equate manhood with being strong, successful, reliable, and in control (Kimmel 1994). Kimmel gives a hegemonic definition of manhood as a "Man in power, a man with power and a man of power" (Ibid: 124). He concludes by showing that 'the chief test of a man is not being like a woman'. In other words, manhood is the anti-thesis of womanhood. Theoretically, the western literature posits the dominant masculinity as fixed and one that every man aspires to achieve in the western context. On the contrary, this study reveals that the hegemonic masculinities in Chuka are not only contestable but also change over time. This western literature sheds

light to our understanding of circumcised men in Chuka as ‘men in power, with power and of power’.

Besides, the western literature has established connections between men, private and public power, ushering in new hierarchies of hegemonic masculinity of the ‘new man’ (Brod 1987, Connell 1995, Hearn et al 1990, Kaufman 1987, Kimmel 1987, 1994, Seidler 1991). The ‘new man’, in these studies is a model generated in the well-resourced social context of the developed world which cannot suit studies of men in poorly resourced social contexts in Africa. The ‘new man’ in western literature differs from the African man who is exposed to varying cultural experiences during the circumcision rituals. This study interrogates how a ‘new man’ is constructed in Chuka through circumcision rather than through acquisition of western education or salaried employment as demonstrated in the developed world. This study has analyzed the versions of manhood in an African context and the contests between the traditional and emerging versions of manhood in the colonial and post-independent Chuka.

African models of masculinity have been sparsely studied and are described in (Uchendu 2008, Morell 1998, 2001, 2007, Lindsay et al 2003, Dunbar et al 1994, Reid et al 2004, Luyt et al 2001). These studies describe masculinities across African cultures and are an important starting point for our interest in Chuka masculinity. The studies stress measures of manhood in Africa as being responsible, protecting the family, providing

for them, wisdom signified by seniority in age and ability to foster harmony. Illife (1995:94) describes a real man in Africa as a 'big man', one who has many wives, children especially sons, has resources and is powerful.

These studies show that the concept of an ideal masculinity is as different as the diverse cultures in Africa. This study is justified since none of the African studies is specific to the construction of the Chuka masculinity. Besides, developments of men's studies in Africa are still at an incipient stage compared to studies in Australia, parts of Europe, and North America (Ratele 2008). This raises the need to study the African man more critically because Africa is an important site for gender studies as posited by (Amadiume 1987, Matroy 1994, Oyewumi 1997, Achebe 2000).

There are few studies of masculinities that shed light on the nature of masculinity in pre-colonial Kenya. Well-developed literature exists which shows how colonially constructed masculinities articulated with indigenous expressions of masculinity (Lindsay et al 2003, McKittrick 2003, Cooper 1940). The transformation of indigenous masculinities in colonial times is a prevalent theme in this literature, which sheds light to this study on how the colonial rule altered the circumcision practices and the consequent masculinities. Most of this literature seems to suggest that the indigenous masculinities simply gave way to the foreign masculinities. This study presents a divergent view and

interrogates how the ritually circumcised man in Chuka navigated and contested with the foreign ideals of masculinity during the colonial period.

More literature on imperial masculinity in Africa focuses on the use of force and the glory of combat led by the British men as discussed by White (2003). White shows that the establishment of an all-male imperial army promoted ethos of restorative masculinity, which led to a political culture of masculine prowess and militarism that was bound up with gender-based violence (Mama, 2007). This masculinity was constructed on the basis of weapon-centered ideology rather than through circumcision rituals as interrogated in this study.

The literature by White and Mama helps us to examine how colonial institutions such as heavily bureaucratic governments, schools, armies and hospitals transformed existing expressions of masculinity in Africa (Morell 1998) and apply it to this Chuka study. Colonial institutions such as the armies shaped the way men and women thought about and expected of a man. This study demonstrates that colonialism did not totally collapse the traditional Chuka understanding of ideal masculinity but rather provided alternative masculinities which were also contested by some community members.

Western education was a powerful site where the traditional ideology on the construction of African masculinities was greatly transformed. Achebe (1959)

demonstrates this by describing an African hero named Okonkwo who tragically killed himself for being excluded from the new colonial structures of authority and power. Contrary to tradition the marginalized but educated men such as Nwoye were elevated to a hegemonic status. This example attests to the fact that colonial education profoundly affected male status and opportunities in Africa by shifting hegemony from senior elders while bestowing power to younger African elites. This discourse is useful in chapter four of this study which examines how colonialism transferred the hegemony of the circumcised males in the 'gaaru' (barracks) to the Chuka elites.

Studies of colonial wage labour and work are useful to this study since they reflect on the transformations and the nature of gender relations in Africa. Wage labour for instance, transformed men into 'boys' which in colonial times refers to the servant status of a grownup African man. Mwaniki (2004), records that among the first people to be jailed in colonial Chuka was a man named Gatungwa, for tearing a letter which a 'boy', (denoting a servant to the colonial masters) was delivering from Embu to Chuka. In other circumstances, the title 'boy' has been used as a device of inclusion as elaborated by Onselen (1992), in his study of paternalism in South Western Transvaal. Here, the white farmers proudly spoke of 'my boys', to refer to their laborers'. However, in many pre-colonial African societies, the title 'boy' was used offensively to capture a refusal to acknowledge the possibility of growth or achievement of manhood (Morell 1998, Branford 1980, Gqola 2007). This study is a valuable investigation on the ideologies and

gendered behaviour of ‘man’ and ‘boy’ in colonial Chuka in relation to the achievement of manhood and the appropriate gender identity.

Some of the gender studies in colonial Kenya show how manhood and masculinities have been transformed (Cooper 1983, Kitching 1980, Van 1975, Stichter 1982). Manhood here refers to the state of being an adult male while masculinity means the qualities or attributes appropriate to the adult male such as physical strength and courage. Other gender studies in colonial Kenya shed light on transformations of womanhood and femininity and focus on the relationship between work and women during the colonial period (Strobel 1979, White 1990, Kanogo 2005). Most of the colonial feminist literature focus on women and deal with social-cultural dimensions of maleness more implicitly rather than empirically. For instance, White (1990) elaborates how the Mau Mau<sup>2</sup> movement sparked new debates on manhood as male gender was constructed and maintained as being superior to the female gender. This study is important to the Chuka discourse as it sheds some light on the understanding of the specific effects of Mau Mau on the ‘Chuka masculinity’.

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<sup>2</sup> Mau Mau Uprising (also known as the Mau Mau Revolt/Mau Mau Rebellion) was a military conflict that took place in Kenya between 1952 and 1960. It involved a Kikuyu-Embu- Meru dominated anti-colonial military aggression against elements of the British army, its auxiliaries and the anti-Mau Mau natives/British loyalists. Its key cause was a long buildup of resentment caused primarily by land appropriation, and the colonial masters’ ignorance towards the natives’ grievances against economic exploitation (Clough 1998, Wasserman 2008).

Elsewhere, a number of authors (Hodgson 1999, Kabaji 2008, Njoya 2008, Ole Kulet 1972, Robertson 1997, Khanakwa 2011, Kisianga'ni 2004, 2011,) raise critical issues on masculinities such as the historical processes of gender construction, sexuality, order and rank in the home and patriarchy in the African context. They provide interesting reading on the roots of masculinity through circumcision, education, marriage, bull-fighting, cattle raids and gender decolonization. The authors have identified customary standards of ethnic masculinities such as bravery and have also contextualized African men's lives within the historical processes. These studies show that there are similarities as well as differences on the specific construction of masculinities African societies.

To illustrate this point is Egara Kabaji's study on the construction of masculinity among the Luhya of Western Kenya (Kabaji 2008). He demonstrates that the bull-fighting contests are central to the generation and dissemination of masculine values among the Luhya. Victory in the contests is the lens against which the hegemonic masculinities define other masculine styles as inadequate and inferior. On the contrary, the Chuka defined hegemonic masculinities through numerous circumcision rituals such as victory in 'gaaru' (barracks) battles rather than through bullfighting contests like the Luhya. Chuka men aspired to score highest in the performance of these rituals to avoid being rated as inferior men.

Other researchers, works and programmes on masculinities in parts of Africa focus on what they have called a 'crisis of masculinities' (Barkar 2006, Njoya 2008, Odhiambo

2009, Morell 1998). These studies associate gender identity crisis to hegemonic masculinities or what Njoya (2008: xix) refers to as ‘flawed masculinities and suicidal manhood’. Murunga (2010) has described this flawed masculinity as ‘one that teaches young girls to become ‘things’, and young men to become ‘people’, whereby ‘things’ are owned by ‘people’. Such reviews make this study a worthy course in order to interrogate the socialization process through circumcision rituals and whether they may have led to flawed masculinities in Chuka.

Current studies on masculinity in Africa demonstrate that the socially recognized version of manhood is facing a crisis due to limited gender-based research. This suggests that there is need to research on the social construction of masculinity in order to unravel the challenges facing young boys as they strive to become men. An in-depth analysis of how boys became men through circumcision in Chuka exposes some of these challenges. Following the social-economic changes such as formal schooling, the Christian church, urbanization, employment and globalization in Africa, the masculinity crisis has assumed alarming proportions. This calls for an urgent research on the construction of African gender that is ‘decolonized’ and relevant to the African condition as advised by Kisianga’ni (2004). This Chuka study presents a decolonized gender research and explores the effects of the socio-economic and political transformations on the circumcision rituals and the ensuing masculinities.

To study man in the Sub-Saharan Africa, one is compelled to study structures and institutions such as initiation which impart manhood attributes to the young men. Traditionally, many Bantu societies celebrated passage into manhood with initiation rituals as the second rite in life (Mbiti 1991). As confirmed in many circumcising cultures in Africa, the uncircumcised is not a 'man' until he complies with this cultural requirement (Hastings 1971, Ole-Kulet 1972, Khanakwa 2011, Wagner 1949, *Saturday Standard* Feb24; 2007:16, Mbiti 1992). The rite is so important in the lives of men and consequently, the uncircumcised man is seen as "weak, nothing, cursed, divided and exiled, goes around alone and can get no woman" (Hastings 1971). He is excluded from society and even women refuse to have sexual intercourse with him. In fact, failure to get circumcised is a good ground for divorce in some African communities.

The significance of circumcision as a rite of passage is reflected in many African literary texts such as *'The River Between'* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in which he articulates the centrality of the rite in the lives of young Kikuyu boys, as depicted by the character named Waiyaki (wa Thiong'o 1965:45). In circumcising societies, being 'Uncircumcised' is an abomination and a disparaging term 'kibici' is used to describe the uncircumcised in Chuka. In other societies such as the Maasai, inheritance is conditional to circumcision. Ole-Kulet (1972:15) shows that there is no property for an uncircumcised Maasai man since he remains a child no matter how big he gets. Among the Meru, the rite is so important that the date when one was 'cut' (circumcised) is a

vital detail in his eulogy' (*Saturday Standard* Feb 2007:16). Such literature broadens our understanding of the significance of circumcision to men and helps us to investigate the place of 'kibici' (uncircumcised) in Chuka.

Studies on circumcision also show that the operation creates a tense moment as the initiates are not expected to cry or show any sign of fear or reaction to the injury. Shouting out in pain during circumcision can prevent a boy from being accepted as a man (Wanyonyi 1992, Daniels 1970, Wagner 1949, Merritt 1976, Mwaniki 2004, Nyaga 1997). Women participate in socializing the boys into 'men warriors' by ensuring that their boys do not cry during the actual operation as posited by Mutunga (2009). This means that women activists should pay more attention to circumcision rites which according to Mutunga (Ibid) gives men power over women.

Barker (2006) quotes a section of Nelson Mandela's autobiography in which he describes the circumcision ritual the former South African president went through and how Mandela thought he was not quite a man because, he had hesitated for too many seconds before yelling out, "I am a Man". In contrast, "real men" say it immediately without gasping in pain. Most African studies on circumcision show how initiation is a transition from childhood to manhood (Mbiti 1992, Khanakwa 2011, Khanakwa 2011, Wagner 1949, Wanyonyi 1992), but do not follow up to shed light on the kind of

masculinities that grow out of circumcision. It is this additional element that this study on the social construction of Chuka masculinity attempts to explore.

Some of the studies also show that a boy is never considered a man if circumcised under anesthesia and mocking of hospital circumcision is common in much of Kenya (Ole-Kulet 1972, Khanakwa 2011, Wanyonyi 1992). Members of the circumcising communities, fully aware of the health risks associated with this practice, view any deaths or injuries occurring during the ritual as a way of isolating those boys who were not fit to play the role of men in society. To compound this 'natural selection' technique is the belief that if the initiate suffers medical complications during the 'cut', he has brought it upon himself through some form of wrongdoing and is therefore being punished (Khanakwa 2011:90) . It was therefore worth finding out in this study the 'natural selection' technique that the Chuka employed and how 'real men' portrayed their bravery during circumcision.

There is a set of literature on circumcision and manhood among the Chuka, though most of it is anthropological and describes their social-cultural, economic and political ways of life (Orde 1925, Mwaniki 1982, 1974, 2004, Nyaga 1997). The Chuka have some distinct features that set them apart from the other Meru groups. These include their dialect and their practice of circumcision (Mwaniki 2004). They should therefore not be

abandoned as incomprehensible whereas there is so much bulk of oral traditions which can be carefully analyzed to reconstruct her past rich cultural heritage.

Insightful as these studies may be, none examines the role of circumcision in creating and sustaining masculinities in Chuka. This study shows how patriarchal practices of male dominance are reinforced during the circumcision rituals. It seeks to address how this rite gives men an identity and the ability to renegotiate their manhood. Furthermore, the study analyzes how socially constructed masculinities have been historically shifting since the late 19<sup>th</sup> C in Chuka.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

It should be noted that the most important aspect in men's lives is not that biologically they are males, but rather that they become 'men'. Apart from their male anatomy, boys are not born socially male; they become 'men' through socialization by the society. While this fact is acknowledged and extensively studied in relation to the social construction of gender, gender is often treated as a female concern. This study shifts the focus from women to men and to circumcision. Consequently, circumcision is treated as an important rite of passage that inculcates into men certain values, expectations and responsibilities of manhood.

The study is an analysis of circumcision in this context evaluating the uncertainties, vulnerabilities and anxieties that males experience as they strive to become "real men"

through circumcision. It is an assessment of historical shifts of masculinities among the Chuka from the early 20<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It explores the dilemmas and the understanding of ideal male adulthood while examining the positive and the negative implications of this ‘Chuka masculinity’ as an outcome of initiation.

It historicizes how circumcision rituals and teachings give order, structure and meaning to men’s lives. It also investigates the explanations of these ritual activities to society. While identifying masculine stereotypes of the past, the study addresses masculine traits emanating from the rite of circumcision. Besides, it examines the behavior that is punished and investigates how young boys complied with or deviated from this societal demand that circumcision was a compulsory rite for the Chuka men.

The study interrogates the various ways in which the Chuka masculinity is shaped or distorted by social, political and economic changes. It assesses how changes such as colonialism, evangelization of Christian values, urbanization, education, social mobility and employment have rendered circumcision peripheral to the construction of an ideal masculinity in Chuka.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

This study is informed by the following questions;

- (i) What are the origins and the social-economic organization of the pre-colonial Chuka?

- (ii) What are the main features of the Chuka Circumcision rite up to 1906?
- (iii) In what ways was the Chuka circumcision rite transformed during the colonial period?
- (iv) How was the Chuka circumcision rite transformed during the post-independence era?

### **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

The study aims at achieving the following objectives;

- (i) Describe the origins, socio-political and economic organization of the Chuka.
- (ii) Identify main features of the Chuka circumcision rite up to 1906.
- (iii) Assess the transformation of the Chuka circumcision rite during the colonial era.
- (iv) Analyze the changing phases of the rite of circumcision in the post-independent Chuka.

### **1.6 Research Premises**

This study is based on four premises. It proposes that:

- (i) The social, political and economic organization of the Chuka significantly influenced their circumcision rituals.
- (ii) The circumcision candidates in Chuka went through elaborate circumcision rituals in the pre-colonial period.
- (iii) The rite of circumcision was of great value and importance to individual men as well as to the society in general.

(iv) The traditional circumcision rite in Chuka underwent fundamental changes in the colonial and post-independence eras, creating new versions of manhood.

### **1.7 Justification and Significance of the Study**

This study has contributed to the understanding of men as an engendered category. While acknowledging that gender is socially constructed, many gender studies often end up focusing on women, without similar treatment of men as gendered beings. The study has taken into account the masculinities that come into existence in specific circumstances through the rite of circumcision in Chuka. Cultures continue to socialize boys into men through dangerous and risky means such as, acts of provoking ferocious beasts into rage and killing them in order to prove their readiness to become men. In the process, some boys may get killed by the vicious beasts causing emotional suffering to their mothers and relatives. This too applies to Chuka whereby initiates are exposed to various dangers as they strive to become 'men'.

As young children grow, they internalize the standards and rules of being a 'boy' or a 'girl'. They work hard to develop an ideal gender that is socially imposed, since society does not tolerate any variations from it. The boy is brought up believing that he has to behave 'manly' all the time, which means enduring pain without blinking an eye, disassociating from women and feminine roles such as sitting in the cooking place,

helping in cooking, laughing with women, not fetching water from the river and refraining from any other duties considered women's work.

This study has enabled us to understand how a 'man' is socially constructed through circumcision in Chuka. Understanding such a construction is indispensable if we wish to transform the nature of relationships between men and women, and among men. There is also need to initiate a gender renaissance and build a new identity of a man and woman, free from western domination and control. Besides, gender studies should offer a critical platform for confronting the deteriorating social, political and economic condition in Africa (Kisiang'ani, 2004). This study contributes to this critical need of addressing issues of masculinity and endeavors to contribute to a more peaceful world order. The study increases our understanding of how young men individually and collectively negotiate relationships within their male friendship groups.

The findings of this study have unmasked hegemonic masculinity in Chuka and its influence on the lives of men. Further, the study has enriched our interrogation of gender inequalities by showing that male superiority is not a divinely ordained reality but a changeable construction. Masculinity has been studied as a form of gender to rescue manhood from its naturalized stereotypes. In so doing, the ills that have been committed through the assumption that the male is superior and the female inferior can adequately be addressed. The challenge of Gender- Based- Violence (GBV) cases that go

unreported due to cultural inhibitions can find a good home in this study. Thus the goal of Women's Liberation Movements can best be pursued by understanding men, and conducting studies on masculinity.

The results of this research justify the need for programs which focus on masculinities that are less aggressive, violent and of less exaggerated performances of power over others. It shows that "real men" who do not dominate, oppress, discriminate or exploit others can be constructed through circumcision. The choice of the Chuka community by the researcher was based on her familiarity with the region, which made it easy to create a working rapport with the informants during the actual research. This enabled this research to fit within the timeline of the study and to be cost-effective while adducing authentic results.

### **1.8 Scope, Limitation and Delimitation**

The study covers the Chuka people who are a sub-ethnic group of the Ameru, one of the highland Eastern Bantu in Kenya. The Chuka share common oral traditions with the other Ameru sub-groups namely Igoji, Miutini, Imenti, Tigania, Muthambi, Mwimbi Tharaka and Igembe. Between 1912 -1932 the Chuka were administered from Embu and in 1933 they were reverted back to Meru as part of Southern Meru together with Muthambi and Mwimbi (KNA, DC/EBU/1/3/1, 1914:5, KNA, DC/EBU/1/3/2, 1934:3). However, the Chuka are very distinct from the other sub-groups of the Ameru (Middleton and Kershaw 1972, Orde 1925) and should be studied as an autonomous cultural group.

This study covers a historical period beginning from 1906 AD to 2000 A.D. The choice of 1906 A.D. marks the year of actual Chuka conquest by the British imperialists and as such enhances our understanding of circumcision rituals before they were influenced by colonization. Circumcision was a highly contested terrain in the colonial and the early post- independent Chuka. Various historical developments during this period shaped the way Chuka men and women argued and thought about circumcision. This study ends at 2000 A.D., which marks the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> C and gives us an appropriate period to comprehensively study the transformations that have occurred on the rite of circumcision. The study proceeds on a ten-year interval, in order to be able to capture the change in circumcision rituals over time and space. This is based on the assumption that each age group conformed to the economic and social possibilities of its time and refashioned the circumcision rituals to suit their specific historical context.

Being female, the researcher acknowledges that male chauvinism, which is highly prevalent in Chuka, may have influenced the findings with regard to male circumcision. Majority of the males take it as a taboo to discuss matters of circumcision in public and more so to a female researcher. This called for the use of three excellent, qualified and well directed male assistants who contacted informants beforehand, yielding balanced and authentic results. The research assistants collected data from the some of the reluctant informants through proxies of their close relatives. Since the subject of the research involves male genitals which the Chuka men hardly discuss freely and publicly,

high levels of confidentiality were maintained for all the sensitive data during the research.

Though the Chuka trace their history back to 300 years, existing written documents cover only the past ninety years. These documents deal exclusively with problems encountered by various Europeans (English, Scottish, Italian, Dutch, and Irish) in imposing colonial rule. Fadiman (1994:5) observes that most of these documents present the Africans as fringes of a European play. In them, Africans appear in supporting roles as carriers, servants, unpaid laborers or as loyal subordinates (converted Christians, tribal police) or as cosmic relief (alcoholics, witchdoctors). Others present the Africans as non-cooperators and Mau Mau rebels, fleeing British imperial justice into the safety of the forests. Besides, these documents mention the Chuka as fringes of the Ameru and as such give little information on Chuka traditions or generalize the Chuka as Ameru (Orde 1925). With this high level of uncertainty and prejudice in the written documents, the re-construction of circumcision practices in the pre-colonial period relied heavily on oral sources.

Most of these oral sources presented a problem of periodization of events, which called for references to the scanty written sources to determine the relative dates of events. Some of the informants' faint memories prolonged the time taken to extract all the relevant information from them, causing further delays on schedule of the work. Mzee

Nkari Magite who had been mentioned severally by other oral sources to have been among the earliest 'Iroge' (men who were circumcised in hospital) died on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2011, before his scheduled interview. His death was sad and regrettable and brought to the realization the urgent need to hasten the oral reconstruction of the history of our societies, as the oral sources are becoming extinct.

Gaining the confidence of the respondents was not always easy. Some men who had been circumcised in the 'kagauni' (traditionally / ritualized circumcision) hesitated to disclose the details of their rituals. At times, the interviewer encouraged reluctant respondents by declaring his own traditional circumcision status, or by signaling it secretly using hand gestures. Men who had been medically circumcised too did not always admit it readily for fear of being ridiculed and branded 'kiroge' (bewitched) by the traditionalists. A few respondents expected some remuneration in exchange for their information but they dropped the idea of asking for the payment once the objectives of the study were made known to them.

### **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

Until very recently studies theorizing on masculinities and femininities were conducted primarily within the realm of psychoanalysis which is centered on Sigmund Freud's

formulation of the Oedipus Complex<sup>3</sup> (Arlow 2005). Freud demonstrated that adult sexuality is an end product of the complex process of development based on a child's relations to the parents. Freud demonstrated that mental life functions on both the conscious and unconscious levels of the individual and childhood events have powerful psychological influence throughout an individual's life. His ideas focused on biological determinisms and oppositions in early life as determinants on the development of masculinity or femininity. He thus conceptualized that a person's anatomy influenced one's destiny.

Post-Freudian theorists such as Erik Erikson, Ralph Greenson, Robert Stoller and D.W Winnicott applied Freud's ideas to show that manhood is a reflection of male and female natures, based on their anatomy and hormonal composition (Gilmore 1990). These theorists studied the concept of identity in little boys and made a conclusion that gender identity is non-contradictory and unitary in the first years of one's life. These theorists understood manhood strictly from a biological point of view.

Freud's psychoanalytic idea on the development of sexuality was advanced in Adler's concept of Masculine Protest (Adler 1992). Adler established that males who doubt their

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<sup>3</sup> Oedipal period is between age's four to six, when a boy-child develops an emotional attachment to the mother and acts as a rival to the father. For girls it is called the Electra Complex when the girls get attracted to their fathers and become antagonistic to their mothers. Freud (1931:229) describes these complexes as 'the fateful combination of love for one parent and simultaneous hatred for the other as a rival'

sexual role exaggerate the traits which they consider masculine in order to dominate women. He theorized that the force behind human motivation was the sense of inferiority and the desire to overcome it through domination and exercising power over others. Adler's sketch of 'psychology of power' in the masculine protest was an abstract idea but it could be used to explain why some men strive for superiority over women and other men through acts of bullying and tyranny.

Ideas of domination in the Masculine Protest were advanced in Jung's Archetypal Theory (Jung 1982). Jung explained that the development of masculinity equals repression of femininity and vice versa. Jung demonstrated that the very masculine men have carefully guarded their soft, emotional and feminine life just as a woman considers it unbecoming to be 'mannish' (Jung 1953:187). Jung developed universal principles of masculinity and femininity as 'animus' and 'anima' which he described as irreducible cores of sexual identity. His idea on archetypes was a primitive mode of thought that personified natural processes of manhood and womanhood in understanding the development of masculinity and femininity respectively.

The Critical debates triggered by Melaine Klein of the English school employed the psychoanalytic ideas on the construction of masculinities and femininities (Klein 1928). Klein characterized mental attitudes into depressive (those which are retained within the individual) and paranoid (those which are projected towards the external world), as ways that people use in dealing with anxiety. Further, Karen Horney (1932) studied character

and situation neurosis as the forces against anxiety. Melaine and Karen's therapy on anxiety could be used to study the fundamental connection of the making of masculinity and the subsequent sub-ordination of femininity. This sub-ordination could be a projection or a neurotic reaction of the males towards females, as they struggle to overcome their anxiety. Such ideas serve to normalize the sub-ordination of women to the demands of social reality rather than question the terms on which masculinity is constructed.

The Frankfurt School theorists of the 1920's such as Max Horkheimer (1936), Theodor Adorno and Jurgen Habermas (1950), drew too from psychoanalytic and Marxist ideas to offer a historical typology of masculinities. They departed from Marxism by locating the sources of domination in the realms of culture and belief systems (ideology), rather than basing it solely on the economic structure of the society. They investigated the impulse towards domination and sources of obedience to authority based on cultural practices. They observed the traits of the fathers' dominance over the family, sexual-emotional repression of women as well as aggression over the females as patterns of conformity to authority. This ideology could help to unravel how circumcision promotes inequality between men and women but may not help us to understand why some circumcised men have hegemony over other circumcised men.

The inequality of males and females was further elaborated by the Radical and Feminist Psychoanalytic theorists such as Judith Lober, Sundra Bartky and Judith Butler (Lober

1986) who added their intellectual voice on psychoanalysis ideas on sexuality. They focused on the ways in which women's perceptions were determined by the particular nature of the female body and the female roles in reproduction. They theorized that masculinity was rooted in patriarchy which divided rights, privileges and power primarily on gender lines. These radical feminists held that masculinity was the drive for domination, power and conquest of women through universalized male experiences. The feminists held the view that women and men ought to be socially interchangeable and opposed the use of gender as the organizing principle of the society. Their ideas help in understanding how men enjoy their patriarchal dividend but their theory fails to conceptualize why the dividend is amassed unequally among all males.

The psychoanalytic and sexuality theories discussed above are useful lines of thought that are based on dualisms (Barker 1966, Jung 1982), biological determinisms, oppositions and sexual universals (Baca 1982, Hooks 1984). The theories view manhood as a polar reflection of female and that the nature of the males is based on their anatomy and hormonal composition. Deployed in detail, the theories may enrich our understanding of social dynamics of men's gender and masculinity. However, to treat any of the above hypotheses as a priori framework for a comprehensive study of masculinity would be misuse of psychoanalysis which on its own is inadequate. Further, the Psychoanalytic theories are definitely out of fashion because they often treat gender as fixed constructions and give limited attention to changing sex roles. Besides, male-

female concepts are not as simple as a set of opposite traits as has been uncritically predicated by the Psychoanalysts in their 'Sex-Role' theories (Brannon, 1976). On the contrary, being male or female is a reflection of a history and a context, which implies that manhood and womanhood are mutable categories that can only be theorized as such.

Using the theory of hegemony, the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' has been coined and used in this study on the social construction of masculinity in Chuka through circumcision. The concept is more relevant than the Sex Role theories in examining the dynamics within and between gender categories in this study. Hegemony is a sociological term which describes the process that keeps a dominant group in power, by ensuring that subordinate groups support or accept the way things are through their 'spontaneous consent' (Strinati 1995, Donaldson,1993). Hegemony is about winning and holding to power, which leads to formation and destruction of social groups in the process. Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that implies enforcing certain cultural standards of real manhood at a particular time in history. It involves the persuasion of the greater population through organized social institutions in ways that appear natural, ordinary and normal. This concept is best placed in this study of circumcision as a 'natural' institution that makes some circumcised men to dominate other men and women in Chuka.

Hegemony is a pivotal concept in Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1933), which is used to refer to a process of indirect control with some nations holding power and

influence that build or destroy other social groups (Strinati 1995, Gramsci 1971). The purpose of hegemonic control is to exploit, dominate and access power in ways that appear natural and normal without coercion on sub-ordinate groups. The concept of hegemony enables us to understand why some circumcised men naturally dominate others in Chuka.

Applied to this study, the concept of Hegemonic masculinity refers to a form of masculinity which without much coercion, controls other men and women through cultural institutions and persuasion. It is therefore that form of masculinity that is ascendant and dominant over the uncircumcised men and women who consider the circumcised men as invincible role models. The concept of hegemonic masculinity was first proposed in reports from a field study of social inequality in the making of masculinities in Australia (Kessler et al 1982). Other basic sources of this concept were feminist theories on patriarchy, who laid the groundwork for questioning the universal categories of men (Goodie 1982, Snodgrass 1977, Baca 1982, Hooks 1984, Angela 1983), and the New Left school (Tolson 1977).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was advanced by Robert Connell, an Australian historian who has considerably influenced recent thinking about men, gender and social hierarchy. It is a powerful concept that has been employed for over twenty five years in men's studies. According to Connell (1985, 1987), the Sex-Role theories which had been used in gender studies for a long time were inadequate in accounting for issues of

power in society since they neglect historical change and have a homogenizing effect on the gender concepts.

Connell who was part of a group of scholars referred to as the 'New Sociology of Men' (Morell 1998) were extremely influential in the masculinity studies in the 1980s. They established that gender identities were socially constructed and acknowledged the existence of dominant and marginalized forms of masculinity in society. These scholars studied masculinity and femininity through the filters of the structures of power, the division of labour and the social organization of sexuality. They came up with the four categories of masculinities as dominant, complicit, submissive and oppositional/protest. It was out of the four categories that Connell (2005) developed the hegemonic masculinity which he described as the dominant masculinity that embodies the most honored way of being a man.

The successful application of the concept of hegemonic masculinity to a wide range of cultures suggests that in all human societies, there is some form of masculinity that emerges as dominant, in control, socially central and associated with power. Such masculinity draws heavily on patriarchy which is a system that supports male domination over women. Patriarchy embodies a pattern of practices that present the most current and honored way of being male and legitimizes the super-ordination of some men over other men and women. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is therefore a

powerful tool that helps us to assess masculinity as a historical process which is contested and negotiated within shifting social and historical contexts.

Hegemonic masculinity has also been employed by many scholars to study the subordination of women by men (Connell 2005, Carrigan et al 1985, Brod 1987, Cockburn 1983, Messner 2003, Chapman et al 1988, Donaldson 1993). These studies present hegemonic masculinity as a powerful concept that can be used in theorizing gender. Its usage in this study enables us to understand how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they legitimize and reproduce the social relations that generate their dominance. The application of hegemonic masculinity in this study allows us to question the category of man as monolithic and to recognize the hierarchy of masculinities following circumcision. It helps us to locate why relationships among men change within different historical, cultural, and social contexts.

Applied as a conceptual tool in this study, hegemonic masculinity helps us to understand the entrenched connections between masculinity and power, which is ascribed to the circumcised male. The concept is applied in this study to show how the circumcised Chuka men ('insiders') dominate the uncircumcised men and women as 'outsiders' and how within the 'insiders', some men have hegemony over other men. This is based on the premise that though all circumcised men enjoy 'patriarchal dividend', the dividend does not accrue to all men in the same manner or in an equal measure (Uchendu 2008:13). Those men who enjoy more patriarchal dividends dominate and control others

and produce cultural images of 'real men', hence creating a hegemonic masculinity which is the 'most honored or desired form of masculinity' (Connell 2005:77).

This concept further suggests that masculinity is dynamic and is liable to contestation and change due to social factors such as generation, race and class. It therefore facilitates the researcher to mount and sustain arguments for historical variations in the nature of masculinities in Chuka. The concept helps us to identify a multiplicity of masculinities or plurality of masculinities and their hierarchies within broader and shifting historical contexts. Using this concept of hegemonic masculinity, this study examines the shifting nature of masculinities as products of human actions and rituals during circumcision ceremonies.

Through the lenses of hegemonic masculinity, this study demonstrates why some men and women in Chuka uphold traditional circumcision as the only avenue of producing an ideal manhood, while others contest the traditional circumcision as primitive. The rite of circumcision is still very popular as the authentic means of constructing masculinity, though the rituals accompanying the rite have been dynamic and must be historicized. The concept of hegemonic masculinity in this study helps us to interrogate how a number of the masculinities co-existed in different historical contexts. It also helps us to cross-examine how a particular masculinity held sway over others, bestowing power and privileges on men who espoused and claimed it as their own.

This concept provides an understanding on how circumcision in Chuka contributes to the gender order and unequal distribution of power, wealth and privileges. Proponents of this concept claim that people who exhibit hegemonic masculinity in any given society define other masculine styles as inadequate or inferior (Connell 2005, Cornwall et al 1994). In the case of Chuka, circumcised men openly display clout over the uncircumcised men and women in order to maintain their hegemony particularly when they perceive a threat or challenge on their manhood. This justifies why the concept of hegemonic masculinity is a powerful concept that has been applied in this study of the Chuka masculinity.

Critiques of this concept of hegemonic masculinity posit that Connell tends to equate 'power' with domination and to locate power in the hands of exemplary men. This power is however not possessed by all or even most men, though they may benefit from it. This disavowal of power creates an automatic sense that someone else is doing masculine power while others are less directly involved in its articulation (Moller, 2007). In the process, Connell fails to show how this masculine power is named and located.

In seeing power only as domination, we run the risk of seeing how men subject themselves to subtle modalities of contemporary power and this suggests that men are always subjects of power. This weakness notwithstanding, the concept still stands as a powerful tool that can be used to trouble the entrenched connections between power and

masculinity. Since this study captures discrete, privileged and relatively small peer groups of Chuka men at given historical intervals of ten years, the concept of hegemonic masculinity can be used to analyze hierarchical masculinities of these men.

Another critique on the concept of hegemonic masculinity is that it tends to overlook the complexity of the phenomena of masculinity which it investigates. As a result of this, more mundane practices of masculinity and masculine power tend to go unnoticed. In its usage a researcher may lose sight of the specificity of men's practices (Jefferson 2002) because the concept lacks ways of appreciating the complex meanings which may be articulated through image or practice. Due to this shortcoming, this study has tried to create space in which many aspects of masculinity can be heard. The study has explored the plurality, complexity and contradictions of masculine experiences and feelings of circumcised men rather than locate them in their respective positions using a coherent pattern.

### **1.10 Research Methodology**

While due attention is paid to all methods that inform the historian's approach, it will be recalled that every discipline is defined by what it forbids its practitioners from doing (Jenkins 2003). Historians have, of necessity, to be selective in their methodology and as such, the framework developed in this study was guided primarily by the historian's approach which proceeded by giving due attention to the archive. It sought to

counterbalance archival narrative with a combination of primary and secondary sources of data relevant to the issue of Chuka masculinity.

In particular, due attention was given to the spoken/oral word which is described by a leading traditionalist Amadou Hampate Ba as ‘the sap of authenticity and the richest and fullest of all sources of history’ (UNESCO 1989; Vol 1: xvii). In designing this research, the sampling procedures, the sample size, and research instruments were all thought of in relation to how they assisted to elicit historically verifiable and relevant data.

### **1.11 Study Site**

The study was carried out among the Chuka who live in four divisions namely Mariani, Mugwe, Magumoni and Igambang’ombe, which are situated in Tharaka-Nithi County and Chuka–Igambang’ombe constituency. Though linguistically similar to the other Ameru groups, the Chuka have a different oral history and mythology (Lambert 1950).

They are located on the fertile eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya and are primarily agrarian. Chuka land goes up to the bamboo zone of Mt. Kenya forest (‘Mirangini’), to River Tungu towards Muthambi.

The border of Chuka with the Embu is Thuci River, while on the lower side they border the Tharaka. Their land is situated between latitudes  $00^{\circ} 03' 47''$  North and  $00^{\circ} 27' 28''$  South and between longitudes  $37^{\circ} 18' 24''$  East and  $28^{\circ} 19' 12''$  West. Meru-South district covers an area of about 734km and is within an altitude of 5,200 meters at the



### **1.12 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size**

The study adopted a purposive sampling procedure and interviewed men and women whom I had reason to believe were knowledgeable on the history and practice of circumcision. I used local contacts to identify the potential informants. I conducted in-depth interviews on a multiplicity of twelve men and women. They comprised of two retired civil servants, three elderly women who had been involved in circumcision rituals and were judged as forthcoming with relevant information for this study. The informants were also chosen on the basis of their status in Chuka society to include the Chairman of the clan elders, two local administrators, two medical practitioners and two religious leaders who were consulted and yielded relevant information for this study. The twelve were aged between 40-89 years a variation which enabled them to present competing and sometimes conflicting perceptions towards different forms of circumcision.

Another twenty two informants were chosen ranging from 30 years to 94 Years of age. Among them were, a retired army officer who had served in the imperial army (King's African Rifles), Mau Mau veterans, descendants of famous colonial chiefs and a 'mutani' (traditional circumciser). Besides several Chuka academicians and ordinary men and women shed light on the general circumcision practices. Questionnaires were administered to eighty people who provided details on the practice of the rituals of circumcision and the resulting masculinities.

### **1.13 Research Instruments**

Data was obtained using formal and informal interviews, questionnaires and field observations. Archival materials such as official records from the local administrators, health centers and hospitals, photographic collections, maps, census data, charts, life histories, film data, correspondences, annual reports, brochures, and minutes of meetings, work descriptions and budgets were reviewed. Original archival materials sourced from the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi were harnessed to give significant information on the circumcision trends in Chuka.

Being a historical study, a number of secondary sources such as published and unpublished documents, books, maps, charts, treaties, journals, magazines, articles, unpublished theses, seminar papers, periodicals and pamphlets were used. They were sourced from libraries in the universities like the University of Nairobi Moi Library, Kenyatta University Post-Modern Library, and the Kenya National Archives. Resourceful information was electronically sourced from the internet for this study.

### **1.14 Data Collection**

Data was collected partly through interviews and by means of questionnaires. The questionnaire was administered to eighty people aged between 30-55years. This age bracket includes the first generation to undergo hospital circumcision (referred to as 'iroge') and members belonging to the younger age groups. Snow balling and purposive

sampling were used to select twelve elderly men and women for regular and in depth interviews on the circumcision practices. Health workers from Chuka district hospital, Mpukoni, Kibugua and Mukuuni health centers were purposively interviewed to give information on hospital circumcision.

The primary information collected from the oral interviews was recorded and transcribed on the same day to retain its originality. The researcher and three assistants took detailed field notes to capture and highlight major points from the informants. A questionnaire (Appendix 3 of this thesis), was designed and used to elicit information from informants. The assistants translated the questions into Kiswahili or Kichuka for the informants who did not understand the English version. Probing and follow- up questions were used to verify feedback, solicit depth and obtain the required details. In order to capture full and exact quotations for analysis and reporting, information from field observations on habitual routines of masculine behaviour was video- recorded whenever possible for analysis.

### **1.15 Data Analysis**

The data was systematically organized and categorized thematically to facilitate analysis. The themes identified were the pre-circumcision rituals, the actual operation and the post-circumcision rituals during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Quantitative analysis was done using a code book in which data was converted

into numerical codes representing measurements of the independent variables such as the preparations for the operation, the operation, songs/ dances, naming and age set formation and roles of the circumcised men over the different historical periods.

This study acknowledges that each form of data source has its strengths and weaknesses and used them in an inter-disciplinary approach. The archival data for instance, gives a primary account to investigations and answers questions that would be difficult or impossible to study in any other way. For oral information whose custodians are the aged, precaution was taken to deliver historical truth based on the fidelity of the oral record handed down over the generations. This was done by interrogating the oral information with the information in the written sources.

Use of integrated sources of history such as the oral, written, linguistics and archaeology helped to avoid unreliable data and to check on the level of information bias and subjectivity. Thus, while sieving through data, weaknesses of both primary and secondary sources were born in mind, establishing their levels of reliability within the limits possible for a historian. Once all the data was analyzed, a conclusion was made to reaffirm whether the results of the study corresponded with the hypothesis. The conclusion also elaborated on how this study positively contributed to the field of knowledge on the construction of masculinity through the rite of circumcision.

### **1.16 Data Management and Ethical Considerations**

While collecting data the researcher informed respondents beforehand so that they could give their consent to participate. The researcher tried to minimize all harm or discomfort to the respondents, keeping their responses and behavior confidential. The interviewees were treated with respect bearing in mind that it was a privilege to peer into their personal experiences. The right to anonymity was maintained by avoiding disclosure of the real names of respondents where necessary. Privacy and copyright issues of archival and written documents was maintained by acknowledging any utilized work in the study. In data presentation the researcher avoided untrue, deceptive or doctored results. The findings of this research were shared to all interested parties without any discrimination.

### **1.17 Summary and Conclusion**

It was the objective of this research to investigate how circumcision was and has been used to socially construct a man in Chuka man from 1906-2000 A.D. The underlying theme of this study was to show that the rite of circumcision had a fundamental role in the social construction of role-based and existential gender identity of a man.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**ORIGINS, SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION OF THE**  
**CHUKA UP TO 1906.**

**2.0 Introduction**

This chapter highlights the migration history of the Chuka from Mbwa in 1300 A.D., to their present homeland on the eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya by 1730 A.D.<sup>4</sup>. The objective of this chapter is to describe the pre-colonial social, political and economic structures of the Chuka which specifically influenced the rite of circumcision. This chapter's aim is to present the background information on the Chuka people, hence furnish us with a deeper understanding of their circumcision practices. This is based on the assumption that the social construction of the Chuka masculinity was shaped by the socio-cultural, economic and political forces within which it was created and nurtured.

**2.1 The Origins and Migration of the Chuka**

Much of the available written and oral evidence suggests that the ancestral homeland of the Chuka, who were part of the Ameru, lay off the northern Kenya Coast, precisely on the northwestern edge of Manda Island, a place referred to as Mbwa. The Chuka are an offspring of the larger proto-Ameru, who broke off during their migrations and came to

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<sup>4</sup> According to Thomas (1992) and Fadiman (1994), the Chuka may have fragmented from the 'Nгаа' people, the proto-Ameru group that began migrations from the coast at Mbwa, on Manda Island, before arriving to their present homeland by 1700-1730AD.

be known as ‘Chabugi’ or ‘Irari’ (Nyaga 1997), also referred to as Ciambugi in Fadiman (1973) and confirmed from Cianguo (O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011). Evidence by H. E. Lambert, a notable linguist and former Commissioner of Meru district (in 1933–1935 and 1940–1941) supports this contention (Fadiman 2012: 23).

Lambert suggests that the name Mbwa or Mbwa is derived from the Swahili term ‘pwani’ (beach or shore). The linguistic difference between ‘pwani’ and ‘mbwa’ is that ‘pwani’ "has added the locative ending (-ni) while discarding the nasalization ("b") in favor of aspiration ("p"), whereas ‘mbwa’ having retained the "m" has kept the "b"; "n" becomes "m" before a labial. Lambert explains that the Swahili stem ‘pwa’ denotes not only "shore", but also a "place where the tide ebbs". This linguistic link between ‘pwani’ and ‘mbwa’ is evident from the oral sources who refer to “Mbwa’ as “Mbwani”, which they say is the possible origin of the Chuka (Cianguo O.I: 24<sup>th</sup> April; 2011, M’baini O.I:10<sup>th</sup> July; 2011).

Fadiman (2012:24) elaborates that Lamberts’ linguistic explanation given above could be used to try and identify the possible location of Mbwa. This he says is supported by examination of historical variants of the word ‘Mbwa’, ‘Mbwa’ and ‘Mbwa’. The oral traditions collected between 1930 and 1970 spell the Island of Chuka origin as ‘Mbwa.’ However, earlier oral traditions collected between 1917 and 1925 use the longer variant "Mbwa" and before 1917 the name ‘Mbwa’ was used in the place of

the short variant ‘Mbwa’. Using the three variants, Fadiman (Ibid) explains that in many Bantu languages, including those of the contemporary Meru region, intervocalic ‘r’ tends to disappear over time when surrounded by vowels within a syllable as in the case of ‘Mbwara’; the three letters run together, gradually evolving into a single short vowel, hence the name ‘Mbwa’. To Fadiman therefore, if ‘Mbwa’ in 1930s–1960s, was once ‘Mbwaa’ in the 1920s, it must have been expressed earlier as ‘Mbwara’.

This linguistic linkage of the proto-Ameru to Mbwa is made stronger by the existence of a specific region on the western side of Manda Island known as ‘Mbwara Matanga’. The name ‘Matanga’ in the Manda dialect means ‘sands’ and is used to refer to a type of sand containing iron ore. This meaning of ‘Matanga’ seems to mesh quite clearly with the Mbwa iron-working traditions. The Manda traditions have made frequent references to the existence of routine iron-working practices of making spear points, smelting and iron smiths, which suggests that the people of the island had easy access to the iron ore Fadiman (Ibid).

Geographical evidence partly supports Manda as the proto-Ameru point of origin based on the fact that two-thirds of Manda is surrounded by coral reefs. The most striking argument lies in the behaviour of the Island's tides which corresponds to the pattern described in the Mbwa traditions (Fadiman 2012: 25). To the North West of Mbwara Matanga lies a narrow channel known as ‘Mkanda’, which fills and empties twice daily,

due to tidal bore. When the channel is empty, it leaves a landscape of streaming mud and tidal pools. The behavior of the 'Mbwa' ocean tides is also described by Cianguo (O.I: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2011) and Gitari (2005) as, 'runci rukuthii kuria nyaki' ('water that goes to eat grass') and M'baini (O.I:10<sup>th</sup> July 2011) as 'ruuji rukuthii' ('water that goes').

Subsequent traditions of the proto-Ameru flight from the enslavement at Mbwa were probably facilitated by their knowledge of this ebb and the flow of its tides. They must have taken the advantage to leave Manda Island when the ocean waters had receded at this ebb. In his study of 'the concept of God in the traditional faith of the Ameru', Gitari (2005: 59) confirms a common belief by his informants that the proto-Ameru came from 'Mbwa', 'mwena jwa urio'(the right hand side) or side facing North Africa, which is probably the point known as 'Mbwara Matanga' on this Manda Island.

Proto- Ameru traditions also speak of the peoples of "Bua," "Nderi," and "Dzunda," as their neighbors who lived on an island near Mbwaa (Fadiman 1994: 23). Historical evidence shows that the three groups are part of the contemporary sections of Pokomo. The Pokomo oral traditions confirm that these three groups had some of their clans living on Lamu Island which was once called Bua and is located about one mile from Manda's western shore (Bunger 1970). The three groups may have been the proto-Ameru neighbours and is further evidence of Manda Island as their probable point of origin.

The proto-Ameru fled from Mbwa in the early 1700 due to persecutions from the ‘Nguo Ntune’/‘Nguruntune’ (red clothed or red legged people) of the East African coast (Hobley 1910, Gitari 2005, KNA; GP/309/Lam1934). The use of ‘Nguruntune’ has a derogatory implication of ‘red legs’, which refers to the skin color of these persecutors. The exact identity of the ‘Nguruntune’ who lived in Mbwa, the original homeland of the Proto-Ameru is not clear. They appeared in a large sailing vessel that landed on the mainland opposite the Island's western shore. The ship's crew then crossed the intervening waters on crude wooden rafts. The invaders are remembered as being tall and light-skinned non-Africans who were Europeans, Persians, or Arabs, commonly perceived as ‘red’ by Bantu-speaking people of the Island.

They were possibly the East African coastal Arab descendants from Middle East (Fadiman 1994: 48). These Arabs had formed numerous commercial communities along the Kenya-Somali coast. The ‘Nguo Ntune’ may have come merely to plunder, having been attracted by the occasional tusks that the Islanders brought to them for trade. The ‘Nguruntune / Nguo Ntune’ may have attacked ‘Mbwa’ around 1700 A.D. when the men of ‘Ntangi’ age set were warriors (Gitari 2005: 60). They wore single red cloths tied around their waists and shoulders, and another bound around their heads hence the name ‘Nguo Ntune’ for ‘red clothes’ (Ibid). They carried short swords of the scimitar type whose blade curved backward and only the outer edge was honed. This type of a sword is common among the Arabs, evidence which shows that the invaders were of Arab and

not European origin. These invaders also carried several guns and may have invaded 'Mbwa' in a single battle in which the use of the guns proved decisive or perhaps the Islanders did not resist them.

These 'red legged' people remained at Mbwa and forced the proto-Ameru to herd, fish, and cultivate for them. After a period of submission to their invaders, the proto-Ameru grew increasingly hostile, refusing to herd the flocks and till the fields as commanded. Angered by this defiance, the 'Nguo Ntuni' summoned the council of elders (Kiama) for judgment and set for them a series of unreasonable tasks as punishment for their disobedience. The 'Kiama' was a system of legal precedents among the 'Mbwa' community which was administered by elders' councils and governed according to traditions of the tribal ancestors.

The proto-Ameru were enslaved to perform impossible tasks such as making a shoe with hair on both sides, removing a fruit from a pit without the use of any sticks, killing all elders until their blood flowed like a flood, providing an eight sided cloth, getting a dog with horns and making a steer that could produce a 'Diatomite' (Nyaga 1997: 1, Bernadi 1989). In all these tasks, the Proto-Ameru prophet named Koome Njue, was able to provide convincing solutions to the 'Nguru Ntune'.

However this prophet was presented with the last but most difficult task of making a ladder that touched heaven and earth. Having no solution to this, Koome Njue

interpreted it to imply a long journey which sparked off their departure from 'Mbwa'. Such persecutions forced the proto-Ameru to flee from Mbwa on the Manda Island. The above traditions have it that Koome Njue led the proto-Ameru in the miraculous crossing of the ocean waters to their present homeland.

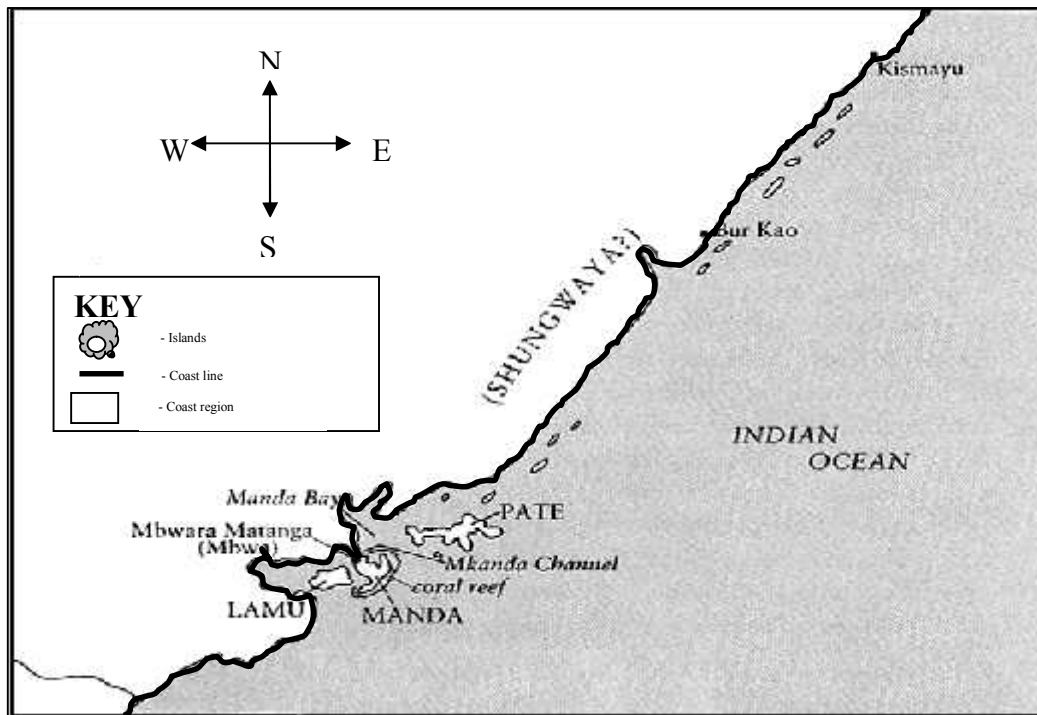


Figure 2.1: Map of Lamu Archipelago showing the location of Mbwa (Source; Fadiman; 1994:24). This figure shows the possible location of Mbwa at the East African Coast, which is believed to be the origin of the Chuka people.

Such an oral tradition of persecution, fulfillment of impossible tasks, and evasion by flight across a conveniently retreating water body is too similar to biblical themes of

migration and settlement to be accepted literally. The themes are frequently repeated within both Arabic and Hebrew literature (*Exodus: 12-15*) and may have been passed on to the African people with whom they had contacts with. It seems possible to assume therefore, that the proto-Ameru acquired the basic elements of their flight tradition through their interaction with an Arabized people at the time when they were enslaved.

The proto-Ameru traditions do not point out on attacks from the Galla/Oromo or the desiccation of farmlands as possible causes of their migration like other northeastern Bantu tribes who fled from the coast. However, natural calamities such as drought and famine cannot be ruled out as possible reasons for this migration since the ancient patterns of Bantu migrations were occasioned by unfavorable climatic conditions and environmental degradation (July 1992).

Another probable cause for the proto-Ameru flight from 'Mbwa' was the rise of other archipelago principalities such as the Pate Island (Fadiman 2012). The people of Pate may have usurped and imposed power over the Manda Islanders, forcing the Ameru to flee from this pressure. All in all, the traumatic shock of conquest, the enslavement traditions, together with the introduction of an ideology glorifying persecution, prophecy, and flight seem to have been the catalysts that set some of the proto-Ameru people on their way from 'Mbwa'.

Following the blessing of their prophet Koome Njue, the proto-Ameru left Mbwa in three bands. These were, the black cluster called 'Njiru' which means darkness, together

with the moonlight group called 'Nyaga' which means light in the midst of darkness, which departed in the night. Others were the two daylight groups known as the white cluster or 'Njeru' and the red band known as 'Ntune' for dawn. The different departure times for each band ensured that if one clan did not make it in their migration or were pursued by their enslavers, the other bands would possibly survive.

Steadily moving westward /inland from 'Mbwa', the migrants spent about four seasons along the Tana River's southern bank (Gitari 2005:60). They experienced food shortages and supplemented their diet by fishing, using the traditional wooden hooks. They drew water from seasonal swamps that dried up wholly or partially, which forced the migrants to periodically move on. By around 1720, they arrived at a desert place 'Ngaaruni'/'Maliankanga' (desert), where they began to call themselves the 'Nгаа' people (Fadiman 1994:53).

The 'Nгаа' arrived at Ntugi hill towards the late 1730s, and settled at a place called 'Igaironi' (sub-divide) located in present day Tharaka, from where they fragmented into two groups. One group called itself the Mukunga or Muku Nгаа (people of Nгаа) and the Murutu. The Murutu subsequently sub- divided further into three smaller sections, with one group remaining on the plains to become the Tharaka. The second group that gave rise to the Chuka moved westward towards Mount Kenya and eventually reached

the mountain base at the modern region of Mwimbi (Kibungi, Kanga O.I; 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011).

The third Murutu group, pressed north into Tigania from where they split into five smaller segments of the Igoji, Abogeta (South Imenti), Abothuguchi (North Imenti), Mwimbi, and Muthambi. By the 1730s, the Chuka and the Tharaka had arrived at Orimba hill and Mt. Kiaga, from where they established a long association. This perhaps marks the beginning of 'gichiaro' ('birth') system, a blood military alliance that the Chuka and Tharaka formed to adjudicate conflicts.

Lambert (1956:12) asserts that the 'gichiaro' systems were blood military alliances between the Meru sub-groups which helped them to reinforce their defense. The sub-groups had divided themselves into opponents and allies regulated by the 'gichiaro'. Lambert (Ibid), records that by 1900 the Ameru 'birth' alliances were divided into three clusters. The first group embraced the Tigania, Mwimbi and Murutu while the second alliance comprised the Igembe, Imenti, Igoji and Muthambi. The third alliance was made up of the Tharaka, Chuka and Miutini. Such alliances prohibited their members from doing battles or else misfortunes would befall them for shedding common blood.

The 'Nгаа' sub- groups settled along river valleys and may have fragmented as they spread across the Meru land. The groups were eventually separated by forests and the

rugged ridges leading to loss of their common identity as the ‘Nгаа’ people. Natural boundaries between the groups were imposed by the giant gorges and racing rivers that divided the fertile lands. This created a series of long and narrow ‘ridge-top’ communities referred to as ‘miiriga’ (Pl)<sup>5</sup> comprising several clans. The groups settled along the narrow spines which marked the boundaries of each ‘mwiriga’ (clan).

The Chuka groups advanced upwards towards the mountain while clearing new land for settlement. Each group evolved unique social-political institutions that were slightly different from the original institutions of the ‘Nгаа’ people and from the other segments of the Ameru. For purposes of administration, each ‘mwiriga’ had a ‘kiama’ or council of elders of its own, a tradition probably carried forward from their original homeland at ‘Mbwa’.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Miiriga’ (Plural), is a Kichuka verb for clans, (singular is ‘mwiriga’), that lived at the ridge tops/ along the narrow spines, and were separated from each other by the deep gorges in the region, (Kibungi, O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011, Fadiman 2012:76,).

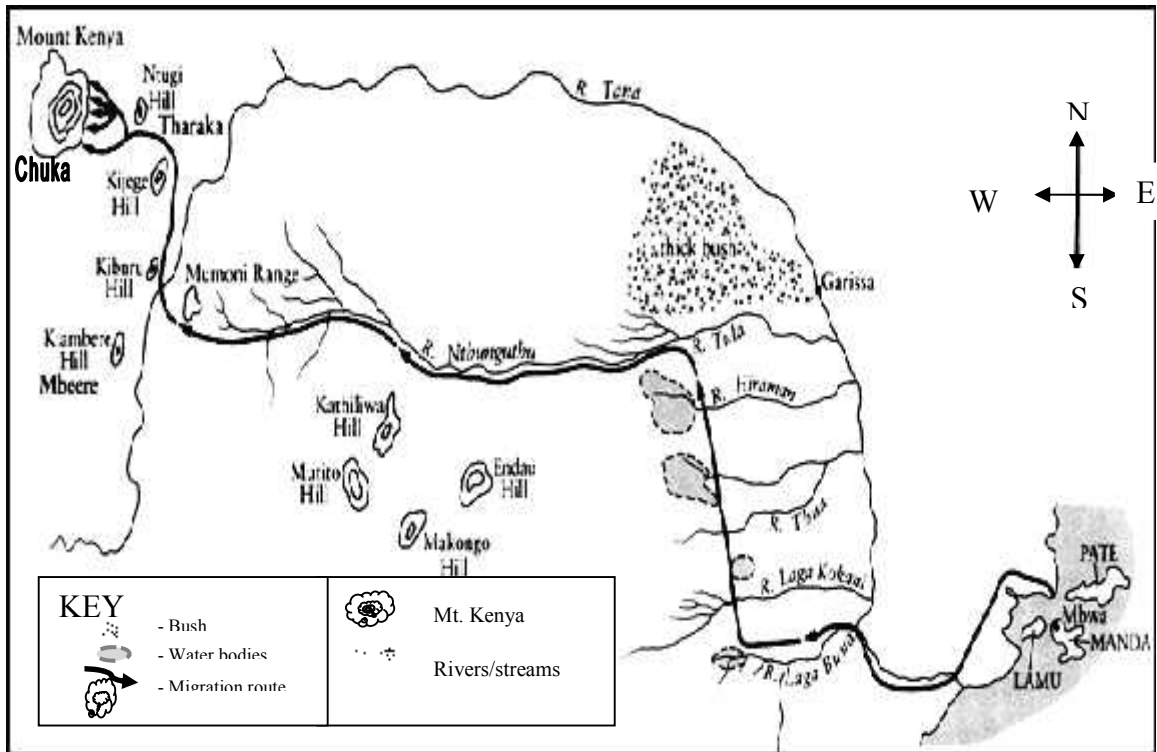


Figure 2.2 showing the Proto-Ameru migration routes.

Sources; Fadiman (1994:63), Mwaniki (2004:194).

As the Chuka sub-groups spread across the ridges, they encountered representatives of three non-Bantu cultures that were scattered in small numbers along the mountain's lower slopes. These were the eastern Cushitic segments of the Galla/Oromo who inhabited the woodland, the Kalenjin-speaking Ogiek peoples inhabiting the higher star grass zone and the lower fringes of the black forest. The Chuka also encountered the Maa-speaking communities occupying Tigania plains and other adjacent grassland (Fadiman 1976:153). The contemporary name Meru may have its origin from the Maasai word 'miru' or 'meiru', a 'Maa' term which refers to a 'repelling or 'still forest' as well as the people who lived within it (Ibid:1994:93).

Historical accounts by Orde (1925: 21) and Mwaniki (2004: 133; 200), confirm that the Chuka had contacts with the Agumba/ Gumba cattle keepers whom they fought and displaced. Mwaniki (Ibid) describes Agumba who lived in pits, holes, or caves and used barbed weapons to spear and arrowheads characteristic of weapons used by some Kalenjin-speaking Ogiek. The Agumba are also mentioned in the traditions of the Chuka neighbors such as the Agikuyu (Kenyatta 1938: 23, Muriuki 1974: 37) and the Embu and Mbeere (Mwaniki 1974: 15). The appearance of the Agumba in these records confirms that, the Agumba had inhabited the Mt. Kenya region long before the arrival of the highland Bantu in the 18<sup>th</sup> C. Mwaniki (2004:207) outlines the pattern of the spread of the Chuka towards the slopes of Mt. Kenya, from ‘Karura ka Nthi’<sup>6</sup> to Ntakani, Magumoni, Itugururu, Mukuuni, Kinoru, Mugaani, Thuita, Mwonge and Karingani.

## **2.2 The Social-Political Organization of the Chuka in the Pre-colonial Period**

The Chuka evolved an elaborate social-political system based on the indigenous practices of the ‘Nгаа’ and influenced by the communities which they came into contact with during their migration and settlement. The family was the basic socio-political unit which comprised a man, his wife or wives and their children. The father was the administrative head of the family, whose authority was autonomous (Middleton 1979). The father owned everything in the family including the wife (or wives) and property

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Karura ka Nthi’ is a place located in Tharaka where rivers Ruguti and Thuci converge and is cited by Mwaniki (2004:207) as a possible point where further fragmentation of the Chuka group occurred during their upward movement towards Mt. Kenya.

such as cattle and land. In his absence or death, the eldest son of the senior wife took charge of his father's duties.

A man was privileged to marry and start a family after serving actively as a warrior and siring a male child to replace him in the 'gaaru' (barracks). By marrying and siring heirs, the Chuka men proved their manhood since they broke the wall of female resistance by fathering children hence controlling their wives reproductive powers. Real men had to sexually perform as best as possible, failure to which they were seen to be sexually dysfunctional, which spelt critical blows to their reputation and was a source of community gossip (Cianguo O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2011). As such, a childless man had no say among other men since he lacked evidence of having conquered women sexually.

Marriage indicated a true test of a forceful man, one who had fearlessly conquered women. Entry into marriage was only possible after the rite of circumcision. Thus, masculine honour was always bound up with aggression and potency. To be fully masculine, a Chuka man had to marry, father many children, especially sons and create a large vigorous family. The more wives and children a man had, the more power he wielded over other men and women. Manhood was not only about bringing up sons who ensured the families continuity, but also about the man's ability to support a dependent wife(s) and household.

Differentiation of gender in Chuka began at birth and naming whereby the number of ululations marked the sex of a new born; four for the male and three for the girl (Murithi 2008: 153). In many instances, the first child was named after the paternal grandparents to reinforce the patrilineal descent of the children. As children grew up, they constantly learnt their gender roles through tales, riddles and proverbs. Division of labour among children was based on one's gender. The major role of the young uncircumcised boys was to herd cows, sheep and goats which they learnt from the elder men. The young girls did domestic chores such as cooking, fetching firewood and water and babysitting through apprenticeship with their mothers.

The Chuka were stratified into 'nthuke'/ 'marika'<sup>7</sup>(age sets) which were created following circumcision of both men and women. Circumcision structured the community into 'marika' which mobilized men and women into some identity groups that governed their life in all spheres. Each male age set carved a form of masculinity governed by generational identity and was distinguished from the others by its distinct property relations, political rights and domestic responsibilities. The male age sets fostered leadership, authority and protection of the society. Female age sets dealt with issues affecting women only such as punishing female offenders, girls' initiation and religious ceremonies related to sacrifice in times of drought and pestilence (Middleton Op.cit: 40).

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<sup>7</sup> Age sets, known as 'Nthuke'/ 'Marika' among the Chuka means groups of men and women bound together over a period of ten to fifteen years, following their circumcision (Murithi 2008: 36, Mwaniki2004:149).

The names of the age sets were chosen by the ‘Mugwe’ (prophet) upon consultation with ‘kياما kياما mugongo’ (senior most council of elders/ Chuka country elders). According to Mwaniki (2004: 49), this senior council was the highest source of authority in the land and drew its members from the ‘kياما kياما nkome’ (junior council of elders). Cianguo (O.I: 24<sup>th</sup> April 2011), literally describes ‘kياما kياما mugongo’ as ‘the owners of the land’, which suggests that members of the senior council had executive powers in all community affairs. One of the cardinal duties of the ‘Mugwe’ and the senior council was to conduct the ‘ntuiko’ (ritualized ceremony to transfer power from one age set to another). This ‘ntuiko’ marked the transition of males from boyhood into warriorhood, then to junior elderhood and finally to senior elderhood (Kibungi, O.I:10th Aug 2011). This means that the ceremony was highly determined by the circumcision of boys to usher them into the warriorhood stage. Therefore ‘ntuiko’ paved way for the formation of new age sets and consequently the proclamation of a circumcision season. The rite of circumcision was the key determinant of the man’s translation from one stage of power and authority to another.

The following table 2.1 shows the names of the proto-Ameru age sets from the time of their departure at Mbwa in the 1730s, up to the advent of colonial rule in 1906. It also indicates the events associated with each group and the possible meaning of the names chosen for the age set.

<b>AGE-SET</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>REMEMBERED EVENTS/MEANING</b>
Irangu	1905-1908	Conquest by imperialists
Murungi/ Murango	1904/1900 (estimated)	New warriors at time of subordination to Great Britain (1906).
Kiremu	1895-1896	Mbogoni invasion, British soldiers camped at Fort Naka (Chuka).
Kang'ori	1893	Mururungo famine, Plagues of smallpox, jiggers, rats, Kamba refugees came to Chuka.
Kiramana or Kilamunya	1892(estimated)	Fought several skirmishes with white men. Recorded by European sources, 1890s, from Igembe to Gikuyu.
Kaburia	1880	First to see, and fight, white men. First recorded entry into Meru, late 1880s, written sources.
Kubai	1868	Trade with Acomba (men of the coast, i.e., Arabs, Swahili, Somali). Embu traditions record Arabs first entering that area (1860s) and extending trade northward (early 1870s).
Nturutimi	1856	Wars against Maasai. Prophecy: "Last born children of Nturutimi [i.e., Miriti] will walk unarmed" (i.e., because of peace established in their area by Europeans).
Thamburu	1844	Wars of displacement with the Maa-speakers.
Kiruja /Nguthugua/ Mbarigu/ Githangaria/ Ratanya	1826 1813 1800 1787 1774	Made contact with Maa-speaking peoples, either Maasai or (earlier) Maa-speaking Ogiek groups, such as Il Tikirri, Mumunyot. Contact led to decades of warfare, interspersed with periods of peace and intermarriage. Gradual adoption of Maasai methods of war.

Michubu Githarie	1761 1748	First age-sets to make contact with Mt.Kenya's earlier occupants, expelling small bands of Cushitic and Kalenjin-speaking peoples (Galla, Ogiek) from the foothills and slopes of Mt. Kenya.
Mukuruma	1735	Crossed Tana River to reach base of Mt.Kenya. Fragmentation of pre-Meru (then called Ngaa) into small bands, each of which approach Mt. Kenya.

Table 2.1 Showing age sets of the Chuka (1735-1906)

Sources; (Thomas 1992, Fadiman 2012); confirmed from Cianguo (O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011), Ciekamba (O.I: 6<sup>th</sup> July 2011) and Mwambia (O.I: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011).

Initiation ceremonies for males and females were conducted between the ages of 15 and 20 years. This marked the formation of new age sets as well as a stage to educate the youth on community affairs. Further, the seclusion of new initiates and the isolation of junior warriors in the barracks led to the transmission and perpetuation of cultural norms and values of manhood and womanhood. Thus, circumcision as a rite of passage organized and facilitated men's smooth entry into the realm of authority and power. Successful completion of this rite helped to define the success for men and carved out an automatic reward system in which resources were distributed. Following their healing, the new initiates were ushered into the warrior barracks which was a second stage of the 'gaaru,' and an abode for all warriors.

Warriorhood was a coveted role, which was accorded to young men following their circumcision and graduation from boyhood. Male circumcision rituals affirmed the

masculine strength and fortitude of the men to the disadvantage of women and non-dominant men. The primary reason for the practice of female circumcision among the Chuka was to insure female virginity and chastity (Cianguo O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011). It was used to shield women from their own sexual desires based on a psychoanalytic premise that the clitoris was the center of female sexuality. The removal of the clitoris was a sure way of having the men gain sexual control over the women because it repressed the sexual desire in women.

During the seclusion period, boys were introduced to the societal traditions, religious taboos and sex, while girls were prepared to face responsibilities of womanhood (Op.cit: 153). Boys were socialized into gender roles in the public domain as warriors and protectors of the home and the society, while girls were socialized into the domestic domain and taught to be submissive, serving and caring. An uncircumcised individual was looked down upon as a social misfit in Chuka. The Chuka believed that uncircumcised men and women were not capable of producing offspring and therefore it was a taboo for anyone to marry the uncircumcised. They were social outcasts, incapable of taking up any adult duties (Ciekamba O.I: 6<sup>th</sup> July 2011).

After undergoing a successful initiation, adult men and women took up well defined gender roles. Women performed household chores such as cooking, looking after children, fetching water and firewood, and weeding. The primary duty of the adult men was to defend the community against attacks and to raid from their neighbours. Men

were entrusted with the more difficult tasks which were regarded as men's jobs such as clearing of virgin land and cutting poles for building houses.

The division of labour in Table 2.2 below demonstrates that men undertook hard physical tasks while women did what Murithi (Ibid) calls, 'soft and easy tasks, where safety and security was ensured'. The table also shows that the men did occasional duties while women did continuous duties. Men used the unequal and hierarchical division of labour to justify their superior and exploitative position over women. The duties of men were considered to be more important and valuable compared to the women's work.

<b>MEN'S' DUTIES.</b>	<b>WOMEN'S' DUTIES</b>
Warfare, legal and ritual experts.	Trading and dealing with social welfare issues
Owners of property such as cattle, sheep, goats and land	Owned as property by either, their fathers or husbands
Guarding the homestead	Domestic chores; cooking, washing
Cutting and erecting timber for buildings	Cutting grass for thatching buildings
Clearing fields, virgin land for cultivation	Sowing weeding, pruning cereals
Planting perennial crops such as yams, bananas.	Planting seasonal crops such as millet, sorghum, and vegetables.
Making wooden and iron implements	Pottery, basketry, weaving
Fathering children as a measure of potency	Giving birth and nurturing the young
Hunting for wild meat /game	Gathering fruits, roots, berries and leaves

Table 2.2; The gender roles in pre-colonial Chuka

Source: (Middleton 1979:21, Murithi 2008: 145).

The social organization and gender-based division of labour was a microstructure of inequality that the Chuka men used to exclude women from positions of power and to dominate them. Within the gendered division of labour men and women were assigned different roles and responsibilities that were valued and ranked differently. Men and women internalized and transmitted their roles and behavior patterns through the process of socialization. As men and women interacted they learnt and acted according to societal rules, simultaneously constructing and maintaining the gender order.

According to the theory of hegemonic masculinity men's dominance over women appear in ways that appear natural and normal without the use of any coercion. Applied in the social organization of the Chuka, a husband's hegemony and masculine honour were intertwined in his ability to support his wife and children. A man's masculinity was embodied in his ability to bring up a successful family, which prescribed the most honoured way of being a man. Men claimed and sustained leading positions in social life through their kinship and patriarchal authority.

Legitimacy of patriarchy guaranteed the men a dominant position over women through culture and persuasion and not through the use of any form of coercion. The social structuring called for axiomatic reverence from women and girls towards men and boys. Women and children in patriarchal African societies became men's' property, to be provided for and protected and they had no option rather than to surrender to male

dominance (Njoya 2008: xiv). The Chuka expressed the male dominance in this patriarchal ideology, whereby the man was the ‘head of the family which meant that he was the ‘boss’ and the one in charge.

Through circumcision, the males were divided into three broad categories. The grandfathers made up the senior most categories of elders who were charged with the spiritual well being of the community and who served as ritual experts. They determined how initiation rituals would be conducted and the successful translation of the males into the junior age-sets. Traditionally the senior elders were retired members of the councils of elders who had a fire place at the entrance of their homes where they held meetings with their male counterparts. The senior elders posed as the neighborhood bosses, meeting regularly for traditional beer drinking and snuff-taking sessions. The senior elder’s fire place was out of bounds to women, for they were prohibited from participating in the men talk.

The second category of males was that of the fathers who were mandated with the administration of the community. This group comprised the retired warriors who were entrusted with legislative, executive, and judicial roles. The junior elders exercised hegemony over warriors and women. Junior elders who had entered the council following their son’s circumcision had more authority in decision making than the elders who joined the council by virtue of their daughter’s circumcision. This practice

reinforced the concept of hegemonic masculinity since men who had sired sons were considered to be of a higher ranking than those who had daughters.

Politically, the clan was the basic unit which consisted of families that had a common descent. Within each clan, conflicts were resolved by governing bodies known as 'kiama gia nkome' (elders who wore a ring) made up of the junior elders. 'Nkome' was a wooden ring fitted on the second finger of the right hand of the elders (Mwaniki 2004:211). The councils were also known as 'kiama kia ncuguma' (elders who carried a forked walking stick). Each member of the council had to wear the ring and carry the forked walking stick which symbolized their seniority over warriors. Junior elders were men who had their son(s) successfully circumcised and had joined warriorhood stage. This means that circumcision was an important rite that conferred power to males within a single family lineage.

These junior councils of elders nominated a few of their members to form an umbrella council known as 'kiama gia mugongo' (Chuka country elders) which was a supreme council of elders in charge of the entire community. The senior councils such as 'kiama kia mugongo', presented forums for men to debate community issues on transfer of political power to the well behaved younger males through 'ntuiko' (ritualized transfer of power). During crucial deliberations, decisions were made collectively and by consensus

among the elders. All the elders were allowed to exercise ritual power and hegemony over younger men and all women.

In pursuit of justice, the 'Kiama' (councils of elders) had three tools at their disposal. The first tool was the ancestral oath, which was a public declaration by the individual, on the truth of the words he uttered. A suspect was expected to take this oath by his words. For instance, one could swear that 'if he lies may the oath kill him' (Fadiman 1994: 39). The second tool that was used by the 'Kiama' in solving conflicts was asking the suspect to offer a sacrifice of livestock such as a goat, sheep, or cattle. They believed that the animals' blood bound the suspect to the ancestral spirits. When they failed to reach some consensus using the first two tools, the elders resorted to the third tool of inflicting physical pain on the suspect by subjecting him/her to a painful ordeal such as licking a hot iron rod or executing a thorough beating. Senior elders exercised their hegemony by meting out punishments to errant members of the society.

The third and lowest rank of the males was the sons, whose core duty was the military guardianship of the society. Each mountain ridge clan was guarded by its band of warriors who lived together in a single 'gaaru' (barracks). The 'gaaru' was a residence military barracks strategically located in each ridge-top clan. Saribatore (O.I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011) describes the 'gaaru' as a huge 'house' that was thatched with either banana leaves or reeds and not mudded on the walls. The structure had no doors or windows,

which enabled the warriors to easily view their attackers from all the directions. Tree top huts were built near the 'gaaru' as watch towers from where the warriors had aerial surveillance on incoming intruders. The primary duty of the warriors was defense.

The warriors kept a big fire burning inside the 'gaaru' for protection against wild animals and for warmth during cold nights. Living in the 'gaaru' and warriorhood experiences mystically and ritually connected the Chuka men. It gave them an identity and a right to belong to a group of men who formed the junior masculinity in the land. Circumcision incorporated the new initiates into this group of protectors of community. Women were excluded from warriorhood hence, denied the power bestowed upon the warriors. The exclusion of women from warriorhood was based on the premise that women were a weaker sex, who could not fight or raid.

According to Thomas (1992:127), the Chuka survival was extremely threatened by their neighbors, forcing them to develop a sense of ethnic solidarity and homogeneity. Kanga (O.I: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2011) posits that the Chuka were always targeted by their hostile neighbors known to as 'maitha' (raiders) and had to develop formidable regiments of warriors to defend themselves. Kanga elaborates that save for the Tharaka, all the other Chuka neighbours such as the Mwimbe and Imenti to the north, Embu and Mbeere to the south and Kikuyu to the west raided Chuka regularly.

These hostile neighbors coveted the well watered Chuka land and the abundant self sufficient economy. Their attacks on the Chuka departed from the regional tradition of raiding neighbours for livestock, to capturing men and women who would be ransomed for the livestock (Fadiman 1982: 123). Due to constant external attacks, the Chuka developed a highly regimental lifestyle in which all the males from their teens to the mid ages stayed in constant military readiness in the 'gaaru'. The hostility towards the Chuka forced them to withdraw to their mountain fortresses and to perfect their barracks system that embraced the entire adult male population.

Reports by Thomas (1992) and Crampton (1927) indicate that by the late 1800A.D, the hostility on the Chuka from the Imenti, Embu, Mbeere and Kikuyu neighbours heightened, forcing them to withdraw from their land and assume defensive techniques and posture. The Chuka warriors constructed defense barriers in the forest by felling trees, digging pits and encouraging the growth of tangled under bush of 20ft in height and 9ft in width (Thomas 1992:127, Crampton 1927:24). In other instances the Chuka destroyed all the roads into their land leaving the tunnels through the vegetation which required travelers to advance in a single file and made it easier for the warriors to counter- attack any hostilities. Thomas (Op.cit:128) asserts that through their defensive strategies and the well established regimental systems, the Chuka survived a series of organized allied invasions from numerically superior forces between 1885- 1900.

In the military barracks, a warrior's life was centred on the construction of his masculinity. As men were expected to fight and enlist their military service, the women were barred from such warring activities. Consequently, combat and military experiences estranged men from women, while binding the men together. Each barracks was governed by a selected council of senior warriors who were given heroic status, subject to the authority of the elders' council. The senior warriors had to be physically impressive with qualities such as big physique, tallness, agility, gracefull movement and ability to command confidence in order to validate their manhood (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011). Warriors who excelled in their duties were axiomatically revered by colleague warriors as their 'gaaru' spokesmen. The hierarchy and inequality among the warriors shows that the men in the barracks did not influence and control others to the same extent.

We can rightfully conclude that the Chuka men used the rite of circumcision to reaffirm their positioning above women and to create ranks of masculinities amongst themselves. The stratification of the males into senior elders, junior elders and warriors subordinated women in ways that appeared normal and natural. The non-conforming men were downgraded as marginalized masculinities, while those men who presented their manhood in the right way such as 'gaaru' spokesmen formed the hegemonic masculinity.

The theory of Hegemonic masculinity postulates that in many human societies, masculinities and femininities are constantly reconstructed as dynamic relational processes (Messner 1993:724). In the social-political organization of the Chuka, the masculinity that occupied the hegemonic position was always contestable and not fixed. Throughout the manhood stages, men constantly positioned themselves in unequal but shifting power relations. As demonstrated above, the Chuka had a multiplicity of masculinities which were determined by age and seniority but sanctioned through the practice of circumcision. The senior council of elders was the hegemonic group which secured the spontaneous consent of subordinate and marginalized masculinities.

### **2.3 Economic Organization of the Chuka in the Pre-colonial Period.**

The Chuka environment favoured a wide range of economic activities. Upon settlement in the region, the Chuka became hunters ('athi') who used small bows, axes and iron knives to hunt and gather for honey and meat. Besides obtaining food, hunting provided the Chuka with feathers and skins for aesthetic and ritual purposes. An example was the Colobus monkey hair dress that was won by the initiates and the circumciser. Proficiency in hunting which involved taking long journeys over a rough and gorgy terrain was a gauge for real manhood. Hunting and gathering was not just an economic activity but a social operation that isolated the naïve and weak from the witty men and women. Those who excelled in the hunting and gathering wielded social control over those who were ungifted. Women gathered fruits and vegetables which was an activity

done closer to their homesteads as they worked with the children and enjoyed the men's protection (Kanga O.I: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2011).

Other members of the community cultivated crops such as millet, sorghum, peas, sugarcane, maize, beans, bananas, a variety of vegetables and fruits. The main food crops were cassava, yams, sweet potatoes and pumpkins. Women weeded for the grains such as sorghum and millet which were labelled as 'women crops' while men planted specific crops such as yams, bananas, and sugarcane. This reflects some gender-division of crops, similarly practiced by the Ibo of Eastern Nigeria where women grew smaller tubers such as cocoa yams and cassava, while men were charged with the yam which is described as the 'king tuber' (Achebe 1959). This division allowed men to exercise hegemony over women by creating the impression that the men's crops were of a higher status than the 'women crops'. Initiation ceremonies were conducted following a bumper harvest since the initiates had to be properly fed throughout their seclusion period.

Wild plants and trees such as the Mbatha, (stinging nettle), Miringa, Mituntu, Migumo (Fig tree), Mibariki (castor tree), Migaa trees, (Acacia trees) and various herbal plants influenced the division of gender roles and the circumcision rituals in many ways. Parts of some plants such as banana leaves were used in the construction of the 'kiagau' (healing hut) for initiates. The name 'kiagau' is derived from the Kichuka verb 'magau', for dried banana leaves.

Besides, the green banana and 'Maringa' leaves served as 'plates' on which food was served. The Fig trees were sacred, and the ritual of plucking their twigs assured the initiates protection from 'Mwene Njeru' ('Owner of the White' also known as the Chuka God). The Castor tree nuts were a source of initiation oil whereas the Stinging Nettle plant was used to sting the initiates to test their endurance. The 'mituntu' and banana leaves sap was applied on the raw circumcision wound to facilitate healing. This demonstrates that the crops that were grown in Chuka significantly affected the circumcision rituals which were most important in influencing the social construction of a man.

Men provided hard labour such as clearing away the bushes, preparing new fields and cut firewood which they gathered into bundles for the women to carry. Most of the trade expeditions were also a men's domain. The Chuka reared various types of livestock including cattle, sheep, goats and poultry. The men tended cattle which were a great source of prestige and a measure of wealth. Young children assisted in harvesting, though young boys herded smaller animals such as goats and sheep. Apart from being great sources of protein, livestock and poultry were given as gifts during the initiation process. For instance, cattle, sheep and goats were used as payments to circumcisers and gifts to ritual experts during the circumcision process such as the sponsors (Mucioka O.I:22<sup>nd</sup> April 2011).

What is more is that, the Chuka engaged in the economic practice of bee keeping and beer brewing. Significantly, the beer was made from honey and was a reserve for senior elders. Both the honey and bee hives were often given out as 'ndatho' (gifts to maternal relatives) by the initiates. Thus, honey harvesting and bee keeping were economic activities which also shaped the social transformation of the young males to men. Mwaniki (2004: 89) asserts that only the ritually pure women would be allowed to touch or carry the hives up to the forest edge for the hive- men, since carrying loads was a female role.

Economically, the traditional circumcision created a masculinity that was based on land ownership and linked to the lineage and kinship networks. Inheritance of land, property and cattle was patriarchal, since boys were looked upon as the future fathers and heads of families. In view of this, the circumcised men were administratively responsible for the family property especially land allotment and use. Njoka (O.I: 30<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011) posits that Chuka men had the power and authority to apportion land, cattle for bride wealth or even for slaughtering. This power to allot, withhold resources and command others defined real manhood in Chuka and presented men with the opportunity to exercise control over the women. The senior men exercised this hegemony over junior men by controlling land distribution hence monopolizing control over the society's reproductive capacity.

The senior men did not have equal ability to exercise hegemony and control the society. Rich men who had huge herds of cattle and the highest number of wives and children were bestowed with power and authority to make decisions while commanding honour/respect from poorer members of their clans. The concept of hegemonic masculinity postulates that men in power sub-ordinate other producers by appropriating productive forces such as labour, land and the produce (Mies 1988:92).

This is reflected in the economic structuring of the Chuka since men appropriated factors of production such as land and the produce from the land. Men used their positions of power to legitimize, extract and exploit the women through their access and manipulation of resources (Kaunda O.I: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept 2011). This means that the Chuka men controlled the economy and imposed their authority over women. Rich men controlled poor men and were perceived to have full control over women and other clan members.

#### **2.4 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the possible origin of the Chuka, the social–economic and political organization influencing circumcision in Chuka before 1906. The analysis of this chapter shows that gender categorization played a major role in setting a platform for the construction of hegemonic power among the Chuka. The distinction between the male and the female operated within the family, the economy and political institutions.

Individuals were expected to fit into these two limited gender statuses, by recognizing and recreating their version of women and men at a particular time.

Besides, within one gender, there were other forms of control by those members who enjoyed various forms of social status. For instance the men who enjoyed the status of serving in the councils of elders wielded control over the warriors, by virtue of a higher social status accorded to the elders. In conclusion, this chapter has elaborated that circumcision was the most important rite of passage which directly or indirectly ordered the gender statuses and gave some men hegemony over the subordinate and marginalized men and women.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RITE OF CIRCUMCISION IN CHUKA BEFORE 1906

#### 3.0 Introduction

In chapter Two, we outlined the origins as well as the socio-political and economic organization of the Chuka. We also interrogated circumcision as an important rite that directly or indirectly influences the social-political and economic life of the Chuka community. In this chapter, we examine the construction of masculinity and the main rituals of circumcision in Chuka. This includes the possible origin of the rite of circumcision, pre-manhood training, preparations for circumcision, the actual operation and the post- circumcision rituals during the pre-colonial era. Moreover, the chapter evaluates the role that the circumcision rituals had in creating the cult of manhood.

This chapter examines the extent to which circumcision rituals are integrated as an inevitable part of the Chuka culture, based on the assumption that the rite adds greater value to the whole society than to the individual men. Using the concept of hegemonic masculinity, this chapter broadens our understanding of how the circumcision created hierarchies of masculinities among circumcised men and how this rite socialized boys to become real men.

### **3.1 Possible Origins of the Chuka Circumcision Rite**

Like other highland Bantu groups, the Chuka live around the Mt. Kenya region and are linguistically classified as the ‘Thagicu’ by Bennet (1967). Others in this group include the Mbeere, Embu, Gikuyu, Mwimbi, Igoji, Tharaka, Igembe, Tigania, Meru (Imenti) and Kamba (Ndungo 2006). Common to this group is that they all practice the rite of circumcision.

The Chuka have no legendary theories on the origin of male circumcision. The origin of male circumcision in Chuka is not known with certainty but oral sources claim that the rite is as old as the Chuka society itself (Kibungi O.I: 26<sup>th</sup> May 2013). Kibungi says that the oral information handed to him by his father M’Kibungi proposed that circumcision began as rite of passage to mark a boy’s entrance into adulthood and to ensure virility and fertility. He claims that the Chuka may have borrowed this practice from Mbwa traditions where records show that the ‘Nguru Ntune’ used circumcision as a means of humiliating the slaves (Fadiman 2004). Kibungi also hypothesizes that the proto-Ameru may have adopted circumcision to demonstrate the man’s ability to endure pain and increase his attractiveness to the women.

Njau, an oral informant in Mwaniki (2004:139) postulates that circumcision in Chuka may have originated from a woman who circumcised his son using a ‘rugio’ (piece of a broken pot). This woman is said to have acted in fear that his son would impregnate a girl before he was circumcised and bring great shame to the family. This source

however, indicates a possibility of a renaissance of circumcision traditions rather than the origin.

Oral sources conceptualize circumcision as a bodily modification on boys that marks the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood (Kibungi O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> August 2011, Mwambia O.I: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011, M'Baini O.I: 7<sup>th</sup> October 2011). Other sources indicate that the Chuka may have adopted circumcision customs from the Kalenjin-speakers (Agumba), the Maa-speakers (Maasai) or even the Oromo-speakers whom they displaced during their settlement in the early 18<sup>th</sup> C (Fadiman 1994).

Although the actual origin of male circumcision seems uncertain among the Chuka, written sources provide a general consensus that it was the most important rite of passage (Middleton 1979, Mwaniki 2004, Fadiman 1982). It was integral to the transition of males from childhood to adulthood and a prerequisite to the attainment of all the respect and responsibilities that went along with it. Traditionally, it elevated the boys' status into warriorhood and toughened them to become men. On average boys in Chuka underwent circumcision between their late teens to their late twenties. The operation was performed at regular intervals of five years (Fadiman 1982, Mwaniki 1982). This interval gave the community room to accumulate an adequate number of initiates who would form a regiment.

The traditional operation was performed by a specialist surgeon known as ‘mutani’ (circumciser), who was assisted by his porters. The operation was certainly very painful with the initiate expected to remain still and silent and refrain from showing any emotions or any involuntary responses such as flinching, blinking or even moving his eyes (Mwaniki 1982, Orde 1915). Males who endured this pain without any show of emotions proved to be ‘real men’ (‘kiumantha’) which made a significant mark on their masculinity. Circumcision was an elaborate practice involving lengthy preparations and a cluster of pre and post circumcision rituals discussed later on in this chapter.

Oral sources described variations in the Chuka circumcision and that of their close Ameru relatives (Muriira O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011, Mutiso O.I: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011). The Tigania and Mwimbi did not remove as much foreskin as the Chuka and they left a small distinctive flap of the foreskin hanging from below the glans of the penis. This differentiation in the Chuka and Tigania/ Mwimbi operation probably occurred because the Chuka believed that real manhood, entailed total ‘pruning’ (removal) of the foreskin (Muriira O.I: 27<sup>th</sup> May 2013).

Consequently, Chuka men considered themselves superior to the Tigania and Mwimbi men who had their foreskins partially removed. The practice of removing the entire foreskin was also witnessed among the Chuka neighbors including the Embu (Mwaniki 1982). This style of circumcision was referred to as ‘karinga kathige’ which literally

means ‘pruning the whole foreskin’ (Mucioka O.I: 22<sup>nd</sup> April, Kaunda O.I: 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2011). Kaunda (Ibid) suggests that the removal of the whole foreskin indicated the degree of power that the Chuka men wielded over those men who had their foreskin partially removed. Besides, the final outlook of a ‘wholly pruned’ penis of the Chuka men was perceived better than the partially ‘pruned’ penis. The scar from this style of the circumcision operation marked the identity for a real Chuka man.

### **3.2 Pre-Circumcision Rituals in Pre-Colonial Chuka**

#### **3.2.1 Pre-manhood training and preparation.**

Before the advent of the British colonial administration in Meru, the social structures in Chuka remained and continued almost uninterrupted. Their social organization was maintained around clans which lived at the top of the ridges due to the hilly terrain on the eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya. Within each ridge-top clan, the boys reached puberty at the estimated season for circumcision. Once the number of uncircumcised boys matured to fill one segment of a warrior band or a ‘regiment’ of not less than fifty boys, a circumcision night was formally proclaimed by the elders. For the boys to be circumcised they had to make various preparations and undergo a number of pre-circumcision tests.

A description of these tests is important to illustrate how masculinity was differentiated from femininity. For a start the boys had to be physically and mentally mature to be able

to defend the society following their successful initiation. The shift from young boys to men came with manly responsibilities such as being protectors, providers and owners of property. Young males aged between 12 and 15 years of age were 'trained' to assume the above responsibilities (Mucioka O.I: 22<sup>nd</sup> April). Part of this training was enshrined in their duty of herding in the dense, hilly and forested terrain. In the process they also hunted wild animals and gathered fruits. It should be noted that while the boys were busy herding and hunting, the girls of their age were busy doing domestic chores such as cooking for these boys.

The enormous task of feeding the boys was communally done by the mothers assisted by their daughters. Here, a division of labour along gender lines is detected, which served to imbue in the girls their domestic roles as opposed to the warrior roles of the boys. Whereas the boys' task was to provide and protect property, the girls took up domestic chores which clearly drew the distinction between masculine and feminine roles that were 'fixed' to either gender.

During the herding, boys were exposed to a communal lifestyle which laid the foundations for age set formation. This communalism cemented a strong bond of identity between the boys who belonged to one herding band. The bonding unconsciously prepared the boys for the forthcoming barracks life as warriors. The division of labour and isolation of the boys from their sisters encouraged them to begin

to exercise hegemony over the girls. Whereas the girls remained at home caring for the day to day needs of the family, the boys had to work hard in herding and hunting in order to gain this hegemony. Consequently, this relegated the girls to a subordinate position in the private domain while elevating the boys to a superior masculine status in the public domain.

It was during the puberty stage, between 12 and 15 years, that the boys began living in separate shelters known as 'gaaru ya Ibici' (barracks for the uncircumcised boys). 'Gaaru ya ibici' was located below the 'makumbi' (traditional granaries). According to Cianguo (O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011), the boys had to pass certain tests of boyhood to be allowed to leave their mothers houses for the 'gaaru ya ibici'. Keenly monitored by the older boys in their 'gaaru', younger boys were expected to hunt for twelve 'Igoros' (fowl birds) or twelve chicken. This, it was assumed, instilled the masculine attribute of hard work and was geared towards preparing them for their future role as providers.

They were also forced to swallow the gizzard of a hen, to symbolize growth of the Adams Apple. This was emblematic of the masculine attribute of a deep, broken and authoritative voice. The summit of these boyhood tests was a ceremony known as 'gutua miringa' in which the older boys armed with 'murembu' sticks, mounted a guard of honour for the novices to march through while whipping them (Mbungu O.I: 17<sup>th</sup> June 2011). Crying or showing signs of fear or cowardice past the whipping parade meant the

young boy was not ready to leave his mothers' house for boyhood 'gaaru'. He was considered unprepared for manhood since masculinity was constructed away from crying.

The separate accommodation for boys helped them to disassociate with the feminine attribute of dependency on parents, making the males more independent and consequently better men. The separation from their mothers enabled the boys to develop a different identity from that of the girls. During their leisure times, boys of different ridges would congregate for competitions which unconsciously prepared them for the 'gaaru' and 'thauthi' dances during their circumcision season.

All the above tests of manhood aimed to distance the boy from any feminine traits or mannerisms before undergoing the circumcision operation. If the boy failed in any of the tests, he was ridiculed and mocked for 'being a girl' and punitively retained in his mothers' house. Boys had to conform to these requirements, failure to which one was ostracized and excluded from their peer group and gender. Masculinity studies show that hegemonic masculinity concerns the dread of and flight from women (Carrigan et- al 1985, Connell 2005, Messner 1985). As a measure of true manhood, boys were trained from a very early stage in life to distance themselves from all women, including their own mothers. This inculcated into the young males that to be a man, one was not supposed to associate with feminine attributes. Boys who maintained the required social

distance from women and girls eventually became hegemonic over other boys and women.

This separation of boys from their mothers and the girls marked the first step towards the construction of real manhood, as the boys indirectly began to gain control and independence. Their development of a hegemonic masculinity began to be idealized at a personal level and also at a collective level in the society. This is because, not only did the men monitor the conformity of the boys towards becoming men but also the mothers and girls who keenly monitored these boys to ensure their conformity. In other words, hegemonic masculinity was as much about distinction between genders as it was about differentiation within the gender. In this case hegemony depended on a gerontocratic practice of senior men policing the masculine behaviour of junior men.

The male had to go through three phases of the 'gaaru' system sanctioned by the rite of circumcision. The first stage was that of the 'gaaru ya ibici' (barracks for the uncircumcised) which housed the boys who had successfully graduated from their mothers' houses aged between 12 and 15 years. At this stage, the boys remained children irrespective of their age and size until they successfully underwent the operation. Once circumcised at roughly the ages between 19-28 years, boys moved to the second phase known as 'gaaru ya nthaka' (warrior barracks). These warriors were senior to the uncircumcised as they determined who among the boys in the 'gaaru ya ibici' would be circumcised. The warriors believed that they were divinely ordained to

'remove' the 'ubici' (behavior of the uncircumcised) from the younger boys who revered them as their seniors.

A warrior was expected to court and get a wife, establish a homestead and raise children. Only after his children grew to warriorhood or womanhood would the family head become a senior or ruling elder by assuming responsibility for governing the clan (Lambert 1956). A man graduated into this council upon the initiation of his own child whether male or female. Entry into this stage upon initiation of one's son was a source of great tribute and prestige for the man over his peers than if it was due to his daughters' circumcision.

This ushered in the third phase 'gaaru ya Mukuru' (elders barracks) for the senior men who had retired from the 'gaaru ya nthaka' and were precisely above 40years of age. Besides their seniority in age, majority of the men at this stage constituted the highest political unit 'Kiama kia mugonngo' (Chuka country-elders). 'Kiama kia mugongo' as elaborated in chapter two was the supreme decision making organ in Chuka. Each ridge top clan had a local council known as 'kiama kia 'ncuguma' or 'nkome' (council of elders), whose role was to resolve disputes and govern their clans (Fadiman 2012:10).

These male stages are illustrated in table 3.1 below;

<b>Age</b>	<b>Life Stage</b>	<b>Termination</b>	<b>Chuka Term For Life Stage</b>	<b>Masculine Duty For Life Stage</b>
0-7+	Infant/Child	Appearance of second teeth	Kabici	Being nurtured by the mother
7-15+	Uncircumcised boy	Puberty	Kibici/Ibici(pl)	Herding/ hunting with the elder boys
15-18+	Elder boy(candidate for circumcision)	Circumcision	Ntinguri	Hunting and Herding cattle sheep and goats
18-25+	Warrior(New Initiate)	Entry into 'gaaru ya Nthaka'	Ntane	Defense /Raiding
30-50+	Family head /apprentice elder	Entry of first son into warrior hood	Muthee	Husband/ family head
50-70+	Ruling elder	Subsequent transfer (Elder Huts)	Kamukuru; tumukuru(pl)	Join Council of elders as junior elders
70+	Retired elder	Subsequent transfer	Mukuru; Akuru(pl)	senior elders, acted as ritual experts
100+	The aged	Death	Kimukuru; Imukuru (pl)	The senior most elders, guardians of ritual expertise.

Table 3.1 Showing life stages of Chuka males; Fadiman (2012:10) and confirmed by Kibungi (O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011).

From Table 3.1 above the key stages of males were childhood, boyhood, warrior hood, junior elders and the senior elders. The hierarchy prepared boys and men to take charge of power and resources within the community. The men controlled hunting, herding, defense, raiding, family matters and rituals. In the course of men's life, they reproduced their dominance over women and complicit masculinities through their roles.

Men worked to do extremely well in their masculine duties in order to become famous and gain indirect control over other men. Men who failed to meet the set standards for each stage acquired a masculinity that was submissive to the other men in their age set. Diligent men became dominant over their peers exercising control, power and influence over the sub-ordinate or submissive men. Junior cadres of men in the age set obeyed orders from senior men without any coercion. Indeed, junior males operated as if they were constantly watched over by the diligent men who positioned themselves as their supervisors.

In conclusion the 'gaaru'/age set system presented multiple notions of masculinity in Chuka. The earliest stage was a junior masculinity which was acquired by the boys in their boyhood as their debut form of masculinity. This was followed by adult masculinity signified by warriorhood in the 'gaaru ya nthaka'. The apex stage of masculinity was that of senior masculinity reflected in the figure of an elder who had retired from the 'gaaru ya nthaka'. Needless to mention here, women were not stratified using any 'gaaaru' system hence relegating them to a separate and obviously an inferior status in the society.

The 'gaaru' system positioned the men as 'organizing intellectuals' of hegemonic masculinity to regulate, manage, reflect and interpret gender relations and regimes. The Chuka men were the regulators of hegemonic masculinity even when what most men

supported was not necessarily what they were. Hegemony was naturalized in the form of a hero which many men failed to attain in their stages. This setup was defective because hegemonic masculinity was applicable to the dominant class only and living in the 'gaaru' did not guarantee true manhood for all men. This is because as the men institutionalized their dominance over women, there emerged statuses among the men in the 'gaaru', with some men commanding more respect from their peers. For instance, the masculinity of the 'gaaru' spokesmen was hegemonic over that of the ordinary men in his 'gaaru'. The latter formed the marginalized or subordinate masculinities, depending on their performances in the 'gaaru' undertakings.

### **3.2.2 Preparing for the circumcision season**

Before the onset of colonial rule, circumcision was a socially sanctioned rite of passage whose rituals, season and success was influenced by several factors. Parents, particularly the father had to give consent for his son to be circumcised. The father had to liaise with the elders and the warriors of the barracks nearest to his home in determining the season for his sons' circumcision. Such consultations portrayed the rite of circumcision as a socially endorsed rite of passage whereby the senior men directly determined who among the boys in the boyhood barracks would be circumcised. The elders and warriors wielded hegemonic authority over the young boys and the society.

The agricultural cycle also influenced the time when the Chuka would schedule the circumcision season. For instance, circumcision ceremonies were disallowed in 1887-

1888, because cattle herds were decimated by rinderpest disease that swept through the African cattle from Sudan to South Africa (Fadiman 2004). A similar occurrence was reported 1891-1892, due to affliction by drought, overwhelming swarms of locusts and an outbreak of smallpox (Thomas 1992:20). During such calamities the Chuka did not have plenty of foodstuffs required for the initiates and as such, they postponed the circumcision ceremonies. Most circumcision ceremonies preceded the cereal harvest in the months of August – September when there was a successful food harvest (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011, Kanga O.I: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2011).

This confirms that the circumcision was not an annual event but it was carried out at irregular intervals stretching up to fifteen years apart, depending on the prevailing circumstances in the society. The number of ‘Ndinguri’ (overgrown uncircumcised boys) in the community also determined when the elders would proclaim a circumcision season. Their number had to be large enough to fill one regiment/ warrior band of a minimum of fifty boys (Kibungi O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2011). The greater the number of boys, the cheaper this ceremony would be, especially in feeding the initiates and their relatives. With the Chuka being patriarchal and the men traditionally polygamous, the order or position of the boy in his family determined which position in the circumcision queue he would take on the day of the actual operation.

The status of the boy’s father too influenced when the boy would be circumcised. It was upon the circumcision of a son that a father got licensed to join the coveted senior

masculinity and to perform the roles of elders. Men who failed to sire boys rose to the level of junior elders upon the circumcision of their daughters and willingly submitted to the authority of the senior elders. Impotent men had no power or influence before their peers because they had failed to prove their manhood through their ability to conquer and control women. The impotence of a man was a top secret among his family members to shield him from community gossip and ridicule (Cianguo O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011).

In pursuit of their seniority, men did all that was within their powers to ensure that their sons got circumcised at the earliest opportunity. This was given impetus by the socio-economic status of the family since some parents could not afford to meet the circumcision expenses, food and material items for the 'mutani' (circumciser). Some of the boys became 'Ndinguri' (overgrown uncircumcised boy) due to poor family backgrounds which making it difficult to meet the circumcision expenses. The 'ndinguri' were eventually circumcised through 'kwangua' or 'kibata', i.e. being paraded nude around the village in 'thauthi' (circumcision dances), to solicit for the circumcision necessities from well-wishers (Cianguo O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011).

It therefore appears poverty was an anti-thesis of being masculine and was probably feminine. Poor men were treated as if they were women, that is, inferior and subject to control by the rich men within the Chuka community. The over-grown boys who got

circumcised after soliciting support through ‘thauthi’ never took up leadership roles in their ‘gaaru’. They had a stigma of inferiority because of the way they had been circumcised and accepted without coercion to be led and controlled by those men whose parents were rich (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011).

### **3.2.3 The eve of the operation**

In pre-colonial Chuka, circumcision entailed a long process of well-designed rituals which had to be adhered to for the well being of the ‘man’ and the society. After parents or elders consented to the boys’ circumcision, the boy had to make journeys to his maternal relatives and uncles to seek their blessings in a ceremony known as ‘kurathia’. Accompanied by his peers in song and dance, the boy presented gifts such as goats to his uncles/relatives. On arrival at the uncles’ homestead, the boy repeatedly sung such choruses as below; (Saribatore O.I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011)

.... ‘Guku kwa mama wakwa  
Nkangambire thome”

Translation;        *‘Here at my uncle’s home*

*I have come for blessings’.*

In response, the uncle gave him gifts in form of goats, axes, beehives, or weapons as a blessing to the nephew which symbolized his impending manhood status. These gifts were known as ‘Ndatho’ hence the verb ‘kurathia’ or ‘ndatho’ song. The bows, spears and arrows showed that the boy was ready to take up his masculine role to guard the

society. The axes, goats and beehives symbolized his masculine ability to engage in the economic activities of farming, herding, and bee keeping for food. This could also be interpreted to mean that once the boy got circumcised, he assumed his masculine role over women through of family wealth.

The goat presented to the boy was called 'mburi ya gutura matu' (goat for piercing of the ears), because traditionally the boys' ears were pierced by the uncle as a pre-initiation ritual. Pierced ears were probably a physical mark for the men who had participated in the 'ndatho' ceremony and had legitimate authority over those poor men who had skipped the 'ndatho' ceremony. M'Baini (O.I: 7<sup>th</sup> Oct 2011) elaborates that the piercing of the boy's ears was aesthetic and that men used different sizes of rods to elongate the ear lobe. This suggests that men who had longer ear lobes signified seniority of their age groups and enjoyed automatic reverence from the men who had shorter lobes or those without pierced ears. According to Mwaniki (2004:10), a person whose ears were not pierced could not speak in the presence of those whose ears were pierced. This means that ear piercing conferred authority to individuals in Chuka community.

Another ritual by the initiation candidate was 'kuuna miti' ('breaking sticks') from gigantic fig trees which were commonly found within the sacred forests, reserved for the ancestors (Fadiman 2012: 218, Gitari 2005:109). The number of twigs picked depended

on the number of days to the actual operation (Muriuki 2004:139). The boy's mother had informed her friends about her son's occasion which was described as "gukura" which means, 'to grow up'. It was an abomination for women to speak directly and say that their son was going to be circumcised but they referred to it as 'gukura'.

The boys' father made the final preparations of liaising with the circumciser ('mutani') and the 'mutiri' (sponsor). 'Mutiri' is derived from a Kichuka verb 'gutira' which literally means to 'support'. The sponsor was to cater for the initiate after the operation and to monitor the proper healing of the wound. The sponsor educated the initiate on the basic ideals of manhood and communicated any relevant information to the initiate from the family members. The 'mutani' and the 'mutiri' determined the success of the whole operation. Their experience based on age, expertise and moral uprightness were paramount (Cianguo O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011).

The 'mutani' had to be endorsed by the council of elders after having successfully circumcised his own son. The chairman of the 'mugongo' (combined clans' councils of elders) informed us that the position of a 'mutani' was hereditary or acquired through apprenticeship by 'akui mboro' (porters of the 'mutani's' bag). The 'mutani' carried a leather bag containing a knife and a dik-dik horn for mystical powers. He also carried a small gourd with 'mbugu' (small seeds) inside that he would shake to invoke blessings from the ancestors. He wore 'bangiri' (armlets), animal skin and a colobus monkey

helmet (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011) which signified his ritualized authority and clearly distinguished him from the other people. The Colobus monkey helmet was a symbol of power and authority in Chuka. The dress code of the 'mutani' symbolized his power and authority to perform the operation and to transmit the masculine attributes to the initiates. His sons or porters learnt and inherited the skill to perform the operation by seeing what the 'mutani' was doing or through apprenticeship.

Young girls awaiting circumcision did a 'kurathia' ceremony but their nature of the gifts differed from that of the boys. The girls' gifts were feminine such as necklaces, grinding stones, gourds, calabashes and baskets, as opposed to masculine gifts received by the boys such as goats, beehives, axes, shields and spears. Besides, the girls received the gifts from their maternal aunties rather than uncles to perhaps emphasize their inferior position to the boys. Whereas the boys' gifts reinforced masculine attributes such as prowess in the men, the girls' gifts exhibited their feminine roles and inferiorated them to the men.

Following the 'Ndatho' and the 'kuuna miti' ceremony, the boy was expected to build his temporary shelter known as 'iganda' within his homestead which would serve as his convalescence hut. The 'iganda' was made up of dried banana leaves that were tied together using the local fibres. In readiness for the ceremony, some of the boys shaved one another to symbolize that the powerless boy had to die before the powerful man was

born. The clean shaven heads of the boys distinguished them from the elder men who had warriorhood braids that were a mark of their seniority and power over the novices. In some instances the initiates made two ‘mibiro’ (long stick of about one metre with feathers attached to one edge) carried on their shoulders to mimic the carrying of weapons to signify their imminent role of defense.

### **3.3 The Actual Operation in Pre-Colonial Period**

The removal of the prepuce was the core of male initiation which was preceded by a series of rituals that intensified one day to the operation. It was inaugurated by ‘kuuna gaaru’ (breaking into the warrior barracks) by the initiates. In this ritual, the bravest, well-built and biggest uncircumcised boy (‘kibici’) was sent to the ‘gaaru ya Nthaka’ to awaken the warriors while singing, trotting and jumping high up. The boy’s physique was an attribute of boyhood which permitted the boy to command respect from peers. The physically well built boys were ordained to exercise power and hegemony over the other boys in the ‘gaaru’. The biggest uncircumcised boy was entrusted with the mission to provoke the ‘nthaka’ into rage. In song and dance, the boy dared the warriors to prove their manhood by consenting to his circumcision. An example of a ‘Kuuna gaaru’ song is given below;

‘Wegua uri muka nagukia utiukire

Uyu iihoi mwijii x 2’.

‘Wegua uri muka utikegue, utigetikire nta ubici’

Uyu iihoi mwijii x 2’.

Translation; *‘If you are a woman do not wake up to this call; do not respond to my Call if you are a woman.*

*Here I am the uncircumcised boy’*

*If you are a woman do not listen to me, do not allow me to be*

*Circumcised; Here I am the uncircumcised boy’*

By referring to the warriors as women in the above song, the boy’s intention was to annoy the ‘nthaka’. Ensuring that he had fully aggravated the warriors, the boy went back to the ‘gaaru ya ibici’ where he and the other boys began to adorn themselves for their ceremony. They painted themselves with red ochre (‘monyo’ or ‘ciakimuri’ or ‘Nondo’) for purposes of easy identification. A clinician Zakayo Kwendo from Kakamega asserts that the use of red ochre in the Bukusu circumcision helped to arrest haemorrhage (*Sunday Standard*: Aug 3; 2014:6). This could probably be a viable reason for the application of red ochre by the boys, to control excessive bleeding.

The boys put on circumcision regalia which comprised ankle and leg bells, whose rhythm announced their presence to the neighborhood. Since an initiate was not supposed to meet with women and children along the way, the sound of the bells signaled his presence to women and children who had to give way to oncoming initiates. The social distance between the initiates and women was widened by unwritten rules such as crouching in the bush to hide from initiates, in order to justify the hegemony of

men over women. Womanhood was equated with powerlessness and a state of dependency which was an anti-thesis of manhood.

In retaliation to ‘kuuna gaaru’, the ‘nthaka’ followed up the provocative boy to prove their manhood and to detest any association with feminine attributes as suggested in the song. All the rituals that ensued were done in song and dance, communicating the anticipated ceremony. An example of the ‘nthakas’ retaliation song is given below;

Nthaka... ‘uraukire kwa mau uu ui mwiji? X2

..... ‘Nyomba ya nyukwe ikururuma ndu /cimba/njogu, etc

..... ‘uu ui mwiji’x2.

Translation: *To whose home had you come to, too early in the morning? You the*

*Uncircumcised x2*

*Your mothers’ house has now been invaded by leopards roaring,*

*you the Uncircumcised’x2*

*In your mothers’ house is a roaring lion, you the uncircumcised x2*

*In your mothers’ house is a roaring elephant, ..... x2*

In this song the ‘nthaka’ in fury refer to themselves as roaring/ trumpeting, fierce animals (leopards, lions or elephants), to oppose the boys reference to them as ‘women’. These wild animals symbolize potency, agility and clout as they easily make their prey vulnerable. Whereas mothers/ women and the uncircumcised are the ‘prey’, the men are the ‘predators’. By implication, this meant that men were aggressive, strong and

determined while women were at their mercy. Such circumcision songs epitomized the Chuka understanding of the character of a real man, emphasizing an ideal masculine man as a risk taker, aggressive, rational and powerful, virile, agile, swift, and independent.

The songs reminded the participants of the attributes of an ideal masculinity, thereby perpetuating images of sturdiness, hardiness and endurance at all times. All the songs presented a woman as subordinate to the man. The masculine attributes were contrasted with the feminine ones, the latter being expressed as dangerous, irrational, vulnerable, dependent, frail and mysterious. The songs moulded the initiate to fit into the Chuka version of manhood while defaming womanhood. For the boys to be men, they had to become the opposite of girls and women. This is a binary mapping of power relations of men and women as strong/weak, brave/cowards, independent/dependent and rational/irrational respectively. The songs demonstrate that masculinity and femininity in Chuka were two contrasting categories that were internally fissured by the sexual anatomy and other systems of inequality. The underlying message in the songs was that a man was not expected to act in feminine ways.

Even as this message was relayed in the songs, men and women had an inextricable link because the man was incomplete without the woman. Each gender constituted the critical half that made the human being complete. Although women were regarded as

inferior in the songs, the mothers supplied plenty of food to re-energize the men for the dances. Indeed, women were mobilized to participate in ensuring that their boys were not to be like women. Women watched these performances by the ‘nthaka’ and supported them by singing and ululating from a distance. In other words, masculine hegemony was not just exercised among younger boys awaiting circumcision, but rather mothers were expected to ensure that their sons became real men.

The retaliation by the ‘nthaka’ marked the beginning of ‘thauthi’ (circumcision dances). The coded songs advised the initiates on how they were expected to behave and to endure the anticipated pain of the operation. An example of such a ‘thauthi’ song is given below.

Nthaka; Wona nkitheka nti mwega, uu ui mwiji x2

Wegua kagau tika ka mwanki, uu ui mwiji x2

Translation; *‘Even if you see me laughing, I am dangerous’*

*‘And if they hear of a dried banana leaf,*

*It’s not the one used in lighting fire’.*

This song was meant to ‘scare’ the initiates and to instill in them the fear of the ‘nthaka’ who described themselves as very dangerous people. The ‘kagau’ mentioned in the song was the venue for the final operation. The use of the ‘kagau’ (literal for dried banana leaf) symbolized the death of boyhood and the beginning of manhood. In this venue, the ‘mutani’ (circumciser) skillfully removed the subcutaneous layer from the penis of the initiate which marked the second and final stage of the operation. In the songs, the coded

language indicates that the warriors were powerful and had the authority to pass on manhood to the candidates in the ‘kagau’. Another ‘thauthi’ song is given below;

Nthaka; ‘Yii, uhui nkethekagira’

Miinu ikienjwa, uii mwiji x2

Or

Nthaka; Kwingiri gugukia ukaune miraga mwiji x2

Uuu uuii mwiji x2

Translation; *‘I will be laughing as your penises get shaved’*

*‘ the uncircumcised x2*

Or

*‘It had better be morning so that you*

*Can go to break your ‘miraga’ thorns’*

*‘ the uncircumcised x2*

In the foregoing songs, the ‘nthaka’ informed the initiates that they would have their penises shaved before the operation. Unaware of the pain that lay ahead of them, the initiates were teased that as they got shaved, the ‘nthaka’ would be laughing at them. The songs served as a blessing from the ‘nthaka’ to the initiates. The ‘nthaka’ expressed concern that it had better be morning for the initiates to prune the ‘miraga’ thorns that would be used to clip the foreskin at the ‘itiri’ (first stage of the operation). ‘Thauthi’ songs were danced towards dawn on the day of the operation, as the initiates were driven to rivers for the chill baths.

As the dances progressed, the horn was blown five times to mark the re-birth of a real man. Early morning, the boys were taken to the nearest river for ‘Mithambo’ (cold or chill bath) ritual. The water was so cold at this hour that it numbed the body and acted as a local anesthesia. Besides, the use of water signified a source of life implying that after the ‘Mithambo’ ritual the ‘man’ became a source of life. This ceremony was also known as ‘nthambo’ (washing) which symbolized cleansing of boyhood. As candidates were driven down stream, the song and dance encouraged them for what lay ahead of them. One ‘mithambo’ song ran thus:

‘Igankubire ii mwiji, ii mwiji gankubire x2

‘kwithamba’, ‘Ruguti’,

‘Tungu’, ‘Mwirithii’.

Translation; *Let me take you, the uncircumcised,*

*Let me take you, to bathe, in River ‘Ruguti’*

*,or ‘Tungu’, or ‘Mwirithii’.*

The table 3.2 below, shows a list of the rivers where ‘Mithambo’ ritual was conducted.

<b>Name of the River/Stream/Pool</b>	<b>Villages Near the River.</b>
River Ruguti	Thuita, Kithunguri, Mukuuni, Mucatha, Mwonge, Ikuu, Rubate.
River Naka and River Tungu	Kiang’onde, Kiereni, Gatumbi, Iriani, Kangutu, Ndagani, Njaina, Kaanwa,
Mwirithii stream/ Iria ria Jeradi	Nthambo, Kigogo, Njuri
Kananki stream	Chera
Pool of Ngacii	Gatanga
River Thuci	Gitotogoto, Kiamuriuki
Kuruguca stream	Ndagani

Table 3.2, showing the names of some of the rivers/pools where the initiates bathed before the operation. Source; Saribatore (O. I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011).

Accompanying the ‘mithambo’ was the smearing of the candidate’s body with ‘mbariki’ (castor tree) oil to anoint him for manhood. Candidates were also presented with shields to symbolize their role of defence. A ‘muthiori’ (girdle cloth) was tied around each candidate’s waist by the ‘mutiri’ for the purpose of identification.

The whole exercise of preparing the initiates through song and dance, river bathing and oil smearing was ritualistically done and deliberately geared at mystifying the male person and empowering them to exercise mysterious power over others including over women. Once the water rituals were done, the candidates took a specified posture described in Mwaniki (2004:104-5) as, ‘looked down, faced forward, stretched arms out, closed fists and bent forearms up wards at right angles with the upper arms’. The candidate would trot in this position to the operation field called ‘itiri’ or ‘kigirini’ for the first stage of the operation.

Following is an example of another ‘mithambo’ song that was sung by the ‘nthaka’ as they escorted to the ‘kigiri’/ ‘itiri’ (first stage for the operation), which was some kind of a village stadium.

‘Waunjuga ndia wegua ikarii atia

uui I uui mwiji’ x2

Translation,

*‘When you stirred the waters, how did you feel it like’*

*You the uncircumcised x2*

The place was encircled with dried banana leaves to shield it from uninvited onlookers. The 'nthaka' heavily guarded the 'itiri' making a 'kigiri' (tightly knit circular setting of the warriors) to prevent any woman or uncircumcised boys from intruding/peeping from a far. Men would ululate in song and dance while women responded from a far distance. The women were powerless and could not be allowed to witness the transfer of power to the boys.

As indicated, the 'itiri' was the first stage for the operation, which began with the 'mubanda miraga' (planter of Acacia thorns) pulling out and clipping the boys' foreskins with Acacia thorns. The 'planters of thorns' were men who had portrayed proper traits of manhood and exercised their power in passing the mantle of manhood to the initiates. The 'mutani' literally flew past the 'kigiri' into the 'Itiri'. He plucked off the thorns while severing the foreskins of all the candidates.

The 'mutiri' (sponsor) then firmly supported the initiate by his shoulders to maintain an upright posture. The 'mutani' used the same knife to cut all the candidates foreskins, with their numbers soaring up to one hundred candidates in some of the seasons. While the foreskins were being cut off, the 'nthaka' were busy dancing and the women ululated from a far. The ceremony was most exciting whenever a boy showed courage and bravery. The initiate was not expected to cry out of this painful operation. He had to dance too, even though some of the 'ntane' (newly circumcised men) bled severely

(Saribatore O. I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011). Initiates valued this frightful circumcision experience because it imbued in them their manhood. Circumcision marked the transition from boyhood to manhood statuses that gave the new men privileges and authority in the society. The traumatic circumcision procedure involving the cutting of the prepuce without any anesthesia was a key testimony of the transition to real manhood. Enduring the pain was an expression of mental strength and physical power.

The first born boy of the first wife had to be circumcised first to give way for the circumcision of the other wives' sons. By being circumcised first, this boy was indirectly socialized to be in control of his younger siblings. The order of circumcision gave the son to the first wife hegemony over the other sons. This was based on the understanding that in the absence of the father, the first son to the first wife assumed the role of the family head as shown in the social organization of the Chuka. This practice entwined with the religious belief that families which respected first sons and transferred power accordingly invited blessings to their lineage.

Once the foreskin was cut the candidate was tossed up and as he landed on the ground, he was dressed in a Colobus monkey head dress. The head dress was worn by men to symbolize power, which implied that the 'ntane' had acquired power and authority. Initiates who demonstrated the slightest fear were ridiculed for behaving like 'women' and this was meant to psychologically charge the cowards to get tough. Circumcision

gave the initiates a chance to prove their dexterity and maturity. Initiates who survived this ordeal without showing any signs of fear proved their ability to endure all obstacles in their lives. This correlates with the findings of Gilmore (1990) which he explained how the ordeal of circumcision awakened fierceness in the boy, making him an independent actor, afraid of nothing after experiencing the worst pain that life could offer during his circumcision operation.

The initiates were escorted calmly in rhythm of hitting sticks ‘*mpa....mpa....mpa....*’ and slow music that was intended to take their mind off the pain. They were ushered into the second stage of the operation known as the ‘kagauni’. An example of a song at this point of the ceremony is here below.

Ii Mwindi uu

Mwindi uri njau namutungire na Gichunge ii x2

Translation; *‘Mwindi’, had a calf, I met with him and ‘Gichunge’ x2.*

This song equates the newly circumcised with a calf hence symbolizing newness or rebirth of the man from the boy. The ‘kagauni’ was the venue where the ‘mutani’ in sobriety, skillfully primed initiate’s penis to make him a real man. The candidate was laid down on his back on wet banana stems. Our sources indicated that this position helped to elevate the lower back of the initiate so as to make it possible for the ‘mutani’ to access the penis from all angles, while carefully removing the subcutaneous tissue (Kibungi O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2011, Kanga O.I: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2011).

As mentioned earlier, the Chuka style of circumcising was 'Karinga kathige', which entailed the total removal/ pruning of the foreskin. At this 'kagauni' stage, the operation was intensely painful but the initiate had to remain motionless and silent. Even an involuntary twitch of the eye would be interpreted as a sign of fear. If a candidate showed any fright, he was forever shamed as a coward and was denounced by members of his age set. Besides, he brought ruin upon his lineage forever and earned himself demeaning names such as 'therenja' (one who moves by his buttocks), 'kiguoya' (coward) and 'gitomo' (one who cries easily).

Those boys who had been forcibly circumcised as a punishment for their misdeed had the worst moment at this stage. The 'nthaka' barred the 'mutani' from completing the operation until the boys' father paid the fine stipulated by the warriors (Mwaniki 2004). Participation in the circumcision ceremonies granted men control over ritual practices since only men were allowed to be present around the venue. According to Mwaniki (Ibid), no woman was expected to be at the 'kigiri and the 'kagauni'. Since the events surrounding the operation were private and unknown to women, the exercise gave the men some sacred and mysterious powers that rendered women powerless and submissive. On successfully completing all 'kagauni' rituals the 'ntane' were taken to their 'iganda' for healing and training for manhood.

### 3.4 Post-circumcision Rituals in the Pre-Colonial Period

#### 3.4.1 The naming ceremony

On completion of the operation at 'kagauni', the 'ntane' (newly circumcised man) was taken in song and dance to his 'Iganda' (healing hut) or 'Kiagau' in less vigor. An example of a song to escort him is given below.

Waurua ni abai wauma kuu

Wauma kiria kuthugura ndigi

Riiu, riiiu, waumaku ndigi? x2

Translation; *if asked by the uncircumcised where you have come from,*  
*'you have come from 'kiria' to get the circumcised'*  
*'Now, now, where have you come from the circumcised?'*

Here the 'new man' was being cautioned in this song to disassociate himself from the boys due to his new status. On arrival at the 'iganda' the escorts of the initiate danced to celebrate the new man and to inform the members of the family of their son's new status. In case a boy died in the process of his operation, the 'nthaka' planted a twig at the entrance to the 'iganda' and screamed to alert his kin of the misfortune. The elders and the warriors liaised with the family members and consulted the 'mugo' (medicine man) to ascertain the cause of the death. If the cause of the death was as a result of recklessness during the operation, the 'mutani' was henceforth barred from circumcising any other boys and required to pay a 'thamantia'(huge fine) to the elders (Cianguo O.I:

21<sup>st</sup> April 2011). The dead body was dishonourably disposed in the forest because it was a threat to masculine power and authority.

Four to eight days after the operation, a ceremony known as ‘nciabuni’ (naming ceremony), was conducted at the ‘ntane’s’ home. His new name was embedded in ‘nciabuni’ song which portrayed the conduct of the initiate during the operation and the warriors’ expectations about the new man. The chosen name epitomized masculine values taken after ferocious beasts such as ‘M’Njogu’ (elephant), ‘M’Mbogo’ (Buffalo), ‘Ntwiga’ (Giraffe), or names with religious meanings such as ‘M’Njeru’ (Chuka God).

The names symbolized the attributes of real manhood as strength, agility, courage and supremacy that were anticipated from the new men. The name signified the new mans’ achievement of masculine power and authority over complicit masculinities and women. The ‘nciabu’ song relayed messages of true manhood while demeaning womanhood as demonstrated in the following song by Saribatore (O. I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011).

*Solo;* Ihai ii ui yiaa maibuni nciabu Na M’mbiuki; (*in this naming*  
‘nciabu, M’Mbiuki’)

*All;* niriету ii yiaa maibuni nciabu; (*Is ours in this naming* ‘nciabu’)

*Solo;* Ria kwirimiria? (*It has been earned?*)

- All; Na mwiri ii yiaa maibuni nciabu; (*through the body in this naming 'Nciabu'*)
- Solo; Nthaka cia Mbiuki? (*the warriors of Mbiuki?*)
- All; Kung'enta ii yiaa maibuni nciabu; (*Are very aggressive ours in this naming 'nciabu'*)
- Solo; Ciatwere Njogu? (*They climbed the elephants'?*)
- All; mugongo ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*back in this naming 'nciabu'*)
- Solo; Nicio cieragwa? (*They were told?*)
- All; Uro uro ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*hey, hey! in this naming 'nciabu'*)
- Solo; Watunga ngi'na wa? (*if you meet with the mother of?*)
- All; Kibici/Therenja ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*the uncircumcised or mover on his Buttocks*)
- Solo; Ringa unaune? (*Hit and break?*)
- All; Mugongo ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*the back! in this naming 'nciabu'*)
- Solo; Watunga ngi'na wa ? (*if you meet with the mother of? )*
- All; Kiuma nthaa ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*the non-flinching in this naming 'nciabu'*)
- Solo; Ringa kithaka? (*run to the bush?*)
- All; Na nkingo ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*by neck in this naming 'nciabu'*)

- Solo;* Nwari Mugumo? (*I wish a Mugumo?*)
- All;* Kuguka ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*uproots in this naming 'nciabu'*)
- Solo;* Ugakura gaaru ya? (*Uproot the barracks of?*)
- All;* Ibici ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*the uncircumcised in this naming 'nciabu'*)

This song illustrates how men's' status was elevated while women and the uncircumcised were demonized. The song above despised mothers of cowards, the weak/feeble and the uncircumcised while at the same time praising the mothers of the strong, courageous, tough, muscular, agile, brave, and the powerful men. Those without the latter qualities were wished bad luck.

Apart from belonging to an age set, a circumcised penis was integral part of masculine identity and a cultural asset that granted men a superior status in society. This was symbolized in the acquisition of the new name during the 'nciabuni' ritual. Apart from the new name, the new men began to wear a 'nyorotha' (beaded head lace) to mark his new status. Henceforth, it became a serious offence to refer to a circumcised man by any other name other than his 'nciabuni' name.

### **3.4.2 Seclusion and education of junior men**

The 'Ntane' spent most of their day time in the river valleys and gorges receiving instructions on their new role as warriors. The bulk of the seclusion period lasted

between two to three months during which the initiates learnt how to be proper men (Saribatore, O.I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011). During this convalescence period, 'ntane' were taught the virtues of obedience and respect for elder men. The education given to the fresh initiates was called 'kirarire' or 'kirira' ('catechism') which lay emphasis on independence and self-reliance. Warriors who had emerged victorious in battles were senior to the other warriors in their 'gaaru' and were entrusted with authority and control over the new initiates.

The elders and senior warriors educated the initiates on diet prohibitions. The initiates were not supposed to eat any form of birds including chicken, fowls and eagles because birds were considered 'cheap' animals that could only be eaten by young boys and women. Men proved their manhood and hegemony over the women and boys by eating meat from bigger and tougher animals like cattle, goats and sheep. The fresh initiates were also prohibited from drinking beer because alcohol would dull their senses against an enemies attack. The Chuka women learnt how to brew varieties of millet beer and potent honey wine, although its actual consumption was by the senior elders.

Kibungi (O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011) posits that the Chuka forbid women from drinking alcohol to prevent them from becoming sexual immoral. Such regulations on beer consumption show that the senior elders had hegemonic control over the junior masculinities and women. Warriors in the 'gaaru' sang songs that had some of the

lessons learnt during the catechism. An example of such a song is given below (Nyangi O.I:13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012);

‘Nthaka ni kithaka’

‘Igendaga mbere ya riua’

‘Nthaka’

‘Igendaga na mukororima’

Translation            *‘Warriors are the bush’, ‘They move before sunrise’*

*‘Warriors’, ‘They move in underground tunnels’*

This song clearly indicates that warriors were not supposed to walk along the same paths used by women and children. Women and children had to run into the bushes on hearing warrior songs, in order to give way to the warriors. Worthington (1920) confirms that in many African societies young boys and women displayed an exaggerated form of respect to warriors by racing and crouching into the bush to hide from an approaching warrior. This practice reinforced male superiority and ensured that women axiomatically accepted and respected the male as superior gender in the Chuka society.

Lifestyle in the ‘gaaru’ was a compulsory stage for all men and pulling out of this barracks was seen as unmanly and cowardly behavior which would attract ridicule and stringent punishments from the elders. Internal wrangles in the ‘gaaru’ were possible causes for some warriors to pull out of their ‘gaaru’. A warrior’s performance and conduct during the ‘gaaru’ warfare and raiding activities determined his hierarchy or

position in his barracks. For example, each 'gaaru' had a leader or 'spokesman' referred to as a 'mugambi wa gaaru' or 'Ncamba' (the cock), who had to prove his fisticuffs and toughness in battles, displaying his bravery and vindicating his manliness in physical combat. The bruises and scars that he obtained in such fights accumulated his prestige and bestowed on him hegemony over his peers. The spokesman linked the team of warriors under his control to the council of elders and influenced the decisions made for his 'gaaru' by these elders.

According to Saribatore (O.I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2012), an ideal 'gaaru' spokesman was eloquent in speech and factual while exercising justice ('ugambi') hence the title 'mugambi'. He must have endured the circumcision pain without any show of emotions to prove himself as a 'ncamba' (cock). Such a man was envied and admired by other men and had ultimate hegemony over them. The gaaru warriors' occasionally met at the 'Itiri', (village stadiums) for 'battle matches' organized by the 'gaaru' leaders to prove their prowess. The battles were executed by wrestling and watched by the villagers. The men who lost in the wrestling were judged to be less manly and their 'gaaru' warriors became inferior to the winning 'gaaru' warriors. The winning 'gaaru' was famed for having real men who became enviable for their masculine competence.

Married men had to live in the 'gaaru' until such a time that their son or daughter was circumcised. The man's retirement from warriorhood was based on the assumption that

his role in the 'gaaru' would be inherited by his circumcised son or daughter. A man who retired from warriorhood following his sons' circumcision gained a higher esteem and honor than the one who retired on the grounds of his daughter's circumcision. This was because the men's' role of defending the society was ranked above the women's role in the domestic domain. The power and authority of elder men and women was based on the gender of their adult children and their roles in the society.

### **3.5 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has explained that the Chuka men were irrefutably esteemed and a favored class than the women having gone through a successful circumcision operation. They were culturally imbued with notions that they were superior to women and enjoyed multiple privileges including their inherent right to dominate. Real manhood was something that men aspired to achieve because it guaranteed them dominant positions over women. Attributes of an ideal masculinity were handed over to men through a series of pre- and post- circumcision rituals.

In conclusion, this chapter elaborates that though it was the desire of all men to attain hegemony, some men failed to meet the necessary criterion to belong to this coveted category of the men with power. The male misfits remained under the control of fellow men. Consequently, some of the circumcised men fell in the category of sub-ordinate masculinities because of failing to adhere to the circumcision rules and for presenting

their masculinity in the 'wrong' way. Other men fell in the category of complicit masculinities that had connected with hegemony but did not fully represent hegemonic masculinity. Such men exemplified a normal masculinity, with nothing really exceptional about their manhood and as such they did not receive the full benefits and privileges accrued to the real men who were purely hegemonic.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHUKA CIRCUMCISION RITE; 1906-1963.

#### 4.0 Introduction

In chapter three we examined the origins of the Chuka circumcision rite and outlined the pre-circumcision activities. We also evaluated the components of the actual operation and concluded with the post-operation rituals in pre-colonial Chuka. Generally, the chapter demonstrated that the practice of circumcision empowered the initiates to wield immense power in the society.

In this chapter, we undertake to assess the transformation of the circumcision rituals during the colonial era. In an effort to achieve our objective, we discuss the influence wrought by imperialists to the traditional circumcision rituals and their subsequent effects on manhood. This chapter is based on the assumption that colonial rule had profound influence on the male status and the gender relations in Chuka.

## **4.1 European Contacts with the Chuka**

### **4.1.1 Establishment of colonial rule in Chuka**

Written evidence shows an early European contact with the Chuka (Southern Meru) by the late 19<sup>th</sup> C. The first European traders came to Chuka accompanied by Kamba, Swahili, Somali, and Arab caravans (Fadiman 2012:127). Habitually, the caravans travelled to Mount Kenya region during every dry season. The Chuka labeled them as 'Acomba' which meant 'men of the coast' (Cianguo O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011, Mwaniki 2004:44). They brought with them trinkets, cloth and 'shanga' (coastal beads) in exchange for tusks, honey, goats and grains.

Among the first white traders to cross through the Chuka region were Karl Peters, Herman Tiedemann and William Astor Chanler (Fadiman 2012:128). These traders used the pattern of plunder, counter-attack, rifle fire, and subsequent alliances for the next decade to enter Chuka. Warriors viewed each intrusion by such European traders as their chance to raid for goods and livestock as well as to gain glory among fellow warriors. Many thoughtful elders opposed the warrior's attacks on the caravans because of their straightforward fear of military defeat. The elders viewed their collaboration with these traders as a means to acquire wealth and material rewards. Undeterred by warrior attacks, European caravans came to Chuka carrying big quantities of goods and guns throughout the 1890s.

Long before the British arrival, the Chuka elders had learnt about the colonization of the neighbouring communities from the Chuka warriors who had wandered to the Gikuyu region. The wandering warriors narrated startling tales of how the Gikuyu had surrendered to the whites because of the power of the gun. They described how the Gikuyu warriors had laid aside their spears in favor of the ‘woman's digging sticks’ during the road construction projects. Such stories served as a warning to the Chuka elders about the impending challenge on their manhood upon the arrival of the British. The warriors and elders expressed the fear that they too could be forced to dig like the Gikuyu, knowing clearly that it was a taboo for men to ‘dig like women’ (Cianguo O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011).

Colonial rule was formally established in Chuka following the arrival of Edward Butler Horne in Southern Meru in July 1906 (K.N.A., DC/MRU/1/3/2). Oral information handed down to M'Baini (O.I: 7<sup>th</sup> Oct 2011) indicates that Horne was popularly referred to as ‘Kangangi’ (little wanderer) due to his constant movements across the Chuka region. The Chuka decided to sue for peace with ‘Kangangi’, probably due to the prophetic warnings on the futility of any armed resistances. Such prophecies had been made by M'kurengia from Rubate and Ciangemi and Kiragu from Mukuuni (Cianguo O.I: 4<sup>th</sup> April 2011).

The Chuka are among the African communities who offered passive resistance to the European incursion into their land which at times has been referred to as collaboration. Interpreted wrongly, collaboration could insinuate that the Chuka had subordinated themselves to European colonialists. In reality, the Chuka used passive resistance as a strategy to gain where they deemed necessary. Adu Boahen (1990) refers to this approach as 'alliance' or 'cooperation' by some African communities that 'collaborated'. The armed resisters should not be branded as heroes while passive resisters like the Chuka as traitors because in the final analysis, both armed and passive resisters lost their sovereignty and independence to the imperialists. Besides, the Chuka motive of submission was an attempt to regain their freedom and not to give it away.

The Chuka's submission strategy to the Europeans was inspired by similar factors to those of the Yoruba states of Nigeria, the Ngwato, the Lozi, the Sotho and Tswana of Southern Africa as described in Boahen (1987:39). Boahen shows that these communities readily surrendered to the Europeans since they knew it was futile and costly to confront the imperialists. The Yoruba of Nigeria derived their lesson of submission from the disastrous defeat of the Ijebu who had dared to oppose the British. Similarly, the Chuka submitted to the British for the fear of being humiliated and defeated like the much larger and more powerful neighbours as the Gikuyu (Muriuki, 1974), Mbeere and the Embu in 1906 (Mwaniki 1974).

Oral sources indicate that some Chuka warriors defied the elders' advice to submit and waylaid the British at Thuci boundary. The resisters' efforts were thwarted following the killing of a powerful warrior named Mukanda from Mugaani by the British soldiers. The batch of resisting warriors withdrew on the realization that they had poor arms (spears, arrows) as compared to the British gun (Cianguo O.I: 4<sup>th</sup> April 2011). In his analysis of the African resistances, Boahen (1987:26) posits that the Europeans breech-loading rifles such as the maxim gun were more powerful than the African bows and arrows. In the case of Chuka, the warriors were armed with bows, spears and arrows which barely matched such muzzle-loading rifles of the British.

Poorly armed and with the examples of their defeated neighbours, the Chuka elders chose to readily submit to the British. In July 1907, Horne had passed through Chuka without much incidence since the Chuka submission had already been sought (Orde 1925). Horne was accompanied by one company of the King's African Rifles (K.A.R.), supported by tall and fierce Maasai spearmen and Gikuyu and Embu porters. Horne moved through Ndiruni, Kambandi and to Gatumbi (present day Chuka town), before encamping at Mwitari which was later renamed Meru town (Fadiman 1994:194, Mwaniki 2004:55). He rode on a white horse and displayed the rapid firing of his gun in order to maximize his initial impact. Horne explicitly informed his subjects that he came to rule, stop raids for livestock and women, and to solve all conflicts (Orde 1925).

#### **4.1.2 The shift of hegemony from elders to ‘Blanket’ chiefs**

The elderhood conferred on Chuka men through circumcision cycles, was greatly affected by the establishment of colonial rule in 1907. Upon his arrival, Horne appointed Mbogori M'Mwendo as the first chief of the Chuka-Mwimbi region. Mbogori was widely acclaimed for his physique, courage and service as a commander of the ‘gaaru’ warriors, which impressed Horne. In order to formalize this appointment, Horne presented to Mbogori a ‘kanga’ or black cotton blanket as a symbol of the chief’s office (Fadiman 1994). This perhaps explains the origin of the title ‘Cibu wa murengeti’ or ‘Munene wa Kanga’ (blanket chief) for colonial chiefs in Chuka (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011). Each colonial chief was given the black cotton blanket to symbolize his chieftainship. The blanket chiefs were sourced from the young warrior leaders in the ‘gaaru’ to become the new ‘Agambi’ (spokesmen) on all European matters. This meant that the ‘gaaru’ spokesmen were given power over the councils of elders (kiama) contrary to the traditions. The new appointees or ‘blanket chiefs’ began to take away power and authority from the councils of elders, thus altering the traditional ordering of male age sets.

While membership to the ‘kiama’ or councils of elders was determined by one’s age and initiation through circumcision, the appointment of chiefs by European governors did not put this requirement into consideration. As a result of this, legitimate claimants to power found themselves powerless, as they were forced to obey leaders who could not

have held under the traditional pre-colonial Chuka society. Hence determination of leadership and distribution of power and authority of councils of elders was distorted. The role played by the elders in the circumcision rituals started to be challenged. Seniority of age sets based on when its members were circumcised ceased to be the organizing principle of authority among men. Senior age sets were stripped of their hegemony by the junior age sets as young leaders' exercised control over all the people irrespective of their age.

Frustrated by Horne's appointees, members of the councils of elders initiated the blanket chiefs to the elder councils, in an effort to continue exercising control and authority over them. The new appointees gradually usurped hegemony from the council of elders to the blanket chiefs. In 1907, the ruling elders were of the 'Kiramana' age set who contested for authority with the colonialists and the blanket chiefs. Horne and his European counterparts did not understand the different status of the warriors and the elders.

From 1911, the mantle of elderhood was put aside at will as the Europeans searched for the native laborers. Among European settlers, the sole criterion for male labourers was not their but their strength to work. As settlers, missionaries, hunters and entrepreneurs settled in the surrounding regions the demands for labour multiplied each year. Within the first ten years of colonial take-over in Chuka, the traditional transition of males through boyhood, warriorhood, junior elderhood and to senior elders had been

dismantled (Mwaniki 2004). This was either due to the establishment of a new administration by blanket chiefs or the recruitment of both the young and the old into forced/ wage labour.

The British administration set up a sub-station at Fort Naka (present day Chuka town) in 1912 due to a series of uprisings and attacks against Imenti labour seekers (Fadiman 1994). Chuka was geographically far from British military control at Mwitari (present day Meru town) and the opening of the Naka Fort made it easy for the colonizers to administer Nithi (southern part of Meru which comprised the Mwimbi, Muthambi and Chuka). In 1912, Orde Browne was appointed as the first assistant District Commissioner (D.C.) for Nithi. He was popularly referred to as 'Kirauni' (for 'Crown') by the natives because he served the British king (Kanga O.I: 6th June 2011). Orde's entourage to Fort Naka comprised three hundred Embu porters, a Kamba policeman, two British officials, three Asians to supply the station and one Kikuyu interpreter (K.N.A.DC/EBU/1/3/: 1914). Orde's horse ride, use of the 'magic' lanterns, fireworks and his looking glasses all served as great attractions to overawe and compel obedience from the 'primitive' Chuka. He was able to quickly win the submission of the Chuka natives to his administration (Orde 1925).

During the second decade of colonial rule, Chuka was governed by a series of administrators. This era has been described by Fadiman (1994:264), as the period of 'pragmatists rule', because the rulers were not as emphatic about the Chuka traditions as Horne. The new commissioners worked to become efficient administrators and induced the natives to perform various tasks. They were interested in practical results and not in cultural theories or principles. The 'pragmatists' made alterations to the councils of elders, which had dire implications on the hegemony of circumcision men. By 1917, the last year of Horne's administration, the councils of elders in Chuka, Igoji and Imenti had almost stopped functioning and the number of cases heard by these councils had dropped from over 100 in 1916 to 41 in 1917 as recorded in (K.N.A. DC/MRU/1/3/2; 1917).

In 1920, for instance the governing council meeting that was convened by D.C. D.R. Crawford was addressed by younger men as opposed to being addressed by the council of elders (K.N.A. DC/MRU/1/3/2:1921). The younger council had been handpicked by Crawford, against established tradition of constituting such councils with elderly men. By 1922, younger men continued to rule in place of the councils of elders. As a result of this, the councils of elders in Chuka ceased to meet, allowing the 'Nkome' council and consequently the 'gaaru' systems to fall into disuse. Fadiman (1994:185) asserts that by the mid 1920s, the concept of social order was forced to give way as 'kids began to lead the goats', where the 'kids' implies the young men of Murungi age set while the 'goats' were the Kaburia age set elders who were the rightful members of the governing council.

The above illustration shows that the 'pragmatist' rulers such as Crawford restructured the indigenous administration of the councils of elders by incorporating younger and educated men into them. Besides, they widened the scope of administration for these new young leaders to include guiding and implementing colonial policies and mandates.

This restructuring of the governing councils became elaborate with the launching of the Meru Local Native Council (L.N.C.) in 1925 which officially took over the roles of the 'Nkome' (indigenous) council of elders (K.N.A., M.C.C./10/12/25, 1925). This L.N.C. comprised twenty two men; with eight elected members and fourteen appointees of the D.C. Majority of the L.N.C. members were former warriors who were elected partly due to their command of Kiswahili, the colonial lingua-Franca, and also due to their successful work blanket police. The L.N.C. members had pro-British attitudes and could be regarded to as 'young, bright and energetic' by the British administrators (Ibid). In Chuka terms the L.N.C. members belonged to the Murungi age set, which was scheduled to rule after the Kaburia age set (Thomas 1992). The 'pragmatist' administrators used young appointees to assume positions of the senior men. The new crop of young leaders was presumably men of administrative vigour, who commanded physical presence.

By 1927, the mantle of elderhood was ripped off at will by the British who were in search of the new brand of rulers and the need for communal labourers. The new generation of leaders ignored the old ways of the elders and transformed the British rule

into reality. The L.N.C. offered an opportunity to the men of political tenderness to share in the responsibility of ruling their people. This change in administration brought an alien understanding of masculinity and real manhood. As a consequence, the fledgling elders' expectation of sitting quietly in councils to absorb ancestral wisdom was rendered useless through this restructuring of the governing councils (Fadiman 1994). The traditional role of elderhood which had been anticipated with much pleasure simply disappeared as elders ceased to control the smooth transition of males from boyhood to manhood through circumcision.

By 1937, the council of elders ('Nkome') existed only in the memories of its former members, having been systematically suppressed by the vigor of British district officers. Henceforth, Chuka was ruled by appointed blanket chiefs and tribal retainers who eventually become too powerful to withstand. The key role of the retainers was to collect taxes and liaise with the blanket chiefs on the successful implementation of colonial policies. Faced with such frustrations, the 'Nkome' elders retreated into apathy and abandoned their role of governing the Chuka. The elders had become passive, disheartened by the rule of the young and the disintegration of the norms. In retaliation, men who were deprived this coveted position of elderhood resorted to having secret meetings at night to deliberate on what they viewed of importance to the community (Thomas 1992). By 1940, the indigenous council system had wholly lost its significance

as the 'pragmatist' rulers had ceased to consult the elders and worked through the Local Native Councils.

H.E. Lambert, who had served as the D.C in 1933-1935 and 1939-1942, (Lambert 1950, K.N.A/DC/MRU/1/4: 1944) briefly restored the council of elders in the entire Meru region. Lambert viewed the council of elders as 'a positive force within a tribe' (Lambert 1950:16). However he set minimum conditions for the elders, requiring them to meet in daylight rather than at night, as they had done for over a decade (Kinyua 1970). Lambert grouped the council of Chuka, Mwimbi, Muthambi, Miutini and Igoji into one unit called Nithi which formed the Southern Division of Meru. His efforts were unsuccessful following alleged assertion by the Imenti that the Nithi were not 'true Ameru' (Lambert 1950).

Lamberts' efforts to revive the Councils in the 1940s were futile as the indigenous system of elders was almost extinct (K.N.A/GP/301 Lam: 30). The Chuka had become more acquainted to the 'blanket' chiefs and the tribal retainers. In the absence of the elders influence the detailed organization of traditional circumcision ceremonies was drastically diluted. The 'gaaru' system became obsolete and lost its significance. Many young men abandoned the barracks life in search for jobs in order to earn money for paying their taxes.

During the last decade of colonial rule, the Chuka experienced further political changes that transformed the relegation of hegemony among men. In 1951, a woman named Ciokaraine in Meru was appointed to the Local Native Councils (KNA MSS/7, Kinyua 1970), thus changing the gender based stereotype that men were in charge of the political power in the community. Leadership was no longer associated with men only but also began to engage women. This infers that going forward the hegemonic masculinity was feminized as males who had hitherto exercised hegemony shared positions of authority with women leaders. Thus, the Chuka people began to question the legitimacy of the rite of circumcision in bestowing power on men over other men and women.

#### **4.1.3 Dismantling of warriorhood**

Warriorhood was systematically dismantled in colonial Chuka which reduced the importance of circumcision in ushering the young males into warrior hood. By July 1907, Horne relied wholly on the K.A.R. to protect and defend the Chuka land. Consequently, the Chuka warriors lost their sovereignty and their right to control their destiny, plan for the initiation ceremonies, and conduct their own diplomacy.

Within the first year of his administration, Horne supplemented this alien force with Chuka warriors. Each blanket chief was instructed to choose two warriors who would serve as 'blanket askari' (police) to Horne's ('Kangangi's') initial force (K.N.A, DC/MRU/1/3/2: 1908). 'Kangangi' preferred men of outstanding size and physical

vigour, men of attested masculine qualities such as the tallest and strongest warriors. Such requirements excluded men of small stature, advanced age, or physical infirmity regardless of their experience, wisdom, or status from being in charge of community affairs. The appointed warriors were designated as porters to the British soldiers and were issued with blankets to symbolize their new appointments. Horne referred to them by the Swahili term 'askari' (police) but the Chuka called them 'Askari ya Kanga' (blanket police).

The 'blanket askari' ranked lower than the British soldiers, but they were more powerful than the traditional warriors. Though the blanket police were allowed to retain their traditional shields and spears, they became subordinate to Horne's 'askari' who carried the gun. Many traditional warriors sought out the position of colonial police as a means for adventure, military action and future praise for their masculinity. The creation of the British force led to the co-existence of distinct militant masculinities.

This scenario of establishing an all-male police in the British colonies was an essential aspect of producing a militant masculinity among the natives (Mama 2007). The norms of this army were defined by male bodies and 'masculine' practices which, just like in the traditional set-up, denied women access to work and hold careers in the defense forces. Recruitment and conscription into 'blanket' police was carried out in accordance with the divide and rule principle while targeting the local warriors. The recruitment of

these warriors into the police force removed them from their 'gaaru' set up and altered the traditional flow of hegemony among the Chuka warriors.

Disgruntled warriors had to seek other avenues of reinforcing their manhood with many of them opting to look for the low cadre jobs such as being cooks, messengers and grounds men within the British system of administration, given their low education levels. In 1908, Horne's decree that weapons were not to be carried openly with pride affected warriorhood (K.N.A. DC/CKU/1/1/2; 1908). This means that the shields and spears ceased to serve as symbols of manhood without which effective training of the warriors proved very difficult. This forced the family heads to carry fighting sticks in the place of the forbidden weapons. The ban on carrying weapons by the warriors denied circumcised men the opportunity to prove their manhood in 'gaaru' battles. It took away powerful symbols of men's authority and control. Circumcised men were denied the open clamor for authority rendering them powerless before the British soldiers.

In the establishment of colonial rule, Horne mapped out the boundaries of each location and designated them as native reserves. Colonial land policy of carving out African reserves put pressure on the men's authority over land appropriation. The entire Mt. Kenya forest region was declared Crown Land which forbade the natives from inhabiting and hunting in that zone (K.N.A. DC/CKU/1/1/2; 1908). In carving out the location boundaries, forested uphill areas were reserved for the crown.

Crown land Ordinances were supplemented with Native Pass Systems of 1908, in which all natives were restricted to their designated tribal reserves. The pass systems forbade warriors from leaving their own locations for any reason except with the permission of their chiefs. All natives who traveled outside their designated areas were required to carry a pass or 'Cheti' (Muriira O.I: 10th Aug 2011). This restriction took away the function of the circumcised men as custodians of clan land and disorganized the warriors from their 'gaaru' set up.

Besides, travelling in groups of any size was totally forbidden. As a result of these restrictions on movement, raids became difficult to stage. The warriors were forced by the new circumstances to endlessly provide labour for the white man. By 1912, raiding was outlawed by Horne, which meant that younger warriors who had not yet raided sufficient animals were unable to marry in honour and to provide for their children (Fadiman 2012). The ban on raiding changed the traditional concept that a circumcised man was the provider for his family, casting misgivings on the man as the head of the family.

Warriorhood was also affected during the construction of the gigantic road from Embu through Naka and Meru Forts. This road was named 'Horne road' and was completed using 'mitiro' (digging sticks) by 1912 (K.N.A. DC/MRU/1/3/1; 1912). The project outraged the warriors for being ordered to dig, a job that was traditionally reserved for

women. Horne refused to exempt the men on request that this digging was against their customs on division of labour. Consequently, men and women participated equally in the road building and shared identical punishments for disobedience. The subjection of the circumcised men in the road digging took away the pride of the manly warriors while relegating them to the feminine duty.

Frustrated and stripped of their manhood privileges', the warriors began to drink millet beer and strong honey, which were hitherto a prerogative of elderhood. The pattern of drunkenness intensified among the warriors due to their enforced idleness. Worse, the pattern of drunkenness spread from warriors to the unmarried girls, which was a greater violation of tradition. The codes that governed sexual relations between warriors and unmarried women began to erode as well. Fadiman (1994) elaborates that traditionally, warriors were supposed to abstain from drinking as well as sexual relations in order to maintain their strength and alertness in case of an attack. The breaking of liquor regulations by the warriors caused conflict between elders and the warrior age-sets. Further conflict was witnessed between the warriors and the uncircumcised boys when the latter adopted warrior braids and dress. Hegemony among the men was no longer expressed in diet prohibitions or in the dress codes.

Between the years 1909 and 1911, Horne introduced a hut tax to be paid in form of currency (initially rupees, subsequently shillings) or in kind such as livestock and labour

for the whites. Large contingents of hut retainers were recruited by the British administrators to count and record every hut for purpose of taxation. The introduction of the hut tax seriously affected warriorhood as young men abandoned their 'gaaru' life style in search of wage labour.

By the mid 1915 the effects of the First World War (WW1) in Europe began to be felt in Chuka (K.N.A.DC/MRU/1/3/1-2: 1914, 1916). Hundreds of native warriors from Chuka were recruited as carrier corps for the British Expeditionary Force (K.N.A. DC/CKU/1/3/1; 1911-1914). Chuka warriors scrambled for this opportunity in a bid to recover their long hidden weapons and restore raiding which had been outlawed (M'Baini, O.I: 7<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2011). However, the warriors were disillusioned when it turned out to be that only whites formed the combat while the native warriors carried head loads. This role was traditionally reserved for women and forcing native warriors to take up feminine roles in the WW1 led to further disintegration the well established gender order.

The return of the carrier corps to Chuka in 1916 triggered a virulence outbreak of dysentery and drought (K.N.A. DC/MRU/1/3/2; 1916). Archival records show that three thousand warriors were killed following this outbreak and the famine that ensued. By 1917, the rising tide of illness intensified resulting into sporadic tax collection by the British. The fear of confiscation of the Chuka cattle to feed the Whites at WW1 led to

resentment and anger from the warriors. Many of them devoured their cattle across the ridge tops butchering them and holding feasts in the night (Fadiman 1994).

Despite the drastic changes on warriorhood, elements of the 'gaaru' system survived on in the first decade of British rule in Chuka. Circumcised men continued to identify themselves with a certain age set, though they hardly congregated in the 'gaaru' for any warriorhood activities. The pioneer administrators had a personal inclination to deeply probe the society and worked to preserve some of the cultural practices that the people held so dearly in order to compel obedience from the natives.

The socio-political and economic changes within this first decade of colonial rule caused a delay in the cessation of 'Ntuiko' (ritualized transfer of authority) between ruling elders/ family heads and their warrior sons who were approaching warriorhood. The delay to promote men to their next stage of manhood forced former warriors to take to universal defiance of traditions and many of them engaged in sporadic brawling and alcoholism. It is clear that the colonial administration overhauled the social stratification of the age sets in Chuka.

<b>Age-set</b>	<b>Date of Entry into Warriorhood</b>	<b>Remembered Events/Meaning</b>
Kiambutu	1965	Majority were elites who had embraced hospital circumcision.
Kiamuiruthi/Kiambutu	1956	Ban on female circumcision forcing women to circumcise themselves.
Kiamatuma	1953	Fierce Mau Mau war, end of emergency, floods of 'muntu wa makembo'
Guantai,/Kianjuri/Kian didi/kiamaguna/kirauko	1942-1950	Disillusionment about colonizers
Njabani	1933(estimated)	Chuka administration shifted from Embu to Meru
Kiambutu,Kaburu(ii)	1928-1930	Famine of locusts
Kiruca	1926	Eclipse of the sun, earth tremor C.S.M built a school at Ndiruni/Kiereni.
Kimuti/Nkonge	1921	End of World War1,Kenya became a British colony
Miriti/kaburu (ii)	1913-1917	Young men/ warriors abducted for war, in British East African Campaign, World War 1, first D.O. to Chuka (Fort Naka), and 'Nchangiri' (Embu-Meru) road constructed Dysentery, foot and mouth, and famine.
Irangu	1905-1908	Conquest by imperialists

Table 4.1 Showing the Chuka age sets in the colonial period.

Sources: Fadiman 2012; confirmed by Cianguo (O.I: 4<sup>th</sup> April 2011).

The period between 1925- 1945, traditional warriorhood in Chuka was abandoned due to changes wrought by the colonizers. It is plausible that from 1945, men joined the Mau Mau in the forest, in a bid to reinstate the warriorhood which had been ripped apart by the colonizers. They seized this opportunity to perform their warriorhood role of carrying weapons which had been prohibited by the imperialists. The warriors failed to succeed in this objective since the fighters and sympathizers were arrested and detained

by the British. In order to disillusion the warriors further, the colonial administrators took their land and gave it to the collaborators (Kibungi O.I:24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2012).

The state of emergency in 1952 and subsequent creation of emergency villages at Ndagani and Thuita were political changes which destroyed the construction of masculinities in the 'gaaru' through circumcision (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 2012). The women, children and the elderly were confined in emergency villages, where hunger and disease were common. Entry and exit into and out of these villages was tightly controlled by the British men. Children were escorted to schools by colonial soldiers in order to delink them from the Mau Mau warriors. The restrictions on freedom of movement and association denied the men an opportunity to congregate for any social rituals of circumcision.

According to Muriira (O.I:10<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011), the Chuka actively participated in the Mau Mau war more than any other sub group of the Ameru. The Mau Mau rebellion lasted the better part of 1950s and had serious implications on the circumcision rituals. Men ceased to carry out all the traditional circumcision rituals due to heightened insecurity in the region. Out of frustration and the urge to attain their manhood, boys who had come of age turned to the hospital (medicalized) circumcision. The age sets that were formed after 1952 had many of their members circumcised the hospital way other than the traditional way. An example of this was the Kiamatuma male age set which was

associated with the state of emergency. The name is derived from the fact that its members resorted to cooking arrowroots in the river valleys due to restrictions on movement. The arrow roots were readily available along the river banks for the Mau Mau fighters who had no access to civilian support for food following the creation of the emergency villages.

The Mau Mau was a male dominated movement which destroyed the masculinity of fathers, sons and brothers through the experiences of the fighters in the forest. As the movement heightened, men were forcibly recruited into it in the guise that they were being registered for employment opportunities. By 1953, Mau Mau activities in Chuka had reached their peak. The fighters burnt colonial schools at Mukuthuku, Chera, Kambandi, Ndagani using 'Gikutha' (home-made detonations). The men were against the interference with their social ordering of the males by the colonizers (Kibungi O.I; 24<sup>th</sup> Nov 2012). Manhood debates reached new and politicized intensity, following the recruitment of some women to join the men in the forest. This shows that the military and defense roles which had previously been associated with men as sites of hegemonic masculinity no longer remained monolithic. This feminization of the Mau Mau witnessed the end of the 'manly warrior' and the birth of a 'womanly warrior'.

The political changes that were brought about by Mau Mau compelled many young men to opt for hospital circumcision. This led to the formation of the of Kiambutu age set

which according to Kibungi (O.I; 24th Nov 2012), was not properly constituted because its members supported hospital circumcision. This age set is therefore not considered by many as a true representation of an age group. During this period too, the traditionalists who were ardent supporters of ritualized circumcision openly showed defiance towards the ban on female circumcision. Between 1956 and 1958, young women in entire Meru region circumcised each other as a show of resistance to the ban on female circumcision (Thomas 1996). The ban came into effect in March 1956 when the D.C, J.A Cumber outlawed female circumcision describing it as, ‘an iniquitous tribal tradition’ (K.N.A. CS/1/14/100; 1956).

By 1959, ‘ngaitana’ (self- circumcision) had spread among Meru girls who feared to be referred to as cowards, or ‘nkenye’, which is a reproachful name for the uncircumcised girls. The practice gave rise to the female age set ‘Kiamwiruthi’ (‘circumcising oneself’) which was named after the act of the women circumcising each other. The Mau Mau had mobilized many young women to support ‘Kiamwiruthi’ as a form of resistance to imperialists’ interference with the female circumcision rituals. As this was happening in Chuka, Murray (1974) reports a similar scenario in Central Kenya, where female circumcisers cut a large part of their clients’ genitals as defiance to the missionary ban on the practice.

By 1960, the crises on male circumcision became a serious site for debates on real manhood. The men’s struggle for hegemony was between the traditional adherents who

supported a ritualized circumcision and the Christian converts who were strong proponents for hospital circumcision. However, as the Chuka approached independence, focus shifted from debates on real manhood and masculinity to debates on their territory and the possible threat on their land by the Agikuyu (Fadiman 1994). This means that the men shifted their attention from safeguarding a masculinity that was too dented by social-political and economic changes to land and territorial sovereignty.

In conclusion, the imperial rule in Chuka brought to a halt the elaborate barracks system that had defined stages of manhood in pre-colonial Chuka. Imperial notions of masculinity displaced the traditional notions of masculinity with more calculative, rational and regulated masculinities. The defined spaces of men and women that rarely overlapped in pre-colonial period were affected by the British rule.

## **4.2 Pre-Circumcision Rituals in Colonial Chuka**

### **4.2.1 The 'Kurathia' ceremony in colonial Chuka**

The ritual of 'Kurathia' went through major changes during the colonial period. During the pre-colonial period, the circumcision candidate was accompanied by his peers to seek blessings from the maternal relatives. However, in the colonial period the candidate was escorted by his father to his maternal relatives. This reflects a change on the practice since the boy was not in the company of his peers and no 'ndatho' songs were

performed. This change was influenced partly due to the administrative changes that the colonialists had implemented.

For instance, Horne had outlawed the feasts and songs that accompanied the 'kurathia' ceremonies because he considered them obscene. Besides, the Native Pass System of 1908 forbade people from travelling in groups of any size and demanded that boys had to cover their nudity during the ritualized 'kurathia' dances (K.N.A. DC/CKU/1/1/2; 1908). Since boys were prohibited from dancing while nude, it became increasingly difficult for them to participate in the 'ndatho' songs.

Another aspect of the 'kurathia' that changed during the colonial period was on the nature of 'ndatho' gifts. The boy received 'ndatho' goods that were in the form of either a blanket or a cloth. Such items were associated with power and authority, because the British administrators gave blankets or cloths to their appointed 'blanket chiefs' and 'blanket police', as symbols of their authority. Besides being new symbols of power and authority, the cloth or blanket became ideal gifts for the initiates which they used to cover their nakedness. The traditional 'ndatho' gifts which symbolized manhood attributes such as the bows, shields and arrows ceased to be presented to the initiate. This was especially so from 1908, when Horne issued a decree that weapons were not to be carried openly with pride (K.N.A. DC/CKU/1/1/2; 1908) which challenged the established 'ndatho' traditions.

The girls too did a similar 'kurathia' to that of the boys during this period. The only difference was on the nature of goods that they presented to their maternal aunties. Girls took with them some grains such as sorghum and millet in exchange for feminine goods such as trinkets and 'shanga' (coastal beads) which had been introduced to the Chuka by the Arabs and Swahili traders, also known as 'Acomba' (Mwaniki 2004:44). The gifts presented to the boys signified that they had control over girls who received inferior gifts that had no relation whatsoever with power and authority.

During the 'kurathia' ceremony, the pre-initiation ritual of ear piercing declined by 1920 because of influence from the Scottish missionaries. Oral information handed down to Rev. Alexander (O.I: 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug 2011), shows that the missionaries put pressure on the boys to stop ear piercing and close up the ear lobes because it was ungodly. Ear piercing had been practiced over a long time for aesthetic purposes and to symbolize authority from those who had the widest earlobes (M'Baini O.I: 7<sup>th</sup> Oct 2011). By 1930, both Catholics and Protestant missionaries abhorred the ear piercing and declared it a mutilation of the body. For the missionaries, the ear piercing was against the will of God and they required that the earlobes be sewn up by their converts. Heightened missionary campaign against ear piercing led to its diminished practice during 'kurathia' ceremony. By 1963, the tradition of ear piercing had become extinct among the Chuka.

#### **4.2.2. 'Thauthi' dances in colonial Chuka**

Another aspect of pre-initiation rituals that changed drastically during the colonial period was the 'thauthi' (circumcision dances). The Chuka warriors continued to perform the 'thauthi' dances as long as they covered their nudity with goat's skin or cloth or a 'kithithi' (skirt-like short that was made of reeds). Within the first ten years of British rule, the warriors' participation in the 'thauthi' had significantly dropped by over 20 % (Kibungi O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013). This could be attributed to the restrictions on the dressing and on freedom of assembly that made the 'thauthi' less exciting to the participants and the spectators.

The decline in the 'thauthi' worsened between 1917 and 1927, the second decade of colonial rule in Chuka. The Christian missionaries forbade all their converts from joining or even watching these 'thauthi' dances. The Protestants and Catholics alike objected the 'thauthi' due to the way males publicly displayed their nudity. The fact that not all the youth participated in the 'thauthi', denied the converted warriors the opportunity to display their nudity and clout during the dance performances. Further, the missionaries associated the drumming with savagery and the time when these dances took place at night and in the darkness with the evil (Fadiman 2004). This was in line with the Christian doctrine that the devil works at night as opposed to day time. The 'thauthi' dancers were not only considered devilish by the missionaries but also obscene.

The 'thauthi' dances were described by the missionaries as lascivious and undermining their progress in evangelization. The messages in the songs were sexually provocative because the verses often elicited the audience response through sexual innuendo. Muriira (O.I: 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012) refers to the style of dancing these 'thauthi' as 'kumunta mburi' (literally meaning 'piercing a goat'). The 'thauthi' dances were sexually provocative perhaps to intimidate the women and other men to believe that circumcision brings about irresistible sexual virility. The dances could also have been used to intimidate women into submission and to force the weaker men to obey the stronger ones.

Due to the missionary view on the 'thauthi' dances, the number of willing participants declined by over 40 % by 1930 (Kibungi O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013). This decline indicates that the missionary presence in Chuka was slowly gaining effect against the construction of masculinities in Chuka. On the contrary, the traditionalists who continued to practice the 'thauthi' viewed the dances as a pre-circumcision guidance that offered counseling to the candidates and prepared them to withstand the circumcision pain. The missionaries replaced the 'thauthi' dancing and its 'pagan' elements with Christian prayer as a pre-initiation ritual for the mission youths. Missionaries called for the virtues of humility from the converts as opposed to the arrogance that was displayed by the warriors during the dancing. The missionaries sought to 'purify' the Chuka male circumcision by excluding 'thauthi' songs from the hospital/medicalized circumcision (Muriira O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011). A similar scenario of excluding ritualized dances from the hospital

circumcision was recorded in Central Kenya, where protestant missionaries ‘purified’ the male and female circumcision by excluding rituals that placed undue emphasis on sexual life (Thomas 2003).

Between 1927 and 1937, the entrenchment of Christianity and Western education affected the general appeal of the ‘thauthi’ dances among the mission youth. Generally speaking, the organization of the warriors at village levels had nearly been dismantled due to the demands of migrant labour. During this period, many warriors had to source for wage employment in settler farms in central Kenya in order to meet the taxation demands. By 1935, the rate of translation of the youths from the villages as migrant labourers was quite high. This reduced the number of youths in the villages who could effectively participate in the ‘thauthi’. The demographic changes forced the youths from many adjacent villages to combine for the ‘thauthi’. Kanga (O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013) posits that information handed to him by his grandfather shows that by 1940, warriors across Magumoni, Mwonge and Karingani ridges combined forces to dance the ‘thauthi’. This implies that by 1940 the ‘thauthi’ dances had drastically reduced from the village levels to ridge top groupings that comprised many villages.

Between the years 1937 and 1947 the ‘thauthi’ dance had not only become rare, but it had also been exclusively preserved for the entire community. The few individuals who adhered to the traditional circumcision rituals performed the ‘thauthi’ dances at a

community level rather than the village level. Horn blowing was used to communicate to the participants about these dances, which had become very rare occurrences. The messages in the song disparaged the colonizers and the mission youths who evaded the dance. The songs despised the colonizers and branded them as ‘uncircumcised’ (Muriira; O.I: 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012). Christian parents prohibited their sons from participating in the ‘thauthi’ due to the Christian teachings that the dance was evil. Majority of the youths participated in the dances secretly because the dance was no longer a spectacular performance for the villagers.

The ‘thauthi’ dances became obsolete after 1952 following the establishment of the Emergency villages after the outbreak of the Mau Mau struggle. Kibungi (O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013) informs us that by 1957, the ‘thauthi’ dance had lost the gist that it once had in the construction of masculinity in Chuka. Kibungi posited that he and a majority of his peers did not take part in the dances because of his Christian parents. He refers to those who participated in these dances as ‘acenci’ (pagans). However, the men who had participated in the ‘thauthi’ such as Saribatore (O.I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011) felt that they had rightfully earned their manhood and had power over those men who had not danced ‘thauthi’. Moreover, the ‘thauthi’ had become unpopular by 1960s, with the Christian men believing that their masculinity was pure and better than the ‘impure’ masculinity of those who had danced ‘thauthi’. The men grouped themselves into two broad masculinities of advocates of ‘thauthi’ and the opponents of ‘thauthi’.

By 1963, the 'thauthi' dances ceased to be an important ritual in creating hegemonic masculinity among the Chuka. Indeed, the Christian converts proved their superiority over the traditionalists by focusing on the benefits which they accrued from their petite education such as wage labour. The debates on hegemonic masculinity focused more on employment and literacy skills as the proper attributes of manhood, contrary to the traditionalists' view that a real man had to have danced the 'thauthi'. The converts eventually wielded power over the traditionalists and won more audience from the youth, who were preparing for their rite of circumcision and who chose to discard the ritual of dancing the 'thauthi'.

### **4.3 Hospital Circumcision in Colonial Chuka**

Hospital circumcision in Chuka can be traced back to the arrival of European missionaries in the early 1920s. Missionaries strained the Chuka social life and the traditional circumcision operation. Influenced by the missionaries, converts vehemently denounced as primitive practices, the traditional circumcision rituals such as the 'ndatho', 'kuuna gaaru', 'mithambo', 'kagiri', and 'nciabu'.

Initially, the Scottish and the Roman Catholic missionaries made every effort to Christianize the circumcision rituals, as they worked to spread the Christian God. They questioned many traditional rituals, training and activities of the traditional initiation.

Missionaries described the rituals of traditional circumcision as ‘strange and backward at best and evil and demonic at worst’ (Thomas 1992:25). Missionaries violently objected to the traditional operation as a direct violation of God's will. But even in the wake of sustained attacks from Western missionaries, many newly converted Chuka men refused to abandon the much cherished traditional circumcision rituals, forcing the Europeans to reluctantly recognize the practice (Ibid). The missionaries had to come to terms with the Chuka traditions which exalted male and female circumcision as the single most important event in the lives of the members of this Mt. Kenya community.

However, the missionaries objected to female circumcision as a form of genital mutilation. Other than discard the rite, the missionaries began to christianize the male circumcision by allowing the operation to be done within the mission dispensary. The Christian youths in the mission stations had to undergo separate circumcision ceremonies from those of the ‘pagans.’ Initially, the medical personnel who were mostly whites replaced the ‘mutani’ in his role of performing the operation. The power wielded by the ‘mutani’ over the initiates was now transferred to hospital doctors with European training. Thus hegemony was transferred to other actors and the mission dispensary became the new ‘itiri’ and the ‘kagauni’ venues, which were the sites for transmitting manhood attributes to the initiates.

The hospital operation had to follow basic procedures as narrated by two medical practitioners who perform the operation among the Chuka to date. The hospital circumcision was short and inexpensive. It also had very few actors. The procedure began with the doctors administering local anesthesia on the initiate's body to induce the loss of sensitivity to pain. The missionaries were particularly concerned with the exposure of young men to excess pain during the traditional operation that could at times lead to the death of the initiates. The procedure in hospital circumcision was painless, largely because of the use of anesthesia (Mwambia O.I: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011, Mutiso O.I: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011). This was contrary to customary demands which forbade any male from showing pain during the operation.

Traditionally, a man who successfully bore the bite of the knife gained full entry into the hegemonic masculinity and exercised power over the men who had behaved cowardly during their circumcision operation. The disappearance of the circumcision pain due to the application of anesthesia removed the value of pain in strengthening the courage and bravery of the initiates. Twitching or blinking of eyes due to the pain of the operation ceased to be parameters for false manhood among men who were circumcised in hospital.

The removal of pain due to the use of anesthesia denied the Chuka men an opportunity to create a hegemonic masculinity based on bravery. The hospital circumcision created a

new category of men, derogatively referred to as 'Iroge' which means 'poisoned' (Saribatore and Nyangi O.I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011). Those circumcised through the hospital were perceived to have acquired their manhood in a cowardly and 'womanly' way. Since the 'iroge' had failed to endure the pain they were not expected to lead or control the traditionally circumcised men.

It has been argued elsewhere (Philipose 2007) that those African men who avoided the pain of circumcision were considered boys irrespective of their age. They were locked out in the social standing as illegitimate men and shunned from participating in debates with real men who had endured the pain of traditional circumcision. The traditionalists held the view that bearing the circumcision pain legitimately epitomized ideal Chuka masculinity.

However, it is plausible that some Chuka men may have welcomed hospital circumcision as an alternative to the excruciating pain of traditional circumcision. Indeed, Mwaniki (2004:107) describes the 'Kagauni' experience as a 'terrible place' because of the severe pain that was experienced by the traditional initiates. This was the venue where the 'mutani' totally scrapped all the subcutaneous layer of the foreskin without any application of anesthesia on initiates. Contrary to the 'kagauni' experience, the youth who were circumcised in hospital simply met the basic condition of attaining manhood through circumcision, irrespective of whether they had displayed any signs of

fear or not. Further, the application of anesthesia denied the mission youths an opportunity to participate in the 'mithambo' (cold bath) that the traditional initiates had to experience. By keeping off the 'mithambo', these youth missed out on the important manhood lessons that were embedded in the 'mithambo' songs. Gradually, the mission youth wielded control over the traditionalists because of the literacy skills which they learnt in the mission schools.

The hospital operation was performed under sterile conditions as compared to the traditional circumcision at the 'itiri' and 'kagauni' venues. The initiate was laid on a hospital bed during the entire operation process as opposed to lying on the wet banana trunks in the 'kagauni'. The amount of foreskin to be removed was estimated and clamped outwards. The clamp replaced the 'miraga' thorns that had been used in the traditional circumcision to clip the foreskin. The nurse who assisted the practitioner became the new 'mubanda miraga' ('planter of thorns') and the 'mutiri' (sponsor) of the initiates. Using a pair of scissors, the foreskin was then opened up via the orifice to reveal the tip of the penis. The inner lining of the foreskin (epithelium) was then bluntly separated from its attachment to the glans. Finally, a scalpel or a pair of scissors was used to sever the foreskin (Mwambia O.I:11<sup>th</sup> June 2011).

The circumcision wound was then stitched and dressed to facilitate healing. During the entire operation, the initiate was put under medical observation and precaution to control

any excessive bleeding. The use of the sterilized equipment in the hospitals gave the mission youths power over the traditionalists whom they considered as 'backward' in their circumcision procedures.

Apart from the missionary intrusion, other factors may have influenced the Chuka to slowly adopt the hospital circumcision. The impact of famine and epidemics on the family resources *vis-à-vis* the high expenses of traditional circumcision ceremonies may have led the Chuka to accept the hospital circumcision (Ciekamba O.I: 14<sup>th</sup> June 2013). In Petersons (2004) study of Central Kenya, the Kikuyu boys opted for group circumcision at the mission dispensary from 1912 due to lack of goats/sheep to pay for the circumcision fees to the local surgeons. For the case of Chuka, the effects of the 'Kithioro' famine of 1916-1919, the outbreak of foot and mouth disease and the influenza epidemic of November 1918 caused many people to adopt hospital circumcision (K.N.A. DC/MRU/1/3/2, 1918-1919). Hospital circumcision was perceived cheaper in terms of feeding of the initiates.

By the mid-1930, economic hardships rendered hospital circumcision common among the Chuka men since it was seen as an easier avenue for attaining manhood. From 1947, hospital circumcision at the dispensaries was shifted to the mission schools due to heightened animosity between the traditionalists and the 'iroge'. The 1950s marked the period when the Chuka men seriously engaged in the Mau Mau activities forcing many

boys to opt for circumcision in the mission schools. In so doing these boys evaded the forced conscription into the Mau Mau struggle.

In the mission schools, the teachers and the clergy registered candidates to be circumcised and selected trained native surgeons to perform the operation. The boys went to the church for prayers and for blessings from the clergy before being lined up for the operation at the school compound. The native surgeons had been handpicked from among the converts and trained by the missionaries on how to conduct the circumcision operation in hospital. The use of the native surgeons reduced the resistance by the Chuka converts towards the European surgeons and such a move was anticipated to increase the number of youths who preferred medicalized circumcision. The native surgeons too used the modern circumcision tools such as the clamp, scissors, scalpel and applied anesthesia on initiates (Mwambia, O.I; 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011, Kibungi, O.I; 10<sup>th</sup> August 2011).

The circumcision in the hospital undermined the roles of the traditional circumcisers and the elders in passing on manly lessons to the new initiates. As such, traditionalists continued to oppose the hospital circumcision because they viewed the 'iroge' as men who were ill-prepared for manhood. The medically circumcised men continued to increase in number and gained popularity among many youths because of the benefits of the education and literacy skills which they acquired.

The hospital circumcision created a genealogy of Chuka men who became critical of and who shunned traditional rituals of circumcision. Results of this denigration of custom created an entire generation of people who held a very low opinion about the traditional circumcisers and seldom talked about them (Thomas 1992). Through the hospital circumcision, the missionaries assumed they had civilized circumcision ceremonies during the 1950s. According to White (2003), this period marks the time when the Christian missionaries made great effort to refashion African men in Central Kenya. The missionaries had forced the mission youths to abandon the traditional rituals for a 'purified male circumcision' in the schools. Having schools as the venues for circumcision, the missionaries scheduled the operation to be done during the school holidays to avoid disrupting learning.

Schools became the new 'iganda' where youths were guided by the catechists and teachers as their sponsors. With the collapse of the barracks system, the missionary intervention in school circumcision shaped the way men and women thought and talked about real manhood (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011). From the mid 1950s, the colonial administrators had passed legislations that further led to disintegration of the traditional rituals of circumcision. Efforts were made to restrict all the initiation ceremonies, requiring that circumcisers obtain a certificate of registration at a fee of five shillings or fifty rat tails. The latter requirement was an attempt by the administration to contribute

to public health campaigns of eradicating the rat menace (Thomas 1996:340, Nyaga 1986:13). But the registration requirement created European hegemony on the 'mutani'. It also caused many traditional circumcisers to lose power over the community.

The new legislations that regulated circumcision practices contributed to a decline in the number of traditional circumcisers. Majority of the local surgeons feared retribution from the colonizers and abandoned their work. Others continued circumcising the boys under cover because they had failed to raise the money for the license. This means that the coveted position of 'mutani' as the giver of manhood became an abomination and many men dissociated from it. The administrators also resolved that all initiation ceremonies were to be done at puberty, rather than the late teens as was tradition. This requirement helped to curb the rising incidences of abortion among the youths (Thomas 1996:341).

After 1955, senior age sets that were initiated through hospital circumcision began to emerge. The members associated their circumcision with gains such as access to employment in the colonial economy. They willingly advocated for the school circumcision for their sons, rather than lose the opportunities which came with being educated. Such males used education and employment to establish themselves as men, against the traditionalists' view that traditional circumcision was the means to real manhood. By 1963, the use of schools as venues for circumcision and the use of native

surgeons had been adopted by over half of the initiation candidates as opposed to the use of white surgeons in the dispensaries (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011). The men who were circumcised through schools by trained native surgeons wielded more power over those circumcised through the hospitals by white surgeons, since many Chuka men yearned to decolonize themselves from the social-political and economic exploitation of the colonists.

#### **4.4 Post- circumcision Rituals in Colonial Chuka.**

##### **4.4.1 Education and seclusion**

Missionaries were keen to introduce a new form of seclusion for the mission initiates in order to prohibit them from the traditional seclusion patterns. Missionaries in particular isolated the converts from their families in order to safeguard them from being 'contaminated' with 'pagan' influences. The hospital initiates were secluded in mission huts. This denied them the 'iganda' experiences which was the seclusion for the fresh traditional initiates. Initially the contest for hegemonic control and power was between the men secluded in the 'iganda' and those of mission huts. The latter were used by the Europeans to implement their indirect rule policies which gave them power over the men secluded in the 'iganda'. Slowly, the young men, women and the elderly began to succumb to indirect control of those circumcised through the schools.

By 1924, Methodists, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics alike had around 300 converts who had enrolled in their centers (Rev. Worthington 1920). This number of converts

represents a small fraction of people compared to the estimated population of 160,000 persons in region (Ibid). These converts chose to live in the mission centers other than the warrior huts. Initially, the small number of converts made it possible for the newly circumcised mission youth to be accommodated in the mission huts during their convalescence period. According to oral information handed down to Muriira (O.I: 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012), the mission youth became popularly referred to as ‘nthaka cia Christo’ (Christ’s warriors).

In 1925, the contest for real manhood was between those youths who had undergone hospital circumcision and were secluded in the mission huts versus the warriors who had been secluded in the ‘iganda’. The latter felt that they were the real men and that the mission youths were children, because they had not learnt the ‘catechism’ for manhood (Muriira O.I: 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012). Whereas the traditional Chuka men and women opposed seclusion in the mission huts as an attack on their culture and their social customs, majority of the mission initiates embraced it as a means to elevate their social status among fellow converts.

Initially, the warriors who were the majority mounted pressure on the minority mission youths to abandon seclusion in the mission huts and move to the ‘iganda’. The warriors held the view that the ‘iganda’ was the proper venue for manhood catechism. This ideology influenced some mission youths to openly oppose the missionary attempts to

shelter them in the mission huts. The mission initiates strongly identified with the traditional 'iganda' as the ideal and socially sanctioned venue for the construction of real men. In order to retain the converts, the missionaries began to allow the mission youths to undergo hospital circumcision but get secluded in their 'iganda' within their homesteads.

Oral sources indicate that by 1930, the 'iganda' that was traditionally made of banana leaves was improved by the hospital initiates to reflect their new status and to differentiate themselves from the warriors (M'Baini O.I: 12<sup>th</sup> June 2013). The new 'iganda' was built using poles and was mudded on the walls. It is possible that the increasing number of mission initiates forced the missionaries to give in to their demands to be secluded in their homes in order to ease congestion at the mission schools. The new 'iganda' became a popular venue for the recuperation of the medically circumcised initiates which gave them more power over the initiates who had been secluded in the traditional 'iganda' that was clumsily built.

The missionaries set several conditions for the youth who were secluded in the new 'iganda'. First, the missionaries demanded that the initiates return to the mission centers immediately after healing in order to isolate them from the pagan teachings in the 'gaaru'. This demand stripped the mission youth of the opportunity they had to redeem their manhood through 'gaaru' performances. Another condition to these initiates was

that they had to shave off their warrior braids and refrain from piercing their ears which traditionally symbolized the emerging warriors. Oral information handed down to Mbungu (O.I; 17<sup>th</sup> June 2011), indicates that the missionaries did not only disapprove of the warrior regalia, particularly the warrior braids, but also put pressure on the mission youth to stop ear piercing and close them up. Braids and long ear lobes that marked junior masculinities were no longer ideal for mission youths.

Thirdly, the missionaries demanded that the red ochre used to enhance the beauty of women and warriors alike was to be scrubbed from the mission youths' hair and body. Beads, skins, and every form of ornament used to mark warriorhood were cast aside by the missionaries. Besides, the missionaries helped to enforce the ban on the taking and brewing of beer, which had been outlawed by the blanket chief Mbogori 1914 (K.N.A, DC/CKA/1/3/2:1914). Consequently, the mission youth were not allowed to brew or take beer since the Protestant and Catholic faiths opposed intoxication. The last condition for the mission youth was that through baptism, they had to acquire new names that had religious meanings as opposed to the traditional names given in 'Nciabu' songs. Examples of such names were Isaiah, Peter, John and Paul, based on Biblical authors. They were instructed to refrain from taking the traditional names in honour of such wild beasts as 'Njogu' (elephant) and 'Mbogo' (buffalo). Naming in the 'nciabuni' ceremony ceased to be an important post-initiation ritual among the mission youth. The

Christian baptism became the new 'nciabuni' ceremony during which the mission youth were given new names that had religious significance.

Boys who chose to join the new faith had to be isolated from their 'pagan' age-mates and from the life of the community. The religious prohibitions separated the mission youth from the warriors who adhered to ritualized circumcision. The emerging differences between the warriors and the mission youth inevitably stimulated hostility between the two sets of young men and created two centers of power.

Informed by the new changes, the mission youth began to lead a different lifestyle from their peers. They discarded the warrior braids and red ochre for European shorts and shirts and learnt how to prepare coffee in place of traditional beer and could speak the English language as opposed to the coded warriorhood language (Cooper 2002). The new lifestyle by the mission youth influenced them to gradually gain control over the young boys who were curious to adopt the new dressing and consumption patterns. This ripped off the traditionalists their hegemony over the young boys, as new initiates envied and adopted a new lifestyle in the mission schools (Rev. Alexander O.I: 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug 2011).

Real contest for manhood focused on the kind of education imparted on the initiates during their seclusion period. The structuring and the content of the formal education to the mission youth had major disparities with the informal traditional education because

they learnt literacy skills. Scottish missionaries led by Dr. A. Clive Irvine, Rev. Dr. John William Arthur, G. Dennis and A. R. Barlow who worked in British East Africa between 1907 and 1937, significantly increased the number of mission schools. The Catholic missionaries too established schools under the flagship of Father Comollo. (Rev. Alexander O.I: 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug 2011, Orde 1925).

By 1937, many schools had mushroomed in nearly all the mission stations within Chuka land (Kibungi O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013). The schools became sites for re-socialization and construction of elite masculinity among the mission youth. Christian missionaries sought to socialize and shape the mission youth into real men. Cooper (2002) shows that in many parts of Africa, the seclusion of initiates in the schools enabled the missionaries to tear down the ‘savage’ beliefs and practices of the African people. This form of seclusion enabled the missionaries to shelve aside kinship ties, age groups, the council of elders and other collectivities to the Chuka social life. The mission youth were expected to abstain from the ‘pagan’ teachings and warfare associated with traditional ‘gaaru’ warriors.

The missionaries entrenched individualism in the entire education process and dismantled the communalism that was common in traditional circumcision. Schools became the new ‘gaaru’ for the mission youth from where they acquired the new knowledge and skills while being exposed to the new faith. Schooling divided the Chuka

men into two broad categories of elite (also referred to as the readers) and non-elite masculinities, with the former being in indirect control over the latter. Further, the elites who excelled academically gained hegemony over their peers who did not do well in school (Mbungu O.I: 17<sup>th</sup> May 2011).

The theme of the mission education was to inculcate the virtues of obedience and humility on initiates as opposed to the traditional education which imbued on the initiates the manhood attribute of aggression. Having gone through education in mission schools, the youth found nothing wrong in shaking hands with their mothers or younger siblings. They ceased to look at womanhood as an anti-thesis of manhood. On the contrary, the youth believed in exercising the cardinal rule of honouring their parents. Oral information handed down to Cianguo (O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011) confirmed that the mission youth freely shook hands with their mothers and by the 1940s, the social distance between mothers and their educated but circumcised sons began to erode.

The mission schools enrolled the circumcised and uncircumcised men and women alike which changed the traditional perception that the hegemonic masculinity had to be constructed away from women and from the uncircumcised. Admission into the mission schools was based on conversion to Christianity which differed from admission into the traditional 'gaaru', which was based on the rite of circumcision. Initially, the youth who

attended mission schools were abused as 'ibici' (uncircumcised) and their school huts were equated with the small boyhood huts by the 'gaaru' warriors.

During the inception stage of the Western education, the warriors throughout Chuka shamed the mission scholars with bursts of song referring to them as 'hairless animals, fearful animals, mice, termite eaters, egg eaters' and bean eaters', foods traditionally eaten by small boys and women. The songs were also directed to girls who looked at these mission youth/ as their future husbands, warning them that if they married the mission youth, they would spend the rest of their life on their 'knees'. Further, the mission youth were shamed and ridiculed for their western clothing which were seen as 'women clothes' and henceforth they were referred to as women, 'who spoke softly to children, to whom the warriors barked orders' (Fadiman 2012: 258-259). This ridicule was the order of the day around all the mission schools in Chuka for the next decade. Fathers and elders continued to lose control over the generation of elites whom they expelled from their homesteads because 'they were spoilt for manhood and unworthy to receive cows to help them marry' (Ibid: 256).

Fathers and elders lost the power to allot property in form of land and livestock to their sons. Through their wage earnings, the elites realized that they could establish independent livelihoods without relying on their fathers to allocate them land and bride wealth, something that fathers did following their sons circumcision. Since schooling led to gainful employment, the rite of circumcision declined in its significance of

determining property ownership among men. Through salaried employment, the elite masculinity could independently own property and this influenced them to have a new following from mission youth and boys whom they indirectly controlled.

Whether judged positive or negative, the mission education produced an ideational climate that was much more receptive to social change on warriorhood. By 1937, the mission youth isolated themselves from the entire spectrum of circumcision rituals which would have ushered them into warriorhood. The warriors exercised control over the minority mission youth, possibly due to the fact that the benefits of formal education had not begun to be felt in the society. However, between 1937 and 1947, schooling had become an attraction for many warriors who viewed it as a means to acquiring jobs within the colonial economy. Through employment, the youth anticipated to earn enough wages to be able to pay taxes and purchase European goods (Cooper 2002).

Due to formal schooling, the elite masculinities acquired new skills to secure wage labor which the warrior masculinities did not have. Men who went through hospital circumcision and Western education qualified to get jobs and earn money to support their families. The attribute of hegemonic masculinity was no longer based on the bravery of the men during circumcision but on acquisition of Western education and consequently waged labour. Salaried men began to control and intimidate other men to submit to their control. From the 1950s, more and more elites became economically empowered and ceased to depend on their fathers for property allotment. Traditionally,

fathers apportioned land to their sons who had successfully gone through all circumcision rituals. The males who defied this cultural requirement of ritualized circumcision were denied their right to inherit property from their fathers. In the early 1960s, education became the new avenue for property ownership and inheritance.

By 1963, the socio-political and economic changes in Chuka created multiple and at times conflicting notions of real men. On the one hand, the elites viewed education and employment as the means to proper manhood while others viewed the ritually circumcised men as the real men. On the contrary, the elites considered the traditional rituals of circumcision as heathen and backward (Muriira (O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2011). The prevailing demands from formal schooling made it difficult for many men to go through ritualized seclusion. As such, the efforts by some men to adhere to ritualized circumcision were frustrated and altered by 1963.

#### **4.5 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the imposition of colonial rule in Chuka changed the understanding and construction of masculinities through circumcision. The colonizers and the missionaries emphasized on the European stereotype of masculinity. As a result, they dismantled the social, political and economic structures that had for a long time created the Chuka masculinity.

Missionaries trained the Chuka men to hate their traditional circumcision rituals, by presenting them as 'pagan' and savage. They introduced hospital circumcision and seclusion which forbade the converts from participating in 'thauthi', 'kurathia', 'itiri' and 'kagauni' rituals. The traditional ideology that a real man had to show courage by withstanding the circumcision pain was altered through the use of anesthesia. By 1963, the traditional notions of masculinity were replaced with some new forms of masculinities. For instance, feminine masculinities emerged as women began to take up leadership positions as 'headmen' and councilors. Masculine femininities too emerged as circumcised men began to do feminine duties such as digging and cooking. Due to their economic independence, the elites challenged the relevance of the traditional circumcision in producing Chuka men and embraced education as the new means to proper manhood.

In conclusion, the imposition of colonial rule transformed the traditional rituals of circumcision and created new versions of manhood and the consequent masculinities. The indigenous masculinities simply gave way to the foreign masculinities as the ritually circumcised men navigated and contested for hegemony with the men who were circumcised in hospitals.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**CHUKA CIRCUMCISION AND MASCULINITY IN THE POST-  
INDEPENDENCE ERA 1963-2000 AD.**

**5.0 Introduction**

In chapter four, we highlighted the transformation of the Chuka circumcision during the era of formal colonial rule. We observed that among the features that underwent transformation were the ‘thauthi’ dances, the role of the ‘mutani’, the significance of the ‘gaaru’ warriors, the pattern of seclusion of initiates and the quality of education given to the initiates. We concluded that the European colonizers and the Christian missionaries dismantled the traditional rituals and structures of circumcision in Chuka.

In this chapter, we assess a further transformation of these rituals of circumcision in post- independent Chuka. The objective of this chapter is not only to evaluate the fundamental changes on the circumcision rite but also to assess how the political liberty attained in 1963 affected the construction of masculinities in Chuka up to the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> C. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been used in this chapter to evaluate how different masculinities co-existed with each other during the post-independence period and how the educated men indirectly controlled the illiterate men.

## **5.1 Pre- circumcision Rituals in Post-Independence Chuka**

### **5.1.1 The ‘Kurathia’ ceremony.**

The ‘Kurathia’ ceremony transformed from being a ritualized event in 1963, to a non-ritualized or casual event during the post-independent period in Chuka. Tradition required that all the circumcision candidates visit their maternal relatives for blessings and to inform them of the intention to ‘gukura’ (literally means ‘to grow’, or to be circumcised).

From 1963, the ‘ndatho’ goods that were offered or received by the maternal relatives and the candidates differed from those goods that were used during the colonial period. This was determined by whether the candidate favoured a ritualized circumcision or advocated for hospital circumcision. Those who were to be ritually circumcised offered ‘ndatho’ goods such as a drum of honey. Honey was used in brewing beer for senior men who had authority over the junior men. Christian converts on the other hand offered goods such as blankets and food stuffs (Muriira O.I: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012). The blanket was used by colonial chiefs who were symbols of authority during the colonial period. The differences in the ‘ndatho’ goods reflect a contest for hegemony between the ritually circumcision and the ‘hospital’ initiates. The ‘ndatho’ goods in the post-independence era ceased to impart attributes of courage and resilience among the circumcised men.

Besides, the 'kurathia' ceremony in the post-independence period ceased to be a communal event since the candidate went alone or was escorted secretly by his father to the maternal relatives. The ceremony became highly individualized with most fathers determining the quality and quantity of goods to be offered to the relatives. In the absence of the peer company, initiates found it difficult to perform the 'ndatho' dances. By 1973, the 'kurathia' ceremony had increasingly become rare, perhaps due to the expense of the 'ndatho' goods or the school schedule which denied the candidates ample time to conduct the visits. Kibungi (O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2013) informs us that by mid 1970s, many boys had enrolled in schools and lacked time to visit their maternal relatives. This forced many fathers to visit their in-laws for the 'kurathia' on behalf of their sons. In other instances, the boy would visit the relatives over a school holiday. By 1982, the girls had totally abandoned the 'kurathia' ceremony due to the government ban on female circumcision (Thomas 1996: 353). President Moi had directed the police to charge anyone who conducted female genital mutilation (FGM) and caused the death of girls with murder. This ban was as a result of the death of fourteen girls in Kathiani location of Machakos district due to FGM related complications (Gazette Notice 3539 1982, Nairobi Times Sept 6; 1982:1).

From 1983, the form of the 'ndatho' goods was highly determined by the socio-economic status of the families. During the second decade after independence there was an inclusion of a wide range of household goods such as grains, sugar, flour and

livestock for 'ndatho'. Educated men gave 'ndatho' goods of academic nature such as novels and pens, while the employed gave the goods in monetary form. This shows that 'ndatho' goods began to be associated with success in academic work and with schooling. The nature of the new goods hardly prepared initiates for circumcision rituals but for formal education.

There emerged a more powerful group of masculinities revolving around education. The educated men and women gained indirect control over the uneducated but brave warriors (Rev Alexander O.I: 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013). This shows that after independence, education had become a key parameter for real manhood since the ignorant but brave warriors could not gain access to the power bestowed upon the educated men and women. Academic achievements and gainful employment, other than bravery during circumcision had become the distinguishing characteristic of hegemonic masculinities from the subordinate and marginalized masculinities.

After 1985, traditional 'kurathia' ceremony gradually diminished as a pre-requisite for circumcision. This was largely due to failed rains that led to a famine that was popularly recalled by many residents as the 'T9' famine of 1984-1985. The name 'T9' was possibly because of the allegation that stray wild dogs attacked and killed the people in search for food (Kanga O.I: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2011). The famine was experienced in much of Africa during which the economic growth rate in Kenya was at its poorest performance

of 0.9% (Miller 1984). The end of the drought in 1985 was marked by an outbreak of army worms that cleared all the crops and vegetation, leaving the Chuka farmland land bare. This forced the Chuka people to feed on yellow maize which was given as aid by the government (Cohen and Lewis 1987, Mbungu O.I:17<sup>th</sup> May 2011).

The deteriorating food situation led to a cholera outbreak and affected all the social ceremonies as the 'kurathia' ceremony which became individualized at family level. Gospel songs replaced the 'ndatho' songs by the initiates who were seeking God's blessings during their circumcision. Families were free to invite guests and pastors to preach and lay hands on initiates (Rev Alexander O.I: 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013). This shows that by 1990, the 'kurathia' ceremony had become more of a religious ceremony rather than a pre- circumcision ritual.

From 1991, the 'kurathia' ceremonies were negatively affected by the poor performance of the Kenyan economy. This could be attributed to external as well as domestic factors such as reduced tourism and increase in the cost of oil in Kenya following the Persian Gulf War of 1990 to 1991 (The Global Coalition for Africa Report; 1992). Besides, the inflation rate remained above ten percent as the shilling continued to decline in value as well as a significant rise in unemployment (UN 1992). Foreign aid and investments were down and the price of coffee which is the main cash crop in Chuka remained low due to the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in July 1990 (Edmund 2002).

In November 1991, twelve major donors to Kenya such as I.M.F., World Bank and United States of America warned that unless political pluralism and economic reforms were forth-coming, Kenya could face aid cuts. The poor economy in Kenya, coupled with the high demands of schooling posed a huge burden to many Chuka families, forcing them to shelve the ‘kurathia’ festivities. Focus shifted from the rituals of circumcision to the individual’s academic performance. Muchiri (O.I:21<sup>st</sup> April 2011) attests to the fact that him and eight peers who were circumcised together at Chogoria Hospital in 1996 did not ‘kurathia’ as a pre-requisite for the operation. He says it was ones volition to visit their maternal relatives for blessings before the operation but this was not a compulsory requirement. It is plausible that by 1999, the ‘kurathia’ ceremony which had been practiced over the years as a pre-circumcision ritual had either become redundant, optional or highly individualized.

### **5.1.2. ‘Thauthi’ Dances**

The ‘thauthi, dances was another ritual of the circumcision rite that went through major changes during the post-independence period. The main change was on the messages conveyed in the ‘thauthi’ songs. In 1963, the participants in ‘though’ were mainly the candidates who favored the traditional circumcision. As shown in the previous chapter, the traditionalists cherished the ‘thauthi’ as the authentic means to attain ‘real’ manhood. The candidates danced ‘thauthi’ beginning from the eve of the circumcision day. Their audiences during these dances were the traditionally circumcised men who believed that

they were the ‘real’ men. It was a taboo for the ‘iroge’ (those circumcised in hospital) to participate in ‘thauthi’. The traditionalists perceived the ‘iroge’ as men who did not comprehend ‘real’ manhood thus, not fit to participate in the ‘thauthi’ dances (Kibungi O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011). By 1965, the number of participants in the ‘thauthi’ dances had increased compared to the previous years, possibly due to the perceived freedom wrought by the political independence.

On the circumcision day, the traditional initiates were driven to the rivers for the ‘mithambo’ ritual. The ‘thauthi’ songs had coded messages to ridicule and disparage the ‘iroge’ for accepting the anesthetized circumcision. Kanga (O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013) gives the following example ‘thauthi’ song, which had coded messages to demean the ‘iroge’ during the 1960s;

Iii kiroge x2

Kiarogerwe Chogoria ii Kiroge

Na runci rwa Mbakuri ii Kiroge x2

Translation: *yes the poisoned one x2*

*Has been poisoned at Chogoria, yes the poisoned one*

*With a bowl of water, yes the poisoned one x2.*

The message in this song indicates that the ‘iroge’ who were circumcised at Chogoria hospital had been ‘poisoned’ due to the application of anesthesia. The song ironically insinuates that the ‘iroge’ had used a bowl of water for ‘mithambo’ as opposed to being

dipped in the rivers for the cold bath. The quantity of the water that was used by the initiates transmitted power to initiates which could be interpreted to mean that the 'iroge' were less powerful than the traditionalists who had the cold bath in the rivers. By 1975, however, the 'thauthi' had totally declined and this may be attributed to the increased demands of schooling as well as the increasing practice of hospital circumcision. Besides, the churches continued to oppose the 'immorality' depicted in the circumcision songs and discouraged Christians from associating themselves with 'thauthi' dancers.

Both the traditionally circumcised men and those circumcised in hospital thought that they were all 'real men' due to their different perceptions of real manhood. Men circumcised in hospital viewed their masculinity superior because of having gone through formal education whereas those men who were traditionally circumcised thought they were real men having gone through rituals such as the 'thauthi' dances. Consequently, the traditionalists lost some of the controls and audiences to the 'iroge'. Some of the things, people, institutions and responsibilities of the traditionally circumcised men were taken over by the 'iroge'. Thus indirect control by the traditionally circumcised men ceased from being a fixed variable but was inclined towards the 'iroge' who had increased in number. Kibungi (O.I: 24<sup>th</sup> November 2012) estimates that by the end of the second decade after independence, over 60% of the males in Chuka preferred to be 'iroge', which shifted the nature of the resulting

masculinities Using the concept of hegemonic masculinity, this analysis demonstrates that masculinity became contestable due to provision of formal education which influenced most men to discard the traditional circumcision.

Apart from formal education, there are scores of influences that worked against the dancing of 'thauthi'. By 1985, Christianity which had become widespread in Chuka preached against the 'harmful' and ritualized 'thauthi' during circumcision (Rev. Alexander O.I. 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013). Intermarriages between the Chuka and other ethnic groups that did not dance 'thauthi' also led to its disuse. Besides, as members of other communities migrated and settled amongst the Chuka, this led to a decline on the use of 'thauthi'. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> C, the Chuka had ceased to attach any meaningful importance to the 'thauthi' and as Kibungi (O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011) posits, the dances were re-enacted in schools during the music festivals.

### **5.1.3 The new men's shelters**

The shelter for the circumcised men was an important pre-initiation preparation that greatly transformed during the post-independence era. It was a basic requirement that all initiation candidates built huts for their residence. Chuka traditions forbade circumcised men from sharing a shelter with their mothers and or the younger uncircumcised siblings. Proper manhood had to be constructed away from women and children. The men's huts were popularly referred to as 'simba' (lion), to symbolize the agility that the occupants of these huts would have.

Kibungi (O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011) recalls that by 1963, the boyhood barracks were non-existent, because boys graduated for their circumcision from their mothers' huts. The boys who skipped the experiences in the 'gaaru ya ibici' formed a younger masculinity in the 1960s, that was perceived to be less powerful than the older masculinity of the men who had lived in the boyhood huts. By virtue of having endured the boyhood tests the elder men indirectly controlled the younger but new masculinities. The contest for hegemony was between the new generations versus the older generation of men. Men who were senior in age exercised indirect control over the younger men by teaching them the lessons which they learnt at the boy hood barracks. However, the women and the uncircumcised boys remained subordinate to all circumcised men.

During the post-independence period too, fathers continued to play an important role in preparing for their sons circumcision. The father's key role was to determine the site for the location of their son's hut. This shows that in the post-independence era, fathers took over the hegemony from the councils of elders in determining the location of the shelters for circumcised men. It should be recalled here that in pre-colonial Chuka the councils of elders had the hegemony to determine the location of the warriorhood barracks in the villages as discussed in chapter two. After independence, fathers usurped this hegemony from the councils of elders since they apportioned land to their sons on which they would build their circumcision huts. The huts became important marks for real manhood

because their completion testified the men's readiness to be circumcised and demonstrated that they were about to be self-governing (Mutunga O.I: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept 2011). Owning a hut signified that a man was about to control his destiny and to take up societal responsibilities.

In 1973, men built shelters that were round, grass thatched huts. The huts became the new 'gaaru ya nthaka', since the traditional 'gaaru ya nthaka' had become a rare occurrence; virtually nil. However, a man had to successfully go through the rite of circumcision in order to be allowed to start living in his hut. The circumcision hut became a permanent residence for the man because he married and raised his family in this same hut. This explains why by 1975 A.D., many huts had mushroomed in almost each and every homestead (Kanga O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

Due to land and economic constraints in building the huts, instances of sharing one circumcision hut among brothers or cousins was common especially in the poor families. Boys from the poor families who could not afford to put up their own shelters were accommodated by their peers. The ability of the boy to put up his own hut became the new parameter for proper manhood. Consequently, boys who owned a hut had more power and hegemony over those who did not have one of their own. This reflects a construction of masculinity based on economic ability since circumcised men who lived alone in their huts indirectly controlled other men who shared their huts with their

siblings. Besides, it became common for elder brothers to share the same huts with their younger brothers after their circumcision.

This gave the first born sons hegemony as they defined their younger brothers to be inferior to them in age. The concept of separating the circumcised men's shelter from their mother's house continued to dominate the lives of young men. The construction of men's huts away from their mother's huts led to unequal distribution of power because men used this to claim hegemony over women. Up to the late 1970s, manhood debates largely revolved around whether a circumcised man lived in a separate shelter from that of his mother. Our conclusion here is that circumcised men who shared shelters with their mothers presented a submissive masculinity and were victims of violence from men who lived in their own huts and epitomized a hegemonic masculinity. Nyangi (O.I: 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2013) claims that men who presented their masculinity the 'wrong way' by sharing shelter with their mothers were dishonoured by being scolded, roughed up and physically abused by their peers.

By 1983, the architectural design of the huts improved remarkably with regard to the construction materials that were used. Boys from the fairly opulent families built houses of timber or stone while the boys from poor families built mud houses. The roofing materials ranged from the iron-sheets, reeds and banana fibers. The contest for hegemony among men shifted focus to the quality and size of their shelter. To promote

their son's ego, wealthy fathers began to put up houses for them using modern building materials such as stone and timber.

Manhood debates ceased to be centered on the boy's ability to build his own hut to the quality of the hut. Nyangi (O.I: 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2013) observes that some parents built extensions on the family houses as shelters for the circumcised sons. Hegemony among men was no longer determined by whether he had gone through hospital or traditional circumcision, but on the type of house that he lived in following circumcision. The men who had descent housing units intimidated initiates from poor backgrounds to submit to their control. The hegemony among men was affected by economic challenges of the 1984-1985 wrought by drought and famine that is mentioned earlier in this chapter. Fathers were preoccupied with sourcing for food to feed their families rather than putting up descent houses for their sons. Housing temporarily ceased to be an important parameter for 'real' manhood among circumcised men due to the effects of the famine.

After the famine, the contest for hegemony was between the men who had literally built their own houses over the men who had their houses built for them by the parents. By 1995, the debates on real manhood revolved around the quality of a house that one lived in and not the means of its construction not forgetting that parents built quality houses for their sons, compared to the ones that the sons would build. Men who had self

contained houses indirectly intimidated their peers who had single roomed houses to submit to their control.

Housing became an important determinant of a man's masculinity and social standing among by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> C. It became a common practice for circumcised boys to be accommodated in their parent's houses. Manhood debates focused on how some circumcised men shared shelter with their mothers as opposed to the practice where manhood was supposed to be constructed away from womanhood. Traditional norms disallowed the circumcised men from sharing shelter with their mothers and as such these men had to submit to the hegemony of the men who lived away from their mothers shelters (Mugambi O.I: 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug. 2011, Mwambia O.I: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011). It is probable that fathers who had fallen victims of violence and harsh training for manhood as indicated earlier, desired to secure their circumcised sons from experiencing a similar violence by accommodating them in the family house. The sharing of shelter could also be attributed to scarcity of land and the need to fully utilize the small plots of land for farming.

Other reasons which may have led the circumcised Chuka men to be housed in their parent's shelter were the social-economic challenges and urbanization which ushered in an unfettered, self-centered individualism among initiated males. Besides, majority of the initiates were barely in their early teens and were therefore 'children' in the eyes of

their parents. Muchiri (21<sup>st</sup> April 2011) narrates how he was housed in his parents' house upon circumcision at Chogoria hospital in 1996. He recalls how he was ridiculed and accused of betraying manhood by the men who had built or lived in their own houses. He was forced to comply by putting up his own house in order to prove his manhood as a 'real man'.

By the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> C, the men who espoused hegemony over their peers were those who had their own houses as opposed to those who continued to live in their parents' houses. It would be of interest to note that even though building one's house proved his manhood, many boys did not practically build their hut because of the demands of schooling or lack of finances to buy the construction materials. Most of the boy's houses were put up by their fathers or kinsmen. As such housing declined from being an important parameter for real manhood in Chuka by 2000 A.D.

## **5.2 Actual Operation in the Post-Independence Period**

By 1963, the Chuka people acknowledged two versions of circumcision. Many Christians advocated for the hospital circumcision which had been introduced by the Christian missionaries, whereas the cultural nationalists adopted the traditional circumcision. It is important to interrogate the two versions of circumcision and how they constructed the Chuka masculinity after independence.

### **5.2.1 Ritualized circumcision in the post-independence period.**

Following independence in 1963, the cultural nationalists advocated for the traditional circumcision as the true means of constructing the hegemonic masculinity. These men preferred the traditional circumcision as the authentic means to real manhood. The traditionalists chose to engage a traditional ‘mutani’ to perform the circumcision operation.

The traditional initiates were either the cultural nationalists who adhered to the traditional religion or the Christian converts who did not comprehend the Christian teachings against the ritualized traditional circumcision. The converts who favored the traditional operation by a ‘mutani’ held their cultural practices so dearly and opposed any European influence on the rite. It is possible that majority of the men who were circumcised by the ‘mutani’ saw it as a means of expressing their liberty and freedom which had previously been suppressed by colonizers.

The traditionally circumcised men participated in the ‘ndatho’, ‘thauthi’ and the ‘mithambo’ rituals which had hitherto been forbidden as illegal and dirty by the imperialists and the Christian missionaries. At dawn, the candidate was driven to the nearby river amidst dance for the ‘mithambo’ (chill bath) ceremony. The cold bath was adopted as a local anesthesia to numb the nerves and reduce the circumcision pain. The

traditionalists demonized the use of modern anesthesia and venerated the traditional initiates for their presumed audacity.

After the river rituals of 'mithambo', the candidate was escorted in the 'thauthi' dance to his hut for the circumcision operation by a 'mutani'. Since the traditional venues of 'kigiri' and 'kagauni' venues for the transmission of manhood had ceased to exist, the entire operation was done from this same hut. The stages of the circumcision operation included the pulling, clipping and cutting of the foreskin and the removal of the subcutaneous tissues as discussed in the previous chapter. The 'mutani' used the traditional tools such as the 'miraga' thorns for clipping the foreskin and the knife to sever it.

A critical assessment of this operation reveals that it was not traditional per se, since the boys did not go through the stages of 'kagiri' and the 'kagauni' experiences as the case in the pre-colonial period. On the contrary, the two stages of the operation were completed all at once in the initiate's hut. The operation had thus been transforming into a highly individualized rite of passage. Perhaps, new venue in the hut limited the number of participants in the circumcision ceremony as compared to the 'kagiri' venue. Consequently the members of the age sets that followed were loosely bonded to each other. Due to the individualized ceremonies in the huts, the traditional initiates failed to identify with one another as members of the same age set. Besides, the hut venues

limited the role of the 'nthaka' in determining who among the initiates was most courageous and therefore hegemonic over their peers. The 'nthaka' lost control over the new initiates by being locked out of the hut which served as the new circumcision venue.

By 1973 A.D., the contest for real manhood was based on whether one was circumcised by a 'mutani' the traditional way, or by a practitioner the modern way. The main contention was on the use of anesthesia on the 'iroge' and the 'mithambo' for the traditionalists. The traditional initiates rarely interacted with the men who were circumcised in hospital. The 'iroge' and 'traditionalists' became the opposing sets of masculinities, with each individual man being keen to identify only with the men in his category.

Men who had gone through the traditional circumcision famed their manhood, while perceiving the 'iroge' as cowards not fit to enjoy the privileges for the real men (Muriira O.I; 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012). Muriira also posits that during the first decade after independence, the 'iroge' were not allowed to participate in public debates in the presence of the traditionalists. However knowledgeable they may have been, the 'iroge' had to remain passive listeners and could not contribute to the debates by the traditionalists who perceived themselves as the 'real men'. On this premise, the 'real

men' continued to exercise power and authority over the 'iroge'. Men congregated and socialized on the basis of 'iroge' and 'real men', which fueled hostility between them.

Mbungu (O.I; 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012), who was a primary school teacher in the 1980s, recalls how the traditionally circumcised boys undermined the 'iroge' and female teachers. She narrates how the female teachers declined to give punishments or allocate manual duties to the traditionally circumcised boys, because they were 'real men' who would refuse to obey the female teachers. These 'real men' believed that they were grownups who could not receive any orders from women. The 'real men' espoused power and control over the uncircumcised and the 'iroge'. They refused to mud the walls of the classrooms or fetch water because such roles were feminine. Moreover, these 'real men' refused to share desks or text books with the uncircumcised/ 'iroge' classmates and only associated with the traditionally circumcised boys and girls.

The traditional circumcision declined following an administrative decree by President Daniel Moi against female circumcision in Gazette Notice (1982: 3539) which created fear among forcible circumcisers such as 'mutani' (Thomas 1996: 353). Majority of the traditional circumcisers probably abandoned their work, for fear of being accused of forcible circumcision, paving way for the trained medics to take over the role of 'mutani'. Mwambia (O.I; 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011) estimates that about 20% of the traditional circumcisers continued to perform the operation under cover while 10% adopted modern

aspects of operating the initiates. An example of a change that was effected by the 'mutani' was adoption of hygienic practices during the operation such as sterilizing the circumcision knife after using it on one initiate (Muriira O.I; 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 2014).

After 1990, some of adherents of the traditional circumcision began to engage a trained practitioner to perform the operation from their homes rather than from the hospitals. This is a clear indication of the declining number of traditional circumcisers. Mwambia (O.I; 20<sup>th</sup> Aug 2014) who is a practicing medic in the region estimates that during this period, 90 % of the boys turned to trained practitioners for their circumcision operation. He laments that the seclusion period for the initiates was inadequate forcing them learn inadequate manhood lessons from the elder men and sponsors. On one hand, a small fraction of men estimated to be 10% (Ibid) went through the traditional circumcision rituals and indirectly controlled the community on matters of tradition. However, the latter who were majority controlled matters of education and were at an advantaged position to secure gainful employment. Circumcision ceased to be the means to gaining hegemony but it became a symbol of solidarity among the age mates who espoused a collective masculinity.

The traditional circumcision had become uncommon perhaps due to the increase in the population, or the economic constraints of conducting elaborate rituals described in chapter three. It had become expensive to host relatives for elaborate circumcision

ceremonies. Besides, the operation by a 'mutani' exposed the initiates to high risks of HIV/Aids infection who shared the circumcision knife. The risks of ritualized circumcision forced most men to seek cheaper and safer alternatives by engaging medics to perform the operation. As the Chuka closed the 20<sup>th</sup> C, more and more families turned to hospital circumcision for their sons in order to fulfill the cultural obligation in the safest way possible.

### **5.2.2 Hospital circumcision in the post-independence period.**

Hospital circumcision also referred to here as modern circumcision gained force in the post- independence Chuka. According to Mbungu (O.I: 17<sup>th</sup> June 2011), most of the elites and the converts preferred the hospital circumcision. Maintaining a traditional circumcision had become increasingly difficult as shown in the previous section. Besides, by 1963, the roles and privileges of the Chuka men in public matters had drastically changed. The traditional Chuka culture which had for a long time governed initiation rituals lost autonomy, as many people proclaimed adherence to Christianity. The traditional culture became identified in the minds of many people, because Christianity represented new development, progress and the future. The advancement of Christianity tilted many Chuka men to prefer hospital circumcision as the proper means of attaining manhood.

After 1963 A.D., fathers organized for trained native surgeons to medically circumcise their sons from home (referred to as 'home circumcision). These surgeons had been trained in the mission hospitals and could effectively circumcise the boys following the medical procedures. During this operation, the initiates laid emphasis to exclude what they perceived as 'dirty' and anti- Christian such as the 'thauthi' dances (Kanga O.I: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013, Muriira, O.I: 10<sup>th</sup> July 2011). This category of men omitted the 'thauthi' and the 'mithambo' which they branded as obscene and synonymous with the devil.

In the home circumcision candidates discarded the ritualized circumcision and adopted hospital circumcision. The practitioner administered anesthesia on the candidate to reduce pain and ease the operation. As indicated in chapter four, the application of anesthesia rendered the operation in the less painful than the ritualized circumcision. Modern equipment such as the clamp to clip the foreskin and scissors for cutting it were used. The circumcision wound was treated and dressed to facilitate healing. The home circumcision was highly individualistic since it involved the candidate, his father, the sponsor and the practitioner.

By 1983, the home circumcision had become the norm as more and more parents acquired education and began to appreciate the medical procedures of circumcising young boys. Other initiates began the practice of going to the dispensaries and hospitals for this operation, accompanied by their sponsors who escorted them back home for

healing and seclusion. The hospital circumcision was a highly individualized affair at the nuclear family level or father to son level. Boys typically went to hospital to get circumcised in the company of their fathers and sponsors. Out of the 80 respondents to the questionnaire, 57 of them (70%) favoured hospital circumcision and seclusion, 16 respondents (20%) were for medicalized circumcision and seclusion at home, while 10% advocated for traditional circumcision.

This hospital circumcision may have applied three different surgical techniques. Mutiso (O.I; 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011) and Brown et al (2001) have indicated that the following three procedures were commonly used in hospital circumcision and resulted in varying genital appearances. In one technique, the prepuce was retracted and injected with local anesthesia, then pulled forward and clipped with artery forceps just beyond the tip of the glans of the penis. Approximately 4 centimeters (cm) of the tip was cut off, and the remaining prepuce retracted behind the glans. If too much of the outer layer of the prepuce was judged to remain, this layer was again pulled over the glans, trimmed, and allowed to retract. The inner layer of the prepuce (attached to the corona) was then trimmed, and the cut edge of outer skin stitched to the corona. Functionally, this technique removed the entire prepuce and both the inner and outer layers.

In the second procedure the prepuce was pulled forward and approximately 1 to 2 cm of the tip was cut off. The remaining prepuce was pulled back forcefully, tearing 1to 2 cm

of skin and leaving a ring of raw, exposed skin on the penile shaft behind the glans. The prepuce was pulled forward again, and a 1 to 2 cm ring of its inner surface was scraped off. Finally, the prepuce was allowed to retract behind the glans, so that its raw inner surface was in contact with the raw outer surface of the shaft. A bandage was applied for several hours to hold these surfaces together as healing and adhesion began. This technique removed most of the inner surface of the prepuce, leaving a small portion of the outer layer.

The third procedure involved pulling the prepuce and approximately 1 to 2 cm was cut from the tip (Ibid). The remaining prepuce was pulled back forcefully, tearing approximately 3 cm of skin from the shaft. The prepuce was again pulled forward, and approximately 3 cm of its inner surface was scraped off. The prepuce was pulled further forward, and the circumciser inserted his/her thumb under the prepuce, above the glans. With the thumb protecting the glans, he/she cut a small slit transversely in the top of the prepuce. The glans was then pulled through this slit, leaving the prepuce suspended below the penis. The suspended prepuce shrunk over time, but remained visible throughout life. This technique removed approximately the same amount of both outer and inner layers of prepuce as technique two, but left part of the outer layer as an appendage on the underside of the shaft.

Of the three techniques, the first technique removed both the inner and outer layers of the entire prepuce. This was in line with the traditional technique of Chuka circumcision known as the 'karinga kathige' (removal of the entire foreskin). The second and third techniques described above removed most of the inner surface of the prepuce, but left a small portion of the outer layer of the foreskin. A clinical officer Mutiso (O.I.; 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011), who is based at Kibugua dispensary and operates on initiates claimed that most boys preferred the first technique which entailed removing the entire prepuce rather than the second or third techniques.

The initiates who went through the first technique believed that their penis was more attractive and pure than that of the men who chose the second and the third procedures of the operation. As such, men who had total removal of the prepuce gained power over fellow men and women because their penis was 'pure' (Nkonge 28<sup>th</sup> Aug 2011). This means that a penis circumcised following the first technique was integral to the cultural definition of the male body in Chuka. The style of 'karinga kathige' was one way of ensuring that the male body complied with the cultural ideal of Chuka manhood.

It is important to identify the causes for the shift from the traditional circumcision to hospital circumcision by the Chuka men. Results of the study by Kibebe et al (2012), on the socio-economic factors that may have influenced the Bukusu of Western Kenya to adopt the hospital circumcision appear similar to the causes for the same shift among the

Chuka. The key factors for this change are, modernization, intermarriages, the spread of Christianity, migration, level of literacy, high cost of living, high unemployment rate, high costs of education and inadequate resources (Kithinji 7<sup>th</sup> Sept2011, Kamunyi O.I: 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2011). It is imperative to try and interrogate these factors at this point.

The Chuka men may have adopted modern circumcision to relieve the initiates of the fatigue that was caused by the elaborate ‘thauthi’ dances (Mwambia O.I: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011). The increased level of literacy and awareness led the Chuka men to choose the hospital circumcision over the traditional circumcision. Besides, the working class would be inconvenienced if they chose the traditional circumcision since it meant going back to their rural villages for the circumcision rituals. Moreover, employment had been embraced as an alternative way of attaining real manhood since it did not matter anymore whether one had been circumcised traditionally/ ritually or in hospital.

After 1983 A.D., some boys who were circumcised at the hospitals chose a new form of seclusion whereby they were admitted for two to three weeks in the hospital. Parents and siblings were free to visit the initiate in hospital as often as they wished. In the eyes of a traditionalist, it was a taboo for mothers and uncircumcised siblings to socialize with the circumcised men, particularly during seclusion. However, parents who visited their sons during this period took it as their parental duty to do so (Mwambia O.I: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011).

During these visits, the initiate received education from the elder siblings and parents on emerging issues such as H.I.V/AIDS, and sexuality. The men who were secluded in hospital had their wounds properly nursed and dressed for proper healing. After their healing, the initiates who were secluded in hospital got discharged to resume their normal life. They wielded more control over those men who secluded at home and probably took a longer time to heal their circumcision wounds. Since the hospital seclusion was only possible at a fee, men from poor families who could not afford this cost became intimidated to submit to the men who had been secluded in hospital.

From 1996 A.D., the hospital circumcision evolved into the institutional-based circumcision. This involved taking the initiation candidates to public or Church sponsored boarding schools for the operation. In this institution- based circumcision, the initiates were operated on and nursed by practitioners who occasionally visited them at the selected institutions. The initiates were charged a fee of Ksh. 3000 to Ksh. 6000 for their upkeep during the two- three weeks period (Mutiso, O.I: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011). This form of circumcision was preferred during the December holidays, as the boys awaited their K.C.P.E results. The institution-based circumcision was organized by groups such as the Catholic Men Association (C.M.A.) of the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church Men', Fellowship (P.C.M.F.) of the P.C.E.A. church.

Mwambia, (O.I: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011), who is a practicing clinical officer attests to have circumcised eighty boys at Ndagani and fifty at St. Joseph primary schools in December 2010. He observed that majority of the boys had enlightened parents who preferred the institution -based circumcision. He attributed this to the safety and convenience of the institution- based circumcision. It was less tedious since the initiates did not travel to and from the clinic while having the raw wound on their penis. Although many parents faced the challenge of raising the circumcision fees, many boys preferred the institutional- based circumcision (Mutiso O.I: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011). However, due to the shortage of finances to pay for the institution-based circumcision, some of the initiates visited the clinics for circumcision and went back to their homes for healing and seclusion.

Mutiso (O.I: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011) revealed that many parents took their sons to be circumcised at Kibugua dispensary had them recuperate at their homes. He shared the advantages of hospital circumcision as it helped in the management of complications arising from blood clotting, hemophilia and low immunity of the HIV infected boys. In addition to the use of anesthesia, Mutiso checked on the initiate's blood pressure and sugar levels to rule out Diabetes Mellitus and to ascertain the wound healing process. After the operation, he dressed the wound and reviewed it regularly to prevent fatal infections. The fact that these medical precautions were ignored or omitted in the traditional circumcision may have informed many parents to choose the hospital circumcision for

their sons (Mutiso O.I: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011). This led to emergence of a hegemonic masculinity among the boys who were secluded in the institutions and subordinated masculinities of boys who were secluded at home due to their inability to pay for the seclusion fee.

Other than the health risks associated with the ritualized circumcision, the Chuka may have adopted the institution-based circumcision due to the rural-urban migration. The families that lived in towns and market centers had housing constraints for their initiates, forcing them adopt the institution-based seclusion for their initiates (Njagi O.I; 4<sup>th</sup> Sept 2011). Urbanization created an urban masculinity that wielded indirect control over the rural masculinity because of their exposure to the town life as well as their teachings and experiences during seclusion. Moreover, the initiates may have adopted the institution-based circumcision following the intervention of the governmental, non-governmental and human rights organizations that opposed ritualized circumcision of boys. Some of these organizations are the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) and Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO)<sup>8</sup> which fought against female genital mutilation and harmful ritualized circumcision for males.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> C, the Chuka debates on ‘real’ manhood revolved around the themes of education and the benefits accrued from it. The elite masculinity gained

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<sup>8</sup> Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) is a Kenyan women's movement which has been working since 1990 to eradicate female genital mutilation. PATH is an international non-profit organization whose stated mission is to improve the health of women and children.(Nation; 30<sup>th</sup> March 1999;Nairobi),

hegemony over the non-elites, irrespective of whether one was circumcised or secluded in hospital or at home. By this period, many parents had attained skills for wage labor and were economically endowed to meet the cost of hospital or the institution-based circumcision for their sons. Besides, the elites challenged the relevance of traditional circumcision in producing real Chuka men to control land, labour and capital.

This shows that the traditional circumcision alone had increasingly become inadequate in constructing and consummating one's masculinity. A 'real' Chuka man had to acquire modern education and money. A 'real' was revered and respected by other men and women following his accumulation of wealth. Men with valuable resources could be appointed to lead community groups and committees since they had proved their manhood. The poor, circumcised and uneducated men were conditioned to believe in being controlled by the wealthy, circumcised, and educated young people.

### **5.3 Post-Circumcision Rituals in Post-Independence Chuka**

#### **5.3.1 Education and seclusion in post- independence period**

The seclusion patterns of the initiates were transformed greatly during the post-independence period. There was consensus from all oral informants that after 1963, the traditional seclusion period of three to four months was drastically reduced to two-three weeks period. This was due to the demands posed by the school schedule on the initiates. Besides, the school holiday was short ranging between three weeks to one

month, which made it difficult for the initiates to enjoy three-month period for their seclusion.

Given the short seclusion period, lessons on manhood were informally taught to the fresh initiates by elderly men. The curriculum focused on life-skills related themes such as responsible behavior, healthy boy-girl relations and sexuality (Mukwanyaga O.I; 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011). It should be noted that the medical procedure of treating and dressing the wound facilitated healing and as such the two-three weeks seclusion period proved adequate. Mwambia (O.I: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011) confirmed that the ritually circumcised men required a three months seclusion period because the wound took too long to heal since no medicine was applied to facilitate healing. During this seclusion period, the fathers continued to play profound roles in the lives of their sons, teaching them affairs of manhood. This shows that while colonialism and Christianity helped to shape the 'Chuka masculinity', they did not overshadow the roles of fathers in its construction. It is implicit here that fathers exercised indirect control over their newly circumcised sons, because they assumed the role of their educators during seclusion.

The ritually circumcised initiates dramatically separated from their mothers and their households in order to construct in them proper masculinities that were not feminine. The initiates entered into a liminal or threshold phase of rituals, in which their joint separation from the normal society and their lack of status were stressed. They were

subjected to various ordeals and tests of endurance, which required their subjection to the 'nthaka'. The education for the ritually circumcised men stressed attributes of endurance, courage fortitude and resilience. The men had to prove their bravery and readiness to take up the responsibilities of adult life through wrestling and 'gaaru' contests. Only the 'nthaka' were allowed into the huts of the ritually circumcised men. The mother's role was to prepare food for her recuperating son, through the 'nthaka'. This shows that though women played a key role in determining the construction of masculinities, they subjected their sons to the control of the circumcised men.

It was clearly elaborated in chapter three that during the traditional seclusion of initiates in the 'iganda' and the 'gaaru', men learnt to distance and dissociate themselves from the 'iroge' and women whom they viewed as outsiders. The 'Nthaka' were the key educators of the traditional initiates who aimed at instilling discipline in them. This discipline was meted out to them in form of brutal acts such as caning, over-feeding them and plucking off their nails (Mbungu O.I; 17<sup>th</sup> June 2012). The initiates were inducted into shared new knowledge and incorporated into productive adults in the society. The seclusion gave order, structure and meaning to the men's life and deviation from the teachings on manhood was not entertained.

During this seclusion, the social statuses of men were carefully constructed through prescribed processes of teaching, learning, emulation and enforcement. Individuals born

and sexed as males were gendered to be masculine in rituals. It is plausible that a great correlation existed between violence and the seclusion rituals. This was particularly so during the first two decades of independence as shown in the previous chapter, where ritually circumcised men ('real men') openly disparaged the medically circumcised men ('iroge'). It is plausible that undergoing the ritualized circumcision gave the circumcised men sole rights over acts of violence as they wanted to prove their manhood.

Violence associated with circumcision and botched ritual circumcision has been recorded in the study by Ncayiyama (2003), in which he identifies malpractices such as gratuitous beatings, physical abuse, and extreme exposure to elements, nutritional deprivation and withholding of medicines during circumcision as common causes of death during circumcision in South Africa. It is possible that the education for the traditional initiates in Chuka was riddled with acts of violence, some of which may have been fatal. Nyangi (O.I: 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012) cautions that instances of violence on initiates went unreported for the fear of retribution from the 'nthaka'. The mistreatment was worse where the 'nthaka' visited a 'kiroge' during the seclusion. The 'iroge' therefore faced the danger of being re-circumcised by the 'nthaka' in a bid to re-construct their manhood. Kaunda (O.I: 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2012) disclosed that incidences of penile amputation could not be ruled out as the 'nthaka' visited the 'iroge' to re-fashion them into real men.

The seclusion for the medically circumcised men was different from that of the ritually circumcised men. Education for the medically circumcised men revolved around the Christian themes of obedience, love and the respect of parents. Following this education, the medically circumcised men were perceived as ‘modern’ initiates who would shake hands with their mothers or younger uncircumcised siblings as indicated in the previous chapter. At times, mothers took food to their recuperating sons without fear of embarrassment for breaching the traditional norms. The medically circumcised initiates willingly performed feminine or masculine roles that were assigned to them. This shows that the education to the modern initiates differed from that of the traditionally circumcised initiates. Their principles and contrasting ideologies may have fueled further animosity between the traditionalists and the modern men (Saribatore, O.I: 8<sup>th</sup> Aug. 2011, Kanga, O.I: 6<sup>th</sup> June 2011).

Despite their differing ideologies, circumcision and seclusion continued to be upheld by many men as important sites for the transmission of manhood. In the Secondary schools, torture may have continued to be meted out on the uncircumcised boys (*Daily Nation*, Feb 15, 2007:37). This article reports that older boys forced the new comers (form one students) to strip naked so that they could be inspected. Those found uncircumcised spent the whole night going through all manner of torture and insults, such as being called “kibici”, (uncircumcised man). The origin of torture on the uncircumcised can possibly be traced to the contest between the traditionalists and the modernists during

the seclusion period. This brutality from the circumcised to the uncircumcised men was a way of winning loyalty and exacting indirect control on the uncircumcised boys.

From 1993, the seclusion for initiates had slowly become individualized, due to this alleged torture on them. Men who had performed well in school were revered as real men as opposed to those who performed dismally in school despite their circumcision status. Schools became the new centers of acculturation while the teachers took up the role of the sponsors and fathers in educating the initiates on responsible adulthood. Manhood lessons on responsible adulthood were integrated into several subjects learnt in the schools such as Christian Religious Education (C.R.E.) and Social Education and Ethics (S.E.E.).

The debates on real manhood focused on where one was secluded after being circumcised. The initiates who had been secluded in their parents' houses were ill-treated by their peers (Mutiso O.I: 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011, Muchiri O.I: 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011). However these initiates who healed from their mothers' houses believed that the proper way of proving their manhood was by excelling academically rather than through where and how they were secluded. Academic excellence therefore became the new way of constructing hegemonic masculinity among men and as such, the educated men gained indirect social control over illiterate men.

After 1996, a new form of seclusion began to emerge, whereby the circumcised boys were accommodated in the schools/ institutions for two-three weeks period. This form of institution- based seclusion brought together many boys who had been medically circumcised. They congregated in these institutions for their healing and socialization. Institutions where this seclusion was done according to Kaunda (O.I; 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept 2011) and Mwambia (11<sup>th</sup> June 2011), include St. Joseph Boarding in Magumoni, organized by the Magumoni parish Catholic Men Association (C.M.A), Chuka Boys organized by the Chuka parish C.M.A and Ndagani Secondary school organized by the Presbyterian Church Men Fellowship (P.C.M.F).

The C.M.A. and the P.C.M.F. appointed sponsors from among the university youth and men who had excelled academically and had positions of influence in the society to guide the initiates. The new category of sponsors' wielded indirect control over the new initiates because they were knowledgeable and were associated with success having excelled academically. This confirms that, education and attaining good jobs became a new parameter for real men. However the institutional-based seclusion was simply an emblem of adulthood, because it scantily retained some traditional teachings on adulthood but lacked the wider social significance of the traditional seclusion.

### **5.3.2 End of seclusion ceremonies**

During the post-independent period in Chuka, initiates who had successfully completed their seclusion went through an important ceremony known as ‘kuuma nyomba’ (‘getting out of the house’). This ceremony replaced the traditional ceremony known as ‘nciabuni’ which not only marked the end of seclusion but also the new man’s resumption to normal life. The ‘kuuma nyomba’ ceremony was characterized by feasting with the family members, during which the new man was showered with gifts such as clothes and books as opposed to the traditional gifts of spears, bows and arrows given during the ‘Nciabuni’ ceremony. The new gifts laid more emphasis on academic achievement for the man rather than courage and aggressiveness which were attributes of manhood emphasized in the ‘nciabuni’ ritual.

The ‘kuuma nyomba’ ceremony was not compulsory for the men and it was organized depending on individual families. An important departure from the ‘Nciabuni’ was that during the ‘kuuma nyomba’ the candidate was not given a new name. The man retained the name given to him at birth or during his baptism for the Christian initiates. The circumcised men were revered and respected as ‘daktari’ (doctor) ‘mwalim’ (teacher), pastor or business people who constantly controlled the lives of the people directly and indirectly.

During the 1973-1983 decade, the 'kuuma nyomba' ceremony emphasized educational achievements by the initiates. This message was given in the new 'kuuma nyomba' songs and speeches from the invited guests. An example of such a song is given below by Nyangi (O.I; 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012).

Solo; Ihai ii ui yiaa maibuni nciabu Na M'njogu; (*and the man Njogu*)

All; Nirietu ii yiaa maibuni nciabu; (*Is ours*)

Solo; Ria kwirimiria? (*The name has been earned?*)

All; Na kithomo iii yiaa maibuni nciabu; (*through education*)

Solo; Nthaka cia Njogu? (*The sons of Elephant?*)

All; Kuthoma ii yiaa maibuni nciabu; (*Are very learned men*)

Solo; Ciagira Nthumbi? (*They got degrees?*)

All; Ya kithomo ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*in education*)

Solo; Watunga ngi'na wa? (*If you meet with a mother of?*)

All; Mucenci ii yiaa maibuni nciabu (*the uneducated*).

Solo; Ringa unaune? (*Hit her hard until you break?*)

All; Mugongo ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*the back*)

Solo; Watunga ngi'na wa ? (*if you meet with the mother of?* )

All; Muthomi ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*One who is educated*)

Solo; Ringa kithaka? (*Run into the bush?*)

All; Na nkingo ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*by body and neck*)

Solo; Nwari Mugumo? (*It was better if a Mugumo tree?*)

All; Kuguka ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*fell down*)

Solo; Ugakura gaaru ya? (*And uproot the barracks of?*)

All; Acenci ii yiaa maibuni nciabu, (*the uneducated boys'*)

The rhythm of the song above is similar to that of the traditional 'nciabuni' song. However, this song lays emphasis on the value of education and academic achievements by the man, other than associate manhood with the qualities of fierce animals such as the elephant, lion, as was the case in the 'nciabuni' song. The new song describes education, securing a degree and employment as some of the greatest attributes of real manhood. The song also despises the academic failures as men who should be punished by society and indirectly controlled by the educated men such that even before they talk to them or point out their inadequacy, the uneducated are instructed to run into the bush.

A second example of a new 'nciabuni' song by Muriira (O.I; 18<sup>th</sup> December 2012) is as follows;

Solo; Twi turi nthaka, riu twakura tugecererie kithomo

All; ah!

*(We are the circumcised, we have matured to go and search for education)*

Solo; Twerwa turi nthaka gintu kia mbere Ni kithomo

All; ah!

*(Being called the warriors, first priority is education)*

Solo; Nthaka nthomu itiremagwa ni gauntu ona kariku

All: ah!

*(An educated warrior does not get defeated by anything however simple)*

Solo; Twiukei mbuku na karamu tugecererie giki kithomo

All; ah!

*(Let us take our books and pens as we go to search for this education)*

Solo; Ngitwa kirima mubanyobanyo na karia kangi cukuru gucua

kithomo

All; ah!

*(As I go up this hill and the other hill majestically to school to seek education)*

Solo; Niuntu kithomo nikio uturo wa nthuke yetu

All; ah!

*(Because education is the livelihood of our age set)*

Solo; Nthaka nthomu itiaga wira kenda itethia uturu wawe

All; ah!

*(An educated warrior will not be jobless; will get a job to help him  
be helpful in his life)*

This song still stresses on the value of education and employment as the only proper means to a good livelihood. From this song, it is clear that the platform of constructing masculinity changed from that of traditional rites to modern rites as witnessed by the new faith in education and religion.

During the third decade after independence, an important transformation on the naming patterns manifested itself on the usage of the title 'boy'. Traditionally, 'boy' referred to uncircumcised males but during this period the title could now be used to address circumcised men. Hitherto, use of this title on circumcised men was offensive since it acknowledged the childhood status of a male. Besides, it was interpreted as a refusal to acknowledge the 'growth' (maturity) of the man. According to one retired teacher Mbungu (O.I: 18<sup>th</sup> Dec 2012), teachers used the title 'boy' as from the mid-1980s to refer to the male students in the schools regardless of whether they were circumcised or not. She asserts that many parents too referred to their circumcised sons as 'my boys'.

It was common practice for the newly initiated men to be referred to as 'boys' during the 'kuuma nyomba' (getting out of seclusion) ceremony. It should be noted that even though circumcised men accepted to be called 'boys', they were accorded great respect for their status as grown up men. During the 'kuuma nyomba' the institution-based

initiates were awarded certificates for successful completion of seclusion detailing the skills which they had learnt. The kin witnessed the ceremony after which the men resumed their normal life and schooling. The discussion above shows that by the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> C, the Chuka delinked the title ‘boy’ from the circumcision rituals and its usage implied the physical and physiological features that differentiated males from females. The masculinities that emerged during this period took no offence on being referred to as ‘boys’.

#### **5.4 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has clearly elaborated how the circumcision rituals evolved in the post-independence Chuka. Contests on masculinity were between the traditional man who maintained aspects of ritualized circumcision and the modern man who favoured hospital circumcision. Major changes have been noted on the ‘thauthi’ dances that were slowly replaced with the gospel songs. The ‘mithambo’ (chill bath) became unpopular as the venue for the operation changed from the ‘itiri’ and ‘kagiri’ to the hospitals. Different seclusion patterns emerged in hospitals, in institutions and in the homes. Different types of masculinities emerged and co-existed with each other due to the diverse social and economic backgrounds of the initiates.

This chapter has demonstrated that the uncircumcised men became social deviants and had no place in Chuka. They were forced to comply with this cultural rite or get

punished through torture that was meted out to them by the circumcised men. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>C, hegemony among various masculinities was not only linked to circumcision but also to acquisition of education and employment. Men who amassed wealth out of their academic excellence in schools insubordinated men who failed to succeed academically. Despite the varying masculinities that emerged, this chapter has demonstrated that circumcision remained an important rite of passage and a cultural practice through which the Chuka men organized their lives.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter is a summary of this thesis, and gives the general outline of what each chapter sought to achieve and the conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the research.

#### **6.1 Summary**

Chapter One covered the proposal for this study, whose problem was to interrogate how boys are socialized to become ‘men’, through the rite of circumcision. The chapter presented the hypothesis that circumcision was an important rite of passage for the men and the society in general. The premise for this study was that a number of masculinities co-existed in Chuka and that the hegemonic masculinity bestowed more power and privileges on men who espoused it, over the sub-ordinate masculinities. It was based on the assumption that the installation of imperial institutions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century transformed the existing ‘Chuka’ masculinities.

Chapter One too presented the methodological approach used in the data collection during several periods of field work. Different sources such as interviews, questionnaires, observations, archival data and other written sources were relied upon. Purposeful sampling among other methods of choosing respondents was very

instrumental in getting resourceful informants. This study was not confined within the geographical boundaries of Chuka but efforts were made to seek useful information beyond these boundaries.

Chapter Two traced the origin and migration of the Chuka people from Mbwa to their present settlement. This gave us a deeper understanding of the nature of the Chuka people and the origin of their circumcision practices. This chapter analyzed the social, economic and political organization of the Chuka in order to locate the significance and effects of this organization on the circumcision rite.

Chapter Three described the practice of circumcision in the pre-independence period. This was reviewed under the pre-initiation, actual initiation and the post-initiation rituals of circumcision. Circumcision being a socialization institution portrayed a man as being physically strong, intelligent and aggressive in his roles. Circumcision was a universal rite, which was performed on the pre-adolescent boys and driven by the cultural influences in Chuka.

The construction of the social statuses of men through prescribed processes of teaching, learning, emulation and enforcement were also discussed in this chapter. Individuals born and sexed as males were gendered to be masculine during the circumcision rituals. Finally, attempts were made to investigate the powers and privileges for circumcised

men in Chuka. This chapter demonstrates the price men had to pay in acquiring true manhood, through the series of pre, actual and post- circumcision rituals. Besides, it shows as real men had responsibility to defend, a right to belong to an age set and to elevate their social status. The findings show that male circumcision governed social norms and roles of men since manhood was defined through circumcision in Chuka.

Chapter Four analyzed the entrenchment of imperial rule in Chuka and its effects on the traditional circumcision rituals. Attempts were made in this chapter to show how the Christian missionaries attempted to Christianize and civilize the circumcision rituals through the introduction of hospital or school circumcision. A particular effort was made to scrutinize how the establishment of imperial rule had profound implications for the male circumcision and consequently on the male social roles, values and identity. It elaborated how missionaries created new versions of manhood as a result of the alien and contradictory education and the new faith, which were different from the traditional versions of manhood.

This chapter showed that the establishment of Western education and Christianity in Chuka by the C.S.M and the Consolata missionaries in 1922 and 1930 respectively gave rise to elites who attained skills for wage labor and economic empowerment. Educated men were able to establish independent livelihoods without relying on their fathers to

allocate them land and pay for them bride wealth, something that fathers traditionally did following their sons' circumcision.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of how the attainment of independence changed the Chuka understanding of manhood and how the modern circumcision eventually took precedence over the ritualized traditional circumcision. With economic independence the elites challenged the relevance of traditional circumcision in producing real men, as elders continued to lose control over this elite generation. Since independence, hegemony in adult men was based on their ability to control essential means of production, with circumcision no longer being the definitive single indicator of their full participation in community life. Contrary to the Chuka tradition and culture, there was an emerging trend where most men turned to the modern methods of circumcision at the hospitals. This change could be attributed to modernization, Christianity, intermarriages, high literacy levels and migration among many other factors.

Chapter Six has provided a summary of each chapter in this thesis, basing it on the objectives that this research was set to achieve. It has also provided a conclusion and recommendations based on the findings of the research. The recommendations are meant to help us understand circumcision as a rich cultural heritage among the Chuka and open for us gaps for future research and investigation.

## **6.2 Conclusion.**

This study proposed that circumcision was of great value and importance to individual men as well as to the society. The analysis of data indicates that circumcision was an elaborate practice involving lengthy preparations and a cluster of pre- and post-circumcision rituals. Male circumcision is still one of the most important rituals deeply ingrained in the Chuka culture. It marks the transition of males from boyhood to manhood and the attainment of all the benefits and responsibilities of adult men. Chapter two has clearly shown that male circumcision is as old as the Chuka society and was a basis that directly or indirectly influenced the way the society was socially, economically and politically structured.

From chapter three we learn that the uncircumcised male had no place in Chuka and was a social deviant, who was forced to comply or get punished by the 'real' men. This chapter confirms the premise that through circumcision different versions of masculinity were created and co-existed with each other in different historical periods. Based on the theoretical framework of Hegemonic masculinity, the findings confirm that there were multiple masculinities in Chuka. At any one given time, the hegemonic masculinity was ascendant and in charge of the marginalized and sub-ordinate masculinities. The rite of circumcision constructed many categories of men and bestowed on each category different levels of indirect control.

Before the onset of colonial rule ritualized circumcision was used in constructing 'real' men and was an inevitable part of the Chuka culture. Although circumcision was a compulsory rite men who showed no signs of fear during their ritualized circumcision gained more power and authority over other men and women. Such men were chosen as the 'gaaru' spokesmen for portraying an indisputable courage and having a well built physique. The council of elders was another category of men who espoused hegemony over other men. Their authority was derived from their seniority in age, as they controlled the social hierarchy of males through circumcision. The findings of this study show that male circumcision governed social norms and roles of men in the Chuka society and that manhood in this community was defined by circumcision.

Over-valuation of men was normalized through a long circumcision process which started at the family level, to childhood stage and continued through to adulthood. The Chuka males' authority was normalized in ways that appeared natural, and without any form of coercion, women were relegated to being their subordinates. During the socialization process, boys internalized and acted according to the prescribed men's behavior while girls had to behave like women. Men were encouraged to adopt and develop certain personality traits that were often referred to as masculine for males while women developed feminine traits.

Circumcision was an institution through which men constantly created and recreated their gender in male segregated settings such as the 'gaaru' and councils of elders meetings. These were some of the zones where masculine attributes were transmitted from the older men to the younger ones by force, personal examples and the appropriation technique. The prerequisite to participate in such arenas was that one had to be circumcised, a rite that was deeply ingrained and valued in Chuka culture. This study confirms the research premises that circumcision as a rite of passage was not only important to the individual men but also to the Chuka society in general.

This study was premised on the assumption that the rite of circumcision underwent fundamental changes in colonial and post-independence eras. Analyzed data confirms that during the colonial period, the traditional circumcision rituals and male activities that closely linked men's identities disappeared. Majority of the migrant workers lived under deplorable conditions that truncated their attainment of proper manhood. These workers became marginalized by the whites' masculinities who exercised hegemony over the blacks' masculinities. Ordering of masculinities on racial lines had profound consequences on the Chuka male gender and female gender identities and relations. The installation of imperial institutions in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century transformed existing 'Chuka' masculinities and disrupted the gender order especially in the division of labour.

Changes on men's roles and privileges were aggravated in the colonial period, when the Chuka men's involvement in public matters drastically changed following the disruption of the barracks life. The creation of new versions of masculinities was compounded by the missionaries' attempts to Christianize and 'civilize' the circumcision rituals through the hospital and school circumcision. This resulted to cultural nationalists who advocated for ritualized circumcision and militant Christians who proposed medical circumcision. However, maintaining a traditional circumcision had become increasingly difficult during the post-independence era due to dynamism wrought by schooling and western medicine. Many boys preferred to be circumcised in hospitals as opposed to going through the ritualized circumcision. The traditional rituals diminished probably due to modern schooling, urbanization and modern medical practices.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity which is used in this study helped to identify ways through which some men dominate both women and other men. This study revealed that hegemonic masculinities were contested and changed over time. While for instance some Chuka men and women upheld ritualized circumcision as the only avenue of producing ideal masculinity, others contested this as a 'primitive' approach and embraced new forms of masculinity based on acquisition of Western education, Christianity and salaried employment. This reveals competing perceptions of what constituted a hegemonic masculinity in Chuka particularly in the late colonial and early post independence periods.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity may have limited our understanding of experiences and meanings of men's lives and the complex meanings of power. By seeing power as domination practiced by some men, the concept presented an automatic sense that someone else is doing masculine power and that others are less directly involved in its articulation. This posed a risk of seeing the practice of hegemonic power everywhere. To neutralize this drawback, the concept was used to analyse discrete, privileged and small peer groups of men within ten year intervals. Thus, this concept was insightful in interrogating conditions under which masculinities change and to mount and sustain arguments for this change over time.

### **6.3 Recommendations.**

In this study, I may have raised more questions than I could answer. However, I hope that they will indicate areas where future research may be conducted. The study emphasizes a need to examine in depth the changing African social contexts and the collapsing structures and institutions such as the traditional schools of circumcision. There is need to examine the emergence of unstable situations that have given rise to new social roles and values to both genders in Chuka.

There is need to explore how changes on circumcision rituals have affected the male and female gender identity, the relations between the sexes and in particular their behavior. We should reconsider and re-conceptualize conventional and stereotyped assumptions

about the relationship between men and women. This should not only be done in Chuka but also in other social, cultural and economic contexts in Kenyan societies, where there is instability and transformation of gender relations.

There is dire need to rethink the notion that the circumcised males are dominant and all powerful, whereas the females are sub-ordinate and to be dominated. The stereotype of male domination and women's subordination is dangerous, static and does not allow for change. Through circumcision rituals, men help to naturalize inferiority on women and this may lead women to internalize themselves as subordinates. While patriarchal ideology may be embodied in the lives of socially dominant men and subordinate women, it does not mean that all men are successful patriarchs or that all women are passive victims.

Results of this study show that medical circumcision is increasingly becoming the preferred version of creating manhood as opposed to the ritualized traditional circumcision. This calls for the government's intervention to reduce or even clear off all circumcision charges in our health centers. Free circumcision services in the hospitals will encourage more people who are staunch followers of tradition and culture to opt for the safer and hygienic medical circumcision. There is need to intensify campaigns against risky traditional circumcision practices particularly to the people in the rural and interior areas. This is because most of the people practicing the risky traditional

circumcision rituals are in the heart of the rural villages and not in urbanized environments.

People should be sensitized on the dangers of ritualized and botched circumcision practices through the governmental and non-governmental organizations. Men should be enlightened to adopt circumcision practices that are congruent with the changing demands of the time. The government should decentralize the health centers or adopt mobile circumcision clinics to reach out to the people who are far away from the urban and health centers. This will motivate the people to embrace the modern practice of circumcision that is safer, cheaper and convenient.

Circumcision rituals should not be left to interfere with the education and rights of the uncircumcised boys, particularly in our secondary schools. One would ask like Makokha in *Saturday Nation* (Feb 17; 2007:9), ‘how does the foreskin hinder the learning of Mathematics’? On this strength, the school system should offer the best chance to engage with the youth on how masculinities are socially constructed. The educationists need to understand how a dented cultural masculinity is nurtured in our schools and how it produces anti-social, irresponsible and violent behaviour in the society.

By understanding the beliefs and customs of our forefathers, we are able to delink the boy’s circumcision from his education. This calls for concerted efforts by human rights

activists, educationists and interventionists to avert the culturally sanctioned violence emanating from the practice of circumcision in our boys' secondary schools. This intervention will produce citizens who will contribute to their development as well as that of their peers and the society.

Besides, the area of the male body and the cultural ideals of gender in circumcision rituals, speech and gestures remain under-researched in Chuka. Even less research has been conducted on the relationship between circumcision and violence, even though the results of this study indicate that there are modest correlations between circumcision rituals and aggression. The construction of masculinity via circumcision legitimates the use of violence and undemocratic assertion of power by the circumcised men over uncircumcised men and women. Although the practice of circumcision has been watered down by modernity, the aspects of violence related to this practice have become a vicious cycle whereby the once bullied boys in turn become bullies after they meet the condition of being circumcised.

Allegations have constantly been made that Kenyans have abandoned their rich cultural and moral foundation that was built by many generations of their forefathers. One way of tackling the rising cases moral and social is to learn how our traditional societies functioned and adapt as much as possible our current society to the positive traditional practices. Moreover the youth should rediscover their heritage for the good of the

society, and discard that which is “bad” cultural practice. Today, the Chuka man is plunged into a world of change since culture is dynamic. The study of our past heritage is very important because it tells us how our ancestors lived in a harmonious society, reminds us of our roots and gives us a point of reference for the present and our future.

Finally, male circumcision has been widely suggested as a possible intervention to reduce the spread of HIV and other genital infections in African men. This study has revealed that there are different styles of circumcising among the Ameru subgroups. This could be the scenario in other circumcising communities such as the Igbo of Nigeria (Achebe 1959), Maasai (Ole-Kulet 1972) and the Bukusu of Kenya (*Sunday Standard* Aug 3; 2014:6). In choosing a circumciser and a technique for their adolescent sons, families are influenced by cultural traditions as well as their religion. Three different surgical techniques of male circumcision have been identified and described in this research which include, the removal of the entire foreskin, folding part of the foreskin/ prepuce or leaving it suspended below the penis. The resulting genital appearances vary considerably in the various Ameru subgroups.

Following this revelation, detailed knowledge of local circumcision techniques and their physiological results is necessary, as we advocate for the removal of the foreskin as a current intervention to the spread of HIV. As young men in non-circumcising societies adopt circumcision, they are likely to copy the styles of circumcision from neighboring

ethnic groups. Medical practitioners and researchers should be knowledgeable about the existing local styles and consequences of circumcision in order to make the right recommendations that can best help to reduce H.I.V. infection. In so doing, the rite of circumcision will be accurately used in the fight against H.I.V. pandemic.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

MAP OF KENYA



Source; Oxford (2013:16) 360<sup>0</sup> Atlas

APPENDIX 2

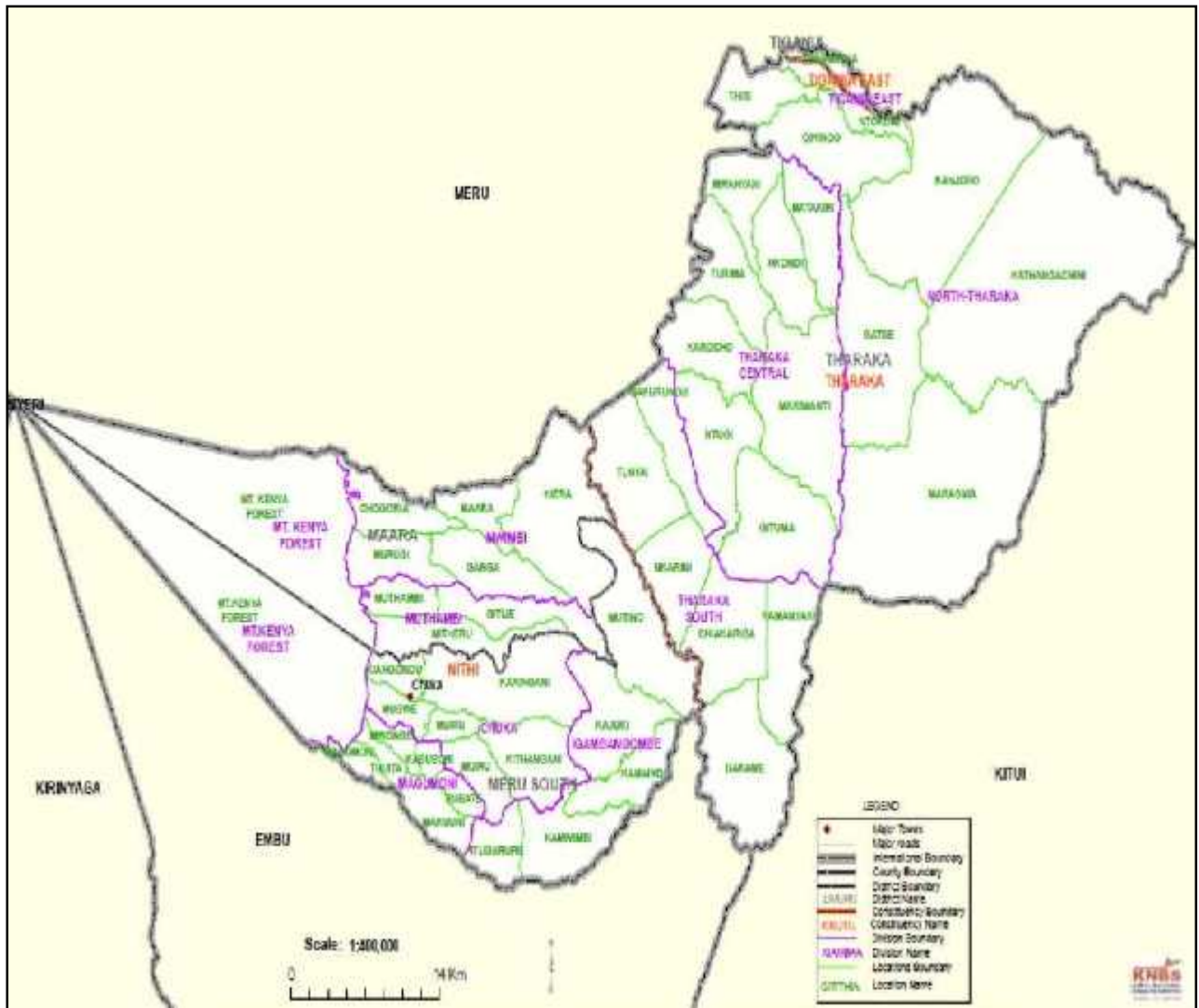
MAP SHOWING THE LOCATION OF THARAKA-NITHI COUNTY



Source; Oxford (2013:21) 360<sup>0</sup> Atlas

APPENDIX 3

MAP SHOWING THARAKA NITHI COUNTY



Source; Government Printers (2011), Kenya National Bureau of Statistics Maps.

**APPENDIX 4:****RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS****PART A;****QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE****TRANSMITTAL LETTER**

Dear respondent,

I am a Master of Arts student, (Department of History, Archaeology and Political Studies) of Kenyatta University, carrying out a research on THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY AMONG THE CHUKA THROUGH CIRCUMCISION, 1906 – 2000.

I hereby invite you to participate in this research by filling in the attached questionnaire.

Your views shall remain CONFIDENTIAL and will be used solely for this research.

As a show of gratitude for your participation in this research, the findings will be availed to you on request using the address shown at the bottom of this page, once the study is successfully completed.

Thank you in advance.

Yours Sincerely,

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Master of Arts-History, Archaeology, and Political Studies  
Kenyatta University.

**QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE****BIO-DATA**

Age .....

Gender .....

Sub-location .....

Division .....

Status/position/occupation .....

1. Do you understand the meaning of circumcision rituals?

Yes .....  .....  Not sure 

2. How would you describe this rite of passage, as guided below? (Tick one).

Unnecessary .....

Compulsory .....

Voluntary .....

Others (specify)

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

3. At what age is the rite practiced on the boys? (Tick one).

Before 2 years of age .....

Between 5-10 years of age .....

Between 10-15 years of age.....

Above 15 years of age .....

Any other .....

Give a reason for the choice of age in Q3 above.

After primary education .....

In order to join form one .....

In order to become a 'man' .....

Others (specify)

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

4. What influences boys to be circumcised at the chosen age bracket?

.....  
.....  
.....

5. (a) Where is circumcision conducted in your sub-location (venue)? Tick one

Hospital .....

Home .....

Others .....

5.(b) Where was it conducted before independence in 1963?

Hospital .....

Home.....

Others .....

6. Are there any uncircumcised mature men in your sub-location?

Yes .....

No

If yes , because of:

Fear .....

Parental control .....

Cultural reason (s) – (Specify) .....

Lack of finances

Others

(i).....

(ii).....

(iii).....

7. Who has the greatest influence on boys' circumcision? Tick one.

Background e.g. other circumcised men.....

Grandparents .....

Self.....

Friends .....

Parents .....

Others

(i).....

(ii).....

8. What are the preparations/requirements that one makes?

Pre-circumcision rituals

.....

.....

.....

Actual operation

i).....

ii).....

iii).....

.....

.....

.....

Post-circumcision rituals.

.....

9. What are the benefits given to the circumcised men?

.....

.....

.....  
.....

10. Name the qualities and expected attributes of a circumcised man in your sub-location?

.....  
.....

11. What are the advantages of being circumcised by a “mutani” the traditional way?

i).....

ii).....

12. Does circumcision cause the boys to be aggressive or violent?

Yes.....

No

13. What are the benefits given to the circumcised men at the expense of the uncircumcised men?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

14. Suggest the effects of circumcision on the boy-child.

Positive effects

.....  
.....

Negative effects

.....  
.....

15. “Circumcision creates real men in Chuka” comment on this statement.

.....

Thank you.

**PART B**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**BIO-DATA**

Age.....  
 Sub-Location.....  
 Position/Occupation.....  
 Religion/Denomination .....

1. Is circumcision practiced in your sub-location?
2. If yes, when is it commonly carried out, what season?
3. Why is it carried out at the time in (2) above?
4. At what age are boys circumcised?
5. What preparations are made before, during and after the ritual?
6. Where is circumcision commonly carried out, in hospital or at home? Why?
7. Where was circumcision carried out in the traditional Chuka society? And by whom?
8. What benefits were/are offered to the circumcised man?
9. Are there any mature male who are uncircumcised in your society? Describe their behavior and reasons for this failure to conform to societal expectations?
10. How is a circumcised man supposed to behave to prove he is a “real man”
11. Is circumcision in hospital considered of equal weight with circumcision the traditional way? Give reasons for your answer.
12. What are the qualifications of a traditional circumciser (Mutani)?
13. Suggest duties and responsibilities of a circumcised man in pre-colonial, colonial and post- colonial period.
14. What benefits are denied to the uncircumcised mature men?
15. Give any other relevant information on how circumcision makes a man in your sub-location, a real man.
16. How does failing to be circumcised prevent one from being a “real man” in your sub-location?
17. Are there men who are more men than others? If yes what makes them so?
18. Apart from through circumcision what other factors would make one to be considered a ‘real man’
19. Are there circumcised men who are considered ‘boys’ even after undergoing the ‘cut’? If yes, what makes them so?
20. Justify the torture that ‘boys’ go through before they face the knife as they strive to become men?

## PART C

### FIELD OBSERVATION GUIDELINES

Targeted areas frequented by men such as Chera market, Kibugua market, Chuka town bus stage, Kanwa market and social joints in the area such as Baituru Baron, Godka and Muringa restaurants. The research assistants looked out for; how men interacted with each other, their general behavior, how they held conversations with themselves/other people and their general reaction to various circumstances. Observations too were made of the common attributes of masculinity displayed at these joints such as;

- Aggressiveness
- Forcefulness
- Domination
- Independence
- Ruggedness
- Virility
- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Any other .....

NB:

- ❖ No intrusions were made with the men/or in their talk.
- ❖ Habitual routines of Masculine behavior were noted after observations were done for not less than 25 hours at each joint, on various days of the week.
- ❖ The observers were within a hearing distance from the men being observed, (a few feet away).
- ❖ Any recording of the observation was done without the ones being observed being noticing.
- ❖ The real names of the men being observed were concealed during the reporting stage for the purpose of confidentiality.

**OBSERVATION SCHEDULE**

<b>Place</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>General Observation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Chera Market	10/8/11, 18/8/11, 7/10/11, 9/12/11 16/01/12, 15/04/12	Ruggedness Domination Forcefulness name calling such as 'kabiu' Independence	8 6 12 7 9
Kibugua Market	12/7/11, 18/12/11, 23/2/12, 4/6/12, 10/7/12	Ruggedness Domination Forcefulness Independence Agressiveness Friendship among peers	6 10 9 8 3 6
Chuka Town Bus stop	12/7/11, 19/12/11, 25/2/12, 4/6/12, 10/7/12 15/7/12	Ruggedness Independence Domination Agressiveness Forcefulness	9 13 10 17 11
Kanwa Market	15/7/11, 23/12/11, 28/2/12, 10/6/12, 10/7/12	Ruggedness Independence Domination Agressiveness Forcefulness	8 12 6 5 7
Baituru Baron	17/7/11, 28/12/11, 3/3/12, 14/6/12, 19/7/12	Ruggedness Independence Domination Agressiveness Forcefulness	6 14 10 15 14
Godka Restaurant	17/7/11, 28/12/11, 3/3/12, 14/6/12, 19/7/12	Friendship among peers Ruggedness Independence Domination Agressiveness Forcefulness	9 8 10 7 9 10
Muringa Inn	17/7/11, 28/12/11, 3/3/12, 14/6/12, 19/7/12	Friendship among peers Ruggedness Independence Domination Agressiveness Forcefulness	8 10 12 9 7 10

**APPENDIX 5****LIST OF INFORMANTS**

	<b>Names</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Dates of Interview</b>
1	Agnes Kawira	40yrs	12/8/2011
2	Alex Mugambi	39 yrs	2/8/2011
3	Benjamin M'baini	89yrs	7/10/2011, 12/6/2013
4	Catherine Mbuba	56yrs	6/12/2011
5	Christine Mukwanyaga	60yrs	21/4/2011
6	Cianguo Kabubu kiambutu	51yrs	21/4/2011
7	Daktari Mwambia	60yrs	11/6/2011
8	Doreen Kagendo	33yrs	24/4/2011
9	Dorothy Kaari Mbungu	55yrs	17/6/2011,18/12/2012
10	Erastus Njoka	48yrs	30/8/2011
11	Esnus Warue	50yrs	12/8/2011
12	Felister Ciekamba	76yrs	8/8/2011, 14/6/2013
13	Francis Kanga (alias Mutema)	80yrs	6/6/2011, 15/6/2013
14	Franklin Nkongge	53yrs	28/8/2011
15	James Nyangi	46 yrs	8/8/2011,10/8/2012,13/12/2013
16	Junius Mucioka	52yrs	22/4/2011
17	Kaari Peter	50yrs	10/7/2011
18	Kaburu Lawrence	35yrs	13/8/2011
19	Kibungi Robert Karitu	72yrs	10/8/11,10/6/13,24/11/12,24/12
20	Late Nkari Magiti (alias Nkanabo)	94yrs	21/4/2011
21	Lillian Njagi	40yrs	26/8/2011
22	Lytesia Karugo Mukembu	50yrs	28/8/2011
23	Marangu Kaunda	42yrs	3/9/2011
24	Mary Miriti	50yrs	12/8/2011
25	Morris Njagi	43yrs	4/9/2011
26	Njeru Mutunga	48yrs	3/9/2011
27	Njoka Saribatore	64yrs	8/8/2011
28	Olinzia Kagendo	41yrs	30/8/2011
29	Pamela Gakii Mutegi	42 yrs	12/8/2011
30	Paul Mutiso	40yrs	9/7/2011
31	Rev. Festus M.Alexander	69yrs	2/8/2011, 16/6/2013
32	Stella Kawira	35yrs	12/8/2011
33	Steve Alex Muchiri	30yrs	21/4/2011
34	Titus Muriera Mbae	55 yrs	10/8/2011,18/12/2012



		but uncircumcised.
<b>Kigiri</b>	-	closely knit circle of warriors to prevent any woman/ intruders in the ceremony.
<b>Kirarire/ kirira</b>	-	catechism for initiates during circumcision
<b>Kiroge/ iroge</b>	-	one /many who is/ are poisoned/ bewitched', used to refer to men circumcised under anesthesia
<b>Kuuma Nyomba</b>	-	getting out of the house for the initiates after healing
<b>Kuuna gaaru</b>	-	act of the candidates provoking the warriors into rage in order to kick off the circumcision rituals.
<b>Kuuna miti</b>	-	'breaking sticks' from a Mugumo tree which was done by initiates
<b>Kwangua/ Kibata</b>	-	parading nude would be initiates round the villages in thauthi dances to solicit for the circumcision rites' requirements.
<b>Magau</b>	-	for dried banana leaves.
<b>Maitha</b>	-	hostile neighbors/ external raiders
<b>Marika</b>	-	age set or age group
<b>Mbatha</b>	-	stinging nettle
<b>Mbogo</b>	-	Buffalo.
<b>Mburi ya gutura matu</b>	-	'goat for piercing of the ears' which was presented to the maternal relatives by the would be initiates.
<b>Mibariki</b>	-	Castor tree.
<b>Mibiro</b>	-	walking sticks for the initiates obtained from the 'murembu' tree.
<b>Migaa</b>	-	Acacia trees.
<b>Migumo</b>	-	Fig tree,
<b>Mirangini</b>	-	Bamboo zone on Mt. Kenya slopes.
<b>Miringa</b>	-	Indigenous tree

<b>Mituntu</b>	-	Indigenous tree
<b>Monyo or ciakimuri or Nondo</b>	-	describing Red ochre applied on the candidates.
<b>Mubanda Miraga</b>	-	planter of Miraga thorns to clip initiates foreskin.
<b>Mugambi</b>	-	‘gaaru’ spokesman
<b>Mugo</b>	-	traditional medicine man.
<b>Mugongo/ kياما gia nkome</b>	-	name for the council of elders in Chuka.
<b>Mukona</b>	-	Name for Banana trunk among the Chuka.
<b>Muraga(s)/ Miraga(pl)</b>	-	Thorny Acacia tree(s)
<b>Murembu</b>	-	Indegenous tree
<b>Mutani</b>	-	circumciser
<b>Muthiori</b>	-	piece of cloth that formed a rounded girdle wrapped up on the initiate’s waist.
<b>Mutiri</b>	-	sponsor to the initiate / one who supports the initiate during the entire seclusion.
<b>Mwene Njeru</b>	-	Chuka God.
<b>Mwiji/Kibici</b>	-	the uncircumcised.
<b>Nciabu</b>	-	ceremony for naming the initiate
<b>Ncogoma</b>	-	Stick, (‘fimbo’ in Kiswahili), used to discipline the new initiates.
<b>Ndatho/ kurathia</b>	-	ceremony by initiates taking gifts to the maternal relatives.
<b>Ndigi</b>	-	Leaving part of the foreskin folded and tucked on the lower part o the penis
<b>Nguru Ntune</b>	-	‘Red legs’-people of white origin who had colonized the Chuka at Mbwa.
<b>Njogu</b>	-	Elephants
<b>Njuri ya Munene</b>	-	colonial British tax collectors
<b>Ntane</b>	-	new initiates

<b>Nthaka</b>	–	the circumcised men in Chuka
<b>Nthaka cia maendeleo-</b>		warriors for development to refer to the Christian converts among the warriors.
<b>Nthambo</b>	-	‘Washing’ or bathing /cleansing of boyhood in rivers.
<b>Nthumbi</b>	-	Colobus monkey head dress.
<b>Ntwiga</b>	-	Giraffe.
<b>Nyorotha</b>	-	lace made using berries, or goats dung tied around the initiates head
<b>Though</b>	-	dances performed during the circumcision season.
<b>Therenja</b>	–	‘one who moves by his buttocks’, describing initiates who made movements during the circumcision operation
<b>Thome</b>	–	village
<b>Ubici</b>	-	behavior associated with the uncircumcised boys.

**APPENDIX 7****PICTURES TAKEN DURING THE FIELD WORK**

Picture App; 7.1 Mzee Muriira (right), hails from Kathigiririni, and Arnold Mugambi (left), a research assistant during a session on the impact of colonial rule on Chuka masculinity. This informant laments of how he failed to become a ‘mbishi’ meaning a cook and only rose to the rank of a ‘boy’ meaning a messenger in a Whiteman’s home in Nyeri. Oral interview dated 10<sup>th</sup> August 2011.



Picture App; 7.2, Cianguo Kabubu (left), hails from Thuita, narrating the history of the age sets and circumcision patterns in Chuka to Steve Muchiri (right), one of the research assistants. She was very resourceful on the traditional circumcision in Chuka and some of the ‘Thauthi’ dances. Oral Interview dated 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011.



Picture App; 7.3, Mzee Benjamin Nyange M'baini (left) born in 1922, hails from Itara in Maara district reciting his story to the researcher. He served in wage employment at Mombasa, Thika and Ruiru, where he was an expert in making ropes from the bark of wattle trees to be used in the trains. He feels sorry that he failed to go to Europe during the world War (II), a dream that would have elevated his masculinity. Oral Interview dated 7<sup>th</sup> October 2011.



Picture App; 7.4, Coins and a whistle displayed by Mzee Benjamin (above). He chose to preserve these coins and whistle because they had helped him to subdue other Chuka men during the colonial period. Money and other European goods such as the whistle elevated a man's masculinity in the colonial period and enabled him to wield indirect control over his peers.

Inscriptions on the coins:

The two smallest coins on the left; front side , 1 cent, 2<sup>nd</sup> Queen Elizabeth, back side East Africa 1959.

The one medium size coin in the upper side ring, 5 cent, GeorgiusV Rexet.Ind;Imp., back side East Africa 1933

The Big size coin in the ring, 10 cent, GeorgiusV Rexet.Ind;Imp., back side East Africa 1933. This coin has the Crown of the queen inscribed on it.