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Dramatic Elements in Sikhebo as an Acculturative Dramatic Narrative of Babukusu of Bungoma County, Kenya

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Abstract:

Like other literary genres, drama explores what it means to be human. With performance at its core, it is the creative actualisation of fictionalised human experience. In traditional Africa, drama is evident in ritual performances practiced during birth, naming, initiation, marriage and death ceremonies. Babukusu initiate boys into adulthood after every two years through a ceremony called sikhebo, a ritual that involves dramatic elements that transmits societal values and ideals to community members. The study adopted Literary Functionalism as a theoretical framework. This paper examines dramatic elements in sikhebo as an acculturative dramatic narrative, including preparation stage, ritual cut, through the seclusion period to the pass-out rite. Although sikhebo is a social-cultural ceremony, the whole process is also a ritual full of dramatic elements. The research design adopts an analytical design. The ritual was analyzed as a creative entity in which there exists a creative and fluid relationship between the performer and the audience, realized through the employment of various modes of expression. It also employed purposive sampling to select one dramatic performance comprising three initiates with their parents, one circumciser, one paternal aunt, paternal uncles as well as neighbours and other on lookers who formed the audience. The study engaged non-participant observation and Focus Group Discussions as the primary methods of data collection. The performers were video recorded. Secondary sources helped the researchers to formulate the background, theoretical framework, literature review, research design, data analysis and ethical considerations. The study concluded that sikhebo is replete with dramatic acculturative elements.

Keywords: Acculturative, dramatic, elements, narrative, sikhebo, circumcision, ritual, babukusu, Kenya

1. Introduction

A number of literary scholars have invested their critical energies in the question of plot as a dramatic narrative device in ritual drama. Schechner (1985) stipulates that apart from songs and poetic expression, dancing and dramatic performances, and other forms of oral literature, are characterized by other visual art which includes cave and rock paintings, rock engravings and petro glyphs, paintings on bark and crayon, body paintings, sacred objects and emblems, carved human figures in wood, wax and clay figures and pole structures. Schechner affirms that body painting is an important aspect of rituals. Almost every part of the body is used for this purpose. He notes, most commonly the face, chest and thighs are decorated with designs spreading across and over the shoulders to the back, although the neck is always left bare. Additionally, each detail of the pattern is linked to the ancestral beings, sexual magic or recent events so that the Aborigine body painting is map-making and myth telling. Therefore, while decorating themselves, the performers sing the relevant songs and retell the myth before the ultimate ritual. Schechner's assertion songs, poetic expression, dancing, oral literature and body art are integrated in ritual performance was vital to the study. The scholar however, does not deal with the verbal and the non-verbal aspects in ritual drama that aid to the plot of sikhebo as an acculturative dramatic narrative. Drewal (1998) draws the attention of Fatumbi's claim that since it is the Ori luu (god) that is invoked in such a ritual process, usually the head is shaved, bathed, anointed, inoculated and painted with spiritually potent substances and symbolic colours to attract and direct spiritual forces in particular ways. They affirm that at the conclusion of such an intricate ritual of knowing and possession, a certain reaction is often expected which proves the efficacy of the entire process and confirms the connection the people still have with their ancestry and the Orisha. Drewal's argument that ritual performance provides the participants with an opportunity to commune in divinity through its creative space occurs in the performance of sikhebo where performers are provided with an opportunity to commune in divinity through its creative space. The study benefited from Drewal's view while appeasing the gods and the ancestors in the shrines and in the ancestral gravesides by male elders aged above seventy years on the eve of the circumcision day. Nevertheless, the scholar

deals with one rite of appeasing the gods and the ancestors and leaves out other rites like pass-out and ritual cut that aid in the plot development of sikhebo as an acculturative dramatic narrative.

Soyinka (1976) postulates that ritual is a theatrical medium in which societal or the collective consciousness is impacted to its people. Soyinka shares a Jungian concept of myth and ritual as the natural effluence of man's yearning for spiritual meaning in life. According to Soyinka, it is in ritual that aspects of cultural sets of behaviour or customs are transmitted to its people. He avers that the dramatic performance of recognizable rite is drawn from the mythical heritage of the community in the ritual. Through submergence in the ritual, members of the community emerge with a new consciousness of themselves as individuals and a community. Therefore, Soyinka uses the ritual formant to express his consciousness of socio-political imperatives precisely because of its communal or audience affective qualities. As such, the playwright envisages the consequent awakening of communal consciousness to be the preliminary step towards change or action. Soyinka's view that a new consciousness is achieved during ritual performance informed the study because among Babukusu, it is during the performance of sikhebo that values and ideals are transmitted to the initiates and other members of the community. However, Soyinka does not discuss dramatic elements that transmit customs to its people. Scribner (2002) affirms that traditional ritual drama and individual playwrights do not write narrative plays. They have been moulded from culture and customs of entire communities and are passed on by memory from generation to generation. Scribner adds that performance is part of the social and cultural activities associated with daily life and major events such as birth, initiation rites, hunting, marriage, spirit possession and death. The study concurs with Scribner because sikhebo is not written down and it is a rite of passage performed during initiation that is passed from one generation to another. Nonetheless, the scholar does not analyze plot in ritual drama as an acculturative dramatic narrative.

Kwakwa (1982) situates ritual performance within the realm of drama by identifying elements of ritual that contribute to its dramatic effect. She identifies these elements as paraphernalia, (in this instance, ceremonial make-up to characterize the gods), setting, a pre-designated place to accommodate the act of possession; pre-assigned roles, those of the gods to be invoked; order, that is, an agreed-upon order of appearance of musicians, dancers, and priests as well as the gods. According to Kwakwa, other aspects of ritual may include music, dance and sacred drums. La Fontaine (1994) affirms that there is communication in ritual performance evident in non-verbal aspects including the objects won, carried by, and constructed around the initiates. Kwakwa and La Fontaine's postulations that dramatic elements that acculturate are integrated in ritual drama informed the study. However, the scholars do not discuss other dramatic elements that acculturate like costumes and verbal aspects.

Graham-White (1974) affirms that traditional performances of drama happened any time in the open air where actors were not separated from the audience; there was also no particular attention to lighting, or raised stage. There was no strict separation of actors and spectators; actors could move freely among the audience and spectators could get up to dance with the performers. Africa had and still has a well-developed form of drama. The study agrees with Graham-White because the performance of sikhebo is performed in the open air where actors were not separated from the audience, there was no particular attention to lighting or raised stage. However, unlike Graham-White argument that traditional performances happened any time sikhebo is performed in the months of August and December during even years. In a study of dirges among the Akan people, Nketia (1969) identifies and isolates dramatic elements in the ritual. Nketia's analysis of the Akan dirge illustrates clearly a classical ritual performance. Graham-White and Nketia's views that dramatic elements are evident in ritual drama informed the study. However, the scholars do not specify the dramatic elements that acculturate values and ideals. Nevertheless, they do not discuss the ritual as acculturative narrative.

Murray (1946) observes that the dithyramb was created within Dionysiac ritual from a ritual dance known as sacerludus (a dance that praises the god Dionysus) that represented the aition (mythical narrative) of the divine spirit/god Dionysus. The dithyramb is a kind of serious and sublime choral storytelling poem, devoted to narratives of gods and/or heroes. Murray suggests an apparent sophisticated method to detect these traces in a pattern of recurrent narrative elements. These elements appear in a certain order and it is supposed to reflect the pattern of death and resurrection characteristic of the rituals generated by the Ur-ritual of the spring Daimon, including the Dionysiac ritual. Murray take that Dionysiac ritual follows a pattern was helpful to the study while analyzing sikhebo as a complete ritual with its stages divided into acts and scenes with the view to unveil the plot of sikhebo as an acculturative dramatic narrative.

Schipper-de-Leeuw (1989) places performance of rituals within the context of drama by identifying the elements that Thespis used to enrich his religious singing and dancing choirs. The elements he uses include a costumed, masked person, who expresses a part of the action in meaningful words and gestures. Schipper-de-Leeuw adds that drama has been the indication of that art which represents a human event in the presence of a more or less involved audience and which is focused on man. The scholar's take that there is a more or less involved audience in ritual performance is evident in sikhebo where at one point the performers become the audience and vice versa. In this regard, the notion of drama as envisaged in the study alludes to the various performances as was highlighted in the ritual performance. Schipper-de-Leeuw's view that ritual performance involves actions evident in the use of costumes, meaningful words and gestures informed the study. The study further assessed the use of props and body art in the performance of sikhebo that acculturate and aid in dramatic development.

Williams (1961) stipulates that through sacrifice, divination or the intensity of the dance, the consciousness of a devotee can be so transformed that the boundary between the ordinary and the extraordinary worlds becomes blurred. For instance, with the rhythm of drums, persons can literally dance in order to tap divine power. Therefore, performers can 'dance out their desires until they are 'mounted by a god' and 'come into possession' of a special identity, power, or consciousness. Williams adds that dance among Africans is sometimes a ritual technique employed to ensure that order is

maintained or a fundamental conflict is resolved. Williams view that dance is part of ritual performance formed the basis of the present study. This study adds that there are different dances performed during the performance of sikhebo that are dramatic and acculturative. Nevertheless, he does not integrate dance and song as part of ritual performance. Additionally, he does not address the role of song and dance in ritual performance.

In his contribution to ritual drama, Ikenga-Metuh (1987) examines the dramatic elements evident in initiation ceremony among the Egungun of Yoruba. His view is that there are dramatic make-ups during the graduation rites. The scholar states that initiates are welcomed by loud songs and dancing when they come back from the seclusion camp. They are then led into the open place through the bush, with heads totally covered using pieces of cloth. Old men encircle the initiates, forming a fence with pieces of cloth around them. Ikenga-Metuh's view that there is dramatic performance in ritual during the graduation rite informed the study. Nonetheless, the scholar's work is limited to song, dance and costume and omits other dramatic elements in ritual performance like paralinguistic features that aid in dramatic development and acculturate. Additionally, Ikenga-Metuh study is limited to graduation rite and omits other stages like preparation, ritual-cut, and seclusion that contribute to the plot of sikhebo as an acculturative dramatic narrative.

Senoga-Zake (2000) observes that among the Tiriki, preparation for circumcision begins once the father has made a decision for the son to be circumcised. The first encounter is when the initiates are joined by recent circumcised boys in the forest in the ceremony known as chisulu. The following day, the initiates are circumcised. As soon as this is done, they wear masks known as ingolole to hide their identity during the village dance. The study concurs with Senoga-Zake that ritual performance follows a sequence of events that are dramatic and acculturate. Nevertheless, the scholar does not analyze all the stages in ritual like graduation rite that is dramatic and transmit societal values and ideals to the community members.

Van der Leeuw (1955) affirms that dramatic elements cannot be ignored in magic rites, but one can only speak of drama when separation is affected between two groups, where a leader of the dance separates himself from the choir and places himself in front of others. He stresses that originally, everybody plays his part in the 'action' although some people may participate more actively than others may. He notes further that gradually, forms are developed which assign the dramatic parts to one or several actors, while the rest of the people forms the 'audience'. According to Van der Leeuw, a small group represents and expresses the pre occupations and emotions of the whole community. Van der Leeuw's view that ritual drama involves a creative entity in which there exists a creative and fluid relationship between the performers and the audience realized through the employment of various modes of expression was insightful to the study. The study further examined the contribution of body art and paralinguistic features as acculturative dramatic elements.

Trumbull (1991) argues that in their quest for resolution or relief, human beings become ritual agents by participating in a field of meaning by means of right action, exteriority and the embodiment of a special mystery. Trumbull adds that symbolic or ritual actions, more than say, a textual expression or a verbal orientation define the vital dimension of reality. The scholar further affirms that ritual actions embody an account for the problematic, which is lived, practiced and experienced. Trumbull's assertion that ritual performance involves meaningful actions aimed at resolving conflicts in society alluded to the dramatic structure of ritual formed the focus of the study. The performance of sikhebo involves a conflict that involves initiates undergoing the entire process in order to become men. Similarly, every member of Babukusu community is involved in transforming initiates from boyhood to adulthood. Therefore, while resolving the conflict in sikhebo, the study uses Freytag (1863) pyramid scheme that divides the performance of sikhebo into five parts. These are exposition where characters are introduced to the audience, rising action whereby the problem becomes even more problematic, climax whereby nothing seems to be able to get worse, falling action involves the consequences and resolution whereby everything that was set into action falls into place.

It is evident that dramatic elements cannot be ignored in ritual rites. In an analysis of a Limba wedding in Northern Sierra Leone, Ottenberg (1986) drives the point home by stating that the question is no longer, whether or not there are theatrical aspects to ritual, but what these aspects are, why they take their particular configurations, and the purposes they serve. Ottenberg's assertion that there are dramatic elements in ritual performance was helpful to the study while identifying the dramatic elements in ritual performance. Additionally, the scholar's argument that acculturation in ritual performance should be studied was informative to the study. This was evident while analyzing features such as the choice of sacred places for execution of rites, the naming of circumcision age-sets by elders and the taboo, belief and symbols in the performance of sikhebo that portray the way Babukusu perceive the world in which they live as well as enhance creativity.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Although acculturative dramatic narrative elements are evident in the chronological order of sikhebo that involves characters actions manifested in the use of literary stylistic devices, scholars who have carried out research in sikhebo like Wanyama, Wafula, Were and Egesa do not analyze the ritual as an acculturative dramatic narrative. The performance of sikhebo among Babukusu falls within particular concern to the study. As such, the study sought to depict sikhebo as acculturative dramatic narrative.

2. Materials and Methods

The study employed an analytical research design to analyze sikhebo as a creative entity in which there exists a creative and fluid relationship between the performers and the audience realized through the employment of various modes of expression. The study was conducted in Bungoma North Sub-County of Bungoma County. The Sub-County is

divided into twelve administrative locations, namely: Mukuyuni, Mbakalo, Milima, Kabuyefwe, Naitiri, Kakamwe, Soysambu, Mitua, Tongaren, Ndalua, Kiminini and Kibisi.

The researcher employed purposive sampling to select one dramatic performance comprising three initiates with their parents, one circumciser, paternal aunts, paternal uncles as well as neighbours and other on lookers who formed the audience. Primary data was collected using non-participant that involved studying the form, content and context of performance of sikhebo in order to get a clear picture of the ritual. During non-participant observation, the following was observed: the procedure, roles specification and participation of each performer, and the non-verbal aspects of the ritual namely, the costume, props, body adornments, body movements and gestures. The ritual observation was done with regard to the stages of sikhebo.

Secondary data was obtained from written materials, which include journal articles, online journals, seminar papers, books, articles, MA and PhD theses and dissertations from Universities across the world. Data collected from the field was analyzed using contextual analysis that was used to categorize data thematically and systematically in order to unveil sikhebo as an acculturative narrative in depth. Information on videotapes was transcribed and translated to come with statements and conclusions. It was then analyzed qualitatively to identify themes that addressed the objectives of the research.

3. Results and Discussion

The study examined the dramatic elements in sikhebo and how they help in the realization of the ritual's acculturative dramatic narrative appeal. The researcher observed the acculturative dramatic elements such as the use of spectacle, song and dance, costumes, ornaments, body art, props, paralinguistic aspects evident in the performance of sikhebo.

3.1. Plot in Performance of Sikhebo

3.1.1. Act 1

The study was governed by Freytag's (1863) pyramid that considers plot a narrative structure that divides a story into five parts, like five acts of a play. The parts of the triangle are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. The exposition introduces all the main characters in the story, the rising action is where a problem occurs and becomes more problematic, and challenging while the climax is the point whereby nothing seems to be able to get any worse. The falling action involves the consequences and reactions following the climax and resolution is where everything that was set into action falls into place. The study also used Aristotle's (1895) scheme to divide sikhebo into acts and scenes namely preparation stage, ritual cut, through the seclusion period to the pass-out rite.

The performance of sikhebo begins once Wanyama, the initiate known as omusinde aged thirteen years voluntarily approaches Wekesa; his father and informs him of his intention to be circumcised while maintaining eye contact and putting on a brave face to show that he is serious. Immediately he receives confirmation of imminent circumcision, Nasambu, the initiate's mother is sent to her relations by Wekesa to inform them of Wanyama's intention to be circumcised. The reason why Nasambu is sent to her relations is to inform her brother, Wakhisi who benefited from her bride prize to carry out a noble rite known as likhoni that involves the maternal uncle appreciating the nephew. Meanwhile, Wekesa with the help of his brothers, Ndalila, Matere Wekhomba and his sister Namaemba, Nyukuri and Man'goli, the male elders ensure that the bull to be slaughtered, the cottage where the initiates will sleep is in good contain. Nasambu ensures that there is enough food and local brew known as busaa to make visitors happy and bless the initiates. This shows that the performance of sikhebo is a collective responsibility whereby every member of the community takes part in transforming the initiates from boyhood to adulthood. Wanyama obtains a hen from Nasambu that he takes to Wakhungu, the blacksmith in exchange of two jingles, known as chinyimba and metal rings known as birere. Chinyimba the plural of enyimba in Lubukusu, are allophones made by curving a single piece of iron plate into a bell shape. The two slits are directly placed opposite each other and they are made without the centre rod that closely resembles cowbells. The two rods are not sealed produce a sharp sound when knocked on metal rings known as birere, the plural of sirere, which are worn on the initiates' wrists. With the help of his paternal cousins, Masafu and Werunga, Wanyama fixes handles on chinyimba using dry sticks obtained from special plant known as chifufu and sisal fibre tied by rubber bands obtained from bicycle air tubes.

According to the focus group discussion, the art of blacksmithing deals with spirits known as kimisambwa that have powers to make jingles produce sharp sound. Among Babukusu, jingles known as chinyimba, are very important basic circumcision instruments during performance. In the entire performance of sikhebo, regular hitting of jingles focuses the initiates' mind to be focused to circumcision. Besides, the tension that is created by the initiates during performance is lessened by the sound of jingles and dancing. As such, during the entire period of sikhebo, the initiates are supposed to take care of jingles by ensuring that they are not put on the ground at whatever cost for it is believed that black ants can bit them as a result hamper the production of sharp sound. Additionally, while crossing a river, the initiates do not hit the jingles for it is believed that bad spirits might be present which could affect the production of sound.

The study concurs with Freytag (1863) for it is at the exposition stage that the audience gets to know the main characters who are Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu and their goal is to be circumcised. Additionally, the category of characters who actively participate in the performance of sikhebo including the initiates' fathers, Wekesa, Matere and Ndalila, the initiates' paternal aunt, Namaemba, Wakhisi (maternal uncle) Mang'oli and Nyukuri (male elders) are introduced to the audience. The problem becomes more challenging Wekesa, Matere and Ndalila with the help of other

relatives ensure that everything needed to ensure the smooth running of the ceremony is availed. On the other hand, Werenga, Masafu and Wanyama) gather at a central point each night as early as the month of April of the year 2018, rehearsing on how to jingle chinyimba and dance to circumcision songs under the guidance of male escorts namely Kundu, Wafukho and Bunyasi who are mainly young men circumcised recently. During this time, male escorts use pointing, eye contact and hand gesticulation to teach the initiates how to play jingles and dance to circumcision songs. The song that is commonly sang during rehearsals is "Mulongo" It was noted that while singing the song, Bunyasi, Kundu and Wafukho dance at a moderate pace carrying twigs, sticks and clubs to scare the initiates and produce war cries to express their joy for the performance of sikhebo. According to the information gathered from the field, the songs sang during rehearsals give the initiates a chance to declare their candidature and inform the entire community that time for circumcision is approaching to help them prepare adequately by ensuring that there is enough food, local brew known as busaa and animals to offer sacrifices to the ancestors and the gods.

Preparation of sanctification of circumcision knives known as khubita chikembe is done the last week of the month July 2018. Khisa, Wanyonyi, Wafula and Maloba the circumcisers contribute in advance maize towards the preparation of local brew known as busaa. On the day of sanctification of the circumcision knives, each circumciser arrives with a cockerel and traditional straw known as lusekhe that they take to Khisa's house the chief circumciser known as omulia mafunga translated as the one who eats initiates' foreskins. Khisa then instructs Wanyonyi, Wafula and Maloba to construct a traditional shrine known as namwima where the gods and the ancestors are appeased. Everyone who gets close removes shoes because it is a holy place. Khisa then lights fire outside the shrine and assembles the requirements for the function. These include unwrapped circumcising knives placed on the bag on the ground, a piece of wood, sharpening stones, herbal solution known as kamanyasi, cockerels including the one that is pure white, a spring cock, traditional brew known as busaa poured on a calabash known as esesi, a stick dipped in busaa, fried dough known as kamakhalange that are dried to preserve freshness, pound simsim (sesame indicum) seeds known as kamasikhisikhi and ugali made from sorghum flour and places them at the centre of the shrine.

The chief circumciser then takes the pure white spring cock and while clutching it, pours liberations to the gods and ancestors. He implores the ancestors and the gods authoritatively through self-praise to give circumcisers the courage to make them swift and have the ability to discern the initiates who may exhibit fear. Khisa implores the gods, the ancestors, and the gods to allow the initiates to go through the rite successfully so that they become productive members of the society. He then declares the period successful based on his reading of the cockerel's organs. Thereafter, he takes a calabash and pours on it busaa, sips it and applies the brew on Wanyonyi, Wafula and Maloba's arms and foreheads in a straight line. Additionally, Khisa offers the circumcisers with an herb known as kamanyasi, which they sip in turns. He then takes the circumcising knife known as lukembe, holds it blade-up on the circumcisers' foreheads of each circumcisers. Maloba also takes a calabash and pours on it busaa, sips it and applies the brew to Khisa. Furthermore, Maloba offers the chief circumciser with an herb that he sips. He then takes the circumcising knife known as lukembe, holds it blade-up on Khisa's forehead while facing east the direction where the ancestors live. Thereafter, Khisa leads the circumcisers to sing a sacred song sioyayo to create the circumcision mood as Maloba, Wanyonyi and Wafula hold the circumcising knives with blades facing up to signify the ever erection of Mubukusu man. Among Babukusu, sioyayo is only sung within the context of sikhebo. According to information gathered from the field, it is believed that if the song is sung by an uncircumcised boy outside the context of sikhebo, the circumcision spirits are easily invoked as a result circumcise the boy halfway during sleep. In such a case, the circumciser is called to circumcise the boy even during odd years known as sikumenya. The fact that sioyayo is a special Babukusu circumcision song meant for special circumcision occasion explains the importance that Babukusu community places on the ritual.

After singing sioyayo for three minutes that creates the circumcision mood, the circumcisers are ordered by Khisa to take off in a run, up to two hundred metres to show how swift they would be. On the way, the circumcisers come across Nekesa who is possessed with the circumcision spirits known as kimisambwa kie bukhebi and Khisa gives her the circumcising knife to hold as he smears the herbs known as kamanyasi on her head that automatically stops the shivering and fainting. According to the information gathered from the field, the art of circumcising among Babukusu is reserved for three clans namely Bamasike, Bakhone and Babasaba. Therefore, women and men from the three clans possessed with circumcision spirits known as kimisabwa kie bukhebi faint or shiver whenever a sacred song known as sioyayo is sung. However, only men are allowed to practice the art of circumcising.

The circumcisers then return the circumcising knives on the bag on the ground and continue sharpening them in turns. This is the time that Khisa warns them authoritatively to abstain from sex, not to attend funerals and not to wear shoes during the circumcision period. According to information gathered from the field, Babukusu associate women with bad luck hence, sleeping with them during the circumcision period as well as attending funerals could result in surgical mishaps, excessive bleeding or fear for the knife on the part of the initiates. Additionally, circumcisers are not allowed to wear shoes for they could make them slide resulting in automatic disqualification from circumcision. Notably, during the entire circumcision period, circumcisers are expected to hold the circumcising knives with blades facing up because the circumcising knives whose blades face up have the capacity to operate while those whose blades face down do not have the capacity to operate the initiates' foreskins.

The remaining cockerels are slaughtered by Khisa who hands to Wanyonyi, and Maloba to roast with features on as Wafula prepares mashed simsim (sesame) known as kamasikhisikhi, which is used to eat ugali as Khisa sets up a pot known as emange for Wanyonyi, Wafula and Maloba take busaa using traditional straws known as chisekhe. However, before circumcisers, start-taking busaa, they open the traditional straws by drawing warm water through them. Once the cockerels are roasted, they are chopped by Wanyonyi and Maloba and served with mashed simsim before settling down to

take the local brew known as busaa to bless the circumcision period. According to information gathered from the field, Babukusu believe that sikhebo deals with spirits known as kimisambwa. Therefore, circumcisers have to re-examine themselves, remember their gods and the ancestors. Circumcisers believe that the gods and the ancestors must be called upon to bless them during the entire circumcision period in a ritual known as khubita chikembe (sanctification of circumcision knives). However, if a circumciser is not sanctified and goes ahead to circumcise, he is bound to face misfortunes. Moreover, it is believed that the spirit of the departed grandfathers whom the initiates are named after must be appeased to protect and bless them during the entire performance of sikhebo and prevent them from bleeding profusely.

In the beginning of the month of August, at Wekesa's home the family relatives namely Ndalila, Matere, Wekhomba (Wekesa's brothers), Namaemba, Masungu and Nyukuri meet to fix the date for circumcision. During this time, Wekesa ensures the relatives that the coloured bull to be slaughtered on the eve of the circumcision day besides Cheloti's grave (Wekesa's deceased father) is provided by Ndalila and another coloured bull provided by him to be slaughtered near the shrine is availed. On her part, Nasambu points at two sacks of maize at the corner of her house to show that there is enough food and local brew to make visitors happy and bless Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu. After assuring the relatives that everything is in place, Wekesa suggests date twelve when the initiates are to be circumcised which is unanimously agreed as they tell Wekesa to allow the initiates to visit them for gifts and blessings. This is the time that Namaemba the initiates' paternal aunt shaves Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu to shed off their boyhood. Similarly, she decorates the initiates with beads known as butundi on their chests and backs in a way that they crisscross on their bodies to form shape of letter X. Decorating the initiates with ornaments make them look unique. In this way, they become the centre of attention that helps them to realize that sikhebo is a serious affair, one that requires them to show courage. While shaving and decorating the initiates, Namaemba uses self-praise to encourage the initiates to be firm and courageous during the cut, to marry and produce children through hand gesticulation and to invoke the paternal ancestral spirits to bless and protect them during the circumcision period. This is the time that Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu put on brave faces and maintain eye contact with Namaemba to show they are focused to face the knife.

According to information collected from the field, throughout the performance of sikhebo, only healthy animals are used. Babukusu believe that healthy animals ensure the lives of the initiates are bright and blessed. Being blessed implies being able to marry and sire many male children to sustain the family's lineage. However, deformed animals are associated with bad luck and when used cause harm to the initiates as evidenced by their inability to marry, fear for women and impotence. The undesired deformities in animals include blindness, castration and lameness. Likewise, animals that are slaughtered during sikhebo must bear bright colours. It is believed that bright colours signify bright future in the initiates' lives while dark colours signify doom. Further, sikhebo is meant to transform the initiates from boyhood to manhood as well as bless them. Subsequently, animals used for sacrifice as well as the skin to be worn while performing the rituals have to come from a bull or he-goat. This skin is believed to instil extra powers in the initiates to enable them to be courageous and firm during the cut.

Among Babukusu, sikhebo is a ceremony that is highly regarded as sacred. As such, it is unsocial to perform the ritual at the time not traditionally designated. The performance of sikhebo takes place during even years in the month months of August and December when schools are closed thus, ensuring a large number of participants in the performance. Even years are associated with good luck while odd years are associated with bad luck. Normally, odd years are associated with practices that appease the deceased, which include cementing of the graves known as khumala bilindwa, grazing communal animals in distant places known as khuuyisha chikhafu and demolishing houses of the deceased known as khukwisia kamakubili. Babukusu believe that performing the rituals that appease the dead during the circumcision year causes harm to the initiates uninspiring to the community's creative impulse and artistry.

Three days to circumcision day, Wekesa's family performs an initial ritual known as khuchukhila that involves mixing fried fermented flour known as kamakhalange and yeast known as limela. Wekesa takes a small pot known as esachi and puts it outside in front of his house inside a depression. The pot is decorated with star grass known as lukhafwa to symbolize prosperity, perpetuation and tenacity. Wekesa takes another small pot, holds in his hand and tells Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu authoritatively that it was their own decision to be circumcised therefore; they should not embarrass themselves, the family and the community by fearing the knife as he slaps them to instil fear. Under the guidance of Lukibisi (Wekesa's son circumcised recently), Wekesa instructs the initiates authoritatively that while going and coming from the river that does not dry implying prosperity in the initiates' lives, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga focus their eyes in front and put on brave faces to show signs of courage. However, the initiates are not supposed to look back, sideways or talk to anyone for these are viewed as cowardice acts. Moreover, while coming from the river, Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu are expected to use a different route from the one that they used while going as they carry the pot in turns on their left shoulders. According to information collected from the field, the act of the initiates using a different route while coming from the river signifies that they should behave maturely. Carrying the pot on the left shoulders indicate that the initiates are doing female cores for the last time.

According to information gathered from the field, the water from the river is preferred during the preparation of local brew known as busaa because it is running meaning, it helps to usher Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga into manhood as well as ensuring that their lives flow continuously, unlike the static water kept in the house. Besides, during khuchukhila, that involves the mixing of yeast and fried fermented dough, the brew in the special pot into which the initiates pour the first water in turns is preserved for the circumciser to bless them after feeding them in a ritual known as khulumia. Khuchukhila as a rite signifies that the initiates are remaining with a few days to face the knife. Similarly, when yeast is put in dough being brewed, it catalyses the maturation process from tasteless water in the first day to a bitter

concentration brew on the third day. The process of maturation of the brew is determined by how the brew bubbles as it turns into a strong alcohol. The process of preparing the brew is symbolic because as busaa gains its maturity, the initiates are expected to turn into tough individuals by the third day they visit Wakhisi (the paternal uncle).

Immediately Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga arrive at Wekesa's home, they are instructed by Wekesa to pour water in the small pot containing fried dough known as kamakhalange mixed with yeast in turns. After pouring water in the special pot, Wekesa speaks cautionary words upon the initiates using self-praise to invoke the gods and the ancestors to bless and protect the initiates at the same time provoke Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu either to surrender or dare go ahead to face the knife. During this time, Wekesa speaks authoritatively as he points and slaps the initiates to instil fear. On the other hand, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga put on brave faces, maintain eye contact with Wekesa to show that they are serious and focused. Immediately, the initiates dare to face the knife, Nasambu (Wanyama's mother) ululates to show that in a short while the initiates are going to face the knife as well as bless them. Thereafter, Wekesa instructs Kundu to sing the sacred song known as sioyayo authoritatively to create circumcision mood in the initiates' mind. Thereafter, the initiates trot around the pot for five minutes as Kundu, Wafukho and Bunyasi sing the song "Khwera Omurwa" that shows that they have killed the enemy, implying that they have dared to face the knife as Ndalila, Matere, Namaemba, Nyukuri and Nasambu observe keenly. Wekesa then places the pot at the corner of his house for the brew to mature.

After trotting around the pot for three minutes, Wanyama, Masafu and Matere are ordered by Wekesa to play jingles and dance to the accompaniment of various circumcision songs sung by singers-cum-dancers to invite close relatives selected by him for blessings and gifts. Thereafter, Wekesa hands the list of names of the people to be invited to the ceremony starting with Namaemba followed by Walumbengo (Wekesa's age-set) and others. As Kundu leads, the crowd to sing the song "Luwaya" the line that says "the wire that gave birth to the initiates" and Bunyasi, Wafukho, Lukibisi, Nakhumicha and Nasipwondi (male and female escorts) reply by singing the line that says Ah! They dance in a matching pace as Bunyasi and Wafukho dance provocatively as they hold their penis while directing them to where the female characters are. Likewise, the female characters dance provocatively as they lift their dresses and face the male counterparts indicating that they are ready for sexual intercourse. During this time, male escorts carry twigs, clubs and sticks. This is the time that singers employ poetic license and drop euphemism. During this time, Werunga, Masafu and Wanyama put on brave faces and focus their eyes in front to show that they are determined to face the knife. The context of sikhebo allows participants to sing provocatively because the performance of sikhebo is pegged on marriage and those who indulge in sexual intercourse are applauded because they teach the initiates how it should be done. Similarly, the act of the male escorts carrying clubs, twigs and clubs is meant to threaten the initiates and reflection of both excitement and security. During invitations, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga put on pairs of shorts as costume and leave the upper part for decoration purposes. According to the information collected from the field, the costume makes the initiates to be unique as a result realize that they are the centre of focus as a result gain the courage to face the knife. Likewise, costumes make initiates to be identified easily by passers-by who advise and reprimand them to be focused. During invitations, Nangila (Masafu's sister), Nanyama (Wanyama's sister) and Nasimiyu (Werunga's sister) have the responsibility of conducting home gifts in form of grains while Lukibisi, Bunyasi, Wafukho and Kundu conduct home gifts in form of animals. This shows that Babukusu have specific roles for characters. Therefore, men are supposed to go outside to graze animals while women remain at home taking care of grains.

On the third day to circumcision day, Namaemba smears Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga with the mixture of fermented fried maize flour and yeast that is white in colour to bless and protect them against any form of malice. Thereafter, the initiates play jingles and dance stylishly to circumcision song as they head to Wakhisi's home (maternal uncle) escorted by Lukibisi (Wanyama's brother) Nasipwondi, Nakhumicha, Kundu, Bunyasi and Bunyasi. While singing the song "Mbe Omukhasi" translated as give me the woman to show that among the blessings that the initiates receive from the maternal side is to marry and sire children. It was observed that as Kundu sings the first line that says "maternal uncle gives me that woman" and escorts respond by saying "give me a woman" male escorts produce bass as female escorts respond in soprano as they dance at a moderate pace as they stamp their feet on the ground. Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga play jingles and dance stylishly as they put on brave faces to show focus. Immediately they arrive at Wakhisi's home, Nafula (Wakhisi's wife) join the crowd singing and ululating to appreciate Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga for inviting them and bless them. After singing and dancing for two minutes, Nafula orders the initiates to stop playing jingles thereafter, lead them to the house where she serves them ugali and meat. Wakhisi also advises the initiates authoritatively to be determined.

The following morning, Wakhisi calls Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga and orders them authoritatively to stand in front of him as they maintain eye contact with him to show focus. He slaps the initiates to instil fear and uses self-praise to tell the initiates that he comes from a brave clan thus; they should not embarrass him by fearing the knife. Moreover, he informs the initiates that any fear witnessed during ritual cut is attributed to the paternal side. Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga maintain eye contact with Wakhisi and put on brave faces an indication that they are serious. After advising the initiates, he hands over a coloured he-goat to the initiates as he orders Kundu to sing sioyayo authoritatively for three minutes to create a circumcision mood in the initiates' minds as a result make them to be focused. The act of Wakhisi choosing an authoritative man to sing sioyayo is to instil courage in the initiates. After singing sioyayo, Nafula ululates to show excitement having been visited by the nephews who are greatly honoured. Likewise, the ululations produced by Nafula help the initiates to remain focused and courageous. Wakhisi then smears the initiates with yeast to bless and protect them from any form of malice. During this time, the initiates maintain eye contact with Wakhisi as they put on brave faces to show they are serious.

According to information gathered from the field, if the maternal uncle has no bull or he-goat to appreciate the initiate, tradition dictates that he ties a special grass known as lukhafwa around the initiate's neck to wish him well and act as a promise that he will hand over a bull to him at a later date. The act of visiting the maternal relations teaches the initiate that he belongs to both his father and mother's clans. As such, the initiate is cautioned against waging war against those of his mother's clan. This is especially important because when misfortune befalls him at his paternal side, he takes refuge in the land of his mothers.

Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu are then escorted to Wekesa's home in the company of Kundu, Lukibisi, Wafukho, Bunyasi, Nasipwondi, Nakhumicha, Wakhisi and Nafula. On the way, Kundu leads the crowd to sing the song "Mayi wo Mwana" translated as mother of the child. It was noted that as Kundu sings authoritatively the line that says "Ee! Mother to the child come and see" the crowd responds by saying "Eh! Mother to the child come and see" This is the time that male and female escorts point the initiates to show how they look different after smearing them with yeast. Additionally, they point the coloured he-goat to show how Wakhisi has honoured the initiates. During this time, Bunyasi, Wafukho and Lukubisi carry twigs and clubs' shoulder high to scare the initiates as they produce war cries to appreciate Wakhisi for honouring the nephews. On the other hand, Nakhumicha and Nasipwondi ululate to express joy. This time, Wanyama, Masafu put on brave faces and focused eye show determination.

Immediately they arrive home, Wekesa welcomes Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga in the company of Ndalila and Matere. Nasambu, Namachemo and Nangami join the crowd in singing, dancing and ululating to appreciate Wakhisi for honouring the initiates. After singing and dancing for five minutes, Wekesa orders the initiates to stop playing jingles and advises them authoritatively to be focused as he observes their faces keenly which are red in colour and focused at one point to show they are seriousness. Thereafter, Wekesa receives the coloured he-goat and hands it to Namaemba to appreciate the maternal uncle for honouring the initiates. Nanyama then escorts Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga to Wekesa's house where they are served food that include rice, meat and chapati in the company of Wakhisi, Nafula, Nakhumicha, Kundu, Bunyasi and Werunga by Nasambu. After eating, the male escorts guard the initiates from running away and deny them the dance.

After eating food, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are escorted to the paternal graveside where Wekesa's father named Cheroti was buried. The coloured bull provided by Ndalila is slaughtered and skinned by Kiberenge and Kitui (Wekesa's male neighbours). After skinning the bull, its stomach is torn apart; Nyukuri moves near and instructs Wanyama Masafu and Werunga authoritatively to wash hands in the bull's waste known as buse. Thereafter, he takes buse and smears the initiates heads, legs and hands as he uses self-praise to encourage the initiates to be brave and invoke the paternal ancestors and the gods to bless and protect them during the circumcision period. The rest of the meat is used to feed visitors who turn up to attend the ceremony. As observed from the field, Nyukuri puts on a brave face as he observes the initiates' facial expressions to gauge the level of seriousness. On their part, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga maintain eye contact with Nyukuri, put on brave faces to show they are serious, and determined to face the knife.

Wanyama, Werunga and Murefu are escorted by Nyukuri to stand near the shrine known as namwima outside Wekesa's house. Another coloured bull provided by Wekesa is slaughtered and skinned by Kitui and Kiberenge. After the stomach is torn, Nyukuri observes the inner parts to decide the fate of the initiates. It was noted that after observing, Nyukuri reports that the bull's inner part is clear an indication that the initiates have the required courage to face the knife. Thereafter, he puts a piece of bull's meat, clouted blood known as kamalasila that is tapped during slaughtering of the bull and bull's stomach waste known as buse at the centre of the shrine. Moreover, he pierces the meat on a twig of a special tree known as lusola and places at the centre of the shrine. Nyukuri then uses self-praise to invoke paternal ancestral spirits to bless and protect the initiates during the circumcision period. During this time, Nyukuri speaks authoritatively as he maintains eye contact with the initiates to gauge the level of seriousness. Additionally, he uses gesticulation to instruct Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga to stand at a specific place. The initiates put on brave faces and focus their eyes on Nyukuri to show that they are determined.

As observed from the field, the shrine known as namwima is a small hut of one metre in height. The shrine is thatched by special rare species of grass known as nabuyeywe. Normally, trees that are used to construct namwima include lusola, kumulaha and likosi. According to the focus group discussions, Babukusu believe that lusola is a tree that is planted around the homestead to signify good luck. Lusola is used in the construction of the shrine to bless the initiates. Lusola is known for its hardness and as a result, termites do not eat its wood easily. Babukusu believe that a boy in the home is compared to lusola tree because he would be permanent in the home and would be in position to propagate the community's lineage. More so, Babukusu believe that a special tree known as kumulaha protects the initiates against malicious people. Additionally, it is believed that likomosi is known for its quick multiplication which means that after circumcision, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga must prove their manhood by marrying and siring enough children especially boys.

After appeasing the ancestors and the gods, Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu are led by Kundu, Wafukho and Bunyasi to an open place where Wekhomba (the initiates' paternal uncle) tears the bull's stomach. Wekhomba slaps the initiates and instructs them authoritatively to stand straight as they focus eyes on him. This is the time that Wekhomba uses self-praise to inform Werunga, Wanyama and Masafu that they come from a brave clan. He goes ahead to tell the initiates to be brave during the cut and warns them that any fear witnessed during ritual cut is attributed to the maternal sides. Wekhomba's self praise invoke the paternal ancestral spirits to bless and protect the initiates. He then takes the bull's stomach waste known as buse, hits the initiates' chests, and smears the initiates with buse starting from the heads to the chests to the rest of the bodies while uttering words of encouragement and blessings upon the initiates. Smearing the initiates with buse protects the initiates against any form of malice. Wekhomba then cuts parts of the bull's stomach's meat

known as khasombo and dresses them around the initiates' necks thereafter, orders Kundu to lead the crowd to sing sioyayo authoritatively to instil courage in the initiates. During this time, Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu put on brave faces and maintain eye contact with Wekhomba to show they are serious.

On the eve of the circumcision day, Kundu, Bunyasi, Wafukho and Lukibisi lead Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu to an open place where khuminya, which involves singing and dancing stylishly to Babukusu songs by participants and initiates, takes place the whole night. The songs are led by Kundu, Bunyasi and Wafukho who have undergone circumcision and are skilful and creative because the songs criticize members of the community of both sexes to promote change. They also make fun of the escorts and family members without reference. Moreover, the songs sung on the eve of the circumcision day are meant to harass the initiates in turn gain the courage to face the knife and world challenges. The song that is commonly sung on the eve of the circumcision day is "Kongona" meaning to finish. The song encourages the initiates to be firm and brave during the cut. During this time, Kundu, Bunyasi and Wafukho use gesticulation to demonstrate to Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga that they should pay the debt as required by the community as the crowd sing and dance in a walking pace while stamping their feet on the ground. Bunyasi was seen using gesticulation to teach the initiates to play jingles and dance to circumcision songs. Moreover, Wafukho, Kundu and Bunyasi arrange themselves close to one another and even closer to the initiates. The performance is in such a way that no single performer breaks away from the circle. During this time, Bunyasi dashes in front at a short distance and turns to the rest. The male and female escorts dance provocatively as Bunyasi and Wafukho carry twigs, sticks and clubs' shoulder high and produce war cries, as they direct them towards the initiates as if they want to hit them as they dance in a circular manner. On their part, Nakhumicha and Nasipwondi ululate to express joy. This time, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga display all styles of dancing and playing jingles as they put on brave faces and focus their eyes on the male escorts to show they are determined to face the knife.

According to information gathered from the field, the act of Bunyasi, Lukibisi, Wafukho and Kundu carrying twigs and clubs' shoulder high, as if they want to hit Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga creates fear in the initiates, which help them to realize that performance of sikhebo is a serious affair. Likewise, the dancing in a circular manner by performers on the eve of the circumcision day signifies that all members of the family are important and no one can live without the help of the others. The act of the male and female escorts dancing provocatively shows that the context of sikhebo gives performers an opportunity to dramatize episodes that would be considered as taboo.

On the eve of the circumcision day, Bunyasi, Wafukho and Kundu escort Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga to the rooms where Nyukuri and Mang'oli (male elders) and Wakhisi, Wamuno and Wandabwa (maternal uncles) are to be advised and encouraged. This is the time that men elders gauge the initiates' seriousness by looking at their eyes and facial expressions. The initiates on their side portray high level of seriousness gauged by focusing their eyes at the male elders and the maternal uncles respectively, which are red in colour and putting on brave faces to show that they are determined to face the knife. As noted from the field, while taking busaa, Nyukuri and Man'goli concentrate on drinking and minimize on talk. Incidences were seen where they used hands and heads simultaneously when asking for permission to say, step out for a call of nature. More so, when they needed the drinking pot to be filled with warm water or more busaa, they used their hands to direct their women counterparts accordingly. Busaa is taken on the eve of the circumcision day to make the visitors happy and bless the initiates. Wakhisi (Wanyama's maternal uncle) Wamuno (Masafu's maternal uncle) and Wandabwa (Werunga's maternal uncle) protect the initiates and the initiates' mothers against any form of harassment from male escorts and the initiates' paternal relations and gauge the initiates' level of seriousness. Notably, the invited guests spend the whole night singing, dancing, feasting, drinking, chanting, planning the finalities of the event and cohesively wait to witness the circumcision.

Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga dance to circumcision songs and play jingles up to three o'clock in the morning when they are taken to the room where their maternal uncles are by Lukibisi. Lukibisi further serves them with half-roasted meat and ugali made of maize flour to harden them to face the knife with courage and world challenges. Thereafter, the initiates are given a place to sleep. Normally, when the initiates go to rest, feasting and drinking of busaa continue as Kundu, Masafu and Werunga entertain the invited visitors with songs and dances. It is at this point that Werunga, Kundu and Wafukho are rewarded with busaa because of their outstanding performance as far as singing and dancing is concerned.

Early in the morning at five o'clock on the circumcision day, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are woken up by Lukibisi and are given one hour to play jingles and dance to circumcision songs stylishly up to six o'clock. This is the time that Nyukuri a male elder leads the crowd to sing a song "Amba Mutalya" that means to uphold the tradition of Babukusu community. The song is sung in a matching pace as Nyukuri dances in front of the initiates as he jumps up while observing their eyes to gauge the level of seriousness. The song is sung in a sad mood because in a short while, the initiates are to face the knife. According to informants, the song encourages Babukusu to perpetuate the old tradition handed to them by Mango and other ancestors. During this time, singers sing and dance in a circular manner at a walking pace as they stamp their feet on the ground. Bunyasi and Wafukho carry twigs and clubs to scare the initiates and produce war cries as Nakhumicha and Nasipwondi ululate to express joy and scare the initiates to be serious. On their part, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga put on brave faces and maintain eye contact with Nyukuri to show they are serious to face the knife. After singing the song, Nyukuri and Mangoli go to the sacred river early before Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga to undo any malice planted that may make the initiates to fear the knife.

At six o'clock in the morning, Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu are escorted to the sacred river in the company of Kundu, Wafukho, Lukibisi, Bunyasi, Wanjala, Nasipwondi and Nakhumicha to be smeared with grey sacred mud in a ritual known as khulonga. During this time, the song that is sung is "liloba" meaning soil and "orao bachonga" meaning put it to be

chopped. This time, Wanyama, Werunga and Murefu use hand gesticulation to demonstrate that the initiates must be smeared with grey mud in order to be circumcised. Equally, they tell the initiates to present their penis to be cut without fear. As observed from the field, the crowd sings and dances the song in a matching pace. Wanyama, Werunga and Kundu put on brave faces and focus their eyes in front to show they are serious to face the knife.

Fifty metres to the sacred river, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are instructed authoritatively by Wanjala (the initiates' paternal cousin) to throw away the jingles and remove the shorts. Nanyama, Nasimiyu and Nangila (the initiates' sisters) are instructed to take the shorts and jingles. At this point, no woman, uncircumcised boys or men circumcised in hospital are allowed beyond for it is believed that the spirit of fear in them can be transferred easily to the initiates making them to fear the knife. Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are ordered by Wanjala to relieve themselves in the open before immersing themselves in cold water. The act of the initiates relieving themselves in the open shows that they are still children while immersing in water numbs blood thus, reducing pain during the ritual cut. Thereafter, Wanjala points at a place where the initiates stand at an open place as he observes their eyes to gauge the level of seriousness. He goes ahead to slap them to instil fear. He then uses self-praise authoritatively to tell the initiates to be courageous during the cut because they are products of brave people. Wanjala's self-praise invokes the paternal ancestral spirits to bless and protect the initiates. He then takes the sacred mud from the swamp known as sitabicha and hits the initiates' chests in turns. He goes ahead to smear grey ochre on the initiates' heads and between the eyes. Some mud is also smeared on their chests, hands and thighs. This is the time that Bunyasi instructs Wanjala to block the initiates' anus with mud to prevent them from defecating during the cut. The initiates maintain eye contact with Wanjala and put on brave faces to show they are courageous. After smearing is perfected, Wanjala plucks special grasses called chisinyande and sticks on the initiates' heads in a progress called Iwanantu. Nanyama, Nasimiyu and Nangila (the initiates' sisters) also undergo the the ritual of smearing but on the faces, hands and legs. Thereafter, the initiates' sisters are given the initiates' shorts and jingles to carry home.

According to information gathered from the field, the spirits of sikhebo tramples upon sacred rivers during the entire circumcision period. Therefore, smearing Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu with mud from the sacred river provides them with extra powers that enable them to withstand the ordeal. In addition, the sacred mud ensures that the initiates do not bleed excessively and their eyes do not blink during the cut. Besides, it is believed that the sacred mud commemorates the action of Mango of smearing himself with mud in order to rid his body of human odour to enable him to approach the serpent undetected. Further, the performance of sikhebo involves spirits known as kimisambwa. Therefore, smearing the initiates with grey ochre from the sacred swamp puts them to be in fellowship with the spirit of sikhebo. Hence, the sacred river known as esitosi where mud is picked for smearing the initiates should not dry up; it is believed that if the river dries up, all the initiates who were served in it consequently die.

Similarly, after smearing Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga with the sacred mud, Wanjala plucks special grass known as chisinyande and put on the initiates' heads. According to information gathered from the field, the grass underscores the respect that the community has on the performance of sikhebo. Moreover, it signifies that the initiates are communicating to the gods and the ancestors to give them extra powers to face the knife. Additionally, the grass and the mud signify the materials that the initiates would use to construct their houses. Besides the mud smeared on the initiates' heads further symbolizes the head of the serpent that Mango killed while the special grass symbolizes the serpent's tongue that came out of its mouth.

Wanjala then directs Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu fifty metres from the sacred river where he directs the initiates' sisters to give the initiates jingles. He then orders Kundu to sing "sioyayo" authoritatively as the initiates start walking to Wekesa's home and the crowd respond powerfully to instil courage in the initiates. After three minutes, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are instructed by Wanyama to throw away jingles that are taken by their sisters. The initiates walk majestically in a matching pace to show determination as the escorts dance and sing behind them in a matching pace. During this time, Kundu, Masafu and Werunga carry twigs and clubs as they dance. Male escorts also wave their hands to tell the female counterparts and uncircumcised boys to pave way. The singing of sioyayo continues until the initiates approach Wekesa's home only stopping ten metres to the compound but this time using a different route. Bunyasi, Wafukho and Kundu dance provocatively as they carry twigs and sticks shoulder high to scare the initiates not to fear the knife and to express their emotions. Meanwhile, Bunyasi notices that Masafu is shivering because of cold and instructs Wanjala to tie a special grass around Masafu's ear that stops the shivering automatically.

It was observed that when Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu approach Wekesa's home Wafula, the circumciser assists and Khisa, the circumciser meets the initiates to check the shapes of their foreskins to acquaint themselves with the best holding and cutting style. Similarly, Namaemba runs with a cooking stick known as kumukango that is dipped in local brew known as busaa and with which she attempts to slap Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga in turns but the initiates try all the means to block. However, when she realizes that the initiates are unafraid and ready to face the knife, she runs back home to inform the crowd that the initiates are ready to face the knife before joining the initiates' mothers to sit horizontally on the floor of Nasambu's house. The act of Namaemba running with the cooking stick with the intention of slapping Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu shows the initiates are taking instructions from the female characters for the last time. Likewise, the act of the initiates blocking any attempt to be slapped by Namaemba shows their role of protecting the community. It was noted that while coming from the sacred river, the initiates use a different route from the one that they used while going to show that they must behave maturely.

3.1.2. Act 2

In performance of sikhebo the ritual cut marks the climax. Immediately Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga arrive at Wekesa's home, they are received by Wekesa, Matere and Ndalila (initiates' fathers) who give them final pieces of advice authoritatively and hold the initiates' hands and lead them to the circumcision spots known as chitian'gi to face the knife. The initiates' fathers then instruct their sons to hold special sticks obtained from a tree known as kumulaha on their shoulders while facing east. As observed from the field, chitian'gi are prepared by placing sand on sacks that are placed in front of Wekesa's house. According to information gathered from the field, the circumcision spots prevent blood from spilling on the ground where malicious people may pick with the intention of harming the initiates. More so, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are given special sticks known as kimilaha to hold on their shoulders to protect them from any form of malice. Facing east has a deep meaning. First, it signifies the direction from which Babukusu community came. Secondly, it signifies that a new member has entered the adult community in the same fashion as the rise of the sun signifies a new day. Additionally, the performance of sikhebo involves covenanting, hence, during the ritual cut, the blood that is shed because of the ritual cut of the penis is a confirmation to the ancestors that the initiates are part of the society the ancestors left.

Immediately Wekesa, Matere and Masafu ensure that their sons have stood properly, they stand in front and maintain eye contact so that the initiates remain focused. There is communicative silence as Khisa a traditional circumciser known as omukhebi and the assist circumciser known as Wafula emerge from a hidden place and start operating the initiates starting with Wanyama followed by Werunga then Masafu using one knife. The ritual cut involves a series of activities. First, Wafula applies soil dust known as lipukhulu on the initiates' foreskins to reduce slipperiness of the fingers while holding the initiates' foreskins in readiness for Khisa to cut. The next stage is pushing the initiates' foreskins backwards as dust is applied. Finally, Khisa holds the initiates' foreskins between the thumb and the forefinger; pulls them forward and cut in a sawing motion. During the ritual cut, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga display unweaving fortitude without portraying any signs of fear or cowardice as Nyukuri and Man'goli are vigilant to observe the initiates keenly to detect any fear so that they can prescribe the penalty. Likewise, after the ritual cut, they observe the initiates' penis to confirm that they are done well before instructing Khisa to blow the whistle to signal the crowd that the initiates have finished well. Notably, this is the time that Nasambu, Nangami, Namachemo, Namaemba and Nafula sit down on the floor of Nasambu's house with their legs horizontal on the floor with the ropes tied around their stomachs to signify the pain that the initiates' mothers underwent while giving birth to the initiates. The initiates' mothers are relieved after they hear Khisa's signal indicating that the sons have finished well. As observed from the field, the ritual cut takes two to three minutes.

After a successful ritual cut, Nasambu, Nangami and Namachemo (initiates' mothers) join Bunyasi, Wafukho, Kundu, Lukibisi, Wanjala, Nakhumicha and Nasipwondi to sing, dance and ululate to appreciate Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu for being brave and give them gifts. On their part, Nyukuri and Man'goli roar in unison as they sing war songs to welcome the initiates into the club of men. The song that is commonly sung is "Khwera Omurwa" meaning we have killed the enemy as the crowd says khwela meaning we have breathed. During this time, male escorts throw down twigs and clubs to appreciate the initiates for paying back the serpent's blood that was shed after Mango brutally killed it as women join in the singing of war song with chorus of ululations and dances of triumph around the initiates. The women's presence and the dance patterns symbolize that they (women) are ready for sexual advancements from the initiates. During this time, Nasambu goes to her house and comes with bananas on a traditional tray known as lutelu covered with banana leaves and throws to the crowd to signify plenty of food in the community.

Nanyama, Nasimiyu and Nangila (the initiates' sisters) are called to hold the initiates' waists to signify the dividends that Mango received after accepting to be circumcised: the Sebei girl as a wife. As such, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are entitled to their sisters' bride prize when they get married. The initiates' sisters further give Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu a place to sit and cover them with blankets for they are mature people who should not expose their nakedness to the public anyhow. Nanyama, Nasimiyu and Nangila also receive presents on behalf of the initiates because of fatigue. Normally, the initiates' sisters remove mud from the initiates' bodies starting from their heads to other parts of the bodies and the briskets around the initiates' necks. The initiates' sisters also ensure that blood that drips on the circumcising spots is removed and handed to Namaemba for safe custody before handing them to Wekesa. Lukibisi has the responsibility of removing the metal rings known as birere around the initiates' wrists.

3.1.3. Act Three

Seclusion marks the falling action in the performance of sikhebo. It means that Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu are confined to enable them perform the stipulated rituals that enable them to interact freely with other members of the society. As observed from the field, the initiates are isolated from the family to stay in a special house known as mwikombe. According to the focus group discussion, mwikombe symbolizes the place to where people go when they die. Notably, the newly circumcised initiates are ritually dead and must be confined to undergo the stipulated rituals. Before the initiates enter the cottage, Wekesa, Matere and Ndalila direct them round the hut in a backward manner until they enter in turns. The act of entering the hut in a backward manner symbolizes the way the serpent entered the cave after realizing that there was no danger: it entered backward and finally placed the head on the log that was placed by the entrance. Secondly, the act signifies that the initiate are no longer children but mature people ready to defend the community.

On the circumcision day at nine o'clock, Masibo and Welubengo (Wekesa's age-sets) come to Wekesa's home demanding for a special and reciprocal reward known as lubaka. It was observed from the field that after Wekesa

appreciates his age-sets for the moral support, he gives them twenty litres of busaa and the hide leg of the bull to share so that they can bless Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga. According to the information gathered from the field, Babukusu dictate that age-set known, as bakoki should respect one another because they shared the knife. Normally, whenever an age-set circumcises a son, he must appreciate his age-sets by giving them part of the meat and busaa. However, in case age-sets are not well appreciated, they might be angered as a result curse the initiates by climbing the nearby hill or twisting the legs while uttering words of curses upon them. Subsequently, to prevent curses befalling the initiates, Wekesa ensures that his age-sets are rewarded well.

On the circumcision day, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are not allowed to eat until Khisa feeds them in a ritual known as khulumia translated as feeding. This is the time that the circumciser takes ugali made of maize flour and roasted meat. He instructs the initiates to stretch their hands ready to wash. However, as Khisa pours water, he instructs the initiates authoritatively to remove their hands for water to pour down until the second time when they wash their hands. Khisa then takes ugali with roasted meat in his hand and directs towards their mouths. However, before the initiates bite, they are teased twice. They are further, instructed to spit the first bite on the right-hand side, the second bite on the left-hand side, before biting for the third time whereby, they chew and swallow. Thereafter, the initiates are allowed to share food on one plate with Khisa to allow them perform the remaining rituals. The act of teasing initiates letting water to pour down shows that Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga should behave as adults and take instructions given to them to enable them fit in the society. During this time, the initiates put on brave faces and maintain eye contact with Khisa to show they are attentive. Thereafter Matere, Ndalila and Wekesa pay one thousand shillings each as agreed circumcision payment as Nasambu, Nangami and Namachemo serve Khisa with busaa in the special pot to bless the initiates.

Two days after the ritual cut, wanyama, Werunga and Masafu are deprived of freedom and their movement is limited to moving from the cottage to the pit latrine and back until the third day known as musialukho. Early in the morning, Wekesa takes the initiates foreskins and the circumcision spots known as chitian'gi to bury in a hidden place where malicious people cannot excess with the intention of harming the initiates. However, before the initiates, leave the compound, to go and intermingle with other initiates in the neighbourhood, Wekesa instructs them authoritatively not to sleep outside their cottage and not to enter other initiates' cottages for luck is transferred to the host initiate. Moreover, they are told not to eat outside their cottage because food can be prepared by women who have not undergone a purification ritual known as sitekho as a result ruin the initiates' life. While leaving the compound, the initiates are accompanied by Masinde (Wanyama's younger brother) known as namakhala who is uncircumcised who acts as a messenger and security to the initiates and learns what should be done when his time comes.

During seclusion, Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu are not allowed to greet people with their hands. This time, they carry sticks known as kimiasi that are obtained from special plants known as chifufu that are rubbed with used bicycle tubes. In case they come across girls and uncircumcised boys, they tap their ankles as a form of greeting. It was noted that if uncircumcised boys and girls resist by running away, Masinde runs after them, get hold of them and forward them to the initiates to be greeted. However, if they come across men circumcised traditionally like Kundu, they give them the sticks to tap their ankles. According to information gathered from the field, when the initiates greet people with their hands it slows the healing process. During this time, initiates tie sheets on their bodies from the shoulders to the knees to avoid hurting themselves. Moreover, tradition dictates that initiates do not bathe and shave the hair during seclusion for water washes away the herbs from the wounds. Therefore, they apply white ochre known as lulongo that sheds off dirt from their bodies. Moreover, initiates carry catapults that they use to hunt domestic birds for meat. The act of Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga taking part in hurting teaches them to be responsible.

It was observed that Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are treated with traditional medicine known as enguu that is applied after two days. The harvesting of enguu is dramatic. As observed from the field, Nyukuri a male elder who is given the responsibility of harvesting the herb, whips it as he whistles before plucking its leaves to make it bitter as a result discipline rude initiates who are humbled and taught a lesson by the intense pain.

During seclusion, Wekesa appoints Lukibisi (Wanyama's elder brother) to assist Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga to apply herbs, clean the wounds and teach them how to behave maturely. Besides, Lukibisi cautions the initiates authoritatively against night movements and female company. According to informants, walking at night expose them to bad men who might scratch their wounds that leads to fresh bleeding. Similarly, the company of female friends could arouse their penis, which could crack the wounds thus, delay the healing process. During the seclusion period, Bunyasi, Kundu and Wafukho visit the initiates in their cottage to assess the healing process and advise them to behave like mature people.

One month after circumcision when Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu heal, Khisa is called by Wekesa to advise the initiates in a ritual known as khubita. The ritual is performed in the presence of Wekesa, Ndalila, Matere, Lukibisi, Nasambu, Nangami, Namachemo and Nyukuri. As observed, Khisa chews fried dough called kamakhalange and spits on the initiates heads as he repeatedly strokes them with the knife that operated them known as lukembe. Speaking authoritatively though self-praises and gesticulation, Khisa passes advice messages to the initiates by use of symbols and symbolic meanings to pass hidden message. The initiates are told to work hard so that they can provide for their families by use of the machete, axe and hoe. Moreover, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are advised to work hard and rear animals and birds. In addition, they are told to show respect to all people both young and old, to avoid drunkenness and work hard to excel in life. However, the initiates are cautioned against getting involved in kitchen affairs since these are affairs of their wives. They are also cautioned never to venture into their mothers sleeping places but respect the privacy of their mothers and fathers. More so, they are taught sexual matters and how to relate with others in the community. Moreover, they are cautioned against bewitching or causing any form of evil to any fellow human being. Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are advised to be contented with what they work for and possess and their status in society and never to use

force to get what is not rightfully theirs. Lastly, the initiates are told to engage in activities that are not prescribed by the society for they might suffer ills and fail to prosper in life. According to information gathered from the field, the words of the circumciser are very important because he is the one who transforms the initiates from childhood to adulthood and they enable people to stay harmoniously. Therefore, the initiates must be attentive by maintaining eye contact and putting on brave faces.

3.1.4 Act Four

Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu start preparing for the pass-out in the last week of the month of November by ensuring that there are enough stumps for the fire with the help of Lukibisi, Kundu, Wafukho and Bunyasi. The first week of the month of December, Wekesa, Ndalila, Matere, Nyukuri and Man'goli meet to fix the date when the initiates are to graduate. The date for the pass-out is fixed for 15th of December. On 10th December, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga in the company of Kundu, Wafukho and Bunyasi prepare a temporal structure known as sisali where the initiates spend on the eve of the pass-out in Nasambu's banana plantation because of her kindness and generosity. The initiates ensure that there are enough green bananas to be roasted on the eve of the pass-out. According to informants, the banana plantation, which is usually selected for the initiates to construct a temporal structure known as sisali, must belong to a woman who is kind, obedient and respectful. Babukusu avoid women who are disrespectful or who are in their monthly period to prevent curses from befalling the initiates.

On the eve of the pass-out day, Wekesa instructs Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga to assemble the bedding they were sleeping on during seclusion period in front of his house. Wekesa then sets the bedding on fire as Bunyasi, Kundu, Wafukho and Lukibisi witness. Further, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are instructed to get hold of twigs of nanjaka plant and dried banana leaves in their hands, light them using the fire that burns the bedding. Wekesa further, instructs the initiates to run towards the banana plantation while calling and abusing Khisa. According to the information gathered from the field, the act of Wekesa burning the bedding that Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu were using during seclusion signifies that the initiates are preparing to start new life. Running with a burning fire from Wekesa's compound to the banana plantation signifies blessings that the initiates get from their parents. The act of Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu abusing Khisa signifies that a man is circumcised once.

The ritual fire that Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga lights on the eve of the pass-out day should not go off for it symbolizes life. Therefore, the fire that burns continuously at night on the eve of the pass-out day reminds the initiates of their contribution to the continuity of life in the community. Therefore, the fire is seen as sacred. Its sacredness symbolizes the sexual lives of the initiates. Now that they have undergone circumcision, they have the licence to take part in the sexual matters that ensures the continuation of the community's lineage. Moreover, on the eve of the pass-out, initiates stay awake as they listen to legendary stories narrated to them by Lukibisi, Kundu, Bunyasi and Wafukho to teach them to be brave because their responsibility is to protect the community. Therefore, the initiate who dozes like Masafu is hit with hot bananas by Wanyama and Werunga to make him awake because his role is to defend the community.

Early in the morning on the pass-out day, Lukibisi, Kundu, Wafukho and Bunyasi escort Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu to the river where Namaemba shaves them. The act of the paternal aunt shaving the initiates is to usher them into adulthood. Namaemba further instructs the initiates to bathe in a flowing river before putting on new clothes to signify a new beginning. As observed from the field, the initiates stay along the river up to ten o'clock in the morning when they walk to Wekesa's home singing the song "Lelo Mugumbo Empia" translated as today in new clothes to provide the denouement of the ritual. In the song, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga reassure parents, relatives and the entire community that they are now mature people ready to defend the community from any form of aggregation. The initiates sing and dance the song in a matching pace to express joy for obtaining a new status as men.

Immediately Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga arrive at Wekesa's home, they are not allowed to enter any house on the compound. They remain out where they are served with boiled bananas on a traditional tray known as lutelu. After eating for a while, Wanyama starts hitting Werunga and Masafu with boiled bananas to signify plenty of food in the community. During this time Nyukuri and Man'goli witness as the initiates hit one another with hot bananas as they take busaa using traditional straws known as chisekhe while preparing to give the initiates the final pieces of advice in a ritual known as khukambila.

After Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are instructed by Lukibisi to sit at a strategic place, Man'goli a male elder starts giving them final pieces of advice in a ritual known as khukambila. This is the time that the initiates are told to respect any person the age of their mothers and fathers, never to play with somebody's wife since they will be penalized by paying cattle. Further, they are cautioned not to have sex with animals, which is a taboo, as well as take care because of the coming of AIDS that has no cure. Moreover, the initiates are told the history of circumcision and the circumcision age-sets among Babukusu.

Similarly, Man'goli advises Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga that when they are ready to get married, they should ask for the women names, their clan and make sure that they are not related. Moreover, they are advised to take care of their wives by making them beautiful and most important bear children with them. Man'goli further advises the initiates to be cautious with strangers since they can be enemies. Additionally, they are told that their responsibility is to guard the community against any form of aggression. This is evident by Wekesa, Ndalila and Matere who provide their sons with the spears that they demonstrate how to kill the enemies by throwing the spears accurately enough so as they pierce and stick in the ground as they shout khuwere Barwa meaning we have killed the enemy. After receiving the final pieces of advice, Wanyama, Werunga and Masafu are given gifts including animals, birds, bedding, furniture and electronics to enable them start new lives. They are then led in Wekesa's house where they are served with food including rice, chapati, ugali and

meat that they share with Nyukuri and Masafu to mark a new beginning. Thereafter, male elders are served with busaa that they take using traditional straws known as chisekhe while the initiates are served on calabashes. However, Man'goli warns the initiates against drunkenness authoritatively.

After receiving the final pieces of advice, Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga are referred to as batembete and they have to visit relatives and neighbours for a period of one month to acknowledge their support and re-emphasize their achievement. Notably, wherever they visit they are rewarded with animals, chicken and eggs to enable them accumulate wealth to pay dowry.

The participants who perform rituals in sikhebo are supposed to have prior knowledge or have experience in the ritual. For example, those who are picked as male escorts (Kundu, Wafukho and Bunyasi) must have been circumcised and are informed regarding the details of the performance. Lukibisi (the initiates' elder brother) who acts as a guide must be a man of integrity and a role model and must be aware of all the rituals acts that are performed during seclusion. Equally, Khisa the circumciser has to be respected is well skilled as far as the art of circumcising is concerned. During sikhebo, performers have total authority and it is unethical for Wanyama, Masafu and Werunga to ask questions as to why certain things are being done the way they are done. This caution is taken to make sure that no damage is done at any stage of performance.

The resolution in the performance of sikhebo is realized when every person who attends the performance participates actively or passively. The participation in the performance of sikhebo is a mark of acceptance and announcement of identity, portrayal of one's pride in belonging to Babukusu society. Through its performance, sikhebo is realized as a communal entity that is religious in its essence but performed as a dramatic piece. The performers are regulated by pre-determined rules, which they have conditioned to adhere to. The functionalism tent that social systems are based on structures was vital to the study while analyzing the plot of sikhebo as an acculturative dramatic narrative. The researcher analyzed sikhebo as a complete ritual from its preparation stage, ritual cut, through the seclusion period to the pass-out rite. The following aspects were analyzed, the procedure, roles, specification and participation of each performer, the non-verbal aspects of the ritual namely the costumes, props, body adornments, body movements and gestures and verbal aspects that include songs and self-praise.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed further that elements of acculturative dramatic narrative are evident in the performance of sikhebo. These elements include the use of spectacle, song and dance, body art, ornaments, costumes, props, paralinguistic features, pre-designed place and setting that are functional. The study revealed that beliefs and taboos integrated into the performance of sikhebo help to propagate Babukusu's ideals and values through the ritual's artistic rendition. Since the study was limited to the performance of sikhebo as practiced by Babukusu it may not have reflected adequately on the acculturative dramatic aspects in ritual performances among Babukusu practiced during birth, naming, marriage and death ceremonies. It is recommended that a similar study be carried out focusing on Babukusu rituals practiced during birth, naming, marriage and death ceremonies. This will help to establish how they have treated acculturative dramatic aspects in those performances.

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