WOMEN-ON-WOMEN VIOLENCE IN TANZANIA:
Current Realities and Future Directions

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By Regina Opoku

Women-on-Women Violence in Tanzania:
Current Realities and Future Directions

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Foreword

Dr. Regina Opoku's book on, Women-on-women Violence in Tanzania: Current Realities and Future Directions, is a welcome addition to the body of literature on the African continent that deepens the much needed decolonization agenda. She moves beyond critiques of Western, Eurocentric hegemony to demonstrate the agency that Africans do possess in challenging and countering colonial and neo-colonial influences. With much courage and candour, she deals with the complex tensions between socio-cultural norms, that underscore harmful traditional practices, and human rights discourses and practices in Africa, and more particularly in the Tanzanian context.

As an anti-colonial stance, individuals, groups and communities that engage in harmful traditional practices, often invoke the "it's in our culture" defense. Informed by critical, radical and emancipatory theoretical orientations, it is this central idea that Dr. Opoku (popularly and fondly known as Sister Regina) hones into and challenges. She asks critical questions regarding what is deemed to be the primordial essence of African cultures, the changing and evolutionary nature of culture, and the role of an authentic reclaiming of Afrocentricity in countering human rights abuses on the African continent. She does this by tackling the unusual and, all too silenced, discourse on women-on-women violence through a thorough, ethnographic study - incorporating observations, in-depth interviews, group interviews and focus group discussions - with 122 participants, of three traditional practices in the Mara and Mwanza regions of Tanzania.

These practices are: female genital cutting (FGC); widow inheritance and widow cleansing rituals; and the Nyumba Ntobhu (woman-to-woman) marriage institution. She describes her research methodology with meticulous detail, paying particular attention to community entry strategies and her subject location as a woman, an African, a nun and a social worker. This was important as she entered the life worlds of people where the traditional practices investigated were constructed as sacrosanct, inviolate, and core to social stability and cultural continuity. Yet, the empirical data reveal these to be violating of women's dignity, their rights to inclusion and participation, and their rights to bodily integrity and to life. Drawing on her rich data, representing the voices of women who were victims of these practices and women who were perpetrators; clan elders; traditional leaders; health workers and community activists, Sister Regina details the similarities and the differences across the practices.

Amid the myriad of specific themes that evolved from the data, the following are crystallized across the three practices: 1) Women are, undoubtedly, the torchbearers of these practices; 2) While women, usually older and more influential, are the torchbearers and engage in the direct practice of the rituals, they do this

in the interests of perpetuating patriarchal beliefs, norms and practices; 3) Idealized notions of normalized dominant femininity and dominant masculinity; 4) Challenges to the victim-perpetrator dichotomy, as women are both victims and perpetrators; 5) The inter-relationship between socio-economic constraints and socio-cultural norms; 6) Whether directly or indirectly, bride price is implicated as women are:- considered worthy of higher bride price and marriage, as in the case of FGC; sold into Nyumba Ntobhu marriages, sometimes for as little as six cows and two goats in efforts to alleviate the dire poverty of their families; held in bondage within this marriage institution; and widows coerced into being inherited by other men and into unprotected sexual intercourse with strange men (who are poor and usually do it for money) as they fear dispossession and loss of inheritance; and 7) Deep seated superstition and instilling fears of bad omens and curses befalling them and/or their families are powerful mechanisms of socio-cultural control and compliance.

Dr. Opoku's focus on women-on-women violence is unique, as much of the literature and popular discourse focuses on violence perpetrated by men against women. This, and the undeniable disadvantages and violations that women experience, particularly in more patriarchal societies, are squarely dealt with in this text. However, Dr. Opoku goes beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions around gender. She critically engages with women's and men's complicities in perpetuating gender stereotypes and discrimination, and their complicities in the reproduction of harmful traditional practices. Perhaps, to the consternation of some who want to see men as villains and women as victims, she has included a chapter on *The Disadvantaged Male,* with a clear elucidation of how gender stereotypes and patriarchy negatively impact men as well. In truth, men are unlikely to give up their privileged positions and the normalized deference of women towards them, if they do not acknowledge the power of patriarchal constraints on them.

Both men and women are victims of patriarchy and its consequences. On the dynamics of the normalization of injustice, discrimination and oppression, Isabel Wilkerson (2020, 16)[1] says, "*The awkward becomes acceptable, and the unacceptable becomes merely inconvenient. Live with it long enough, and the unthinkable becomes normal. Exposed over the generations, we learn that the incomprehensible is the way that life is supposed to be.*" Further on, she makes the following cogent observation: *"Perhaps it is the unthinking acquiescence, the blindness to one's imprisonment, that is the most effective way for human beings to remain captive. People who do not know they are captive will not resist their bondage"* (p. 33-34). The real danger, as the results of Dr. Opoku's study show, rests not only in not resisting, but in actively reproducing the unthinkable, the unacceptable and the incomprehensible.

1 Wilkerson, I. (2020). Caste: The Origins of our Discontents. Penguin Random House.

We are born into political bodies, shaped by historical, political, economic and socio-cultural norms, and we do, in turn, reproduce the worlds that we are born into. But, as Hägglund (2020, 12) asserts "I am not merely causally determined by nature or norms." "The authority of our norms", he argues, must be "called into question, contested, and revised … we are responsible for the form of our shared life" (Hägglund, 2020, 16)[2]. Dr. Opoku makes numerous policy and practice recommendations in relation to the factors that contribute to the maintenance of these traditional practices and their pernicious consequences. Underlying these, is her call for an emancipatory praxis – the core of which is liberating ourselves from the constraints of our own and societal thinking, and politicization of the self. She adds a strong and much needed voice for fundamental socio-economic changes. Equally important, is that she makes an impassioned call for the normalized and naturalized socio-cultural norms - that drive FGC, the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and wife inheritance and sexual cleansing rituals - to be called into question, challenged and changed. In doing so, we reclaim an authentic Afrocentricity, with Ubuntu at its root, to define our humanity and our human rights commitments and to defy colonial and neo-colonial impositions on our fractured identities.

Professor Vishanthie Sewpaul 6 March 2024

2 Hägglund, M (2020). This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom. New York, Anchor Books.

Acknowledgments

This book, an adaptation of a PhD dissertation approved by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Tampere, Finland, in March 2017, stands as a testament to a comprehensive interdisciplinary research project. The study delved into the traditional and cultural constructs of African women's lives and the patriarchal violence they navigate, aptly titled "Gendered Violence: Patterns and Causes of Women-Women Violence in the Lake Zone Regions of Tanzania, East Africa." The insights presented in "Women-on-Women Violence in Tanzania: Current Realities and Future Directions" are the culmination of contributions from numerous authors whose profound knowledge on gendered violence has been indispensable. I thank my PhD supervisors, Professor Tarja Pösö and Dr. Satu Ranta-Tyrkkö, under whose guidance the study was undertaken.

I am deeply indebted to the Kuria and Ukerewe girls, women, and men who courageously shared their sensitive stories and experiences of female genital cutting (FGC), widow cleansing rituals, and Nyumba Ntobhu marriages. Your openness and willingness to educate have greatly enriched my understanding of African cultures, traditions, and rituals.

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This book is dedicated to all women who face any form of violation and activists, who fight for social justice and human rights.

List of Abbreviations

ABCF	Action Based Community Foundation
AC	Africa Charter
AIAHA	American International Health Alliance
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AU	Africa Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CCT	Christian Council of Tanzania
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CDF	Children Dignity Forum
CNN	Cable News Network
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DV	Domestic Violence
EAC	East Africa Community Treaty
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GEAS	Global Early Adolescent Study
GSWSEP	Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work
ICAST	ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tools
ICESR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
ISPCAN	International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Ne glect
KIMIDEU	Kuboresha Mienedo na Desturi kwa Ustawi
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LHRC	Legal and Human Rights Centre
LMA	Law of Marriage Act
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
NAP	National Plan of Action
NGO	None Governmental Organisation
NPM	Neoliberalism and New Public Management
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PSWs	Paraprofessional Social Workers
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
REPOA	Research on Poverty Alleviation

SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGM	Sexual and Gender Minorities
SOSPA	Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
STD	Sexual Transmitted Diseases
SV	Sexual Violence
TAMWA	Tanzania Media Women's Association
TASWO	Tanzania Association of Social Workers
TDHS	Tanzanian Demographic Health Survey
TESWEP	Tanzania Emerging Schools of Social Work Programme
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Emerging Fun
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VACS	Violence Against Children Surveys
VAM	Violence Against Men
VAW	Violence Against Women
WHO	World Health Organisation
WSR	Women's Situation Room

Introduction

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 goals and 169 targets, provides a blueprint for socio-economic development and the advancement of all peoples across the globe that member states have committed to. There is a growing awareness that social and planetary imbalances exacerbate each other with their inadvertent concomitants – conflicts, wars, and displacements. As the United Nations Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) respect the human rights principle of indivisibility and promote all civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, is it important to deal with the SDGs holistically to recognize the inter-relationships between no poverty; zero hunger; climate action; clean energy; species biodiversity; peace, justice, and strong institutions; decent work and economic growth. One of the key concerns in Tanzania is strengthening analytical capabilities to inform approaches to tackle gender inequality and identify best social protection practices. These include approaches to social services provision, social protection, and attention to pervasive gender gaps in multiple spheres of life for the welfare of human beings, paying particular attention to gender differences to develop human capability and growth (Beller and Kröger, 2021; REPOA, 2021). At the outcome level, research conducted under this theme seeks to inform national and regional development commitments consistent with the United Nations SDGs, particularly 3: Promotion of Good health, 4: Promotion of Quality education, 5: Gender Equality, and 6: Clean water and sanitation for all.

Prior to the turn of the Millennium goals, the UN Decade for Women, from 1976 to 1985, sought to examine the status and rights of women, bringing women into decision-making to address women's issues. The 1996 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognizes that equality of women and men is necessary for social justice and to achieve development and peace. Since then, the world has experienced profound political, economic, social and cultural changes, but the promise of women's equality has fallen far short of expectations. Globally, women continue to suffer different forms of discrimination and in Africa and Asia, cultural and traditional beliefs constitute major sources of violation of women's and girls' basic human rights.

In Tanzania considerable progress has been made since the global Millennium goal initiative to close the gender gaps across the social, political and economic spectrum. For example, research has shown that more girls are going to school (and passing exams), the number of girls forced into early marriage continues to decrease, more women are serving in parliament and positions of leadership, and labour participation of women is on the rise (The World Bank Group, 2022; Moyo and Dhliwayo, 2019; United Nations, 2015). Moreover, the laws and policies in Tanzania are being reformed and introduced to advance gender equality, and more social and economic data are disaggregated by gender. In the East

African Communities, Rwanda is doing so well in the political arena in gender balance. The Global Gender Gap report of the World Economic Forum (2020) placed Norway second, behind Iceland, which has closed over 85% of its overall gender gap. Norway scored 83.5%, and Sweden and Finland 82.2%. It is interesting to note that the Scandinavian countries with social democratic regimes, with strong welfare provisions are most successful in narrowing the gender gap, and retained their top positions in 2020. While it is heartening to note two African countries in the top ten with Rwanda ranked 6th and Namibia, 10th in 2018, it is unfortunate both lost their positions in 2020, with Rwanda being 9th and Namibia 12th. Tanzania ranks 68th out of 153 countries ranked (World Economic Forum, 2020).

There are a complex range of intersecting political, economic, and socio-cultural factors that contribute to the violation of women's and children's rights in the African context. Traditional norms and practices are one of them. Traditional beliefs, traditional faith healing and witchcraft are among the cultural beliefs that infringe on women's rights in Tanzania. These beliefs have led to intimidation, psychological isolation, abuse, violence and, in extreme cases, the killing of older women simply because they were accused of witchcraft when a disaster happened in the community (CEDAW/C/TZA/6) April 2008; (CEDAW/C/TZA/7-8) December 2017). Women's violations cannot be separated from cultural, economic, and political contexts. For example, traditional practices like widow cleansing - wife inheritance, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage (meaning "house without a man"), and female genital cutting (hereafter referred to as FGC) are often linked to socio-economic deprivation, women's economic dependence, preference for male children and the satisfaction of men in patriarchal societies. These practices, with a unique focus on women-on-women violence, are the subject matter of this book, which draws on a PhD study that I completed.

Background And Rationale For The Study

This study on gendered violence argues that violence against women is both a historical and a global issue. This is because gender inequality, which lies at the root of violence, is embedded in human history (Gray, Stuart, Lee, and Bartels, 2022; UN Report on Gender Violence, 2012). In Tanzania, most studies on violence against women focus on violence inflicted by men on women, but this study deals with women-to-women violence within the constraints and norms of patriarchal thinking and structures. According to Ajayi, Olanrewaju, and Nwannebuife (2019) and White, Kamanga, Chweza, and Chidyaonga (2002), the preponderance of African research on gender and violence indicates that African men are both the aggressor and oppressor. Researchers such as Erken (2020), Tuyizere (2007), and Tungaraza (2005) argue that many African societies are patriarchal in structure, resulting in the subordination of women to the authority of men; this situation often gives rise to the violent treatment of women. While not countering research conclusions pointing to men as sources of aggression against women, the literature in this area might be overlooking two significant

facts: there is evidence that there is "women against women" violence and that patriarchy does disadvantage men as well.

A number of African researchers such as Bourdon (2013) and White et al. (2002) contended that most cultures in Africa have traditionally exercised strict control over the female in a wide range of cultural practices. They claimed, for example, that more restrictive gender roles are imposed on girls and women, which affect their health and lives. Women in these patriarchal communities feel unable to oppose societal dictates, even when these roles affect them adversely (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021; Opoku, 2017). The effort to prevent such violence challenges customs and traditional beliefs (Africanus, 2012).

Otiso (2013) and Tuyizere (2007) explained that in African patrilineal communities, elderly women are assigned duties to ensure the implantation of gender roles to maintain the social structures of the community. Traditionally, highly respected women - believed to possess supernatural powers, either inherited or learned from a relative - are designated to perform practices such as the FGC procedure (Opoku, 2017; Kisaakye, 2002; Talle, 1993). The elderly women who perform the acts of female genital cutting and the rituals of widow cleansing are indicted for being the torchbearers of such practices, and they are, indeed, complicit in reproducing harm within patriarchal societies that condone harm (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; Opoku, 2017). These traditional practices occur within the confines of patriarchal power relations and dominant cultural beliefs. The cultural practices of female genital cutting, woman-to-woman marriage (locally known as Nyumba Ntobhu marriage), and widow cleansing rituals are less documented phenomena, and dynamics of violence perpetuated by women against women are poorly understood (Opoku, 2017; Africanus, 2012). These cultural and traditional practices are examples of cultural violence perpetuated by women on fellow women in some communities situated along the shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania where these practices are highly prevalent (Tanzania Human Rights Reports, 2012; Bond, 2005). In 2012, the Tanzanian Demographic Health Survey (TDHS) estimated that the percentage of "cut" women increased in the Mara region from 43.2% in 2004-5 to 51% in 2010. The Mara region in Tanzania has witnessed FGC-related arrests of both practitioners and opponents of the practice. Wantaigwa (2020) is the author of a research report by 28TooMany, an organisation that works to end female genital cutting in Africa. She reported that in January 2020, several people were arrested for allegedly killing a secondary-school teacher with arrows. The teacher had publicly denounced FGC in the Mara region.

There is a lack of statistical information to determine an accurate number of women who have undergone the widow cleansing ritual and those involved in Nyumba Ntobhu marriage in Tanzania. However, Tanzania human rights researchers assert that FGC, widow-cleansing and Nyumba Ntobhu marriage are some of the "unacceptable cultural" and "traditional practices" promoting gender discrimination and perpetuating violence against women in Tanzania (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2020; 2012; Bond, 2005).

For many years, the media (TV and radio) in Tanzania has constantly broadcasted news locally and nationally about the occurrences of these practices in the country. The local and national newspapers, such as "The Daily News," "The Citizen," and "Mwananchi" (to mention a few) have frequently published articles concerning the ongoing harmful traditional practices in regions such as Arusha, Dodoma, Singida, and Tanga. Each time these articles are published they, without exception, concern incidences occurring in the Lake Zone regions, particularly Mwanza and Mara regions. Religious bodies, specifically the Roman Catholics and the Pentecostals in these communities, have been against the practices, condemning them as primitive and evil (28TooMany, 2020; Africanus, 2012). The Christian leaders in these regions have taken initiatives through youth programmes to sensitize their congregants about the immoral aspects of the rituals and some of the harm that these cultural practices inflict on the human body. There are also many small-scale programmes organised by schools, and community groups in these communities to enlighten and create public awareness of the immorality of the said cultural practices (Winterbottom et al., 2009).

Tanzania, like many African countries, continues to see the resurgence of anti-cultural practices campaigns since the 1990s (Winterbottom et al., 2009). Mutua (2008) holds that the colonial masters and missionaries regarded certain African traditional practices as offensive and tried to eradicate them through various campaigns during the colonial era in Africa. In recent years, the resurgence of such practices has many drivers, including globalisation and its opponents. According to the Tanzania Human Rights Report (2012: 153), harmful traditional practices are inhuman, degrading, and uncivilised against women in the country. These human rights campaigners continue to create awareness of the detrimental aspects of these cultural practices and the harm caused to those who undergo the respective rituals. Studies have shown that during the postcolonial era, the Tanzanian Media Women's Association (TAMWA), and the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) reintroduced these campaigns. The Tanzanian Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA) often led coalitions of NGOs working to eradicate the practices under study through educational and advocacy programmes, media campaigns, and research projects (Winterbottom et al., 2009). Moreover, the Tanzanian government in collaboration with the Tanzanian Ministry of Health runs, for example, anti-FGC programmes in conjunction with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These include awareness and educational programmes (ibid). Importantly, the government of Tanzania has policies against these practices and has enacted laws in recent years that forbid the practices. Tanzania criminalized FGC in 1998 and since 2017 adopted a National Plan of Action to end Violence against Women and Children in all its forms, including FGC, by 2030. While formal interventions by the Government are credited with having halved the national prevalence of FGC between 1998 and 2021, substantial disparities exist at the sub national level highlighting the need for continued research, policy and programme interventions in this area (REPOA, 2021).

On a global level, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has researched and

documented the health hazards associated with the practices of FGC and widow cleansing and inheritance. This evidence has drawn the attention of the international media, which have frequently aired such news on channels such as CNN, Aljazeera, and the BBC. On the 26 August 2015, the BBC broadcasted a documentary reported by Tulanana Bohela on the *Nyumba Ntobhu* practice among the Kuria of Tanzania. The report highlighted how an age-old tradition involving women marrying women in the Kuria communities is increasingly being used as an option to escape from domestic violence in heterosexual marriages. The report rated the Mara region in northern Tanzania as having the highest rate of domestic violence in the country. In addition, the commentary explained that the alternative family structure, known as *Nyumba Ntobhu*, has become a practical alternative for many women in the region[3]. In another media context, for example, in Finland, where I was studying when this research was undertaken, the Finnish newspaper "Helsingin Sanomat" published an article on the 6 February 2015 on the practice of FGC by Finnish photographer Meeri Koutaniemi. This photojournalist travelled to Ethiopia and had the opportunity to interact with men attending a community meeting that discussed the eradication of FGC, a programme run by the the Children's Development Organisation Plan. According to the photographer, the men who participated in the discussion had a change of attitude toward FGC practices when they realised the harmfulness on girl children who undergo the ritual. Narratives such as these could be replicated locally, nationally, and globally.

Human rights activists lobbying against the traditional practices of FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu and widow cleansing rites in the Lake Zone regions consider education as the most valuable tool in their eradication process. Winterbottom et al. (2009: 60) hold that many NGO workers and women's rights advocates call for "education" in the broadest possible terms as a strategy to end, for example, FGC. They maintain that "because few girls in rural East Africa attend secondary school, many colonial and contemporary commentators have argued that harmful cultural practices will decline when girl children are educated." These researchers gave a telling example of a district education officer in the Kuria region of Kenya whom they claimed said: "Let us circumcise the minds of our daughters with quality education instead of subjecting them to this primitive culture…." (The Daily Nation 2005; cited in Winterbottom et al., 2009: 61). They sum up their claims with this example, "FGC is condemned worldwide the local community should not stick to it" (Ibid).

3 http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34059556

Problem Statement

Cultural practices have the potential to cause human suffering. In their edited book, *The Tensions between Culture and Human Rights*: *Afrocentricity and Emancipatory Social Work in a Global Work*, Sewpaul, Kreitzer and Raniga (2021) critically interrogate the relationship between culture and human rights across Africa and offer strategies for pedagogy and practice. Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021: 279) deal with the complexities of the issues, asserting that many cultural traditions that constitute sources of human rights violations have as much "to do with values and beliefs of groups of persons as they do with socio-economic exigencies."

In her research, Abdi (2012) argues that "the lack of education" is not the cause of the continual practices of FGC. It could also be claimed that neither is it the "paucity of education" that is fueling the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage and the widow cleansing ritual in the Lake Zone regions of Tanzania (Opoku, 2017). The idea of lack of education is an over generalized and rather ethnocentric notion, implying that those perpetuating the practices are unaware of the adverse health effects (Abdi, 2010: 116). But as Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021) argue it is not any type of education. They call for an emancipatory praxis, with a focus on the use of reflective dialogue. Critically reflective dialogue is critical to understanding and undoing our taken-for-granted assumptions. Freire (1973: 21) asserted, "Dialogue requires social and political responsibility, it requires at least a minimum of transitive consciousness". This is paramount as Freire (1973, 14) warned about the dangers of naïve consciousness, which can manifest in things like fanaticism, nostalgia, or fatalism. In his words:

> A critically transitive consciousness is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by testing of one's 'findings' and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old – by accepting what is valid in both old and new.

In order to understand how and why these educational programmes foisted on these communities for several decades have failed to achieve their objectives, it is important to interrogate the assumptions upon which they are based (Abdi, 2012). If these practices are so dehumanising and damaging to the body, why would the practicing communities not be more concerned about them over the years? On the other hand, if these three practices are as harmful as the government, media, activists, religious organisations, and NGOs portray, then the practicing communities must definitely have an outstanding reason to

perpetuate the practices. They may have strong enough reasons to continue the practices that override the adverse health effects and the harm to bodily integrity and life (Opoku, 2017).

In the Tanzanian context, there is very little research and literature available on the traditional practices and cultural beliefs amongst the ethnic groups in the studied population that influence and determine female dominance and power relations. Some African feminists such as Abdi (2012); Gachiri (2010); Bond (2005); and White et al. (2002) have researched and documented gendered violence in the African context and highlighted matters that are more general on the impact of cultural practices on the oppression of women and girls in African societies. They have, however, not explicitly explored how elderly African women are implicated in gendered violence through their attempt to preserve their cultural heritage.

Hence, Opoku (2017) and Kisaakye (2002) note that it has become increasingly apparent and important, especially in Tanzania and throughout the African continent, to recognise this ongoing tension between women's human rights and traditional culture to understand the relationship between the two. It is only by doing so that appropriate interventions to target their eradication will be put in place (Kisaakye, 2002: 268). In exploring how elderly African women are implicated in this form of gendered violence, this study investigated the role that Kuria and Kerewe older women play in promoting traditional practices that are seen as important for political and economic stability and the social well-being of their communities. The physical and psychological implications as well as the exploitation of the bodies of vulnerable women, who undergo the traditional practices, were significant areas to examine.

Theoretical framework

The study applied critical theory to examine and unearth the traditional practices in their social and cultural context and explains how aspects of these traditions function in the studied communities. The knowledge would help make reasonable predictions of social behaviour to address concerns about power and control in order to promote women's empowerment. These reflect the reality in the African patriarchal societies among the Kuria and the Kerewe ethnic groups under study. Twikirize, quoting Anderson (2005), points out that empowerment entails a process of learning to move from only being reactive to life events to becoming proactive in shaping one's vision for life (Twikirize, 2014: 69). According to Mathias (2011), empowerment is derived from the word "power." Quoting Batliwala (1993), she explains that "power" has two central aspects: control over resources and control over ideology (Mathias, 2011, 18). Thus, to empower the women in this study means to equip them with the ability to gain control over their resources and ideologies.

According to Foucault (2020), power is blind and purposeless, and he stressed that power is not attributable to anyone or anything. Power, he explains, is impersonal because it is neither possessed nor exerted by individuals, groups, or institutions;

power is the total influence that actions have on other actions. Elisheva (2004: 36, cited in Bukuluki, 2021) argues that "power is the production of obedience to the preferences of others, including an expansion of the preferences of those subject to it so as to include those preferences." The power struggles or relations between the powerful and less powerful that exist among members of the community are seen and experienced among women (Opoku, 2017). The ability to study power and control is one of the strengths of ethnographic research, as it gives the researcher the ability to provide an understanding of social practices and indigenous knowledge in everyday life in the community. These may be taken for granted and easily passed without notice (Ranta-Tyrkko, 2010).

Proposing five spheres of empowerment as: personal, social, educational, economic and political empowerment, Twikirize (2014: 69) explains that these domains provide the intertwined dimensions that serve as a focus for intervention. Critical theory, rooted in emancipatory and anti-oppressive approaches, speaks of issues of power and powerlessness, oppression, domination and privilege, and the impact of dominant ideologies and structural factors on the substantive aspects of peoples' lives (Larsen and Sewpaul, 2014). Thus, a critical theory may assist in unveiling taken-for-granted, common-sense power relations on macro and micro levels among women within the confines of the dominant cultural beliefs.

According to Notko and Sevon (2006), this area of 'Women' study has not been at the core of family or feminist studies. They note that woman-to-woman violence poses a complex question in feminist research as feminist researchers have not been interested in topics such as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships, which challenge feminist theories that underscore female "ways of being" (ibid). Yllo's (1993) radical feminist literature on violence against women evoked patriarchy as a theoretical concept. Yet the term patriarchy quickly became heavily contested; it was criticized for being 'under-theorized' (Kandiyoti, 1988), and the effort to construct a theory of patriarchy to explain violence against women was derailed (Hunnicutt, 2009). She argues that feminist scholars have produced abundant writings on violence against women, yet theory development has stagnated. Hence, the effort to construct a theory of patriarchy to explain violence against women was derailed by criticism. However, Hunnicutt (2009: 553) claims, "the concept of patriarchy holds promise for theorizing violence against women because it keeps the theoretical focus on dominance, gender, and power."

Feminists' critique of violence is that the 'gendered lens' is narrowly focused on individual-level characteristics and family dynamics in isolation from broader social forces (Hunnicutt, 2009; Straus, 2009; Kandiyoti, 1988). It is also clear that gender-specific violence is connected to general social contexts, and therefore, a theory of the varieties of patriarchy and violence against women should be situated within a larger social setting (Greenberg, 1993 cited in Hunnicutt, 2009: 563). This is because the concept of patriarchy is especially useful for theory

building as a term that evokes images of gender hierarchies, dominance, and power arrangements. A theory of varieties of patriarchy would retain gender as a central organizing feature, maintaining a hierarchical emphasis and focusing on social systems and social arrangements that reinforce domination (ibid). The concept of patriarchy is useful in that it keeps the gaze directed toward social contexts rather than toward individual men who are motivated to dominate (Hunnicutt, 2009; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005). This concept of patriarchy also anchors the problem of violence against women in social conditions, rather than individual attributes (Hunnicutt, 2009). The literature available in this context is driven primarily by social action and research that contains very little theory (Yllo, 1993 cited in Hunnicutt, 2009: 553). There are claims that the core concept of patriarchy � systems of male domination and female subordination � continue to appear in the literature in a disguised language. A better understanding of violence against women depends on further development of feminist theory. Although feminist political action is essential, according to Hunnicutt (2009), we have not yet fully developed a gender-centered theory of violence against women.

In the study, an alternative way of gendered violence is presented to understand violence against women by employing patriarchal violence as a core theoretical concept. Adopting what Blumberg (1984) suggests as the concept of stretching and reshaping patriarchal violence brings this gender ideology in line with gender inequality, which can diminish the strength of women's structural gains. In her study, hooks (2000) proposes the term 'patriarchal violence', rather than domestic violence, as a label for the type of abuse that happens in the home as the result of patriarchal structures, beliefs, and values based on power differentials.

Concepts such as patriarchal violence, cultural violence, and gender violence from theories that embrace feminist perspectives are used in the study. These concepts concern the political, social, cultural and other forms of gender violence and their social relations to patriarchy. These concepts guided the analysis of the findings and the details of these concepts are discussed in the empirical chapters. The study also highlights the legal norms in opposition to the socio-cultural norms of the practices under study, and adopts a human rights approach as embodied in the several international human rights conventions and regional treaties signed and ratified by the Tanzanian government. This empirical study details the real-life experiences of women who have undergone the rituals of FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu and widow cleansing practices. While patriarchy has mainly been used as an analytic framework to understand women's subordination by men, and the infliction of violence by men on women, this study is unique in that it examines patriarchy in relation to women-to-women violence.

Aim and objectives of the study

The overall aim of this undertaking was to explore women-to-women cultural violence perpetuated over time in the patriarchal communities in Tanzania. The following questions guided the investigation into finding meaning and understanding of the research phenomena.

1) How has the phenomenon of "women-to-women" violence persisted over time?
2) What are the mechanisms through which women establish power and domination over other women?
3) What is the driving force feeding the continual women-to-women violence?

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Understand the mechanisms or driving forces that have maintained the cultural practices of FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage and the widow cleansing ritual over the years.
- Explain how and why these three practices, which are considered 'unacceptable cultural' and 'traditional practices' by scholars and Tanzania human rights activists, persist in the Lake Zone communities, even in light of increased penetration of modern education in Tanzania.
- Unearth the cultural meanings that women as "torchbearers" of these customary rites attach to these practices.

Profile of the study targeted areas

The study was conducted in three specific targeted areas in the Mara and Mwanza regions around the Lake Zone, which are located in the northwestern part of Tanzania on the shores of Lake Victoria. In the Mara region, the research was conducted in two Wards namely, Bwirege and Kyanyari Wards in the Musoma Rural District. In the Mwanza region, the research was conducted in three Districts namely: Ukerewe District (an island), Nyamagana and Ilemela Districts.

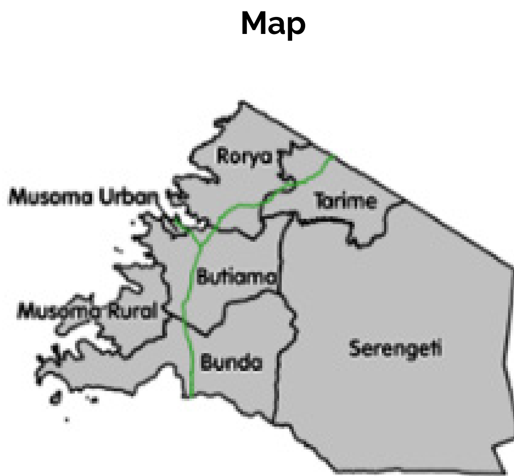
About 80% of the Tanzanian population live in rural areas, with most people living in villages. For administrative purposes, these areas are grouped together as "wards" with a population of between 8,000–12,000 people. In Tanzania, rural communities are spread out in places, and the different villages that make up a "ward" can be many hours walk from each other. A number of wards, on average four or five, will form a division with a population of between 40,000–60,000 people. Four or five divisions form a district, whilst four or five districts make up a region.

Map 1: The districts and population of Mare and Mwanza Regions of Tanzania since the last census in 2012

Administratively, Mara region is divided into seven districts as indicated below.

Districts of Mara Region

Map



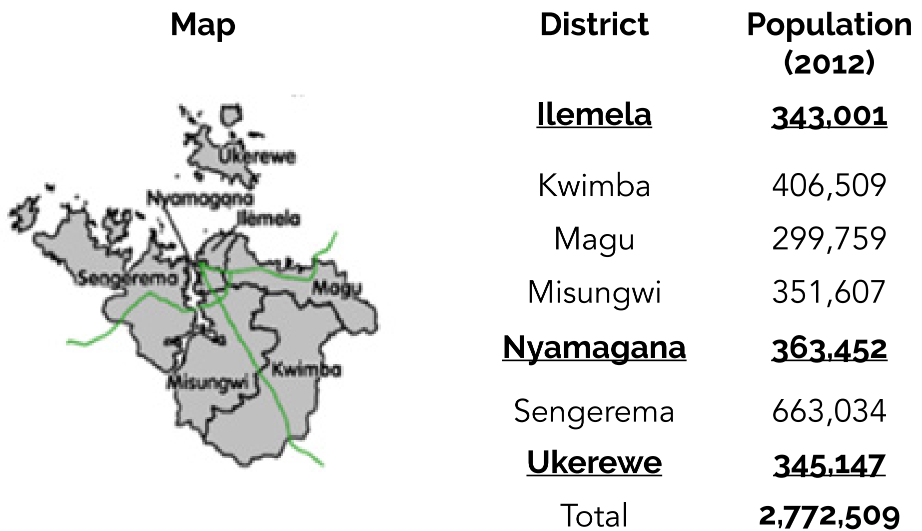
The districts of Mara region (Wikipedia)

District	Population (2012)
Bunda	335,061
Butiama	241,732
Musoma Rural	**178,356**
Musoma Urban	134,327
Rorya	265,241
Serengeti	249,420
Tarime	339,693
Total	**1,743,830**

The underlined is the research district and population. Administratively, the districts are divided into 27 wards. The study was conducted in two of these wards namely: Bwirege and Kyanyari wards.

Administratively, Mwanza region is divided into seven districts as indicated below.

Districts of Mwanza Region



Map	District	Population (2012)
	Ilemela	**343,001**
	Kwimba	406,509
	Magu	299,759
	Misungwi	351,607
	Nyamagana	**363,452**
	Sengerema	663,034
	Ukerewe	**345,147**
	Total	**2,772,509**

Districts in Mwanza Region (Wikipedia)

The three underlined districts and population are the research-conducted areas. Nyamagana and Ilemela districts make up the population of Mwanza city, whiles Ukerewe District is an island within the region.

Collaboration with local NGO, Kivulini

In order to reach women and girls who had undergone the three studied cultural practices and have experienced the rituals, I collaborated with Kivulini Women's Rights Organisation, a registered nongovernmental organisation (NGO) established in 1999 to prevent violence against women and girls. Kivulini operates in the research locations in collaboration with other rights organisations such as the Action Based Community Foundation/Organisations (ABC F/CBOs) and "*Kikundi Cha Mila na Desturi Ukerewe*" meaning "Organisation for Customs and Traditional Norms in Ukerewe". This NGO is popularly known by its abbreviation as KIMIDEU, which is used throughout the study. Their aim is "*Kuboresha, Mienendo na Desturi kwa Ustawi*" meaning "Improving on Norms and Customs for the Betterment of the Society."

Kivulini has extensive roots within the communities to build momentum for the prevention of violence against women and girls with emphasis on domestic violence in the Lake Victoria Regions (Mwanza, Kagera, Mara and Shinyanga) and

Singida. The organisation mobilizes communities to take action against domestic violence, and strengthens the capacities of local government by advocating and influencing key local and national policies that empower and benefit women and girls. Their lobbying includes a network of over hundred community-based groups and about three hundred community volunteers who conduct community awareness and education sessions on domestic violence. Community volunteers engage their constituents to challenge traditional norms and customs that encourage gender-based violence. They also support and counsel victims of violence, and when necessary, make referrals to hospitals, courts, and ward tribunals.

Gaining entry into sensitive research fields can be very challenging, and my research assistant and I had to develop appropriate entry strategies. Having obtained research permission to conduct the research from the University of Tampere in Finland and the Regional Commissioner in Mwansa, I visited Kivulini Women's Rights Centre to discuss the research aims and objectives as well as methodology with the organisational team involved in legal aid and counseling. It was agreed that apart from conducting interviews and group discussions in the Ilemela and Nyamagana districts (the two districts that make up the Mwanza city population), similar interviews and group discussions could be conducted in two rural areas within the lake zone region along the shores of Lake Victoria.

The fieldwork took six months from December 2011 to end of May 2012. Mama Anna Chambo, the programme officer for capacity building, who was the legal facilitator as well as a counselor at Kivulini, agreed to be the research assistant. In order to devote her time fully to assist in the fieldwork, Mama Anna took twenty-one working days leave from Kivulini office. Mama Anna had trained the NGO staff on legal matters in previous years in the research-targeted area and so was familiar with people in the area.

Mama Anna was a 73-year-old at the time of the study, a Tanzanian from the Sukuma ethnic group. As a trained primary school teacher, she had the opportunity to study physical education in Great Britain in the late 1960s. She returned to Tanzania and taught in many teacher training colleges as a tutor trainer before her appointment to work at the Ministry of Education. She retired from the Ministry of Education in 1992 and joined the Kivulini Rights Organisation in 1997. She had a good grasp of Kiswahili, the official language of Tanzania, the local dialects of the research areas as well as the English language, which was a great help, as she always explained informants' stories or ideas that I did not fully understand. I knew Mama Anna and worked with her as a volunteer since 2005 at the legal aid and counseling Centre at Kivulini and so had a cordial relationship with her.

Mama Anna helped me to contact NGO leaders in both Musoma and Ukerewe in order to discuss and explain the research project. She also made the necessary arrangements by sending copies of the research permit to the clan elders and the NGO leaders in the districts and wards under study.

Recruitment of participants

The study involved various categories of participants in order to solicit different understandings and experiences regarding the practices of FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu Marriage and Widow Cleansing Rituals. The categories included married and unmarried males and females; local clan Kuria and Kerewe leaders; practitioners of female genital cutting; healthcare providers; teachers; village and ward leaders; governments officials, NGO leaders and religious representatives. Practitioners of female genital cutting and local leaders were included for obtaining information regarding meanings attached to the practices (Africanus, 2012).

As suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), the leaders of NGO collaborators were informed about the funder of the research, who the research team was, and how the data will be used. They were told that I wanted to understand the customary practices among the Kuria and the Kerewe ethnic groups of woman-to-woman marriage (Nyumba Ntobhu marriage), female genital cutting, and widow cleansing rituals. The NGO organizers were briefed that I was looking to interview females who had experienced the rituals/procedures, and to find out whether there were any forms or types of cultural violation in their context. This process, which took place through phone calls, justified my presence and helped to address questions that community leaders and NGO collaborators had (Starace, 2009). It also enabled me to clarify the questions needed for better understanding during the interviews and group discussions.

Within a week, the NGO organizers at the research targeted areas of Musoma and Ukerewe Island sent lists of women and girls who experienced different forms of abuses by e-mail. As the focus on the study was on cultural practices, a number of cases which were suitable and appropriate for the research project was selected for the interviews from the lists sent. The leaders were asked to find out whether those selected would be willing to be interviewed to share their stories.

Once we had an idea of the number of women and girls to be interviewed and a copy of the research permit was accepted in the research areas, the NGO leaders contacted those selected from different villages through phone. NGO staff members were sent to the villages to contact those women who had no cell phones.

The NGO leaders phoned to suggest the interviews and group discussions take place in the wards more central to the villages of the participants. I agreed with the NGO leaders that little stipends would be given to the research participants to compensate their transport and lunch. This was necessary because the participants had to travel early and most of them from long distances to the central place of the interviews and group discussions.

The recruitment of participants took a different format in Mwanza city. We met the ward tribunal leaders at Kivulini Centre. The research questions, objectives

and methods were explained and discussed. The leaders informed us that there were women and girls who considered themselves victims of cultural violence by women perpetrators. They were to contact those women and girls receiving counseling to find out whether they were willing to be interviewed and share their experiences in groups. Again, we agreed on a little stipend that would cover their transport and lunch for each day. The interviews and group discussions were conducted in a central place, convenient for the participants.

When all was set, Mama Anna Chambo and I drove to Musoma in Ryamisanga village where we remained for two weeks and conducted the interviews and group discussions in Bwiregi and Kyanyari wards. After the two weeks in Musoma we drove back to Mwanza and took the ferry to Ukerewe Island. We were met by the leader of the KIMIDEU NGO who had completed all the preparations for the interviews and group discussions to be conducted in different villages and wards for the two weeks. The careful attention to detail with regard to community entry strategies and the recruitment of the participants, and the use of sensitive interviewing, as discussed below, contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Approach And Methodology

Study method

Choosing the appropriate methodology for a study is said to be one of the most important decisions that a researcher makes. This study is designed based on the type of limitations that have been identified by research to challenge oppressive cultural and traditional beliefs that perpetuate gender inequality, to help the individuals, groups, and communities to begin to question their realities through a process of conscientisation, as well as to challenge exploitative and oppressive power structures and address concerns about power and control.

A qualitative method was chosen because the nature of the research required flexibility in order to learn from every step of the study to focus more on addressing the research questions as insights would be gained in the process (Africanus, 2012: 55). Researching cultural meaning is sensitive as it touches the lives of powerful, valuable and vulnerable members of the society (Atkinson et al., 2008). For this reason, the study was guided by the qualitative approach and the main strategy of data collection was in-depth interviews. Interviews tend to be more formal than friendly conversations because the interviews have a definite purpose and direction (Fox et al., 2007). While most research highlights that interviews are used to get to know the participants better, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006: 314) added that "the purpose of that knowing varies according to the research questions and the disciplinary perspective of the researcher." A better knowledge of participants in a research project makes it easier for "the researcher to collect empirical materials bearing on the questions" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 18). This served as the guideline in conducting the interviews as the study was designed to understand the root causes of women-to-women violence that exist in the three cultural practices under investigation.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) hold that a single method can never adequately shed light on a phenomenon. They suggest that using multiple methods can help facilitate deeper understanding, and checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods. In this study, the use of qualitative research as the methodological framework for investigating gendered violence among the Kuria and Kerewe ethnic groups introduced "many distinct formats of qualitative interviews that greatly expanded the process of data collection and the depth of information being gathered in the study" (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 314). Ellsberg and Heise (2005, 73) highlight the value of qualitative research, asserting that, "Qualitative research methods are extremely useful to researchers and advocates interested in the study of violence as they are helpful for assessing community needs, designing prevention campaigns, planning and evaluating interventions, and engaging community actors via participatory research."

The study employed a multi-methodological approach, a technique known as triangulation. According to Flick (2004) and Ritchie (2003) triangulation refers to the use of more than one qualitative method to look at the same issue. In this study the triangulation involved using multiple data sources to produce understanding. Triangulation in the study included sample and data triangulation in that the same phenomena was studied through inclusion of women who had undergone the cultural procedures, key informants in the community and elderly women who undertook the procedures, and data were collected via in-depth interviews and group discussions. This approach comprised the capturing of unstructured data through audio recording and note taking during the interviews. The purpose and value of triangulation varies based on researchers' interpretive frameworks (Natow, 2020). As suggested by Natow (2020) and Flick (2004), the use of triangulation in conducting interviews helped to ensure that the research findings are trustworthy, meeting the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. According to Natow (2020) and Denzin (1978) qualitative researchers generally use this triangulation to ensure that an account is rich, robust, comprehensive, and well developed.

The use of qualitative interviews was not only to obtain information and describe the typical situations of the women who claim to be victims. As suggested by Atkinson, Foster-Powell, and Brand-Miller (2008) it is to consider the fact that in the analysis of qualitative data, the question always concerns the concepts of meaning and sense making. Even though the study was influenced by ethnographic thinking, the main source of data remained the interviews, which were based on a holistic form of interviewing utilizing respectful, on-going relationships with participants that allowed for an all-embracing and meaningful understanding of their world (Pink, 2009; Spradley, 1979). The study had crucial elements of ethnography, based on my and Mama Anna Chambo's foreknowledge of the Kuria and Kerewe cultures, and the observations made while in the field.

In the study, the participants represented the ethnic groups of their societies

where the research was conducted. Therefore, the interviews are interpreted as authentic expressions of the participants, although they may have been impacted by situational factors (Alasuutari, 1995). As Jacobsson, Göransson, and Wästerfors (2013) highlighted in their study, during fieldwork, the researcher begins exploring the individual micro-level experiences, and then working 'up' the participants' experiences to link with socio-cultural macro-level characteristics.

Data collection methods

Data collection methods in qualitative research approach are exploratory, and they are usually more focused on gaining insights and understanding the underlying reasons by digging deeper (Durmic, 2020). These methods are acknowledged to be more appropriate for investigations seeking to explore sensitive issues through the lived experiences of those centrally involved (Africanus, 2012, 59). According to Ellsberg and Heise (2005: 450) researchers employ a wide range of techniques when collecting data. These researchers suggest the use of techniques that may include personal interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), observations, open-ended questions, and storytelling, which were appropriate in this study. Interviews used in this qualitative study were unstructured in accordance with the kind of content the study sought to elicit (Roulson, 2006). The interviews explored the meaning of the phenomena under study. This entailed particular approaches to data analysis and their representation (ibid). Each interview technique employed was used for different purposes, which corresponds with different theoretical assumptions about how/what I learnt about the participants' social world.

The use of unstructured interviews in a study as suggested by Silverman (2006) highlights the fact that I have the research topic in mind and from time to time steer the conversation towards the research questions. The talks generated from the unstructured interviews resemble conversation, and the participants are freer to ask questions during the interview (Pink, 2009; Silverman, 2006). As explained by Malinowski (1961), the most widely used unstructured interview originates from the ethnographic tradition of anthropology.

Seventeen in-depth interviews with individual women were conducted in the research-targeted area. Fourteen of these women considered themselves to be victims and survivors of cultural violence while three were perpetuators of the same cultural violence. The fourteen participants were undergoing counseling at Kivulini, and other NGO centers, such as KIMIDEU, ABCF, and CBO working within the research area.

Fifteen group interviews and focus group discussions that consisted of NGO leaders, community actors, comprised of male and female clan and village elders, who were influential and powerful in their communities were also conducted in the entire research area. Two sets of these groups consisted of widows who opted to be interviewed in groups to share their stories and experiences. These participants were perceived as the key informants of the studied cultural practices whose input assisted to collect in-depth qualitative information.

In total, there were 122 participants in both the individual and group interviews aged between 16 – 90 years old as illustrated in the **Table 1.1** below

Table 1.1 The number of interviews and group interviews conducted with the age of participants in the different districts of the research area.

NGOs and Research targeted Districts	Individual Interviews	Focus group discussions	Group interviews	Total participants	Age range (years)
ABCF and CBO (Musoma Rural District)	12 (9 victims, 3 perpetuators)	2 groups, 18 members (9 each) **(8 male and 10 female)**	3 groups, 11 members (3, 4, 4) **(6 male and 5 female)**	41	16 - 90
KIMIDEU (Ukerewe District)	2 (2 victims)	2 groups, 21 members (10, 11) **(11 male and 10 female)**	3 groups, 16 members (4, 6, 6) **(3 male and 13 female)**	39	23 - 73
KIVULINI (Ilemela and Nyamagana Districts)	3 (3 victims)	2 groups, 25 members (11, 14) **(14 male and 11 female)**	3 groups, 14 members (5, 5, 4) **(6 male and 8 female)**	42	18 - 65

Individual in-depth Interviews

At the beginning of each interview, Mama Anna Chambo and I introduced ourselves to the participants and directed their interaction by introducing the research topic. Participants were asked for their permission to use the recording device. In an informal and relaxed way, the participants were asked to introduce themselves giving their names, age, and occupation. Using an open-ended form of interview approach, each participant was asked to tell when she first came across the kind of violence she had experienced and was encouraged to recall and retell her story. This process is similar to what Abdi (2012: 117) described as "… 'life history' approach, through which participants could retell their stories in somewhat linear chronological order from the perspective of memories, experiences, and opinions through to the present day. The use of open-ended questions during the individual interviews provided broad parameters within which the participants formulated answers in their own words concerning the specified topics designed to understand the studied cultural practices (Legard et al., 2003). As suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) this form of storytelling technique generates detailed descriptions to achieve the objectives of the study. For further descriptions and understanding of the participants' experiences, follow up questions were asked using their own words to generate the questions.

Group interviews and Focus group interviews

As indicated in the table on page 21, this research involved fifteen group interviews and focus group interviews in the selected areas of study. Nine group interviews consisted of 15 male and 26 female participants, aged between 16 to 90 years old, who shared similar characteristics or experiences related to the research topic. Six focus group interviews consisted of 33 male and 31 female participants, aged between 21 to 72 years old, who had different perspectives or opinions on the research topic. Group interviews are a type of qualitative research method that aims to explore the individual views and feelings of each participant, as well as to compare and contrast their responses (Katz-Buonincontro, 2022). I chose group interviews because I wanted to understand how the widows (participants) made sense of their own situations, and how they and the community actors perceived a certain phenomenon of the practices in the study. In the group interviews, Mama Anna and I acted as interviewers, facilitated the discussion with a set of predetermined questions, probing for more details, and clarifying any ambiguities.

The focus group interviews on the other hand, are a specific form of group interviews, where the emphasis is on the interaction and discussion among the participants, rather than based on the questions asked the interviewees (Katz-Buonincontro, 2022; Kitzinger, 1995). My aim of focus group interviews was to generate insights and ideas from the collective views and in this study, the experiences of the clan elders, and NGOs as well as to observe how they influence and persuade each other. The NGO leaders in the research areas assisted in the formation of the focus groups consisting of community actors[4]. There were 10 to 14 members in each of the groups formed. In focus group discussion, Mama Anna and I initiated the discussions with a broad topic or questions, which encouraged the participants to talk to each other. We intervene only when necessary to keep the conversation on track. According to Katz-Buonincontro (2022), group interviews are more structured and directed by the researcher, while focus group interviews are more flexible and driven by the participants.

In conducting the group interviews and focus interviews, the same introductory format was used as with the individual interviews. Mama Anna and I explained the reasons for organizing the group interviews, and asked their permission to record the discussion. In their small groups, each member in the group gave a short introduction of who they were and the post or position they held in their communities. There was a gynecologist in the focus group discussion on the Ukerewe Island, and in Musoma and Mwanza groups, there were two nurse midwives in the discussion groups. The opinion of the health personnel in each of the groups was crucial because they treat or deal with women who had undergone FGC and widow cleansing ritual practices. Hence, I wished to know the views of the health providers and their cultural understandings of the traditional practices.

4 In this study community actors included health care providers, local government officials and staff, ward tribunal members, community teachers, members of civil society organisations and religious representatives.

Participants sat in a circle during the group discussions to see each other and hear them clearly when sharing. Using an unstructured open-ended questioning format, the group participants were asked to describe and explain their understanding of the cultural practices under study. Then the three research questions were put to them for discussion. Each one of the participants offered ideas about the questions. During the discussions, Mama Anna and I interrupted, questioned, and gave permission to the participants to continue. On many occasions, further questions were asked using their own words to question them for clearer understanding of how they viewed the cultural practices. Each member in the group was encouraged to share and give his or her opinion. However, there were a few occasions that I relied on Mama Anna's interpretation to fully understand the participants' points of view. The group interviews and discussions were conducted using a language sensitive format in the Kiswahili language (the official language in Tanzania), which was familiar to the participants and we the facilitators.

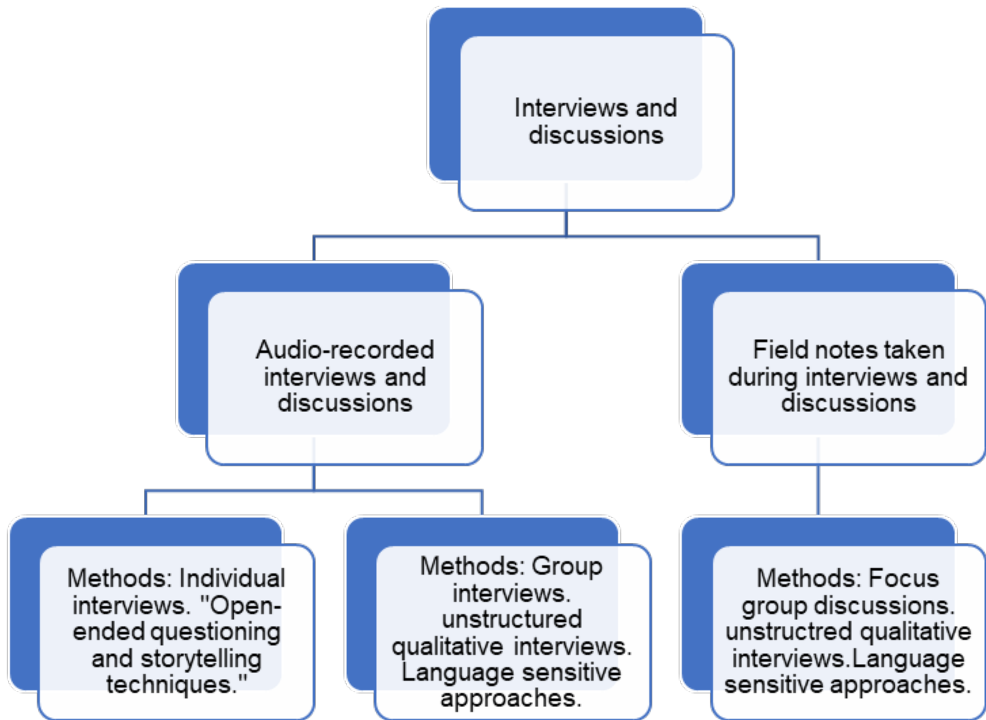
All of the fifteen focus group interviews took place in safe and comfortable offices of the ward executive officers in the different communities of the research areas. The group interviews were unstructured and audio recorded. The informants were asked personal questions such as: "Can you describe how FGC ritual is performed?" Alternatively: "Why is FGC ritual important in your society?" "Can you explain why Nyumba Ntobhu is practiced in the Kuria communities?" The same kind of questioning format was used to interview the key informants and widows on the cleansing rituals. Each of these widows was asked the question for example: "Can you describe the cleansing ritual you underwent, and what does it mean to you?" "Can you describe how the widow cleansing ritual is performed in your community?" Framing these kinds of questions enabled the participants to talk about patterns of behaviours in a meaningful cultural setting.

Using the language sensitive approach, we asked clan leaders to describe the cultural practices in question and their role in society. For example, we asked how they would refer to 'Ukeketa[5]' and if that was the common term. This questioning method was important for both informants and facilitators, as it encouraged them to use their cultural terms and phrases, and showed that we had learned their dialect and respected their culture. With this questioning, and their answers, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argue that participants address the meanings, implications, and values embedded in their language. This approach was a social encounter where participants collaborated in producing feelings from their past (Legard et al., 2003). The data from the interviews were natural as participants narrated their stories from their own situation, independent of the literature (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) and our prior knowledge of the practices.

In all of the four targeted districts, the narratives of the participants, exemplified the meaning that the Kuria and Ukerewe communities make of the cultural practices in the study. Figure 1.1 illustrates the techniques used to collect the empirical data while Figure 1.2. explains the analytical process of the study.

5 In Ukeketa, a Kiswahili word meaning the 'the cutting' of female genital.

Figure 1. 1 **illustration of the format of interviews and focus groups, and the techniques used to collect the empirical data.**



Transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews and group discussions was a difficult task. We used Kiswahili, the local language, to conduct all the interviews and group discussions. Then, we translated and transcribed the tape-recorded information into English. Mama Anna and I also took field notes in both Kiswahili and English, even though we recorded the interviews. At the end of each day, we spent at least three hours listening to the recordings and comparing notes. We wrote the data as an English text. If our notes differed and we could not explain a certain story or narration, we contacted the informant or participant for clarification. We prepared an attendance sheet for each village and ward where we conducted the interviews and discussions. Those who had mobile phones provided their phone numbers when they signed in. This was very helpful as we could call them later for further explanation if necessary.

Thematic Analysis

I used thematic analysis, a foundational method for qualitative research (Clarke and Braun, 2013), to describe and interpret the data collected from the women and the clan elders in Kuria and Ukerewe communities. I also discussed the difficulties I encountered in the process. Thematic analysis is an approach that aims to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) that emerge from the empirical data and relate them to the research topic and questions (Coffey and Atkinson,

1996; Clarke and Braun, 2013). I conducted thematic analysis alongside data collection, as suggested by Africanus (2012), to allow questions to be refined and new avenues of inquiry to develop. Thematic analysis was an important tool to analyze the data gathered from the interviews and group discussions. In the next section, I will describe and discuss the coding process, and the theoretical framework in the study.

Coding Process

The coding process is a key step in thematic analysis, as it helps to organize and interpret the text data into meaningful categories or themes (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). I used qualitative content analysis, a method that systematically analyzes the text within its context of communication, following thematic and analytic rules and a step-by-step model (Mayring, 2000). I applied three different approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. These approaches differ in how they create and use categories and codes, and how they relate them to the research questions and objectives. I also looked for relationships among the categories and codes to understand the patterns and meanings that emerged from the data (Patton, 2002).

I used an inductive approach to analyze the empirical data and understand the participants' narratives. I looked for variations and similarities in how they described the cultural practices under study, and how they expressed their hopes, expectations, advantages, disadvantages and violations. I sorted out these variations and similarities into themes and concepts that reflected the participants' perspectives and experiences. I coded the themes and concepts into categories, following the initial step of data analysis suggested by Merriam (1998). I was immersed in the raw data and the themes that emerged from it. The purpose of this approach was to validate or extend a conceptual framework (Merriam, 1998). Data analysis was a messy and complex process, involving both description and interpretation, and both inductive and deductive reasoning.

I revisited and listened to the recorded interviews several times. At first, I was only interested in the harm that the women experienced through the rituals of the practices. However, as I collected and analyzed the data, I realized that I could not understand the women's stories without considering the clan elders' views of the cultural practices. I triangulated the different data sources to gain a deeper understanding of the traditional practices and their complexities. For example, some key informants defended and justified the practices, which made me wonder: Do the women really reflect on the implications of the practices? Do the women and girls have the time and space to address the harmfulness of the practices? These questions lingered in my mind and challenged me throughout the research process.

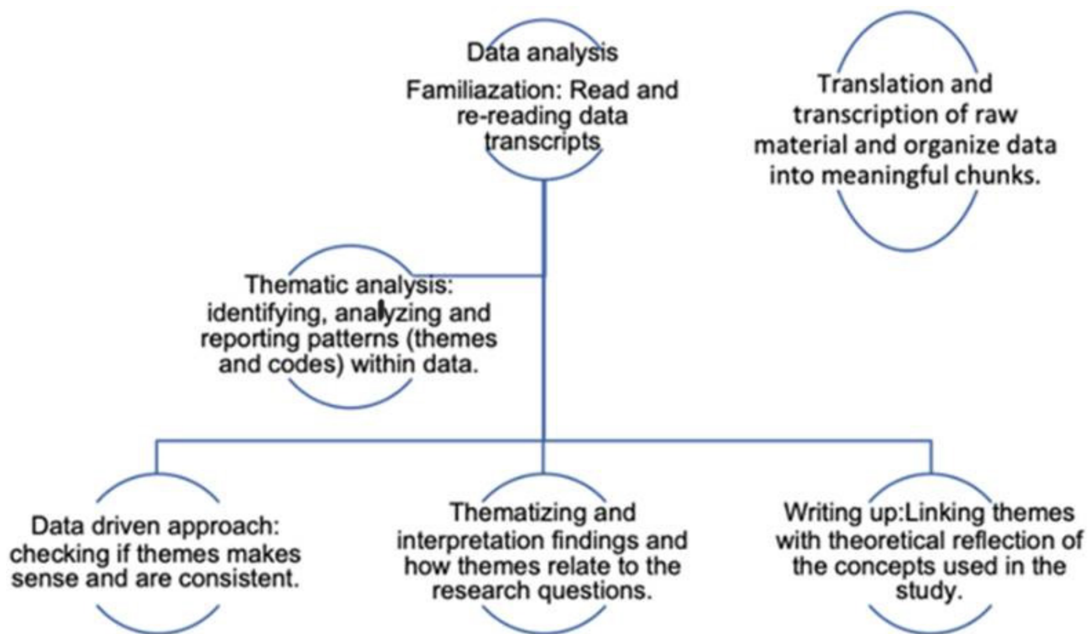
I struggled to organize the data meaningfully and make sense of it. The women had different opinions about the practices: some considered themselves as victims, while others saw them as virtues and expressions of African culture. Some

also argued that retaining the culture was a way of resisting colonialism. I was in a dilemma about how to frame the practices as harmful, especially in light of the literature that claimed that such framing was a manifestation of Eurocentric worldviews and human rights constructions.

As I began the analysis, I realized that I needed more understanding of the specific cultural meanings and implications of the practices in the Kuria and Ukerewe context. I contacted some key informants by phone to get more explanations and clarifications. These challenges were due to the complexity of the research topic and the themes that emerged from the data. The analysis was more difficult than the fieldwork, the interviews, and the writing. The most challenging aspects of the analysis were to interpret the interviewees' stories and to make sense of their experiences of the practices. I found that the study topic was very complex, involving not only traditional practices and rituals, but also various cultural discourses and socio-economic factors that affected the communities' social life. I revisited the data several times to identify and understand these issues.

Below is the diagram I used to illustrate the six steps of thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke and Braun (2013).

Figure 1. 2 An illustration of the analytical process of the study



Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the concepts drawn from the models of human rights, gender equality, and cultural relativism. These models provide different perspectives on the issues of cultural practices and their implications for women and girls. Human rights model emphasizes the universal values and norms that protect the dignity and freedom of all human beings, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Gender equality model focuses on the equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres of life, including education, health, work, and decision-making. Cultural relativism model acknowledges the diversity and complexity of cultures and their values, beliefs, and traditions. It also challenges the ethnocentric views and judgments that may impose one culture's standards on another culture. These models are used to analyse the empirical data and to relate the facts obtained from the field to the research questions. The data-driven analysis is required to capture the participants' meaning of their narratives (Clarke and Braun, 2013). The analysis also involves using both inductive and deductive reasoning, moving back and forth between data and concepts, between description and interpretation (Merriam, 1998).

Ethical Issues

This study was approved and a license was issued for conducting research on violence against women in the entire East Africa communities by the Regional Commissioner of Mwanza region. According to Kanyamala, obtaining formal consent is of utmost importance as stipulated by the Tanzania National Health Research Forum, which states "under no circumstance should research be conducted without the consent of the prospective research subject or any authorized person on

his/her behalf" (Kanyamala, 2010: 55). Ellsberg and Heise (2005) emphasised the need to obtain consent from local district or national authorities concerned. Hence, before conducting the research, I examined ethical guidelines, as I was aware that my study was highly sensitive.

I followed the idea of Gilliland, Kunkel, Nguyen, Urada, and Christenson (2023), that the ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and respect for persons should be adhered to according to the ethical guidelines of the relevant institutions and authorities. My positionality as an African nun influenced how I related to the research participants, data, and evidence. It also shaped how I addressed issues of power, ethics, and reflexivity in the research process. Reflexivity helped me to acknowledge and address the potential limitations, challenges, and ethical dilemmas that might arise from my positionality.

One of the ethical issues that I faced in this study was how to respect the cultural and religious diversity of the participants, who were from different backgrounds and had different views on the harmful practices affecting women. As an African Christian nun, researching sensitive issues related to harmful cultural practices and using as a framework Eurocentrism and colonialism discourses, I had to balance my own standpoint as a researcher who wanted to collaborate with the NGOs in the communities, and the standpoints of the participants, who had their own moral beliefs and experiences. I also had to be sensitive to the emotional distress that some of the participants might have felt when recalling their traumatic experiences of female genital cutting, widow cleansing rites, and Nyumba Ntobhu. I hold that how the participants perceive the researcher is important, as this could affect their behaviour and responses (Holmes, 2020).

To address this ethical issue, Mama Anna and I obtained oral and written informed consent from the participants, and assured them of their right to withdraw at any time. We maintained confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, and used pseudonyms for all the names. We also and approached the participants through the village leaders and the NGO leaders, who had the trust and respect of the community. We created a non-judgmental atmosphere during the interviews, and listened to the participants with empathy and respect. Mama Anna and I provided counseling and support services to the participants who needed them, and followed up with them after the fieldwork.

Another ethical issue, Mama Anna and I faced in this study was how to deal with the resistance and defensiveness of some of the participants, who were critical of the interference of modern societal structures and the increased interest of the public in the harmful practices affecting women. I had to balance my own standpoint as both a nun and a researcher who wanted to understand and document the cultural meanings and implications of these practices, and the standpoint of the participants who had their own views and opinions on these practices. I also had to be aware of the power dynamics and the potential harm that my presence and questions might cause to the participants and their community.

Hence, Mama Anna and I obtained permission and consent from both the clan leaders and the elderly women, who were the gatekeepers and the custodians of the cultural practices. We respected the cultural considered taboo or offensive. We created a rapport and trust with the participants, and explained the purpose and significance of the study. We also acknowledged the participants' agency and autonomy, and allowed them to express their views and opinions without judgment or pressure. The women's experiences, the clan elders and the community actors' interpretation of the practices in their social and cultural context unfold in the next three empirical chapters respectively.

Gendered Violence and Human Rights: Overview of Cultural Practices and Policies in Tanzania

This chapter examines violence against women from a perspective of gender and power relations, which is the main focus of this book. Previous policies and research have often used the terms "gender-based violence" or "domestic violence" to describe men's use of violence against women, rather than "patriarchal violence" (Barker, 2016; hooks, 2013). This chapter argues that "patriarchal violence" is a more useful analytical framework, as it explores how violence is rooted in complex power dynamics - involving influential women in power and vulnerable women in specific groups within a dominant patriarchal culture.

Introduction

The concept of human rights is central to examining the traditional values of the cultural practices of female genital cutting, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and widow cleansing ritual in the Tanzanian and African context. International human rights laws as well as traditional African understandings of what human rights mean, are considered in this chapter. The progress the Tanzanian government has made in protecting women's rights and the limitations of the state legislation, and the social policies and practices, are discussed. Lastly, the chapter addresses social work as a fundamental human rights profession and the professional institution of social work in Tanzania.

Gendered Violence and Power in African Patriarchal Societies

An alternative way of conceptualizing gendered violence is presented in this chapter to understand violence against women by employing patriarchal violence as a core theoretical concept. McKee (2014) and Blumberg (1984) suggest that adopting the lens of patriarchal violence underscores the alignment of gender ideology with discourses and practices that favour gender inequality, which can diminish the strength of women's structural gains. It has been argued by many researchers that patriarchy violates women's human rights and creates an environment of fear that impedes their help seeking (Rasool, 2021; Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021; Opoku, 2017). Patriarchy in this study refers to the hegemonic belief in male rights, ownership, and control over women, where men hold socio-economic and political power, and are privileged both in the private and public domains (Rasool, 2021; Pendergast and McGregor, 2007). Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021: 288) argue that "patriarchy and stereotypical gender roles manifest differently in different contexts, with both women and men being involved in their disruption and/or continuity."

In light of the linkage between men, boys and violence, the facile conclusion is that there is something about how we socialize boys - or perhaps even genetically, some argue - that leads men and boys to be overrepresented in these statistics (Mahamuda, 2021; Barker, 2016). That linkage has led to use of the expression "male violence." In a similar light, describing women's use of violence against other women, as "female violence" ignores the power dimensions and dominance of some women over other women that are the root of such violence. Neither does it consider the occurrence of such violence within the overarching ideology and practices of patriarchy. In short, "female violence" is merely a descriptor, or an obvious adjective that describes the demographic characteristics of such violence without understanding the power dimensions. Hence, I argue that it is more appropriate to link violence to patriarchy and power rather than talking about "male violence/female violence". In recent years, policy advocacy and research has focused significantly on men's use of violence against women, and as said earlier, the terms gender-based violence or domestic violence have often been used rather than "patriarchal violence". Feminist scholar and activist Bell hooks has argued that domestic violence is a "softer" term as it inadvertently ignores power and male dominance inherent in such violence (hooks, 2013). Other feminist activists and researchers have similarly argued that bringing patriarchy back into discussions of violence is key to focusing on the power dimensions that drive it.

By patriarchy, I refer to the power structures that frame men's and women's lives that are rooted in power hierarchies related to gender (Opoku, 2017). Patriarchy refers to both the greater aggregate power that men have over women - social, political, economic - as well as power hierarchies between individual men and groups of men (Moore, 2020; Barker, 2016). Domestic violence, however, explores ways in which family members, in particular some female kin such as mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and older women in families contribute to the violence, accepted by males and culture at large, against wives and girl children.

These patterns vary from the typical scenario of the lone man battering the lone woman. Barker (2016) and hooks (2013) propose the term 'patriarchal violence', rather than domestic violence, to refer to the type of abuse that happens in the home as the result of patriarchal structures, beliefs, and values based on power differentials. This lens of patriarchy helps us see how violence is imbricated in complex power relations. hooks (2013) prefers the term 'patriarchal violence' because it maintains the connection between the violence that happens in the micro context of the home with macro level discourses on sexism and male domination. In Tanzania the prevalence of violence against women in the home is a manifestation of deeper cultural assumptions about women and their worth within relationships, families, and communities (Jodie, Kellier, and Maselle, 2009). The family, although regarded as the ideal basic unit of society where there is support, love, understanding and care, very often becomes the most oppressive unit including serious violence and femicide (Coulter, Anger and Kiwanga, 2014; Tanzania Gender Networking Program and Macro International, 2007).

There are certain beliefs, norms, and social institutions in Africa that justify cultural practices which perpetuate violence against women (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021; Morgan, Ayiasi, and Barman, 2018; Kaur, and Garg, 2008 cited in Centre for Health and Gender Equity, 1999). In the context of the violence that arises from cultural practices, studies highlight that the same acts that would be punished if directed at an employer, a neighbour, or an acquaintance often go unchallenged when a man (and most especially a woman) directs them at women, usually within the family. The same argument goes for an act of violation that is directed to less powerful and vulnerable women or girls in most of the developing countries in Africa (Otiso, 2013; Tuyizere, 2007; Ajayi-Soyinka, 2005). Of deep concern is the normalization and naturalization of gender discrimination and gender injustice by both women and men in patriarchal contexts (Sewpaul, 2013; Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021).

In East Africa, a typical example that illustrates the kinship hierarchies within the system of women and power is what Opoku (2017) quoting Aguilar (2007) describes as the most salient female relationships. Aguilar (2007: 108) gave an example that among sisters and between mother and daughter, mother and daughter-in-law, and co-wives, and grandmothers and granddaughters age hierarchy is ever present, but muted. The descriptions of these key relationships include both the norms of behaviour and the ways subordinates resist the power of the dominant (Moore, 2020). Women who feel victimized by traditional practices such as FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and the widow cleansing ritual and yearn to fight for their rights, may experience dilemmas and find themselves becoming co-opted into the power of the dominant. How can the oppressed become the oppressor? Another salient question is: How do girls and women in vulnerable positions know that their yearning for social justice and rights could transform their plight into a positive reality, especially as the violent acts are directed to them by elderly women known to them?

Women's Position in African Patriarchal Communities

Despite the prestigious status of the elderly African woman in patriarchal communities, feminists and scholars such as Adedoyin (2015), Tuyizere (2007) and White et al., (2002) have questioned and debated the African woman's role and position in relation to gender equality. These scholars, for instance, question whether the African woman could traditionally inherit property such as land in the same way as the adult male does.

According to Swantz (1986: 96) there is evidence that the African elderly woman could hold property under the traditional system, but she held it in trust for her children. Swantz stresses that an elderly woman could defend her own rights herself, and be recognised as one of the heirs together with her brothers. However, she claims that in case the woman gets a full share, she could be liable to lose some of it through the manipulation of the male members of the extended families.

Structurally and culturally, women in most African families are subjected to the authority of men, whereas men delegate the supervision, for example, of the younger daughter-in-law to older women. Older women's position as generational superiors can conflict with their loyalties to younger women in the gender hierarchy. However, when faced with patriarchy, African women develop their strategies within a set of concrete constraints, which Kandiyoti (1988) identify as patriarchal bargains. Different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct "rules of the game" and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression (ibid). Caldwell (1978) identifies this patriarchal belt as the more corporate male-headed entities that are prevalent in African societies. She analyses the breakdown and transformation of patriarchal bargains as their relationship to women's consciousness and struggles. Tuyizere (2007: 63) quoting Mugenyi (1991), describes two myths that exist in most African patriarchal cultures as the myth of female weakness and the myth of female strength. Mugenyi alleges that the same culture that assumes women to be weaker is threatened by and suspicious of women's potentials. The second myth that Mugenyi (1991) describes is that of female strength in the patriarchal community, which she claims is deep-rooted in African culture. If women obtain political power, the fear is that the world will fall into chaos and women themselves would suffer.

Discussing some complexities of power among the Abaluyia women of Kenya, Cattell (2007) explains why subordinate groups or classes accept and even actively participate in their own oppression as one interesting puzzle. She clarifies the way dominant classes or groups maintain their dominance without constant coercion. Building arguments on such claims, Tuyizere (2007) contends that culture always reminds African women that they are delicate and do not possess the courage and determination of men. Moreover, Swantz (1986) argues that there is a belief in African patriarchal communities that women are not generally considered capable of handling their own affairs. She explains that those women who are confident and successfully stand up for their own rights may bear a grudge against those who violate them and feel that they have suffered an injustice. According to White et al. (2002), a woman who feels endangered by clinging to her rights may easily give up her rights. Researching on Tanzanian women, both Vuorela (1987) and Swantz (1986) concluded that in the Tanzanian patriarchal setting, matters of inheritance are a constant point of conflict in which women get entangled. Tuyizere (2007), however, maintains that the African culture always reminds women not to set their goals too high. Cattell (2007) discusses that gender relations among the Ha (Hutu) women in colonial western Tanzania, and makes a case that Ha women acquiesced to their own domination because they understood their lack of options. Cattell suggests that women, realizing their powerlessness are reluctant to overly challenge those who are more powerful, that is, their fathers, brothers and husbands.

In trying to make meaning of African women's powerlessness in patriarchal communities, White et al (2002) suggest that unlike women in matrilineal

societies who attempt to resist, for example, unfavourable labour relations in the household, women in patrilineal societies have more restrictions in their patriarchal system. They often adhere, as far and long as they possibly can, to rules that result in the unfailing devaluation of their labour (White et al., 2002). The cyclical fluctuations of their power position, combined with status considerations, result in their active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination (Kandiyoti, 1988). Mushunje and Sewpaul (2021) highlight this dynamic among women in the subsistence agriculture sector in Zimbabwe.

However, although individual power tactics do little to alter the structurally unfavourable terms of the overall patriarchal script, some women become experts in maximizing their own life chances. With regards to the instruction of males, a greater emphasis is placed on gender difference (Rop, 2014: 46). Traditionally, patrilineal communities assign women a subordinate role, and the African woman in such a position feels unable to oppose community dictates, even when these affect them adversely (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021; Starace, 2009; Koso-Thomas, 1987).

The gender roles assigned to women in the community to be subservient to men and to other women encourage gender inequality and promote gender violence. Gender as an analytical variable refers to the social construction of male and female roles and relations (Adedoyin, 2015; White et al., 2002; Sewpaul, 2013). It entails, on the one hand, the male and female active roles in society and, on the other hand, ingrained social ideas about what men and women should do and how they ought to behave and interact in their communities (Ajayi-Soyinka, 2005; White et al., 2002). These assigned gender roles are understood as systematically linked to the organisation of social inequality (Sewpaul, 2013; Lauretis, 1989).

In Tanzania, cultural beliefs are instilled in the girl child before she reaches womanhood through agents of socialisation (Otiso, 2013; Vuorela, 1987). Socialization is used here to refer to pressures of reward, punishment, ignoring, and anticipating values that push the girl and the boy child towards acceptable responses (Tuyizere, 2007: 62). The major agents of socialization include the family, the community, peer groups, schools, religious institutions and the media, with social media increasingly becoming a powerful influence. Through the culture of socialization, girl children and women acquire characteristics that enable their integration into any given culture, which is a double-edged sword as it can contribute to their success and empowerment and/or their subordination and oppression. Adedoyin (2015) claims that African women are brainwashed by customs. She highlights that these African women believe that failure to abide by the culture will result in them being rejected by their societies. Mushunje and Sewpaul (2021) discuss how, despite heightened awareness, both the men and women in their study were too afraid to challenge and change gendered norms. They point out that such fears are understandable as there is ample empirical data, in diverse contexts (Hill and Lynch, 1983; Koening, 2018; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan and Nauts, 2012; Sirin, McCreary and Mahalik, 2004) that reflect that

both men and women experience backlashes from their communities when they deviate from prescriptive gender norms, with some researchers arguing that men tend to be on the greater receiving end of ridicule as they are branded as weak and lacking agency when they transcend stereotypical gendered expectations (Rudman et al, 2012). It is a common belief in African communities that women experience life differently from men due to socialization patterns that impact on the experience of gender differently (Ajayi-Soyinka, 2005). In the family, it is assumed that an African woman/wife has to remain submissive and subordinate to her male counterpart. It could be argued that the term 'submission', as used in this context, does not reflect the understanding of mutual submission. Rather a literal translation denotes a woman's subordination and inferiority before her male counterpart (Rop, 2014: 47). In societies that have been influenced by such misinterpretation, very few women find themselves holding key positions in political, societal, or religious realms (ibid).

The patriarchal and extended family ideology in Tanzania that give most senior men authority over everyone else is bound up in the incorporation and control of the family, and in the transition from kin-based to tributary modes of surplus control (Otiso, 2013; Hunnicutt, 2009). However, in this social system, the implications of the patrilineal-patrilocal complex for women are not only remarkably uniform, but also entail forms of control and subordination that cut across cultural and religious beliefs (Ajayi-Soyinka, 2005).

It is a common historical belief in Tanzania that culture has put a double burden on women because they are the carriers of tradition and are the center of the family. Yet, according to Otiso (2013) and Tuyizere (2007), during the periods of rapid social change, women's actions and appearance change less rapidly than that of men, or do not seem to change at all. Demands for family stability and unchanged roles for women may be tough, when the processes of change are perceived as coming from outside the group (Tuyizere, 2007, Akintan, 2002). These demands require a high level of female submission and acceptance of male control and, in turn, provide men with a sense of superiority over events that seem to be out of control (Rop, 2014; Mlama, 2002).

According to Otiso (2013), in Tanzania, female children are taught from a very early age that the man is the head of the household, and are advised by their mothers to remain in complete subjugation to their husbands. On the other hand, there are no such corresponding values imposed on male children, who grow up believing that they are free to behave as they please, and that women have to shape their behaviour to suit men's desires and whims (Ajayi et al., 2019; White et al., 2002). Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie put it simply in a speech she delivered in London on April 12th 2013, TEDxEuston[6] Telling the African story:

6 http://bit.ly/1FAg8hB http://www.tedxeuston.com

> The African girl children have been raised to think so little of themselves that they feel men and boys are superior in society. We police our girls but we do not police our boys. We praise girls for their virginity but we do not praise boys for their virginity. We teach girls shame, for example, how to sit with closed legs, and teach them to cover themselves well etc. We make them feel like 'bad girls' as if they are already guilty of something. They grow up to be women who have been silenced by societal taboos. Gender role in this sense is prescribed for the African woman to portray how the woman should be rather than recognising who she is. There is too much 'weight' on gender expectation in the African sense.

Adichie (2013) further explained that African women have been raised to think or feel guilty when they do not meet community demands. She stresses that women are often apologetic for their femaleness whereas the male folk do nothing about their gender, or actually relish their more privileged positions as discussed by Mushunje and Sewpaul (2021). Rop (2014) and Atere (2001) had similar thoughts, attesting that these African women are trained to endure different forms of pain, braveness and to refrain from certain "taboo" behaviours for the communal good of the society. Awe (2002), for example, holds that African women have been exposed from early childhood to strenuous work such as carrying heavy loads. Some of these criticisms uncover the explanatory strengths, and lay some foundations for a more fully developed theory of violence against women. Yet, elderly African women believe that such a traditional upbringing is not meant to violate the rights of the girl child (Opoku, 2017).

Adichie (2013) emphasize that socialisation exaggerates the difference between boys and girls, which becomes a self-fulfilling process. Tuyizere (2007) provides the example of women, over the years, being taught to see cooking as their role, yet today there are opportunities for women, more than there were 50 years ago, because of changes in policies on gender that expand the roles of women. It is equally important to recognize the role of men in the sphere of the home in relation to child-care, child-rearing and household responsibilities, and to challenge the notion that the domain of the kitchen belongs to women. Both Adichie (2013) and Tuyizere (2007) are of the opinion that the attitudes and mind-sets of what is believed to be valued as gendered roles must be questioned and debated. These debates and questions need to be brought into daily discourse in the private and public arenas. The question I would ask is who teaches girls and boys their gender roles?

The Traditional Roles of Elderly Women in a Patriarchal Society

Historically, in the African context there are distinct gender roles with women mostly being responsible for domestic chores such as cleaning, food production and preparation, taking care of smaller livestock, fetching water and firewood, caring for the sick, and rearing children (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021; Otiso,

2013; Tuyizere, 2007). Even in the area of trading, women are usually engaged in petty trades that are related to their domestic chores, including food vending. On the other hand, Tanzanian men play smaller domestic roles, though they are usually the main breadwinners and shelter providers. It is quite common in African communities that men generally own most of the country's productive assets (e.g., land, livestock, and tools) and make most of their family's important socio-economic decisions, and carry out chores like building, fishing and hunting. Generally, men are responsible for clearing, preparing and ploughing the farm and crop fields. Yet, in these areas, there is a gendered division of labour. Women do most of the milking and fish preparation, and marketing (Otiso, 2013; Akintunde, et al., 2002; Kisaakye, 2002). As mothers, women are the traditional guardians of family health and the teachers of sanitation, hygiene and disease prevention (Oderinde, 2002).

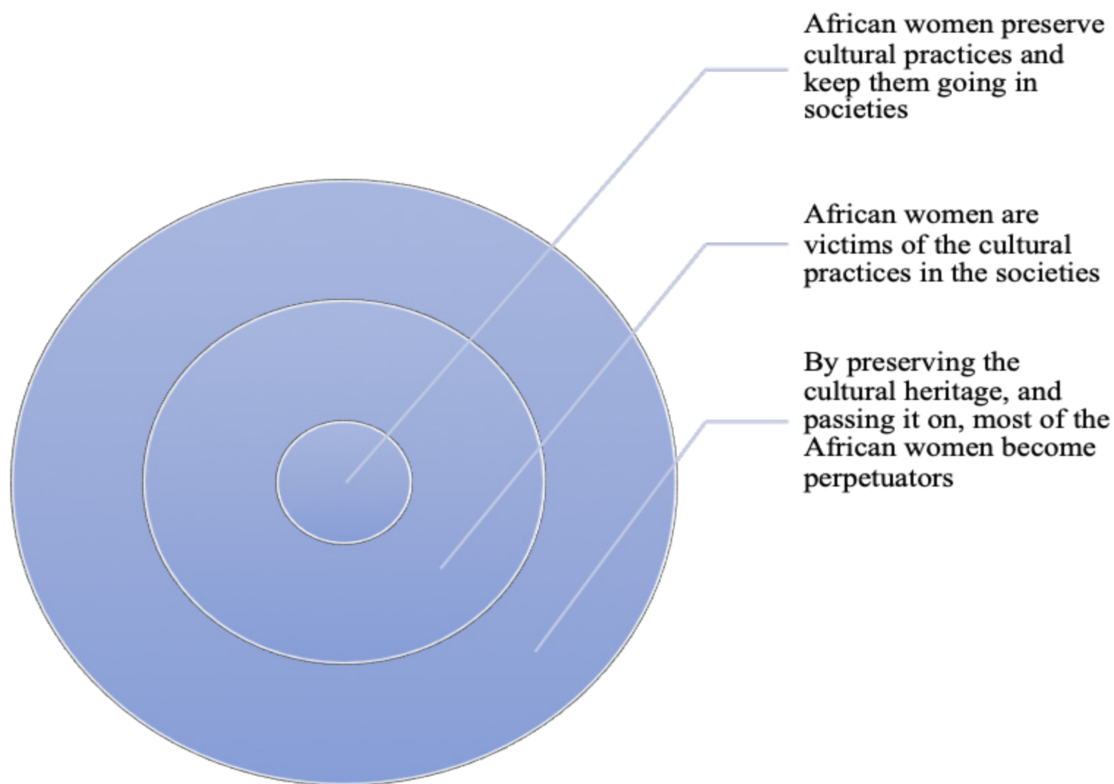
Gender inequality in the division of labour, access to and control over resources and income, circumstances and position in society, decision-making as well as exclusion from economic and political spheres are some of the factors to be taken into account for gender-sensitive social development programming (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021; Twikirize, 2014). According to Otiso (2013) Tanzanian women dominate the agriculture sector, providing up to 80 percent of the sector's labour as well as producing 60 percent of the country's food. Specifying the female role in Tanzania's agriculture sector, Otiso holds that women overwhelmingly play a central role in sowing, weeding, applying fertilizers, and pesticides and do most of the production. However, the existing social conditions do not allow the women to control their cash-crop produce. Observing the predicament of women, the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, once said: "Women in Tanzania and elsewhere in African toil on the land they do not own, to produce what they do not control and at the end of the marriage, through divorce or death, they can be sent away empty handed" (cited in Otiso, 2013: 159).

It has been repeatedly stressed in this study that while males are encouraged from childhood to think of themselves as invulnerable, females are both subtly and overly taught to think of themselves as entirely vulnerable and in need of the protection of a male figure (Rop, 2014; Akintunde and Labeodan, 2002). This kind of education has been so internalised that most women find it difficult to express their views publicly, especially before men (Rop, 2014; Nussbaum and Glover, 2007; White et al., 2002). Since moral formation takes place in a community, and people construct their social world, some researchers such as Nussbaum and Glover (2007) hold that African women have been taught and socialized into thinking of themselves as incapable of making any serious decisions. However, they are also the chief guardians for the upbringing of both the boy and the girl children, and are held responsible should the girl fail to withstand the restraints of societal demands (Cattell, 2007; White et al., 2002). A general normative system of customs and traditions in the African context reveal that the inculcation of traditional practices starts at birth and ends at death. Boke (2012) holds that to be maintained effectively, society needs rules and regulations that are instilled

within society and implemented on a day-to-day basis. She concluded by pointing out that traditional social control, embedded in its customary culture, relies on the socialisation of its members to establish social order. That is to say, every member of society has a social position or status that goes with a specific role. In her study, Tuyizere (2007) concluded that women keep these patriarchal structures intact. According to Bourdon (2013) and Koso-Thomas (1987) those women who champion practices adopted by their communities do not realise that some of the practices they promote are designed to subjugate them.

As predicted by Cattell (2007) and Kandiyoti (1988) a woman's life cycle in a patriarchal extended family, in several African societies, is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride from her mother-in-law is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law. The cyclical nature of women's power and control relations (Kandiyoti, 1988) in the household, and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by women themselves (Opoku, 2017; White et al., 2002). Dorkenoo (1995) holds that in many African societies, older women achieve status that more closely resembles that of men. She held that it is not surprising that elderly women are most often the initiators of infibulation ceremonies for their grand-daughters. Dorkenoo (1995) suggests that elderly women must be considered perpetrators of the harmful traditional cultural practices. Additionally, she emphases that women, having been denied wider societal power, will hang on to the little power they have and exercise it in the area over which they have most control. Other researchers such as Cattell, (2007); Tuyizere (2007); and Koso-Thomas, (1987) have suggested that very often in patriarchal systems, subordination to men is offset by the control older women attain over younger women. Based on this realisation, Atere (2001) and White et al. (2002), in their research, highlight that by trying to preserve the traditional belief, the African elderly woman could be seen as a perpetuator of offensive cultural practices as well as a victim of these practices as demonstrated in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2. 1. The visual cycle of the African elderly woman as a victim and a perpetuator in a patriarchal community setting.



The illustration above is the core of this research – it demonstrates 'the woman' in the dual position of the cultural practices in the study. Firstly, the woman is seen as a victim of the cultural practices as a young woman when she endures and sustains the rituals. Secondly, as she grows older, she preserves and promotes the rituals, with younger women as the victims. Thirdly, she becomes a perpetuator as she ensures the continuity of the traditional practices. For example, the elderly women are expected to build and inculcate the societal value systems into their children, thus preparing them to perpetuate the system as adults (Oderinde, 2002).

The relevance of gendered violence, for instance, as a strategy that elderly women use to further their social and economic positions in society is yet to be determined in the study. The anticipation is that the strategy and practice used by the African elderly women may exhibit power and control in the relationship and violate the rights of the younger woman in that relationship (Bond, 2005; White et al., 2002). Yet, Vuorela (1987) points out that in Tanzania, women are both united and divided in their concerns over the use of power by elderly and influential women. There is a belief that some elderly women in communities have hidden knowledge or 'social capital' that is used to communicate with the ancestral spirits, and that they can use this power over vulnerable widows, for

example, to perform the cleansing ritual (Otiso, 2013; Vuorela, 1987). Similar divisions and commonalities emerged in Tanzanian debates and research as in other African countries. Vuorela (1987) holds that Tanzanian research found that women were divided along class lines. She explains that within classes they are divided by ideological barriers and in their relationships to the male folks. With age and experience, females become more adept at resisting the domination of the males and asserting themselves (Oderinde, 2002). As highlighted earlier, Tuyizere (2007) and Dorkenoo (1995) hold the elderly women use power over less powerful women and girls in order to promote and maintain tradition and culture, to promote violence and to violate vulnerable women and girls' human rights.

According to Hearn (2005) and Stanko and Raymond (2003), the calling of violence into view and its naming are essential in the analysis of violence in society. The claim here is that violence is interrelated with social practices; its deployment and regulation are embedded in and constituted by social institutions, and are significant for the making and reproduction of regimes of inequality (Hearn, 2005). Violence is not merely an instrument or tool of already constituted power; it is itself constitutive of power (ibid). Stanko and Raymond (2003: 1) state that "debate about violence inevitably begin by deploring standard ways of measuring the impact of violence on different populations." They stressed that too much violence is hidden and that findings based on 'seen' violence will necessarily be distorted or biased. Stanko and Raymond asked: How can something so pervasive remain so elusive to research? Walker (1990) suggests that the process of making the experience of oppression in our homes visible to ourselves, and getting it accepted as a matter of public concern, involves defining it as an issue or problem in our terms. She continues to describe the conceptualization process as one occurring over time and dictated by activities and events. The study of tradition and culture in the African and the Tanzanian context may contribute to us assessing and understanding what constitutes cultural violence.

Tradition and Culture in African Patriarchal Societies

Culture does not exist in isolation (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021); it is a universal concept, yet its meaning depends on the context in which it is used (Akintan, 2002). Culture is interlinked with histories and socio-economic and political structures and can contribute to the development and flourishing of humanity or the curtailment of human freedoms (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). Tuyizere (2007: 45) quoting Nida (1983) defines cultures as learned behaviour, which is socially acquired, namely the material and non-material traits, which are passed from one generation to another. Culture has been variously defined through different disciplinary lenses. Bukuluki, Mukuye, Luwangula, et al. (2021: 237) explain that culture is a "set of guidelines (both explicit and implicit) that individuals inherent as members of a particular society, and that tell them how to view the world, how to experience it emotionally, how to behave in relation to other people, to supernatural forces or gods and to the natural environment." Generally, it

incorporates elements of arts, values, beliefs, symbols, customs, traditions, and practices of groups of persons, with emphasis on the intergenerational and contemporaneous transmission of these (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021: 2)

In this book, the concepts of culture and gender are understood as the processes by which persons learn gender roles that a culture defines as appropriate for them without questioning their underlying assumptions (Bourdon, 2013). Culture is both transmissible and cumulative and the traits are cultural in the sense that they are transmitted by society, not by genes (ibid). This makes the transmission of culture different from the biological heritage of human beings or animals. Bourdon's studies show that culture is a way of behaving, thinking, and reacting to situations. Hall (2004) believes that the notions of identity, race, and ethnicity, which are linked to culture, are dynamic and are a part of a never-ending production, thus pointing to the social construction of these social criteria. For Opoku (2017), culture and its values are not something to simply appreciate, or study, but a dominant position of social events and involvement, where power relations are both perpetuated and disrupted.

In most African rural communities, including the Kuria and the Kerewe ethnic groups of Tanzania, culture seems to be static for some women and girls in vulnerable positions (Opoku, 2017). When researching on some East African traditions and cultures, Seid-Mekiye and Kreitzer, (2021); Otiso (2013); Tuyizere (2007); and Bond (2005) explain that culture could be referred to as the accepted norms and practices. They give the example of women accepting certain societal norms, such as the practices of the FGC ritual and the payment of bride price, as well as the inheritance of widows which potentially turns them into commodities. In some West African communities there are similar subtle cultural practices. For instance, among the Anlo-Ewes in Ghana, girls are used to appease vengeful spirits in the form of sacrifice (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; Opoku, 2017). Another example is the practice of polygamy which exists within many African communities. Among the Msoga of Tanzania, the replacement of the dead married daughters with their younger sisters persists to date (Vuorela, 1987). In all of these practices, whether the act is promoted by the men or women, it is the men who benefit and remain the head of the family (Olaore et. el, 2021; Tuyizere 2007). Women, however, bear the negative impact of the practices in most cases (Opoku, 2017).

Dolphyne (1991: 1) argued that, "every human society has a body of beliefs that regulate the way people behave and relate to each other in society. Over the years, these beliefs and modes of behaviour are modified to suit the changing circumstances of the society concerned. African societies are no exception." However, in spite of the contact with Western civilization and the uneven influence that this civilization has had on African societies, there are traces of traditional rural society in many African cultures (Bolye, 2002; White et al., 2002, Dolphyne, 1991). African feminists and scholars such as Para-Mallam (2010) and Labeodan (2002) consider aspects of the African traditions and beliefs, which over the years have held or kept women in subjugation, and which make them feel generally

inferior to men and incapable of operating at the same level as men in society. According to Olaore et. el, (2021), in African societies a number of norms and beliefs are particularly powerful in the perpetuation of violence against women. These include a belief that the men are inherently superior to women (Rop, 2014; Chepyator-Thomson, 2005; Kisaakye, 2002), which creates and reinforces female oppression. In their study, Bouilly, Rillon and Cross (2016) point out that in many spheres of life, African women's needs and issues are neglected. They explained further that those women have suffered from the life-threatening impact of practices that continue under the guise of cultural and social conformity and religious beliefs.

Some historians believe that the history of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property (Kisaakye, 2002; 2009). Women in many ways have been hidden in history and culture and are still invisible in many areas in society. It remains a task of high priority in feminist learning to do research about women and to construct an understanding of gender relations and gender and power, which interrelate culturally, historically, and societally (Lundgren, 1995). For example, in the African context, the life cycle of a person is wrapped up in culture from birth to death (Akintan, 2002; Gyereke, 1998; Mbiti, 1994). In this view, the individual is defined only in reference to their community, not by any of their physical and psychological characteristics (Gyereke, 1998). The individual is born out of and into the African community and will always be part of the community (Opoku, 2017; Venter, 2004). Hence, the strong African philosophical saying: whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual (Mbiti, 1970). It is in this rootedness in an ongoing human community that the individual may come to be known as a person: through language and the social rules that bind them with other community members and the ancestors (Menkiti, 1984).

In African culture, the community always comes first (Venter, 2004). This understanding is summed up in the statement: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Ngomane, 2019). A reflection of Ubuntu's philosophical meaning: 'people are people through other people' implying that the African believes 'I am human because I belong to the human community and I view, respect and treat others accordingly.' Based on this ideology, most African communities, including the communities of Kuria and Kerewe ethnic groups in Tanzania, define women's roles religiously, culturally, and socially. As a result, the traditional practices do not give the ethnic groups under study much room to decide the course of their lives. Studies in this field have shown that among most African ethnic groups, culture and religion are not distinct from each other: they embrace all areas of the community. The discussion is around an understanding of culture as a people's way of life; the perception and manner of doing things that not only identify a people but also sets a particular framework and standard of behaviour and self-esteem for a decent socio-economic survival of a society (Ngomane, 2019).

It is a society's own vision of what constitutes an ideally decent socioeconomic structure for survival that frames core evolutionary drives and fosters life order to maintain stability and regularity in the community (ibid). These frames include food, shelter, safety, and procreation/reproduction (Otsio, 2013). The framework of the vision is also influenced by other factors, such as geographical location, climate, and innovations. Secondly, it is the system of behavioural patterns, ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes that enshrine the vision to keep the tradition in place (Ngomane, 2019; Mlama, 2002). These guidelines exist for members of the society who relate to each other and their environment. With the Kerewe and the Kuria of Tanzania, as with many other African societies, deserving to belong to society means abiding by systems that regulate social behaviour, including individual behaviour driven by self-interest rather than the common good (Otsio, 2013).

In African societies, as in some societies worldwide, these patterns of behaviours are cherished and do not leave the cultural moldings of their people to chance or change. According to Otiso (2013) specific institutions are strategically set up to inculcate, reinforce, and foster the accepted behaviours, beliefs, values, and attitudes. Some of these institutions include religion, art, communication, and education. From childhood, a person's perception of life in terms of what is good or bad, acceptable, desirable or undesirable is directly formed and influenced by the educational curricula of the community (28TooMany, 2015). The religion practiced, the images and messages of art and the communication skills are taught or passed on to young members of the community (Otiso, 2013).

Without incorporation into a particular community, individuals are considered mere risks to whom the description of 'person' does not fully apply (28TooMany, 2015; Menkiti, 1984). In order to ensure survival of an individual, a society expects conformity to its defined systems of behavioural patterns, beliefs, values, and attitudes. For example, women who undergo societal rituals often try to endure their pain and demonstrate courage so as to get rewards, honour and praise in their communities. Those whose behaviour adhere to what is expected by society are normally rewarded through material gains and status (28TooMany, 2015; Talle, 1993; Malinowski, 1961). The renegades are subjected to sanctions including reprimand, humiliation, exclusion, isolation, and other forms of punishment. Various regulatory bodies and legal systems are put in place to give effect to the sanctions (Malinowski, 1961). Ejizu (2002) holds that for most African groups, ostracizing an individual or group that has disobeyed the community is thought to be the most severe punishment that could be meted out to anybody. It feels like death for anyone so punished since such a person becomes an outcast/ outsider who is not allowed to share the life of the community. The punishment of being ostracized is so strong that every member of the community dreads it, and will do anything possible to avoid it (Opoku, 2016). As observed by African feminists and researchers such as Tuyizere (2007); Bond (2005) and Labeodan (2002) the immense power of the community in traditional African communities explains why African women have to undergo some of the harmful rituals at the

expense of their health. In addition, most African women in a senior or elder position pass these rituals on to the next generation, despite the physical and psychological harm that they engender (Olaore et al., 2021; White et al., 2002).

Eldén (2011) explains that when discussing violence committed in the name of honour it is often conceptualized as male violence against women. She continues to say that in order to be understood, concrete acts of violence must be located in the context in which they take place and be related to the control of and the discrimination against women. In her earlier study, Eldén (2011) underscores that, in a cultural context of honour, men's honour is related to what female relatives show to others: 'as their good or bad reputation'. Eldén (2011: 6) holds that the crucial meaning of women's reputation may be interpreted in light of a divided femininity as understood in the ancient tradition of Abraham that is rooted in the traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This statement is factual and underscores the reality for believers in the African tradition, where a woman's reputation is seen as appropriate when she observes the desired cultural norms and practices of society (28TooMany, 2015).

Reflecting on cultures of honour in the different contexts of Africa, Sirman (2011) raises questions as to whether FGC, as a rite of passage for a girl child from 'childhood' to 'womanhood', is a 'culture of honour.' She asks: does the girl child become a 'citizen' or a 'native' only after going through the rituals? Widowhood rites and cleansing rituals, which some women undergo after the death of their husbands, could also be seen as cultural honour (ibid). Traditionally, girls and women who are not able to undergo rituals and rites in societies are stigmatised and their reputation is tarnished (White et al., 2002). In some communities, with a distorted sense of family honour, girls or women who do not adhere to tradition would be killed (Bukuluki et al., 2021) "Unfortunately, such excessive punishment shows how a well-intended practice – what is this well intended practice? inherently embeds gender-based violence" (ibid. 247). White and colleagues (2002) explain that a woman's inability to withstand cultural and traditional demands is seen as a reason to punish her because she has stained the honour of the family, which could be seen as a direct threat to her female relatives. In other words, the violent acts directed towards a woman are interpreted as the woman's own fault (Eldén, 2011). Getting a bad reputation communicates a message to other women: If you behave in the same way – or if people say you do – you may meet the same fate (Eldén and Westerstrand, 2004). Thus, women are not only made responsible for their own behaviour, but for other women's behaviour as well (Eldén, 2011). The visibility of a woman's reputation is of vital importance and in most instances, women choose to remain loyal to their male folks.

Eldén (2011) maintains that in some cases when women have been exposed to violence by close male relatives, they interpret their experiences by using concepts which can be placed in a cultural context of honour. Fernandez (2009) argues that these factors, along with the economic dependence of daughters-in-law, set the context in which domestic violence, when it occurs, can include

not only the husband and wife but female kin as well. It could be argued that the focus on women as co-perpetrators of men's honour violence against women may, in many instances, be a blind alley (Opoku, 2016). Eldén (2011) concludes that this focus redirects the questions and actions, and removes men's individual responsibility for their violent acts, while making the gender-cultural context in which the violence takes place invisible. However, this does not mean that it is irrelevant to talk about women's activity in, and responsibility for, violence directed towards other women (Eldén, 2011). This raises issues about gendered violence that oppress and marginalize women in many Tanzanian communities, which could be tackled with professional approaches as discussed in this chapter.

The Legislation: Policies and Practices to Tackle Gendered Violence

Overview of Legislation in Tanzania

The Tanzania legal system is based on the English Common Law system. It derived this system from its British colonial legacy, as it does the system of government, which is based to a large degree on the Westminster parliamentary model (Manning and Kasera, 2020). However, unlike the unwritten British constitutional system, the first source of law for the United Republic of Tanzania is the 1977 Constitution (Manning and Kasera, 2020; 2016). Before going into discussing the policies to tackle gendered violence, it would be appropriate to comprehend fully how the legislation was formed and what constitutes Tanzanian legislation, which serves as the nation's civil law.

According to Hofman and Katuu (2023) and Shadrack (2011) there are two sources of law in Tanzania, namely formal or primary and non-formal or secondary. Formal/primary sources of law include: (i) The Constitution (as the basic law); (ii) Statutory laws, i.e., principal legislation (Ordinances or Acts of Parliament); (iii) Subsidiary legislations, i.e., by-laws, regulations, rules, directives, orders, etc.; (iv) Court Decisions in Tanzania: (especially, the Courts of Records, i.e. The High Court and Court of Appeal).; (v) Received laws: i.e., the Common Law, Doctrine of Equity, and Statutes of General Applications; (vi) International and Regional law: i.e., treaties, conventions, bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreements, declarations etc., e.g., that refer laws of the Africa Charter (AC), the East African Community Treaty (EAC), Africa Union (AU) and other laws such as CEDAW, etc. made under the auspices of the United Nations (UN). Non-formal/Secondary sources of law are: (i) customary laws (customs and norms of each ethnic group), e.g., Kuria inheritance on succession law. (ii) Religious laws, e.g., Islamic law. (iii) Trade usage, customs and lawful agreements contracts or arrangements between private individuals (Shadrack, 2011).

Legal researchers like Salwan and Narang (2008) define the term law as: (a)

legislative pronouncements of the rules, which should guide one's actions in society; (b) the body of principles recognised and applied by the state in the administration of justice: (c) a rule of action to which human being's conduct must conform. These researchers explained further that the state law must be a body or system of obligatory rules or norms (not optional) obeyed or adhered to by every member of society. This is the normative nature of the laws, which are obligatory to human conduct. With regard to these facts, the Tanzanian legal system in this study means a set of rules, norms or a standard of pattern of behaviour to which every individual in the society has to conform (Msuya, 2020; Opoku, 2017). In the state legislation therefore, "rules ought to be obeyed, otherwise, the violator of such rules or standards behaviour can be taken to court, tribunal or other formal/informal institution or person and get punished/sanctioned" (Salwan and Narang, 2008: 201).

Msuya (2020) and Ndulo (2011), contended that the colonial administrations recognised customary law and its institutions, although its application was generally restricted to Africans. In Tanzania, as in almost all African countries, state laws are interconnected with customary laws. Muna Ndulo explains that in a typical African country, the law of the country is composed of customary law, the common, or civil law and the legislation enacted by both the colonial masters (the British in the Tanzanian context) and post-colonial parliaments (Ndulo, 2011). In an earlier study, Ndulo (2012) held that African customary law is the indigenous law of the various ethnic groups of Africa. He states that:

> It should be appreciated that the use of the term 'African customary law' does not indicate that there is a single uniform set of customs prevailing in any given country. Rather, it is used as a blanket description covering many different legal systems. These systems are largely ethnic in origin, and they usually operate only within the area occupied by the ethnic group and cover disputes in which at least one of the parties to the dispute is a member of ethnic group (Ndulo, 2012: 88).

Ndulo (2012) and Bond (2010) highlight that pre-colonial laws in most African states were essentially customary law in character, having their source in the practices, traditions, and customs of the people. Such traditions and cultures are esteemed as promoting African identity and heritage (Msuya, 2020). "The normative force and legitimacy of customary law is derived from the idea that it is ancient, unchanging and passed on from generation to generation, and that it is part and parcel of people's identity and culture" (Ndulo, 2011: 94).

The Tanzanian legal system includes customary law, which is a combination of indigenous and imported institutions (Msuya, 2020; Bond, 2005). At independence in 1961, Tanzania inherited a dual legal system thus bringing 'native' law on par with the general law, which was predictable since it is written. Even where the

states recognised customary law as valid, there were concerted efforts at bringing all laws together with the general law (Chacha, 2004). It has been stated earlier that the customary law is a blend of traditions and customs, which is a mixture of civil law notions, the religious concepts from Christianity, Islam, the colonial common ideology, and the traditional African religion (Bourdon, 2013; Bond, 2010; Adjetey, 2009). Being non-formal, for the sources of customary law to be enforced, they must be constitutional and consistent with primary sources of law (Shadrack, 2011). In Tanzania, customary law continues to have significant impact on the individual citizens in regard to matters such as marriage, rights within the family, inheritance and traditional authority (Msuya, 2020; Ndulo, 2012).

Historically, the Kuria and the ethnic groups on Ukerewe Island had full recognition of the customary laws that allow for the practices studied. However, in its present form, customary laws are distorted and have been influenced by encounters with colonial and post-colonial rules. Ndulo (2011: 4) argues that "customary law is often discriminatory, especially in relation to women's capacity in these areas. It tends to treat women as adjuncts to the group they belong to, such as a clan, family or ethnic group, rather than as equal with men." This creates a conflict between the state principal legislation and constitution and the international and regional laws signed under the auspices of the UN.

Describing how the use of international law would be impossible in a state without first translating the international or regional law into national law, Cassese (1992) stipulates that international law does not determine which point of view is to be preferred, monism or dualism. Every state decides for itself, according to its legal traditions. International law only requires that its rules are respected, and states are free to decide on the manner in which they want to respect these rules and make them binding on its citizens and agencies (Cassese, 1992). Moreover, the transformation of either international or regional norms into domestic law are not necessary from the point of view of international law. The necessity of transformation is a question of national, not of international law (ibid).

It has been argued by Fluet, Calaguas and Drost (2006) that the pluralistic nature of Tanzania's legal system discriminates against women and other marginalized groups in that where there is conflict of law, the more empowered groups resort to enforcing the discriminatory laws against the less empowered to the detriment of the latter. Moreover, women's access to justice is further weakened by environmental factors such as corruption, case delays and economic deprivation (ibid). This legal environment runs counter to the provisions of CEDAW and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (the African Protocol) which requires that both women and men have equal protection under the law as well as access to justice (Abdulla, 2020).

Although the Constitution of Tanzania (1977) which was amended in 1984 does not directly reference harmful practices, Article 9 imposes an obligation on the State to respect and preserve human dignity and rights, to accord men

and women equal rights and to eradicate all forms of discrimination. Article 13 addresses equality further and states that 'all persons are equal before the law and are entitled, without any discrimination, to protection and equality before the law' and charges the State to implement procedures that take into account that 'no person shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment.' Article 16 also states, 'Every person is entitled to respect and protection of his person' and 'privacy of his own person.' It is unfortunate that androcentric language is embedded in State legislation, as evident by the use of "his".

When it comes to violating a woman or a girl child's rights in the context of patriarchal violence in this study, researchers on women's rights such as Olaore et al, (2021); Bond, (2010) and White et al., (2002) claim that the African law does not always protect the oppressed woman, nor does it convict the perpetrators. They assert that women and girls who undergo certain customary rites and experience violation are easily identified in Africa, and that NGOs and activists are doing a lot to help them. The perpetrators/perpetuators of the cultural practices, nonetheless, remain invisible (Opoku, 2017). Although the Tanzanian government has ratified the main international and regional women's rights protection instruments (Human Rights Watch, 2014), many of these provisions continue to be violated in both law and practice. Human rights researcher, Bond (2010) attests that the coalition of human rights campaigns remain particularly concerned about the following violations in Tanzania: (i) the persistence of discriminatory laws; (ii) violence against women; (iii) unequal access to education, (iv) employment and health services; and (v) violations of the right to own property.

Some NGO researchers of 28 TooMany (2020; 2012) and Tuyizere (2007) in Tanzania have also highlighted that domestic violence and sexual violence, which can be conceptualized as patriarchal violence, are highly prevalent. Additionally, these researchers claim that customs and traditional practices condone the harassment and abuses of women, which prevail as the culture of impunity. Networking Program and Macro International (2007) suggest that some NGOs and activists hold that cases of violence are underreported and those that are reported are often settled out of court. Kisaakye (2002) explains that the Penal Code does not contain a specific provision on domestic violence and does not criminalize marital rape for instance. According to the Tanzania Human Rights Report (2012), in 2001 the Tanzanian government adopted a National Plan of Action to Combat Violence Against Women and Children (2001–2015), but inadequate funding and the lack of a comprehensive legal aid system that can be accessed by women have hindered the effective implementation of this plan. In 2008 the Tanzanian Government announced its intention to amend laws that perpetuate gender-based violence, but no such reforms have been introduced (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Bourdon (2013) asserts that under Tanzanian law, the effect of the legal processes to protect human rights remain relatively small. According to Wilson (1997: 3), who called for an exploration of social life rights, "Discussion of the cross-cultural applicability of human rights still revolve around universalism/relativism debate and the importance of culture."

The Tanzanian Policy on Women, Development and Gender (2019) provides guidelines to promote gender equality and encourages communities to refrain from harmful traditional practices, such as FGC, woman-to-woman marriage and widow cleansing rituals. The policy, however, falls short of condemning such practices (Tungaraza, 2005). According to the 2020; 2015; and 2003 Tanzania National Policy Guidelines for Reproductive and Child Health, all women and girls have the right to be protected against all forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse, including practices that adversely affect their reproductive health. In Tanzania, the National Policy on Women Development and Gender addresses community education and the vital role of the community in combating harmful traditional practices, which have a deleterious effect on women's reproductive health (Policy on Women in Development in Tanzania, 1992, 2019).

The legal pluralities have drawn anthropologists to recognise and investigate how sources of law originating in domains outside of the nation state are the source of legitimacy and recourse for many people (Benda-Beckmann, 2022; Haram, 2021). Anthropologists and other scholars have, on the other hand, begun studying the ways in which various actors constitute human rights through negotiation, re-appropriation, reformulation and rejection. These actors make use of local understandings of personhood and rights and weave those conceptions into their human rights advocacy (Bourdon, 2013). Utilizing a grounded theory approach to the law has revealed the ways, and extent to which people understand and locate themselves amongst existing legal regimes, and in some cases, shop for law or laws that will best suit their interests (Benda-Beckmann, 2009). Bourdon (2013) attests that plural and legal orders offer both constraints and opportunities for people who live within them and offer new opportunities for key decision makers, such as legal advocates, lawyers and judges to invoke laws with which they are most familiar, and to advance positions with which they are most ideologically aligned. Bourdon (2013) acknowledged the limitations in the Tanzanian legislation and discusses some of the strategies and initiatives that have been adopted by various actors, such as the government, civil society organisations, religious groups, and development agencies, to address issues that promote women's rights in a plural legal context. However, she also observed that there has been some progress made in Tanzania. She highlights some of the achievements and challenges of these efforts, such as the enactment of gender-sensitive laws and policies, the provision of legal aid and education for women, the empowerment of women leaders and networks, and the dialogue and collaboration among different stakeholders.

Haram (2019) and Bourdon (2013) noted that Tanzania has made some positive responses to the issues of gender equality. They highlighted that the Tanzanian government has signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). By signing the CEDAW, the Tanzanian government is required to report the steps taken to protect women's rights. In addition, the government has heard the outcries of public and civil society organisations (CSO) regarding the need to review, change and repeal

some of the outdated and unfavourable laws impeding the rights of women and girls. The progress which Tanzania has made to address violence against women (VAW) includes:

> The creation of National Strategy for growth and Reduction of Poverty (MKUKUTA): MKUKUTA contains several goals, targets and strategies which specifically address women's issues. Namely, to improve the quality of life and increase protection of rights for the poorest and most vulnerable groups: and to eradicate domestic violence (DV) and sexual violence (SV). As a strategy of attaining these targets the document indicates, "Government and other key actors will scale up the fight against all forms of abuse, including …. discrimination against women and children and other vulnerable groups (Government of Tanzania, 2005: 52).

In November 1990 the Tanzanian government established the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children with the responsibility to facilitate community development. Its mission was to promote community development, gender equality, equity and children rights through formulation of policies, strategies and guidelines in collaboration with stakeholders active in the country. However, in 2015, the ministry was restructured and renamed as the Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (MCDGEC-Tanzania). The vision of the new ministry is to be the centre of excellence in promoting communities' pro-activeness, confidence, commitment and culture of hard work in striving for better livelihoods, embracing gender equality and children's rights. The Ministry stressed that the development of monitoring indicators for the CEDAW implementation plan, and the affirmative action plan in Parliament supporting women comprising 30.0–33.3% of local government. The document highlights that:

> The Law Reform Commission was established in Tanzania in early 1990, which had a mandate of reviewing laws associated with the Constitution and Bills of Rights. Twelve laws were presented to the National Assembly for review or change. However, of these laws, only four have been passed by the national Assembly to date. They are: The Sexual Offences (Special Provisions) Act of 1998: The Village Land Act No. 4 of 1999; The Village Act of 1999; The Marriage Act (Kivulini Archives, April 2012).

Scholars such as Bourdon (2013) and Tungaraza (2005) maintain that these responses are the first steps in ending domestic violence. They believe that the state is concerned about the protection of its citizens' rights and that measures to defend these rights have been made. However, on its own, legislation is ineffective and perhaps even insignificant (Bond, 2005). In reality, there is a huge disparity between having the laws in place and ensuring that they reach the

majority of the population in rural and urban areas. Issues that are central to human rights, as reflected in various international and national declarations and conventions, are crucial to social work, as is the challenging and changing of traditional beliefs and practices that violate women's and girl's rights to bodily integrity, safety, security and to life (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). Well-equipped and qualified social workers who are deeply involved in human rights issues, respect the human rights principle of indivisibility, and promote all civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, as reflected in the Global Social Work Definition (IASSW/IFSW, 2014) and the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (GSWSEP) (IASSW, 2018).

Social Work as a Fundamental Human Rights Profession

From its inception social work has been regarded as a human rights profession (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021), and may be seen as a profession at the core of human rights practice that cuts across the different levels of society. The social work profession gives a good grounding for this study to address issues from individual and grassroots levels to policy and macro-institutional levels. This makes social work a dynamic profession to play a crucial role in ensuring that gender issues are fully integrated in development and that gender equality is achieved (Spitzer and Twikirize, 2014). Thus, as a social science discipline, social work remains committed to the promotion of social justice and human rights, focusing specifically on marginalised and disadvantaged people (Mwansa and Kreitzer, 2012). Popple and Leighninger (2004) describe the social work profession as core to social welfare institutions which, without gender lens interventions, would be futile because they ignore a key aspect of social life.

The social work profession holds hope for millions of marginalised groups such as the women and girls (Mwansa and Kreitzer, 2012) across the world. Hence, this study draws on the social work profession to obtain the strategies "to engage with individuals, families, groups and communities, working alongside people to assess and intervene" (Foote, Quinney and Taylor, 2013: 133) in the violations associated with the cultural and traditional practices under study. According to Spitzer and Twikirize (2014), issues of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women and girls should be central in educational curricula and in practice. Scholars in the arena emphasize that social workers should be vested with skills and have essential knowledge about the origin and social constructions of gender roles and relations. Moreover, they should have the capacity to apply gender as a key and cross-cutting category in analyzing social, political, institutional, organisational and cultural contexts (Spitzer and Twikirize, 2014: 364). This is supported by Dominelli (2012), who holds that the social work profession has a strong commitment to promoting gender equality so as to tackle the multiple forms of women's oppression and to empower women at local, national and international levels.

According to Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021: 12) social work's respect for cultural

diversity is one of its most unifying, constitutive aspects, with debates around universal human rights and cultural specificity abounding. Social work's commitments to respecting cultural diversity and doing no harm are accepted on global, regional, and local levels. While these are noble ideals, and on the surface may appear to be unproblematic, the reality is that the values of respect for cultural diversity and doing no harm may often reflect competing and conflicting interests (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). Sewpaul (2016: 35) asserted that, "While respect for diversity is a fundamental value of social work, and the profession grants eminence to unity in diversity, we need to ask, 'how far do we stretch the boundaries of moral relativism?" She challenges social workers to stand up, particularly for those whose rights are violated in the name of cultural and religious traditions, and avers that social workers are in strategic positions to adopt the role of cultural mediators in local communities. The Tanzanian government has signed several international human rights conventions, which provide a strong basis for the characterization of the three practices under study as violation of human rights (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2012).

Hence, Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021), researchers of 28 TooMany (2020; 2013); Chacha (2004) and White et al. (2002) argue that a human rights approach acknowledges that cultural practices such as FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage and widow cleansing and the denial of a woman's right to inheritance promote the violation of women's and girls' human rights. According to 28 TooMany (2012) researchers, the human rights approach is sometimes used alongside strategies to eradicate harmful practices, based on the social abandonment theory derived from the social change theory. Sewpaul (2013; 2016) argued that while communities might hold doing no harm as a prized value, the problem is that when one is socialized into a culture, one often does not see the harm induced by certain cultural practices; they become naturalized and normalized. Some researchers suggest that components of the social change theory include: (i) a non-judgmental human rights approach; (ii) community awareness raising of the harmfulness of the practice; (iii) a decision to abandon, for example, the studied practices, which would be a collective decision by the entire community; (iv) the requirement of community public affirmation of abandonment of harmful practices; (v) intercommunity diffusion of the decision; and (vi) a supportive change-enabling environment, including the commitment of government (28 TooMany, 2012: 61–62).

In his book "Using the Law in Social Work;" Johns (2014) states that human rights and justice are fundamental to the principles and rule of law in many countries. He explains that law is a very important component of social work practice, and stresses that the majority of social workers are employed by statutory agencies, that is, organisations such as local authorities whose every action has to be based on some kind of legal power. Johns (2014) maintains that even for social workers employed outside the statutory sector, the law provides the framework within which services are offered, and is crucial in areas such as child protection, where inter-agency co-operation is essential, and where every social worker has

responsibilities. The argument raised by many social work researchers is that it is impossible to practise without coming up against the law; it is equally impossible to practise effectively without an in-depth understanding of how the law affects every day social work practice. Johns (2014) contended that much of social workers' professional lives are spent in providing services to people and, in some cases, intervention in people's lives in order to protect them from themselves or other people.

When contemplating the origins of the welfare state and the development of social work in most African countries, there is the tendency to assume that the primary driving force has been humanitarian concern. It is often assumed that charities, social reformers and legislators were motivated primarily by a strong sense of social responsibility, and that as previously hidden social evils were exposed, philanthropists, charities and governments moved to stamp them out (Cunningham, and Cunningham, 2014: 17). Society, from this perspective, became increasingly sensitive to the needs of the poor, and as social evils were exposed, the harsh excesses were gradually curbed by progressive, charitable and state intervention (ibid), which disguised the social control functions of the modern welfare state.

The literature discussing societal institutions implies that every member of society has some social position or status that go with specified roles. However, if members fail to perform their roles adequately, or social institutions fail to extend help to them and social stability is threatened, then the State and professions like social work has to intervene, thus supporting a residual rather than an institutionalized approach to social welfare. Popple and Leighninger (2004) point out that the social work profession has two targets: The first target is that of helping individuals who have difficulty meeting their expectations. This is referred to as micro practice or clinical social work (social casework). The second target of social work concerns those aspects of social institutions that fail to support individuals in their efforts to fulfill role expectations. Popple and Leighninger referred to this as macro practice. They advised that empowerment and consciousness raising must take place across all system levels.

There are other multi-model interventions to deal with the complex issues of cultural hegemony, patriarchy, power and violence. Larsen and Sewpaul (2014: 244) argued that "development cannot occur through macro level interventions alone. A critical reflection on one's own thinking and on one's social and political realities and the capacity to develop action strategies consequent upon these reflections is central to development." Such an approach is particularly salient to issues discussed in this book, where social workers deal with individuals and communities that have naturalized and normalized dominant harmful cultural beliefs and practices (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). In reaching out to people in vulnerable and marginalised positions, macro social work practices such as engaging in policy formulation and legislation could assist in underlining policy and practice in Tanzania.

The Tanzania Human Rights Report (2012) discusses how the cultural background, as a primary source of identity, self-definition, expression, and sense of group belonging, is diminished in the modern world where people's cultures meet and blend. Mutua (2008) holds that culture in Africa and, indeed, in Tanzania, is defined by its distance from traditional cultures and proximity to Western values. Mutua (2008) maintains that, in many instances, African states continue to carry out 'modernization' campaigns against 'backward' people such as the Massai of Kenya and Tanzania. Those ethnic groups in Africa who cling to their traditions are not regarded as living in a modern society. The Tanzania Human Rights Report (2012) documented that in a world of high cultural diversity, the concept of the universality of human rights would always tend to undermine the cultural relativism to maintain its status. Yet, at times, and in many countries, universal principles of human rights often collide with the enjoyment of cultural rights (Mutua 2008). Scholars such as Bond (2010, 2005) and Kisaakye (2002) assert that that cultural relativism negates the idea that human rights are absolutely universal. However, according to the Tanzania Human Rights Report (2012: 146), international law emphasizes that human rights are "for all without distinction. Human rights are natural-born rights for every human being, universally. They are not privileges."

It is argued by rights activists and scholars, in the 2012 Tanzanian Human Rights Report, that the rights to enjoy one's culture are human rights as any other rights. According to Kisaakye (2002), African rights researchers attest that, unfortunately, Tanzania does not recognise this. The Tanzania Human Rights Report (2012) explains that cultural rights are slightly protected in human rights within the realm of the following two conditions. Firstly, there is the right to practice one's culture; this provides that people have the right to practice and continue shared traditions and activities. Secondly, the protection of culture in international law covers the scientific, literary, and artistic pursuits of society (ibid). With regard to the former, while promoting respect for traditions, cultures, ideologies, beliefs and religions is regarded as one of the core purposes of social work, Sewpaul and Jones (2005: 219) qualify this with "insofar as these do not conflict with the fundamental rights of people." The latter condition raises the questions posed by Mushenje and Sewpaul (2021: 9). "Who makes the decision with regard to bringing about change? Who should drive change? What happens when people do not want the change? What happens when change is forced on people and they are not ready for it, regardless of how well intended it is? Is the very framing of the gender dynamics and practices, as oppression, injustice or discrimination, in itself problematic?"

When outside my own cultural and religious beliefs, on what authority can I work for change? These kinds of questions raise debate about cultural relativism and universal human rights (McGarvey, 2007). Adopting Huntington's (1993) approach of cultural relativism, McGarvey contends: "Rights must represent the particular belief system of the people concerned and therefore are to be defined by each particular culture society. However, minority and voiceless groups such

as women are often those who suffer injustices in their societies as they are at the mercy of those in authority who define the content of rights and responsibilities" (McGarvey, 2007: 2).

Given the global recognition and provisions in international human rights instruments, which entrench and guarantee the equality of sexes, the equal and full dignity of the person, and non-discrimination on the basis of freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, it could be expected that women should enjoy their human rights (Kisaakye, 2002: 268). However, in practice, according to Kisaakye (2002), this is not so, and particularly in Tanzania, where the enjoyment of women's human rights remains elusive for the majority of the Kuria and Kerewe women. The human rights approach focuses attention on state-tolerated and state-sponsored discrimination against women. In many countries, statutory restrictions curtail women's freedom of movement, ability to inherit property, ability to divorce, and access to education, health care, and jobs (28TooMany, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 1999). In others, such restrictions, while not strictly legal, are still tolerated (Human Rights Watch, 1999). The human rights approach recognises that these discriminatory practices make women more vulnerable to violent victimization and emotional abuse. Gender-based violence constitutes discrimination against women, which intersects with and impacts on other aspects of women's well-being and their enjoyment of human rights (28TooMany, 2015; White et al., 2002).

The notion of the rights of humanity in the African tradition establishes the viable core understanding of human rights. Gyekye (1996) builds on this claim and explains that people are entitled to make a reasonable fact that they are human beings. There is a belief among the Kuria and the Kerewe of Tanzania that the conception of human dignity and the sanctity of human life are explicit. According to Gyekye (1996: 150), the belief among African indigenous communities is that "All human beings are children of God; no one is a child of the earth." This claim in the intrinsic value of human dignity means that every person is worthy of respect in every sense. Gyekye (1996) and Mbiti (1991) hold that the concept of human dignity is linked with or derived from the concepts of intrinsic value and respect. Concepts of human dignity, intrinsic value, and equal moral worth, which generate a notion of moral rights, as deriving ultimately from God or as belonging fundamentally to every human being as a creature of God, could be linked with the notion of innate rights (ibid). These scholars claim that such rights belong to every human being by nature.

In the Tanzanian context, among the Kuria and Kerewe as well as other societies in Africa, the conception of human dignity compels the recognition of rights, not only in an individualistic, but in a communal context as well (Gyekye, 1996). This is so because the derivation of human (individual) rights from the supernatural cannot be confined to an individualistic context (Mbiti, 1991). According to Gyekye (1996: 151) "the respect for human dignity, a natural or fundamental attribute of human beings that cannot be set at nought by the communal structure, should

generate regard for personal rights in a communal context." He also explains that the natural membership of the individual human being in a community cannot rob them of dignity or intrinsic value, a fundamental and inalienable attribute one possesses as a human being (ibid). However, despite the African understanding of the communal concepts of human dignity and rights, these scholars do not rule out that many violations exist on the Africa continent.

Gyekye (1996: 149) asserts that the reputation of African governments in the postcolonial era, in matters of protecting and promoting the human rights of the citizens of their states, has been poor. Gyekye claims there have been numerous scandalous violations of human rights and a lack of respect for lives. The systematic nature of violations has raised questions about whether the value and concept of human rights is appreciated and practiced in the traditional cultures of Africa (ibid). "Gender based violence is a silent crime. It is a violation of human rights that usually goes undetected, behind culture and tradition, unreported and little addressed by legal structures" (Africa Link, 1999: 3). It has been discussed in detail in this chapter that in patriarchal societies, the male dominated power structure continues to promote gender violence and gender inequality.

Boateng and Sottie (2021) and Kisaakye (2002) hold that in Africa, the cultural and traditional practices that violate women's rights are many and include early marriage of young girls, forced marriage, female genital cutting, polygamy, bride price, widow inheritance, widowhood rites, the trocosi system (female religious slavery), wife sharing, husband sharing, killing of twins and albinos, food taboos for women, honour killings, land/property acquisition and ownership rules, human sacrifice and witchcraft, male/boy preference, marriage and wife replacement (Boateng and Sottie, 2021: 105; Kisaakye 2002: 268). I would add the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage institution to the list. Sewpaul (2016) argues that one of the complex issues across the globe is the compromising of civil, and political and socio-economic rights on account of specific cultural beliefs and practices. Addressing this complexity and the tensions between the universal and particular, the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training specifically calls for social work students to be schooled in a basic human rights approach (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005: 223). These authors elaborate that: "Such an approach might facilitate constructive confrontation and change where certain cultural beliefs, values and traditions violate people's basic rights. As culture is socially constructed and dynamic, it is subject to deconstruction and change. Such constructive confrontation, deconstruction and change may be facilitated through a tuning into, and an understanding of particular values, beliefs and traditions and via critical and reflective dialogue with members of that cultural group vis-à-vis broader human rights issues" (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005: 228). Considering the important roles that social workers play, it is essential to investigate the standpoint of the professional institution of social work in Tanzania.

The Professional Institution of Social Work in Tanzania

Rwomire (2011) contends that social work practice is not well understood in Africa and most especially in Tanzania. This was observed during my fieldwork experience in 2012 in the communities of Mwanza and Mara in the Lake Zone of Tanzania. This is because social work, as a profession, is still at its initial stages in Tanzania, and social workers have a long way to go in fully comprehending the meaning, objectives, functions, and methods of their profession (Rwomire, 2011).

The following global definition of social work, adopted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) in 2014, is widely accepted:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and academic discipline that facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and Indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (IASSW/IFSW, 2014).

The above definition, which is accompanied by a six-page commentary that explains the key concepts, may be amplified at national and/or regional levels, as it acknowledges the diversities of social work practice and its context specific nature. There are claims in research that every society, in every given stage of development, has devised ways and means of providing services for those in need. The tendency of humans to help one another has been a common feature of all societies. Globally, every person owes certain duties to the family, community, and the nation state. Every person has rights, benefits, and responsibilities, which derive from membership to these social groupings (Rwomire, 2011; Farley and Smith, 2006).

In traditional African societies, the family (both immediate and extended) deals with social needs and social problems. Researchers such as Farley and Smith (2006) hold that there were no cadres of workers to handle such problems as human rights violations, epidemic disease, or poverty. Traditionally, in most African communities, the family or clan elders dealt with such problems. Help was provided through the extended family and the intervention of neighbours (ibid). It could therefore be argued that the family laid the foundation for modern social welfare and religious organisations have also made a huge contribution to the development of social welfare (Rwomire, 2011). Over time, the nation state has gradually assumed a greater role as the principal source of social provision. Although the family and religious organisations are still important actors in the welfare field, they are no longer considered adequate to address social problems, which have increased, partly on account of rapid social and technological change

(ibid). Modern societies have become so complex that state intervention in social welfare has become a universal phenomenon (Farley and Smith, 2006).

According to Larsen, Sewpaul and Oline (2014: 1), discourses on participation must of necessity include other aspects of global discourse, such as human rights, direct democracy, and the power of contexts, social justice, social inclusion and social cohesion. Additionally, related discourses on poverty, exclusion, marginalization, and oppression highlight the power of dreams, hopes and visions of change. According to Larsen et al. (2014), doing social work among indigenous communities assumes, for example, the kind of practice that portrays changes that must start from the grassroots. Relating this proposed practice in this study to the studied communities of the Kuria and Kerewe in Tanzania implies that the locals be conscientized to address the oppressive practices in their communities. The kind of method that portrays Freire's (1996) theories of emancipation and empowerment based on education with conscientisation. This notion has provoked and stimulated independent thinking based on egalitarian relationships. According to Kreitzer (2012: 3) the idea of critical thinking and participation became global, and has inspired community workers all over the world to focus on the importance of participation and involvement of indigenous people in democracy building and in challenging and changing oppressive structural conditions of life. The philosophy of participation, peaceful action and the struggle for democracy, welfare and human rights are closely related to politics, the way countries and communities are organised and the types of welfare systems that exist (Freire, 1996).

According to Mabeyo (2014) the social work profession in Tanzania must assume a very important role in addressing the multifaceted problems in local communities. Social work must address the huge challenges as a result of poverty, marginalization, and they must empower communities and restore people's problem-solving and coping capacities. The realisation of the above problems and challenges led to the training and creation of a social worker that could be deployed at the grassroots level and reach remote groups of people who tend to be marginalized, excluded and oppressed. Writing about social work education in Tanzania, Linsk, Mabeyo and Omari (2010) explained that the social welfare structures and educational resources vary in terms of the existence of social institutions such as ministries of social welfare as well as academic institutions to train competent workers. However, it is observed that in Tanzania, societal recognition of the value of professional training in social work is not wide (Burke and Ngonyani, 2004). This is because social work training has a narrow coverage and a relatively short history in Tanzania (Mabeyo, 2014). According to Mabeyo (2014: 125):

> … the Institution of Social Work (ISW) was established by an Act of Parliament number 3 of 1973 that as subsequently amended under the written Law (Miscellaneous Amendment) Act No 3 of 2002. The Institution can, therefore, be considered the mother and the founder school of social work education and training in the country. From the early 1970s to mid-2000s, ISW was the sole public school that offered courses in the field of social work in the country. The rationale for the establishment of the Institute was to respond to the government demand for trained social welfare officers who would help to address various social problems facing the country at the time. …. So far, the Institute has expanded from having a social work student population of less than 100 in 1974 to above 2,000 in 2012. The growing size of the student population partly indicates that there is an increased awareness and increasing demand for professional social workers in the country.

To accomplish this task, Mabeyo (2014). related that the Institution of Social Work in Dar es Salaam in partnership with Jane Addams College of Social Work and the Midwest Aids Training and Education Center at the University of Illinois in Chicago have collaborated with the Tanzania Human Resource Capacity Project. Together with these partners, more than 4,026 paraprofessional social workers (PSWs), 642 PSW supervisors, and 103 master trainers across the country were produced to bridge the deficit between the actual and the required number of social workers in the country. According to Nakaka (2013) the American International Health Alliance (AIHA) and the said partners also support the development and standardization of social work curriculum across 12 universities through the Tanzania Emerging Schools of Social Work Programme (TESWEP). AIHA and partners have also revitalized and are working to strengthen the capacity of the Tanzania Association of Social Workers (TASWO), a national professional association for social workers (Nakaka, 2013, cited in Mabeyo, 2014: 123).

As an outcome of the above programmes, TASWO organised and facilitated the formation of a Social Work Council and Bill in 2012. The Tanzania government gave full support at the inauguration of the social workers campaign for the Social Work Bill. In his opening speech at the TASWO Summit on 16th October 2012, Dr. Hussein Mwinyi (the Minister of Health for Tanzania) expressed that social work has an essential role to play in creating meaningful change in the lives of people, particularly those who are in vulnerable positions. The Minister congratulated TASWO for spearheading initiatives for the betterment of the social work profession and the welfare of Tanzanian society (Tanzanian Daily News Paper, 20 October 2012). In response to the Minister's speech, the acting chairperson, Dr. Mabeyo, told the Minister that the lack of a regulatory council and an explicit social welfare policy were major stumbling blocks to the development of the social work profession in Tanzania.

Mabeyo holds that accounts of the history of social work show that there are several distinct patterns of the evolution of the profession. In the African experience, the development of modern social welfare and social work is a result of colonialism (Mabeyo, 2014; Mwansa and Kreitzer, 2012). Quoting Kreitzer (2012), Mayebo expressed that teaching the history of social work in Africa has relied on the European perspective with little attention paid to how social supports evolved in Africa. Despite the distinct patterns of evolution, the profession is committed to promoting human rights and social justice, focusing on people in marginalized and vulnerable positions (Mabeyo, 2014; IFSW, 2010).

Social work is a profession that is change-oriented and directed towards ensuring that meaningful changes in peoples' lives are attained. In their studies, Twikirize et al. (2014) highlighted that tradition and culture are important aspects of social work practice. Social workers have the responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society in general and in relation to the people with whom they work. However, despite social workers' commitment and contribution to creating positive changes in people's lives, social work as a profession is not adequately known and hence not fully utilized in Tanzania (Mabeyo, 2014; IFSW 2010). A good number of factors stand as a stumbling block for the profession to be visible and accessible to the vulnerable and the rural poor, among them are those women and girls in Kuria and Ukerewe communities in this study. Mabeyo (2014) attests that not much has been documented in Tanzania regarding the social work profession. She emphasizes that with the existence of multifaceted problems, the social workers in Tanzania must assume very important roles in addressing poverty, empowering communities, and restoring people's problem-solving and coping capacities (Mabeyo, 2014: 121). There is also an immediate need to address problems related to the oppressed and oppressor regarding traditional practices, such as the three practices under study that this book deals with.

According to Freire (1996: 26) the oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted their guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. The freedom the women folk seek is not to be got overnight, and not through bribing their way out. In this study context, however, that freedom must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freire contended that freedom is not an idea located outside of people, nor is it an idea that becomes myth. He maintained that freedom from oppression is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human accomplishment (ibid). Research has shown that when we analyse the situation of oppression, people must first critically identify the external sources of oppression so that through transformative action they can create a new situation. This kind of transforming act makes it possible for the women folk to realise their fuller humanity.

Freire (1996) suggests that the situation of oppression is a dehumanized and dehumanising totality affecting both the oppressors and those they oppress. Researchers such as Tuyizere (2007) and White et al. (2002) predict that it is the latter who must, from their stifled humanity, wage struggle for their fuller humanity; the oppressors, who are themselves dehumanized because they dehumanize others, are unable to lead this struggle (ibid). Freire (1996: 29) explained that the oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks required. It might be argued that for women in the patriarchal communities like those in the Kuria and Ukerewe areas, the struggle for their freedom from oppressive traditional practices threatens not only their oppressors such as the male oppressors, but also the elderly women who oppress fellow women. There is also the Fanonian thesis of the lure and seduction of power, and the dynamic of loving the oppressor (Fanon, 1967; 1963).

Trevithick (2012) holds that all assumptions should be questioned in doing this kind of research. She explains this assumption by quoting Lord Laming (2003) who stated that "the concept of 'respectful uncertainty' should lie at the heart of the relationship between the social worker and the family – an approach that needs to involve the critical evaluation of information that they are given" (cited in Trevithick, 2012: 26). What this example highlights, according to Trevithick (2012), is the importance of questioning all sources of information – of thinking carefully and critically about the information or data available to support our assumptions and the positions we adopt – whether this originates from our own personal experiences, the professional knowledge that we and others have acquired, the teaching we have been given or the research findings we have read. However, these assumptions may not always portray a clear image because how people interpret and understand events or information may lead to different conclusions and it is this tension that needs to be grappled with (Trevithick, 2012: 26).

Conclusion

The major agents of socialization include the family, the community, peer groups, schools, religious institutions and the media, with social media increasingly becoming a powerful influence. Through socialization, girl children and women acquire characteristics that enable their integration into any given culture, which is a double-edged sword as it can contribute to their success and empowerment and/or their subordination and oppression. Adedoyin (2015), claims that African women believe that failure to abide by the culture will result in them being rejected by society, while Mushunje and Sewpaul (2021) discuss how, despite heightened awareness, both the men and women in their study were too afraid to challenge and change gendered norms. They point out that such fears are understandable as there is ample empirical data, in diverse contexts, that reflect that both men and women experience backlashes from their communities when they deviate from prescriptive gender norms. Within the context of patriarchal

violence, I discussed the cyclical nature of violence inflicted by women, typically older women in positions of authority, on younger women who later on perpetuate the violence.

While there are numerous laws and policies in Tanzania to support and promote non-discrimination and gender inequality, state laws and customary laws sometimes conflict. Patriarchal norms and expectations have become normalized by both women and men, and culture often trumps laws and policies. This chapter has, inter-alia, highlighted the tensions between universal human rights and cultural relativism, and underscores the importance of social work, with an emancipatory thrust in addressing these tensions, challenging the naturalization of patriarchal power and gender stereotypes that are the sources of girls' and women's oppression, and in addressing the socio-economic realities of local communities as these often intersect with cultural and traditional practices that violate the rights of girls and women.

Experiences and Interpretations of Female Genital Cutting (FGC) in Kuria Society

This chapter describes the traditional practices of FGC rituals and gives the socio-historical and geographical background of the practice, not only among the Kuria but also as perceived among other ethnic groups in Tanzania and on the Africa continent. The chapter also highlights the experiences of violation, health risks and complications of women who undergo the ritual of FGC. It portrays how women create spaces to perpetuate these violations against fellow women. It addresses the origin of FGC among the Kuria and interventions that are leading to the weakening of the practice. The socio-cultural values, factors fueling the continued practice of FGC and the symbolic meanings of the practice are discussed. The interrelation, observations and summary of the women's personal experiences and cultural norms are underlined, and it ends with the major findings, conclusions born out of this chapter. The data are triangulated with information obtained from individual interviews and a group interview, representing the voices of women who had undergone FGC, *Ngariba* who had been performing FGC, health workers, social activists and clan elders.

Introduction

FGC is a longstanding customary ritual, which involves the total or partial removal of the external female genitalia (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; WHO, 2019; Talle, 1993). The practice is deeply rooted in some African cultures, religious superstitious beliefs, witchcraft, and is connected to myths, as well as feelings of fear and insecurity (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; Koso-Thomas, 1987). Some researchers claim that FGC practice is found in traditional groups or cultures that have patriarchal structures (28 TooMany, 2013; Dorkenoo, 1995; Koso-Thomas, 1992). Africanus (2012) and Nour (2008) wrote that the practice transcends religion, geography, and socioeconomic status. Nour (2008) argues that although FGC predates Christianity and Islam, a small number of Muslims have adopted the practice as a religious requirement. Some scholars hold that the reasons for the practice of FGC often vary in relation to national and regional views, ethnicity, beliefs, and worldviews (Africanus, 2012; Gruenbaum, 2001; Talle 1993).

Studies show that in patriarchal communities practising FGC is often motivated by beliefs about what is considered appropriate sexual behaviour, with some communities considering that it ensures and preserves tradition, virginity before marriage, marital faithfulness, initiation of girls into womanhood, fulfilment of religious requirements, enhancing male sexual pleasure, and keeping the female clean, beautiful, and hygienic and preventing promiscuity or prostitution (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; Antonova and Siradzhudinova, 2018; Africanus, 2012; Talle, 1993). According to Africanus (2012) FGC is a socio-cultural practice with different meanings and beliefs attached to it by different practicing communities.

Quoting Rahlenbeck and Mekonnen (2009: 445), Africanus explains that among the Amhara people of Ethiopia, the practice carries a religious meaning analogous to male circumcision. In this religious context, the Amhara people are obligated by their faith to undergo circumcision. Many Tanzanians living in rural areas reportedly believe that FGC is required by their religion and is crucial in deterring prostitution by girls and women. However, research has proven that in some practicing communities FGC has no religious connotation whatsoever: to them, it is cultural just as in societies not circumcising a female is cultural (28TooMany, 2020; Akumadu, 1998).

Through his research, Africanus (2012) concluded that the origin of FGC is unknown in Tanzania, however, it is grounded in cultural beliefs. Rosenberg (2012) asserts that "if FGC is cultural reality, culture should be drawn upon to oppose it." He argues that the practice of FGC confronts some of the various means which women are subjected to a system that both relegates them to inferior positions within Tanzanian communities, and inflicts upon them a variety of traumatic experiences. Tuyizere (2007) and Gruenbaum (2001) also disclosed that women in the practicing communities are mainly viewed as potential wives and mothers. Hence, parents in such societies are not motivated to keep girl children in school for longer than is considered necessary, as this would delay marriage, and prolong parental financial responsibility for their daughters (28 TooMany, 2013; Tuyizere 2007; Bond, 2005; Akintunde et al., 2002). In recent years, it is believed that this traditional practice is no longer very common among the ethnic groups that practice it (28TooMany, 2020). This has been strongly argued against by activists and researchers who hold that FGC is very much alive in practicing communities.

In the Dodoma, Iringa and Mtwara Regions of Tanzania, some individuals believe that the practice cures a sexually infectious disease known as lawalawa (28TooMany, 2015; Winterbottom et al., 2009). It is a general view where FGC is practised that there is a strong link between FGC and marriageability, the ritual often being a prerequisite to marriage (Bukuluki, 2021; Africanus, 2012; Abdi, 2010; Talle, 1993). A report by 28 TooMany (2013: 43) reveals that in Tanzania, the Maasai and the Kuria, instill ideas of the importance of marriage in girl children, and socialise them to be able to run households by the age 10. According to Magoke-Mhoja (2008), this early socialisation is a means to validate a girl's body for marriage. He further emphasizes that child marriage and FGC are intrinsically linked for the vast majority of practicing communities in Tanzania. The Children's Dignity Forum (2008) report concludes that it is within the economic interest of parents for their girls to marry early. Within the families of the communities in Africa practicing FGC, girl children are perceived as those who provide the opportunity to obtain wealth through the payment of bride price.

Types of FGC and the Framing of the Practice

Researchers on FGC have documented that clitoridectomy or excision is the most common type, which involves the cutting off the clitoris and most of the external genitalia (Tuyizere, 2007; Adjetey, 1995; Koso-Thomas, 1987). An additional type is classified under other mutilations that affect the female genitalia (Boateng and Sottie, 2021) are seen as the most extreme form of FGC procedure and known as 'infibulation or pharaonic circumcision.' An example of this is a form of mutilation where the clitoris, the labia minora and inner parts of labia majora are wholly or partly excised thereupon the sides of the vulva are stitched together (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; WHO, 2008; Tuyizere, 2007; Talle, 1993). "For this kind of practice, the girl's legs are tied together for weeks to ensure that the vaginal opening is completely closed off" (Kisaakye, 2002: 270). According to Talle, a tiny orifice, so small that 'nothing larger than the end of a needle can pass', is left open serving as an outlet for urine and menstrual blood. The surgery transforms the natural genitals of a woman into a flattened, smoothed vulva with an oblong scar and a tiny hole at the lower end. In appearance the mutilated vulva is radically different from that of the natural pudenda, the operation accentuates and dramatizes the difference between female and male organs" (Talle, 1993: 83-84).

Based on the above description that portrays the intensity of FGC, UNICEF[7], and UNFPA[8] framed all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons as female genital mutilation (FGM) (Alradia-Mohamed, Kabir and Arafat, 2020; Kissaye, 2002; Dorkenoo, 1995). Researchers such as Tuyizere (2007) and Kisaakye (2002) hold that there are two types of FGC (clitoridectomy or excision and infibulation or pharaonic circumcision), while Boateng and Sottie (2021); Adjetey (1995) and many other researchers categorize FGC practice into three types. These researchers contend that clitoridectomy is the removal of the clitoral prepuce or tip of the clitoris and the excision is the removal of the clitoris and the inner lips of the female external genitalia or labia minora, hence could not consider these two types as one. The WHO (2021/2019) reports on harmful traditional practices recognize four main types of FGC. The fourth type is the 'other' being: All other harmful and non-medical procedures to the female genitalia, these involve the pricking, piercing, incising, cauterizing and scraping of the genitalia. WHO's classification is explained below:

7 United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
8 United Nations Fund for Population Activities

Table 3.1 The WHO Classifies FGC into Four Types[9]

Type I	Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce (clitoridectomy).
Type II	Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (excision). Note also that the term 'excision' is sometimes used as a general term covering all types of FGM.
Type III	Narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation).
Type IV	All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization (WHO, 2021; 2019; 2008).

In performing the rituals of the cut, there are different types of instruments used such as special knives, razor blades, pieces of glass or scissors. Research has revealed that on some rare occasions sharp stones have been reported to be used in some parts of Eastern Sudan (28TooMany, 2016; Dorkenoo,1995; Talle, 1993). A traditional birth attendant, called the *daya* in Egypt and Sudan, (Dorkenoo, 1995) does the operation of the cut. In Somalia, the operators of excisions are from the *midgan* clan (Talle, 1993). Among the Kuria ethnic group in Tanzania, the operator is called *Ngariba* in Swahili and in the Kuria dialect *Omosari* (28TooMany, 2020; Opoku, 2016). It is believed that she could originate from any of the Kuria sub-tribes. These excisors look on their profession as an integral part of their culture and ethnic identity, and some perceive it as a religious obligation (Althaus, 1997; Talle, 1993).

In most African communities, the practice of FGC is linked to male circumcision (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; Ibraheem, 2013). This term 'circumcision' is considered to be confusing by some since it seems to associate male circumcision with FGC (Ibraheem, 2013; Dorkenoo, 1995). In the Tanzanian context, for example, the Swahili word for circumcision is *tahiri*, which is the collective name used to describe the variety of practices involving the cutting of the female genitalia. *Tahiri* often refers to operations that fall under FGC type I and II (Africanus, 2012). However, according to WHO (2010), the only form that is anatomically comparable to male circumcision is when the clitoral prepuce is cut away, which medical experts attest seldom occurs in the practising communities. These medical experts argued that the term circumcision obscures the serious physical and psychological effects of genital cutting on women (Earp, 2020; WHO, 2010; Dorkenoo, 1995; Koso-Thomas, 1987).

Over the years, there have been controversies about the naming of the practice. Female circumcision was considered the favorite term used to describe the alteration of the female genitalia (Earp, 2020; Walley, 1997, cited in Abdi, 2012). Nevertheless, it was believed to portray a false image of the practice, meaning that the removal of the foreskin in males is equivalent to the removal of the

9 http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/statements_missions/Interagency_Statement_ on_Eliminating_ FGM.pdf

clitoris in the females (28TooMany, 2020; Abdi, 2012; Boyle, 2001; Dorkenoo, 1995). According to Dorkenoo (1995: 4), it has taken many years for f people to start using the terminology female genital mutilation FGM as opposed to the euphemistic term female circumcision. The term FGM has been popularly used to refer to "a name given to several traditional practices which involve the cutting and removal of female sexual organs" (Adjetey, 1995: 279). FGM is also a collective name used to describe other injury to female genital organs whether for cultural or other non-medical reasons (Earp, 2020; WHO, 2010; Dorkenoo 1994).

The term FGM, used by a wide range of women's health and human rights organisations and activists, is not just to describe the various forms of the cut, but also to indicate that the practice is considered a mutilation of the female genitalia as a violation of women's basic human rights (Bukuluki, 2021; Earp, 2020; Kisaaye, 2002; Adjetey, 1995). Since 1994, the term FGM has been used in several United Nations conference documents, and has served as a policy and advocacy tool. According to Abdi (2012), the renaming of the practice as 'Female Genital Mutilation' by the WHO in 1996 was considered by some as 'clearly disapproving and highly evocative'. A 2009 statement on FGC adopted by ten prominent UN agencies clearly states that:

> … the guiding principles for considering genital practices as FGC should be those of human rights, including the right to health, the rights of children and the right to nondiscrimination on basis of sex (UNICEF, 2009).

The terms 'female genital operations' by Walley (1997) and 'female genital cutting' by James and Robertson (2002) are used to provide a more precise and sensitive term to describe the practice. Different terms are used in Kiswahili. In the past, '*tohara*' was used, but later the right term became '*ukeketaji*', and sometimes the two are used interchangeably (28TooMany, 2020). In Tanzania, '*Keketa*' a Swahili word meaning 'cut' and '*Ukeketaji*' the one who does the cutting of the genitalia is the accepted term used among those who have the practice. For these reasons, some organisations have opted to use the more neutral term 'female genital cutting' which according to Bukuluki (2021) and WHO (2010) is used to reflect the importance of using non-judgmental terminology with practising communities. While the term 'mutilation' emphasizes the gravity of the cut which is demeaning for communities that practice FGC, it seems to indicate malice on the part of parents or circumcisers. The use of judgmental terminology bears the risk of creating a backlash, thus possibly causing an alienation of communities that practice FGC or even causing an actual increase in the number of girls being subjected to FGC (Bukuluki, 2021; Abdi, 2012; WHO, 2010). Hence, I chose to use the term female genital cutting (FGC).

Historical and Geographical Background of FGC

Nour, (2008) and Dorkenoo (1995) argued that the existence of FGC is a mystery and that it is difficult to trace the origins on the African continent because there are no written documents and that the practice has long been part of African history. On the other hand, Koso-Thomas (1987: 15), attests that female circumcision has evolved from early times in primitive communities, desirous of establishing control over the sexual behaviour of women. Affirming this claim, Nour (2008) and Slack (1988) explained that FGC has been practiced for over 2000 years among powerful nations like Egypt, Ethiopia and Greece in ancient times. Although it has obscure origins, there has been anthropological and historical research on how FGC came about. Some anthropologists, who traced the practice to the 5th century BC, believe that it existed among Equatorial African herders as a protection against rape for young female herders, as a custom among stone-age people in Equatorial Africa, or as an outgrowth of human sacrificial practices, or some early attempt at population control (28TooMany, 2020; 2013).

According to UNICEF (2013) and WHO (2010) FGC is concentrated in a swathe of countries from the Atlantic Coast to the Horn of Africa. There are recent reports which estimated that about 130 million girls/women have gone through FGC in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Boateng and Sottie, 2021). In Africa alone, it is believed that 101 million girls over the age of ten have undergone FGC. It is widely practiced in various forms, in some 28 African countries (28TooMany, 2016; Nour, 2008; Tuyizere, 2007; Toubia and Sharief, 2003). The country with the highest number of cut girls in Africa is Egypt, with approximately 27.2 million girls and women having undergone FGC (UNICEF, 2013; Africanus, 2012; Boyle, 2001). This is closely followed by Ethiopia with 23.8 million women and Nigeria with 19-20 million (Tegegn, 2021; UNICEF, 2013; Atere, 2001). On the continent, as a whole, there are the possibilities of more than three million girls at risk for FGC annually (28TooMany, 2020; Toubia and Sharief, 2003).

The practice of clitoridectomy and excision are known in Africa to be practiced among some ethnic groups in the following countries: Burkina Faso, Benin, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Niger, Togo, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya and Tanzania. A few, scattered occurrences of the practice have been reported in Botswana, Lesotho, and Mozambique (UNICEF, 2009; Boyle, 2009; Tuyizere, 2007; Dorkenoo, 1995). FGC infibulation is practiced in countries such as Mali, Malawi, Sudan, Somali, and some part of Ethiopia and Northern Nigeria (UNICEF, 2009; Boyle, 2009; Kisaaye, 2002; Dorkenoo, 1995). Studies have revealed that apart from Africa, some communities in Asia, Europe and Latin America also have practiced female circumcision. According to Dorkenoo (1995), in Asia, the practice is common among Muslim groups in the Philippines, Malaysia, Pakistan and Indonesia. The practice of FGC that existed in ancient times in parts of Europe became a practice of the past. However, the practice has resurfaced in certain parts of Europe in countries such as France and Germany where large numbers of immigrants

from Africa and Asia have settled. Thus, the immigrants have transferred their circumcision culture from their countries of origin to the adopted homelands (Koso-Thomas, 1987: 17). Dorkenoo (1995) holds that in Latin America female circumcision is practiced among some indigenous groups in countries such as Brazil, Eastern Mexico and Peru.

A 2013 UNICEF report indicates that the age of girls forced to undergo the procedure varies from weeks after birth to puberty. Statistics in the report show that in half these countries most girls were cut before the age of five years. Generally, with most ethnic groups on the African continent that practice FGC, the procedure is carried out on girls between the ages of four and twelve years (28TooMany, 2016; Dorkenoo, 1995; Koso-Thomas, 1987). In case of the latter age, FGC is typically part of a ritual initiation into womanhood and marriage that includes a period of seclusion and education about rights and duties of a wife (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; WHO, 2018; Althaus, 1997). Koso-Thomas (1987) and Tegegn, (2021) explained that FGC practice may be performed on girls during infancy, during adolescence or even during a woman's first pregnancy. An elderly woman trained for the job does the surgery, educates on what it takes to be a 'woman', usually in a sacred place after the girl child has been fattened and well groomed. Traditionally, the operation is carried out without any form of anesthetics or antiseptic precautions (28TooMany, 2020; Africanus, 2012; Nour, 2008; Kisaaye, 2002; Talle, 1993). In order to prevent excessive bleeding and infection, a mixture of herbs and special oils, believed to have homeostatic effect, is applied to the wound after the operation (28TooMany, 2013; Akintunde et al., 2002).

Like many African countries that practice FGC, there are significant regional and ethnic variations in prevalence (28 TooMany, 2013; Boyle, 2007; Dorkenoo, 1995). According to the Tanzania Demographic Health Survey (TDHS) report, Arusha, Dodoma, Kilimanjaro, Manyara, Mara and Singida are regions that have FGC prevalence rates of between 20-70% (TDHS, 2010). The UNICEF (2013) report estimated that 7.9 million women and girls in Tanzania have undergone FGC. The TDHS estimated the prevalence of FGC in girls and women aged between 15-49 was 14% in 2010, which indicated that the rate has not changed from the 2004-2005 TDHS but has decreased by 3.3% from 17.9% in 1996 (TDHS; 28 TooMany, 2013). On the one hand, the TDHS recorded that of the nine regions in Tanzania with the highest prevalence of FGC, five have seen a decline in the practice and the remaining four regions an increase between 2004-05 and 2010. On the other hand, there are indications in the 2010 report showing that the percentages of cut women have increased in Arusha and Mara regions, with the largest increase occurring in Singida from 43.2% in 2004-05 to 51% in 2010. According to 28 TooMany (2013) reports, the prevalence rates may vary widely between different ethnic groups within the same region. For example, in the Mara region where this study was conducted, FGC is as high as 75% among the Kuria ethnic group, but much lower among other ethnic groups in the region (28 TooMany, 2020; 2013; TDHS, 2010). It is against this background that the data were analyzed and

presented below, under the following themes: women's experiences of violence; humiliation; health risks and complications linked to FGC; myths surrounding FGC; interventions to decrease the incidence of FGC; and the socio-cultural values and symbolic meanings attached to FGC. The data are triangulated, representing the voices of the different categories of participants in this study.

Women's Experiences of Violence

Four young Kuria women from Musoma rural district aged between 18–35-years old, shared their experiences of FGC. The narratives of their personal account reflect the rich and holistic interpretations they gave to the FGC rituals they underwent, as well as their perceptions of its cultural meaning. Having undergone the genital cut ritual, three of these women considered themselves victims of the practice. The fourth participant regarded herself as a 'survivor' not a 'victim' of FGC. The participants shared the various societal demands that compelled them to undergo the ritual of the genital cut. The general perception among the population in the study area is that societal pressure is so considerable there is no option for Kuria girls but to be cut.

When the issues of violence were addressed in the interviews, three of the women who considered themselves to be victims of the practice of FGC told how they were compelled to submit to the rituals. They had no choice. Two of them shared that the elderly females of the household told them that the procedure would be painful but that they had to be brave to prove their inner strength. One of them reported that she was told by the elderly women: "genital cutting is so painful and also good, and women who are not cut are hated." Another 35-year-old participant said:

> "A few days before the cut, my mother told me it would be very painful, but I should be brave and make her happy on that occasion. She also promised me many gifts. I was young and frightened; I did not want it done but could not escape. My mother forced me to undergo the ritual and make her proud."

Girls feel societal pressure to undergo FGC in order to benefit from their circumcision ceremonies as they reach puberty (28TooMany, 2013; 2016). Each one of these three women who felt victimized by the practice talked about how painful the process was. The 35-year-old woman explained how she endured and coped with the pain during the cut:

> "I felt my intestines grinding when the cutting was going on, but I gathered the courage to remain still and calmed. I fixed my eyes on a tree in the distance to divert my concentration from the pain. It was all over in few minutes, and I could not believe it."

From the above excerpt, it was obvious that the initiate's mother acknowledges the painfulness of the cutting ceremony. Nevertheless, she convinced her daughter to understand and made promises of gifts for enduring the pain. The women claimed that they were not prepared psychologically for the pain and trauma involved in the cutting ritual, yet they developed their own coping strategies. It was evident from some comments and sentiments, such as "*fixing the eye on a tree to endure the pain*," helped the initiate to concentrate and divert her attention from the pain of the cut. These women were nonetheless under duress as they underwent the procedure.

Hinting at the anticipated rewards, the three women said they would receive gifts such as money, clothes, kitchenware, and other utensils. Livestock such as sheep, goats, and even cows are among the gifts the FGC initiate receives to assist her in beginning a happy married life. However, the 18-year-old participant said that she received only a fraction of the gifts promised to her because she had cried out and screamed when undergoing the cutting. She said: "I felt sad and have carried a guilt of humiliation because I felt I had failed to live up to societal expectations."

The reaction to the severe pain under the blade made her lose half of the reward promised to her. Feelings of guilt and failure are a reflection of the pressures faced by initiates in a situation when a grandmother or a mother encourages her granddaughter or a daughter to be brave during the genital cut and make her proud. The grandmother or mother, in this position, perceives it as her parental role and responsibility because, in her societal context, it is what she is expected to do. A mother giving instructions to her daughter, according to the traditions and norms of Kuria culture, is acceptable and desirable in these communities. A grandmother/mother who plays her societal role successfully gains the support and love not only of the male folks but the females as well.

There were a lot of statements in the narratives that portrayed the susceptibilities of the initiates. The 35-year-old shared an example of such susceptibility:

> "My grandmother told me that a cut woman is decent and respectable. She also said to me that it is a blessing to drop blood on the ancestral soil so that the ancestral spirits will, in turn, bless my womb with children when I marry."

Another, a 28-year-old woman disclosed a similar experience. She said that in her community a girl child named after her grandmother, could not escape the genital cut under any circumstances. She gave the reason that in Kuria society, a grandmother's wish is always carried out because of the belief that blessings are associated with a grandparent's wishes. Such beliefs are deeply rooted in Kuria women's mindsets. However, in recent times, some women in the Kuria community are beginning to feel that they are victims of certain societal norms such as FGC. This was evident in the narratives of the three young women in

their commonly expressed sentiments: "*…the cut under the blade is very painful. It violates the mind and the body*." The 18-year-old initiate declared her vulnerable position at the time she underwent the cut:

> "I was only 12-years old, the youngest in a group of five, the other girls ages were between 16 and 17 years. When undergoing the cut, I tried to keep calm, but the pain was so much that I started shaking, crying, and screaming. I was cut badly and bled a lot as a result of that."

While it is evident that FGC is a very painful process for the initiate, this young woman did not say whether she fainted from the pain and excessive bleeding, however, in her interview, it emerged that some of the girls passed out after the cut. According to the prevailing cultural belief, the Ngariba who performs the operation is not to be blamed for any such collateral damage. Self-blame and the internalization of oppression in the face of structural injustices (Freire, 1970) is not uncommon, as reflected in the words of. this participant:

> "I was positive it was my fault, and I blamed myself for what had happened, so I felt guilty and suffered my pain in silence."

This 18-year-old woman was told that parents would have to pay a penalty of a sheep if initiates accidentally held the hand of the Ngariba during the operation because of the pain they felt. The participants explained that the circumciser performs the ritual in a contemplative mood and she would be distracted if an initiate tries to stop her by holding her hand. There is a societal belief that the ancestral gods guide the ritual, thereby protecting the initiate against any ill omen or harm. But this required that the circumciser not be disturbed. Hence, it is required that the initiates remain still and keep calm to enable the Ngariba total concentration at her job. As shared by the young women, beliefs and sanctions attached to the cutting ritual do not only increase anxiety in the initiates, but ensures that other younger girls undergo the FGC ritual. The sanctions make both girl children, and their mothers more vulnerable to the FGC practice as they feel pressured to fulfil societal obligations.

Despite their vulnerabilities, these young women said that as initiates, the ritual was presented to them in a way that justified the act of the cut ritual. Hence, they somehow felt attracted to undergoing the ritual to acquire societal status. This familiar phrase, shared by the young women: "*it is good as it is something done by all Kuria women, but it is very painful*," demonstrated the meaning and the perception they attached to FGC. While these young women expressed the opinion that genital cutting was, on the whole, a positive thing, there are strong indications that they had few realistic options to go against what was expected of them.

From the previous discussion, it is clear that not only can the genital cutting process be classified as violence, but there is also the prospect of what might happen if one does not comply. For example, the young women said that they were warned that no man would marry an uncut girl. Comments like: "*it is painful, but it is good as it is our culture and must be done*" confirms the normalization of the practice, despite the pain. Enduring pain was seen to affirm their Kuria identity. By so doing, these participants seemed to redefine the pain as necessary, as the ritual granted them status and acceptance in their communities.

It is evident that the four young women who told their stories and those elderly women who either encouraged or forced these young women to undergo the cutting ritual acknowledged the pain of the cut by the blade. Throughout their narratives, the four initiates continually stated that young girls/women were forced either by female folks or compelled by the socio-cultural norms of their community to undergo the cutting ritual. Yet, they described FGC as good, positive and necessary, reflecting the internalization and normalization of dominant cultural discourses.

Humiliation

In addition to their experiences of pain and duress in suffering the genital cut, the four young women also shared the humiliating experiences they endured during the cut ritual. Two of the women, aged 35 and 28 years, expressed what they did not appreciate in the cutting ritual; one said:

> "Many people from the village came to watch us when we were being cut. I was shy and felt humiliated, exposing my private parts."

The other shared:

> "I was morose and upset, during the cut, I felt humiliated when people of all ages gathered to watch us and see which one of us is the bravest."

Apart from having to endure pain, the women had to contend with being made public spectacles. The women talked about this being a deprivation of their privacy. While both women said that the public watching them experiencing the cut was humiliating and shameful, they both asserted that it is the norm for the Kuria that FGC is performed publicly, and every community member is welcome to witness the occasion.

I wanted to get more clarification and understanding about why woman's sexual organs that are held to be so sacred could be exposed during a ritual for public view. In Kuria society, and Africa as a whole, sexual organs are hardly mentioned because it is considered to be a taboo to even talk about them openly. Contrary to this fact, the 58-year-old Ngariba, during our interview, gave her opinion that performing FGC in public is neither humiliating nor a deprivation of a woman's privacy. She explained that allowing the whole village to come close and watch

the initiates endorses the validity of the cutting ritual. She expressed her delight in her profession thus:

> "It is a great joy, and it pleases me when people from the village: women, men, boys, girls including children gather to witness the ceremony of FGC. Such an occasion makes me feel my job is essential to the community."

The Ngariba stressed that the parents of the initiate advertised their daughter to the men of the society as available and ready for marriage after the cutting ritual. She explained further that traditionally, coming close to watching young girls and women undergoing FGC is permitted and not a taboo in their society. I asked the Ngariba whether male circumcision is also open to the public view. She explained that the male circumcision is not open to public view but done in private. She continued to explain that women do not go anywhere near the sacred premises of the male circumcision during their ritual procedure.

I asked the Ngariba how she felt about being observed during the genital cut. She replied:

> "Even though I make my living from the practices, I honestly believe exposing the woman's genitals in public is a violation. Naturally, through FGC practice, women's rights to privacy have been breached. My right was violated many years ago when I underwent FGC. Men, young and old even children come close to watching the girls, and when the men are undergoing circumcision, women and children are not permitted go near."

There was a shift in her opinion from the previous comments and sentiments. It is clear that while the Ngariba initially defended the public act of the cut ritual as essential, in the end, she and the young women acknowledged the breaching of the Kuria women's rights to privacy through the FGC practice.

Health Risks and Complications Associated with FGC

The negative consequences associated with FGC revolve around the health risks of the practice (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; 28TooMany, 2020; Opoku, 2016). These researchers urge that FGC exposes women/girls to severe medical risk, which violates their right to health. Hence, this section examines the health risks that female participants reported and the complications they continued to experience because of the FGC ritual. The participants spoke about the long- and short-term health issues they encountered due to undergoing the FGC ritual. In the focus group discussion, the senior women also shared their personal health experiences, highlighting the health burden they carried because of the FGC practice. The narratives of two health workers (a female nurse midwife and a male gynecologist) gave medical explanations for the health problems participants

shared. The midwife was not a Kuria and therefore had not undergone FGC.

The Kuria communities practice FGC type II. The health risks, identified by locally respected health experts, have been the most widely used motivator to decrease the incidence of FGC (28 TooMany, 2020; Toubia and Sharief, 2003). The risks and complications associated with FGC types I, II, III, and IV are similar, however, studies by other researchers of FGC highlight that complications are more severe with the practice of types III and IV.

The women talked about the short-term complications they associated with the cut, which includes violent pain, haemorrhage or excessive bleeding from the rupture of the blood vessels of the clitoris. The 18-year-old said that the cut is a high health risk and could place the lives of girl children in danger. She narrated that: "Because I was cut badly and bled a lot, it took a time long for me to heal."

This young woman said that she felt dizzy and was weak for many days after the cut. She recalled how her mother spent weeks nursing and feeding her with a nutritious diet to regain her energy and strength. She also explained how she could not walk properly for days after the cut and believed that the *Ngariba* could not identify the blood vessels before the cut. Another 28-year-old woman talked about how she and her colleagues recuperated from the cut. She said:

> "I had infections after undergoing FGC that took quite some time to heal. I was too young; this was before I turned 12 years old. I had a lot of complications and had health problems for almost two years. As a result, I dropped out of school. I got married shortly after regaining my health and had my first child before I turned 16."

This woman indicated that she and her initiate companions were kept in a camp under the watchful eye of an elderly woman. She said the older woman nursed and treated them with special herbs and botanical oils until they healed and could walk properly. It emerged in her narrative that unsanitary conditions under which the operation was performed prevailed, and at times the herbs and oils applied to their wounds after the cut were not always prepared under hygienic conditions. These combinations contaminated the fresh wound from the cut and gave them infections, which prolonged the recuperation period.

In her interview, the Ngariba said that it takes three to four weeks for an initiate to heal completely from her wounds. She added that some of the initiates take a longer time to recuperate, depending on the gravity of the cut and infections they have. The Ngariba's explanation confirmed the seriousness of their ordeal, however, she did not accept the responsibility for any poor health outcome. She said: "I do my job as required; the initiates have to be taught not to resist during the genital cut."

In their narratives, the women participants highlighted the unhygienic conditions, the skill/expertise, and eyesight of the circumciser. They believe that the health risks and complications of FGC depend on the severity of the cut. This issue became a concern for me, so I brought it up during the focus group discussion of the community actors. One of the elderly women explained:

> "Most of the circumcisers (Ngariba) are old women, some of them may experience poor eyesight. Coupled with the resistance of the girl child during the operation, it may cause damage to some other organs. This kind of situation prolongs the healing process."

Some of the women in the group discussions shared that some girl children faint, while others have died during the cut because of the pain and the consequences of excessive bleeding. They claimed that the Ngariba performed the cutting ritual without any form of anesthesia. The Ngariba argued her standpoint in her interview that the girl child is supposed to be healthy and well nourished by her parents before the cut ritual. Moreover, if the initiates' instructors, such as their mothers or grandmothers, feed their daughters properly, there should be no casualties because the girl child would be robust enough to withstand all odds. This circumciser explained that before the cut, the girls have a cold bath that should help clot the blood and prevent excessive bleeding. She added that in ancient times, the cutting ritual was performed in the early hours of the morning before the scorching sun comes out.

All of the female participants mentioned that after the cut, they had been afraid to pass urine because of the pain of the raw wound. As a result, they had acute urine retention for the first few days after the cut. The health workers explained that urinary infections also occur from applying local dressing of cow dung and ashes. The medical expert further stressed that fever could result because of blood poisoning as the cut might well be performed in unhygienic conditions with unsterilized equipment. Moreover, the health workers said that the application of herbs and ashes to the wounds in addition to the use of instruments that have rarely been sterilized often results in tetanus and septicaemia.

When the issue of long-term risks and complications were addressed in the focus group discussions, some of the elderly women shared that they have seen fellow women in their communities suffering from fistulae. They claimed that some of these women do not even seek medical advice because of the stigma attached to the disease and therefore remain in isolation. I became concerned and asked the health workers whether they had seen cases of this nature in their health facilities. The nurse midwife passionately stated:

> "Female genital cutting poses a threat to a woman's health. It is also a major public health problem that has long and short-term consequences. The magnitude of the health issue includes severe pain, problems with urination, excessive bleeding, menstruation problems,

> infections and kidney problems, which are on-going in this discussion. The FGC practice is also causing complications with pregnancies and childbirth. It contributes to a high number of maternal and infant deaths in our district."

The midwife also talked about a terrifying delivery she had witnessed as a young trainee a few years ago:

> "A woman in labour was brought to the health facility one night when I was on night duty. Her relatives had told that she had been in labour for almost three days. She bled so much and was weak, but the baby's head was already coming out, so we encouraged her to push. When she managed to deliver, she had a tear from the vagina to her pelvic bone. I later discovered she had undergone FGC."

The strain of pushing too hard could affect the mother and result in fistula, according to the midwife's narrative above. I asked the health workers if they could have done anything to help women with FGC during such a difficult delivery. The gynecologist explained that when the midwife realised her patient had the clitoris removed, she should have used tactical means and then applied her expertise. He thus explained:

> "The midwife had to make sure that she gives an episiotomy to open the lumen of the birth canal where the child would pass; this would have avoided the tear that could cause fistula. This is because no matter the kind of FGC ritual performed that removed the clitoris damages the elasticity of the vagina. The vagina's elastic muscular canal is soft, and has a flexible lining that provides lubrication and it can harden and form a scar. Therefore, because the cut area is hardened it cannot expand for the cut woman to have a normal birth easily."

The gynecologist explained further that in such a situation, it is necessary for the midwife to give an episiotomy. He stressed that failure to apply such knowledge could result in a nasty tear that can extend even to the rectum, as was the case witnessed by the nurse midwife in the study. Incidents such as these could lead to fistula as a long-term health problem.

A narrative of the 18-year-old young woman cohere with the health workers' explanations. She shared:

> "I had such a difficult and prolonged delivery, and the midwife told me it was because I have undergone FGC, I am afraid to have any more babies."

The health workers attest that prolonged delivery could happen to any woman in obstructed labour if she is not attended to in time. However, they advised that cut women are more likely to experience obstructed labour than uncut women. The 18-year-old woman's narrative did not say she had a fistula, however, she shared that she was not quite 12 years old when she underwent the cut. She explained that she never had her menstruation before the ritual and was lucky to have gone back to complete her primary school education that year before getting married shortly after. She said that she became pregnant without experiencing her menses.

Another disturbing health problem disclosed by a 35-year-old women participant was the lack of sexuality education and the lack of sexual desire. An example of her experience shared was:

> "I do not have sexual desire, and this has caused me many problems in my marriage life. I went to the hospital looking for medical help, but I was disappointed because I did not get any help."

The 35-year-old disclosed that it was when her husband married another wife that she began questioning herself as to whether there was something wrong with her sexuality. A few of the female participants in the group discussion shared similar stories of not having sexual pleasure. A 53-year-old participant passionately stressed how FGC, as a practice, constituted sexual oppression:

> "I have no sexual desire, thus my husband kept teasing me; *"what kind of a woman are you?"* At times, out of desperation, he beats me up when he could not arouse me sexually. There was much tension in my married life that at a stage, I thought my marriage was breaking up. We both tried hard to make it work, but it was not easy. He has since then married four other women after me. I now understand his frustration. If my parents were to be alive, I would ask the government to convict them to life incarceration."

Like the 35-year-old, this woman also could not get medical help when she went seeking for a medical solution to her problems. In a casual conversation outside of the discussion group, some of the male participants shared how they had to develop a way of having sex with their wives. These elderly male research participants told how they too got frustrated when they could not arouse their wives. They said they would appreciate medical help for their wives. So many questions ran through my thoughts after the conversation with them. For example, do the men not see cessation of FGC as a possible solution? Do they even understand female sexuality and the place of the clitoris in sexual arousal? These questions need research for better understanding.

There was a common concern among all of the participants that the practice of FGC could transmit blood-borne diseases among the peers undergoing the ritual at the same time. There can also be many long-term implications, such as the risk

of HIV infection and transmission of hepatitis B, especially when genital cutting is done simultaneously on many girls in one group with non-sterile instruments. One of the participants highlighted the dangers of HIV transmission:

> "The Ngariba uses one razor blade to circumcise about 10–20 girls. When I underwent FGC almost 17 years ago, each one of us was told to bring our razor blade. Even though we all had our razor blades, the Ngariba did not wash the blood off her hands after each operation but went straight to operate on the next girl. She could easily transfer diseases from one girl to another. My fear shifted from the pain to the fact that I might contract the HIV in case any of my colleagues is infected with the virus."

It was obvious that women in the Kuria community were concerned and worried about their health. They also identified the harm done to their bodies because of FGC practices. The nurse midwife in the group discussion argued that FGC practice damages the sexual organs. Additionally, those cut women who are severely cut and have their vagina almost sealed, could also suffer further damages because they had to be reopened after marriage. In today's world, many parents are afraid of their daughter's contracting HIV through FGC. However, they still put their daughters through this despite the fear.

The women's testimonies assist in understanding the gravity of the health burden and provides a clearer picture of what FGC entails. Considering the impact of the health risks and complications shared, I questioned the participants about the origin of FGC, and whether there were signs of weakening of the practice among the Kura.

The Origin, Interferences and Weakening of FGC Practices in the Kuria Society

Although the origin of the practice seemed to be unknown, in Tanzania, among the groups that practice FGC, the socially constructed meaning of the practice and myths around FGC have been maintained. This has been passed on from generation to generation to the extent that it has been normalized among members of Kuria society (28TooMany, 2020, and 2016; Africanus, 2012). In a group interview, I inquired about the origin of FGC, when and how the practice became a norm in the Kuria society from three clan elders (two male and a female) aged between 65–73 years of age. While these clan elders claim that genital cutting is a cultural norm, all three elders had very different justifications and ideas about the origin of the practice. Two of them, the 68-year-old man and the 73-year-old woman gave their versions of the origin of FGC as:

> "We have no documented record about the origin of FGC in our community; we met the tradition in our society".

> “A long time ago, our ancestors used to go to war and could be away for a long time. The men at that time thought of ways in keeping their wives sexually inactive until they would come back from war. Hence, they came up with female genital cutting.”

These elders in the Kuria society used different narratives to explain the origin of the FGC, that does not give a convincing reason for the enforcement of the practice. However, it highlights how the actual reason might have been lost with time. The third clan elder, a 65-year-old man, came up with this explanation:

> “The different stories we have about the origin is evidence that female genital cutting has been in the Kuria society for as long as members of the community could remember.”

It was apparent in the clan elders’ narratives that married men in the Kuria society were envious and felt other men could exploit the sexuality of their wives. Hence, the idea of the female genital cut was conceived. The 73-year-old elderly woman explained that men were hoping that with the introduction of FGC, their wives will remain faithful to them.

> “In the ancient times our elders saw wisdom in the female genital cut. At that time, people in the society thought it was a good idea, and so it became a tradition and a norm. This idea was enforced in the society that no Kuria man could marry a woman who has not undergone FGC.”

This elderly woman’s narrative was understandable and highlighted how the clan elders at the time were jealous men. She felt men came up with this tradition as a way of keeping women to themselves. She stressed that the male possessiveness over their wives was a necessary tool adopted by them to manipulate the loyalty of married women in Kuria society. The informant’s understanding of why the elders at the time initiated the practice of FGC makes sense because she felt it had something to do with adultery, love, trust and faithfulness. The 73-year-old also thought that men have some tendency to believe that if the woman’s sexual desire is curtailed, then her virginity will be maintained, and men would have total control over the woman’s body. By so doing, women would remain faithful to men.

The clan elders explained that in Kuria society, husbands (and particularly senior males) are understood and looked up to by most married women as having wisdom and knowledge. In the olden days, these elderly men were perceived to be knowledgeable and wise people who were entrusted with conceiving and implementing the customs. This implies a link between customs, traditions and knowledge and wisdom, with traditions and customs becoming entrenched, taken-for-granted truths.

In an interview, a 56-year-old Ngariba clarified how in Kuria society, the circumcision ritual was originally only meant for male children but later, included the female children in the practice. The Ngariba talked about ceremonial rites of passage and the social construction of gender in the Kuria tradition. She said that the Kuria have two forms of rites of passage. First, the naming ceremony which marks the first rite of passage in the life cycle of children that gives them formal recognition and identity. The Ngariba added that a new-born child could only be considered genderless and would become 'mtu', (human being) only after the naming ritual. She added:

> "In our tradition, to recognize a child as an adult, s/he has to undergo a second rite of passage – circumcision. Our elders informed us that, formally, circumcision practices were mainly for male children in the Kuria communities as a rite of passage to manhood."

The Ngariba explained further that with FGC, the ceremony goes on for three months – September, October through to November in the different wards of the community. During those three months, over 150–200 girls could undergo the ritual of the genital cutting in a particular year. This explanation gives a clearer picture about the scale on how the FGC ritual ceremony affects female children in the Kuria society.

The clan elders asserted that the importance of FGC was that every Kuria girl knew that to be a decent and respectable wife in the society depended on the preservation of her 'virginity'. The elders claimed that this kind of system could be described as female chastity, which is of crucial importance for the male. The 73-year-old elderly woman explained further:

> "A young woman, who is not a virgin at her marriage, is considered 'loose' both morally and having a poor upbringing, which tarnishes her image and that of her family. Such a girl cannot compete and stand up to her peers in marriage life."

According to the 73-year-old woman, in the olden days, FGC was compulsory for all girls entering puberty or shortly after puberty in the Kuria society. For this reason, a girl-child who gets pregnant before undergoing FGC brings shame and sullies her family's reputation.

Another elderly woman in the FGD remarked that teenage pregnancy, for example, was rare in Kuria society. In the group discussion, the 73-year-old elderly woman shared that in ancient times, the male folk would have been afraid to propose to a young girl or have sex with her before she underwent the FGC ritual. There were societal fines imposed on any man found to be guilty of taking a girl's virginity, and the clan elders made sure these sanctions were in place for offenders. The older women added that morality and woman's dignity were highly valued in the community.

The elderly women in the study believed that FGC prevents their daughters from promiscuity; a value that was emphasised by all participants, including the key informants. The 65-year-old man explained that:

> "The cut girl gains self-esteem after the ritual; she transforms from childhood to womanhood. FGC gives her access to belonging to her peer group. She is seen as responsible, and she is given responsibilities in society."

It is obvious that women in the Kuria society are involved in the practice of FGC. The common phenomenon in patriarchal societies is that the males in the household make the decisions about their daughters. However, in some cases, no matter what the views of the male, the female could arrange with their daughters and extended relatives to have them undergo the ritual. A 62-year-old woman had this to share:

> "Even when my husband is against the fact that our daughter undergoes the cutting, I feel it is my duty to do the right things for her."

Elderly women have lived long enough to have seen and witnessed uncut women being mocked and called names in the community because of not undergoing the ritual. Facing such situations, these uncut women blamed their mothers for not doing the right thing for them.

> "I cannot leave her uncut, my daughter listens to me. I am not an uncut woman, why should my grandchildren be called the children of an uncut woman?"

As related earlier by the young women, the elderly women also disclosed that it was very common in Kuria society that the last wishes of most grandmothers before dying was that the granddaughters, especially those named after them, undergo FGC. Similarly, the clan elders explained that the dying wish of a dignified person, such as a grandmother, was usually respected and her wish is always carried out. The reason is that those who abide by the wishes of a grandmother are blessed with having good children who are protected from the haunting and harm of bad and evil spirits. Most members of society believe these evil spirits may cause great harm to the entire clan if the ancestral spirits are not appeased.

As positive values are attached to the FGC ritual, so too are taboos associated with the cutting ritual. These taboos are believed to help put order in the societal structure to ensure problem-free processes of the FGC ritual ceremony. It has been said that in Kuria society if any of the girls are found to have had sexual intercourse beforehand it will be found out during the FGC ceremony. Informants

shared that during the ritual, the whole cutting process is stopped until the girl in question discloses the man with whom she had sex. The man, '*sex offender,*' pays a fine of a goat/sheep as a penalty for having taken advantage of the girl's sexuality. If he disappears or goes into hiding, the girl's parents pay a fine for the immoral act of the girl. A delay in finding the *sex culprit* or the parents of the girl to pay the penalty could endanger the lives of her peers who have undergone the surgery with her. The reason is that the already cut girls in the group would be waiting with their blood dripping as they had no permission or right to leave the premises until their colleague was purified and cleansed.

The community actors gave additional insight into how the morality of a girl is measured by her sexuality. According to them, it was considered taboo for an uncut girl to conceive and birth a child. One of them, a 63-year-old elderly woman, gave this explanation:

> "In the olden days, a girl child who gets pregnant before undergoing FGC is not only banished from the community but her family are also expected to have her burial ceremony. The girl in question is, therefore, counted among the dead. Moreover, she could never return to her village."

As expressed in the young women's narratives, the clan elders also disclosed that it was a taboo for a girl to cry out or try to stop the Ngariba during the cut. Hence, girls were discouraged from crying, as it did not only make them cowards but it brought shame to their parents. Another serious taboo surrounding FGC held by the Kuria is death. The practice is that before the circumcision ceremony, the girl child is well fed and nourished. It is the duty of her family to make sure she is in good health to withstand all odds of the surgery. The 68-year-old elderly woman, in an explanation that absolved the Ngariba of any responsibility for harm and fatalities, stressed that:

> "In the course of the cut and the recuperating period, if a girl bleeds to death, she could not be buried among her deceased family members. Her body is disposed of in a secret location at night in the forest, far from the village, for hyenas and other wild animals to devour. Death during the ritual of genital cutting is believed to be a taboo and a bad omen, not accidental. It is presumed the mother or other female instructors in the family failed to make sure the girl child was fit and strong to undergo the severity of the cutting ritual."

Informants explained that in the Kuria tradition, especially in the olden days, the death of a girl child undergoing genital cutting is not announced to the public. The dead woman or girl simply disappears, and no one ever talks about her. No one mourns her in the village, neither her parents nor relatives are permitted to show any sign of bereavement for her passing. If parents or the family disobey

this sanction and mourn, they are levied to pay a cow to appease the gods and the ancestral spirits.

The taboos surrounding the practice of FGC place women (i.e., both the elderly and young women) in a complex situation. The mystery surrounding these myths is not always easy to understand, especially when trying to find a holistic meaning as to why the practice continues in these communities.

From the narratives of the informants, I identify three ways a woman is kept in her place in a patriarchal society with these cultural taboos. First, the woman keeps her virginity for the man she marries in the future. Second, the woman reaches a mature ripe age before marriage. Thirdly, the Kuria women used to subject the girl child to FGC at the ages between 16 and 18 years and so they are married shortly after the ritual ceremony. However, in recent years, the ritual is performed on girls at an earlier age between 12 and 13 years and even at a younger age in some communities. Very few women have undergone the cut at the age of 18 years in the last two decades (28TooMany, 2020). Research done on FGC in Tanzania shows that there are signs of the practice of FGC dying in the society because of the outside interferences.

Interferences and the Weakening of FGC Practice in the Kuria Society

The informants blamed a swift change in FGC patterns on outside interference in the Kuria culture. They highlighted that parents who still hold on to old traditions had their girl children cut at an early age before they could be influenced by modern ideas from Western cultures or the ideologies of Christianity (28Toomany, 2020 and 2016; Yusuf, 2013; Bond, 2005).

In the different interviews and discussions, almost all the research participants shared that the practice of FGC among the Kuria is beginning to weaken for various reasons. It was observed that the elderly Kuria women, and most elderly African women in the ethnic groups who practice FGC, encourage the cutting ritual on their children in the belief that it is best for them. “It is not men who perpetuate the cycle of FGC. It remains practiced by women who themselves have been cut” (UNFPA, 2020: 68). They do not consider FGC as a malicious act to punish their girl children, rather they perceive FGC as a traditional ceremony that protects and safeguards their daughters’ future for marriage opportunities (UNFPA, 2020; Yusuf, 2013; Talle, 1993; Kissakye, 2002). When discussing attitudes related to FGC, specifically in the Kuria context, the community actors held that since 1998, the Tanzanian Special Provision Act prohibits the practice FGC. They claimed that while the practice has been outlawed, it is still considered compulsory in some Kuria communities, but in others it is becoming optional.

It is worth examining the different environments of those who practice FGC, whether they live in urban or rural areas. Other factors such as educational back-

ground, economic situation, and mindset might help shed more light on why they believe in the practice with such tenacity. In their discussion, the community actors concluded that usually, those in the rural areas have a great tendency to think FGC is to ensure the virginity of a girl before marriage. These locals also believe that it is a guarantee that the girl will not be in a position to have sexual intercourse before marriage, which is a credit to the parents, especially the mother, for the good upbringing of her daughter. On same rare occasion, some well-informed educated young women have opted to be cut by their own free will in the Kuria society. A clan elder, a 68-year-old woman, testified that:

> "Three university students from this Bwirege ward came home and demanded to be cut. These young women wanted to be Kuria, and be blessed by their ancestral spirits."

The mystery and the sacred appeal of FGC remains deep rooted in those who practice the ritual. These young university students might have heard about the pain and health hazards associated with the practice yet participated in the ritual.

When the young women, who felt victimized by the practice of FGC, talked about the lack of protection they experienced from clan elders and the law enforcement bodies in their society, the community actors explained that issues of civil law and customary law are complex and could be confusing to practitioners of customary rites. The human rights activist in the discussion group highlighted that knowledge of the adverse implications of FGC may be shallow and not deep enough to convince community members to desist from the practice. It emerged in the discussions that the message conveyed to the locals is that FGC practice is seen as a violation of human rights and prohibited because of outside interference with local customs. Furthermore, Christianity is perceived as the waging of war by the Christian culture on the traditional culture. Thus, retention of the practices are erroneously constructed as an anti-colonial stance (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). In the group discussion, a 67-year-old elder gave his views affirming the ongoing debate on why the FGC practice was dying out:

> "Christianity has contributed to the dying of the FGC tradition among the Kuria because most Kuria have been converted to Christianity, and the Christian faith condemns the practice. In the last decade, I noticed a cultural change, especially since the government enacted laws to arrest, prosecute and convict parents who put their daughters through FGC. Another big issue is that our men are working in different parts of the country. They meet women from various ethnic groups, fall in love, and marry them. My son married a Sukuma, an ethnic group that does not practice genital cutting. I have accepted her as a daughter-in-law."

A Kuria man marrying a woman from a tribe that does not practice FGC does not always guarantee the weakening of the practice. One such case will be discussed in this chapter where a girl child from a mixed marriage opted to undergo FGC because of peer pressure and her claim of her personal identity. There

were arguments among the participants about religion being used to promote FGC and not contributing to ending the practice. Even though in both Christianity and Islam, there is emphasis on the human body being perfectly created by God and that people are encouraged to look after the body and not scar it in any way, most participants believed the practice continues to be carried out in both Christian and Islamic societies because of cultural values among the Kuria. I asked the young women about the socio-cultural values they attached to FGC, which is discussed below.

Socio-cultural Values, Motivating Factors and Symbolic Meanings of FGC Practice

The practice of FGC amongst the Kuria in Musoma Rural District was found to have social and cultural significance. Different Kuria informants revealed many insights into genital cutting, culturally known according to Africanus (2012) as *esaaro,*[10] and attributed the practice to numerous representations and functions in the Kuria society. Even though the four women participants felt they were *victims* and *survivors* of the practice, it emerged in their narratives that having a traditional Kuria identity was significant to them. These women were told that the initiate is recognised as a respectable Kuria woman and given responsibilities in the community after the FGC ceremony (Alradie-Mohamed et. al, 2020; Opoku, 2016; Africanus, 2012).

In her narrative, a 28-year-old woman shared how she had envied and admired her older sister before her initiation. She said that she had witnessed part of the ceremony of her elder sister's ritual but became scared when she saw blood oozing out of the initiates. She got frightened and left the scene. However, to her surprise, her parents and other relatives praised her sister and lavished her with gifts. They had also talked for days about how good her sister had been during the cut ceremony. This participant also explained that before her elder sister married, her parents no longer restricted her movement. She observed the freedom of her sister visiting friends and enjoying herself in their company.

> "I had seen how my elder sister was treated with respect in the household and the community after she had undergone FGC and got married."

Apart from the prestige, self-esteem, and respect an initiate enjoys, the idea of receiving gifts enticed the girls or young women to be courageous during the genital cut. All four of the participants talked about the biggest motivation to endure the pain during the operation was the '*crown of bravery*' which they looked forward to achieving. The 35-year-old said:

> "The feeling of being brave and courageous makes me proud; it is a lifetime honour."

10 Female genital cutting and male circumcision practices were collectively referred to as ichisaaro, sing esaaro.

Being able to tolerate and endure the pain is a marker of passing the FGC test. It is evident that the FGC initiate was motivated with the promises of gifts as rewards for fulfilling their traditional norms. This gesture empowered them psychologically to endure the pain. While this explanation may seem to be a barbaric act to outsiders, in the Kuria context, this prestigious and ceremonial act becomes a motivating factor. According to the participants, it also encourages the continuity of FGC because they claimed young girls who witnessed their elder sisters undergoing the ritual and receiving a lot of gifts attracted them to the act.

Two of the women participants said they were not prepared psychologically for the trauma of the pain of the cut. However, the third, a 35-year-old participant explained that when she underwent the cutting ritual in a group of 20, she and her colleagues were kept in a camp for a week. There was a respectable woman who spent the days with them and taught them the role of womanhood. She explained that:

> "The senior woman taught us how to keep the home and ourselves clean, be respectful and obey the elders and our husbands. We learned to be discreet about what we shared of our married life. Most importantly, our instructor taught us to be tolerant and withstand hardships in life in all circumstances."

This account demonstrates the distinct gender roles in the Kuria culture associated with the practice of FGC. The woman held that it is an outstanding tradition that helps prepare and shape female adolescents for the future and her married life in the society. She appreciated the instructions given to her and her colleagues in the camp before and after the genital cut ceremony. She felt she was a true Kuria because she went through the FGC ceremony to achieve her status in the community.

While these young women linked FGC to positive socio-cultural values, they also highlighted, as indicated above, some humiliating aspects of the procedure, which they did not find beneficial. They explained that cutting off the clitoris discriminates against them, relative to their male counterparts who only have the foreskin of their penis removed. They also said their men use the weakness in their sexuality against them during sex, which they find humiliating. They said while they were aware FGC is an acceptable norm in Kuria culture and was socially validating and appealing, they dreaded the actual experience and the painful aftermath of the ritual.

Peer pressure was a key factor in maintaining the practice of FGC. The participants felt that girls who reached puberty had to undergo the ritual in public, so that everyone in the community would know who had been cut. Otherwise, they would face stigma and discrimination from their peers. A 20-year-old young woman's story illustrates this situation. She chose to have the ritual on her own, against her parents' wishes, because of peer pressure. She was not one of my

original interviewees, but I learned about her after interviewing her parents. They both opposed their daughter's decision and blamed the Ngariba for persuading her to have the FGC. They only found out about it when she got an infection and could not move. I was curious to hear her side of the story, so I visited her home and asked for her consent to interview her, especially after so many women shared how they had been pressured and forced to undergo the ritual against their wishes.

Her first reaction in the interview was: "*Why? Do you want people to make a mockery of me?*" It took a while to pull myself together to assure her that I was neither blaming nor judging her action but wanted to know why she chose to have her genitals cut without the approval of her parents. In response, she said:

> "I chose to undergo FGC against my parents' wishes and had to be courageous to endure the pain of the 'cut' in order not to suffer intimidation and stigmatization from the songs and poems used to deride and taunt uncut girls. I was tired of the stigma and could not stand the humiliation from my peers any longer."

This 20-year-old was a final-year student in a boarding secondary school. She said she faced mockery and insults from her friends for not having the FGC ritual. She believed that as a Kuria, she had to be cut to become a complete Kuria woman. She praised the benefits of FGC and felt it was her right and duty to preserve her Kuria identity. She had no regrets or negative effects from the practice. Her parents, however, opposed her decision and accused the Ngariba of influencing her. They said that she had threatened to kill herself if they did not approve of her choice. The father gave his testimony thus:

> "I got worried and tried my best to explain to her how the government could convict her mother and me if the procedure went wrong and she would need medical attention in a hospital. However, she did not take my advice. The worst part for us was that she took money from her mother's purse without our permission to pay the Ngariba. Moreover, her mother had to nurse her for weeks from the resulting infection before she healed."

When a girl decides to have FGC without her parents' consent, they face a dilemma. The mother of this woman was scared by the extent of her wounds, but she could not take her to the hospital. She feared that the medical staff would not believe that she did not force her daughter to have the ritual. This kind of incident was not uncommon in their society. The young woman's secret act of having FGC showed her strong belief that it was a vital part of her culture and identity. Her mother, however, disagreed. She did not see her daughter's choice as voluntary. She explained:

> "Since the practice of FGC was outlawed in our society, the Ngariba has been visiting schools, especially primary schools. She tries to convince the pupils to pressurize their parents to undergo the ritual and have their Kuria identity. Hence, my husband and I accused her of being the brain behind our daughter's act."

The couple condemned FGC and its harmful effects on girls. They urged the government to take action against the promoters, such as the Ngariba, who cut girls for money. They blamed the Ngariba and some clan elders for keeping FGC alive in their community. I found out that the parents of the 20-year-old woman had different ethnic backgrounds. I was curious to learn more about how FGC affected mixed marriages in the Kuria community. The father, a 42-year-old Kuria man, said he married a Jita woman because his parents were poor and could not pay the high bride price for a Kuria bride. The Jitas' are another ethnic group in Tanzania, along the lake zone, who do not practice FGC. They also have a bride price system, but they do not demand as many cows as the Kuria. The father of the 20-year-old opposed FGC for obvious reasons:

> "My wife is not recognised as a proper woman in the Kuria context, and she cannot join other women folk to receive her daughters' home if they undergo the ritual with their peers."

The belief of the Kuria is that only dignified parents who have undergone genital cutting could receive their cut children home. It is, therefore, humiliating for the Kuria man in the mixed marriage relationship that some of his fellow Kuria men make fun of him when discussing clan matters that involve womanhood. The father continued to explain thus:

> "My wife too told that some women in her community mock her. For these reasons, I do not want my daughters to undergo the FGC ritual, unfortunately, my eldest daughter demanded her rights as a Kuria and underwent the ritual."

It was revealed that the couple had three daughters, but they did not want them to undergo FGC. Their Kuria father claimed that it was not the wife's culture. She was not cut, and he saw no reason for their daughters to undergo the FGC ritual. However, his Jita wife was of a different opinion. When I questioned and asked her how she felt about her daughters' choice, the mother of the 20-year-old said in a quiet low tone voice:

> "Well, it is their culture, what will I say, if my daughters want recognition in their society then I cannot stop them. But I would rather want them to tell me about it and not to undergo it secretly as my eldest daughter did."

The couple's wish for their daughter was ignored. Their eldest daughter had been cut when I interviewed them. They had two other daughters, aged seven and nine, who they feared would follow their sister's example. They requested

the government and activists to help raise awareness in the community and in schools. They suggested that the school curriculum should include the impact of FGC on girls' bodies. However, a key traditional informant in the group discussion defended FGC as a respected ritual that marked the transition to adulthood.

The Symbolic Meaning of the FGC Practice

There is ample of information among the practising communities concerning the symbolic meaning and the carving of identity through the physical cutting of flesh (28 TooMany, 2020; Abdi, 2012; Talle, 1993). Among the Somali "the act of – *cutting out* part of female genitalia – is the same act that carves in the female gender" (Abdi, 2012: 134). In the communities where FGC is prevalent, the practice is perceived as any other cultural rituals, which are associated with establishing or strengthening identity, and derives some of its power and tenacity from its symbolic value in identity formation (Abdi, 2012; Gruenbaum, 2001; Talle, 1993). According to Gruenbaum, "male circumcision for example, (and other body-altering practices such as sub-incision and ordeals of scarring) has carried the symbolism of a variety of meanings; maleness, age status such as incipient adulthood or adult manhood, membership in an ethnic or religious community" (Gruenbaum, 2001: 67). In the context of those who practice it, FGC conveys similar meanings (Gruenbaum, 2001; Talle, 1993). In their studies on ancient Egypt, both Dorkenoo (1995) and Koso-Thomas (1987) explain that the removal of the male-like parts from women and female-like parts from men are interpreted as reflective of gender definition.

Gender identity issues are evident among many cultures in Africa, where the removal of masculine parts from a female body is often given as one of the reasons for excision of the protruding clitoris and other tissues (Townsend, 2020; Gruenbaum, 2001). In Boddy's (1989) study in Sudan, an interpretation was made that the removal of the parts considered masculine and the construction of smooth scar tissue is seen as feminizing, and producing enclosure. Among the Somali, for example, Talle (1993) contended that the parts of the vagina being carved away are the "hard" parts of the female pudenda. In the same way, in Tanzania, in the Kuria culture as with most cultures in the country that have the practice, "hardness" is associated with maleness (28TooMany, 2016; Africanus, 2012). Thus, the male element of the female genitals, the clitoris, is irrevocably removed. The clitoris, as it were, must be excised in order to give clarity to the female-male distinction and propagate 'gender-identity' (Talle, 1993: 84). By removing the clitoris, the Gikuyu in Kenya also believe that they are removing the ambiguity of gender; in that way that "status and gender became crystalized" (Gruenbaum, 2001: 67). In their studies on ancient Egypt, both Dorkenoo (1994) and Koso-Thomas (1987) explain that the removal of the male-like parts from women and female-like parts from men are interpreted as reflective of gender definition; bodily substances are used as metaphors for social relations (Sanneh, 2022). As explicated by Talle (1993) when she studied FGC among the Somali, the bones (hard) that symbolize maleness represent and include the testicles, the penis, the

teeth and reason (intelligence). These male features are believed to be inherited patrilaterally through the semen of the father. While those which are soft symbolize femaleness and include blood, veins, muscles, skin and tissue, flesh, hair, nails and cartilage. These derive from the mother through female blood, with blood being the chief element that a woman contributes at conception (Talle, 1993: 84). Both Gruenbaum (2001) and Talle (1993) highlighted that in the practising communities, a child was seen to be an outcome of interaction, preceding birth, of both 'hard' and 'soft' relations.

In patriarchal societies in Tanzania, particularly among the Kuria and the Maasai, FGC is a gender metaphoric vehicle that provides telling images of how to think about the ritual and the value of other relations associated with the practice (28TooMany, 2020; Africanus, 2012). The scheme of gender classification proposes a hierarchical relationship between the sexes, as well as between 'things' that are female and male, giving precedence to the male image (Helander 1988 in Talle 1993: 84). Talle explains that the efficacy of gender as a metaphor may be related partly to the practice of infibulation and to male circumcision. She emphasizes that genital cutting strikes at the very part of the body where the anatomical difference between women and men is most prominent (Talle, 1993); therefore, for the societies who practice FGC, the surgery reinforces a primordial genetic dichotomy (Gruenbaum, 2001; Talle, 1993). Those who practice FGC believe that these prominent gender images do not spring from biological sex as understood in the ordinary sense (Sanneh, 2022). Among the Somalis, for example, the newborn is composed of both male and female parts; in gender terms, the infant is 'androgynous' (Abdi, 2012; Talle, 1993).

Bearing in mind this multiple-gendered state of the African understanding of personhood, women and men in the practising communities are considered impure beings, hence ambiguous and incapable of reproducing themselves until they have become 'women' and 'men' (Sanneh, 2022; Abdi, 2012; Gruenbaum, 2001; Talle, 1993). In studies among the Sudanese and the Somalis, both Gruenbaum (2001) and Talle (1993) state that the gendering of the person in practicing communities begins right after birth. Their emphasis was on the fact that when the women assisting in delivery announce the sex of the child to the people around, in the case of a boy being born, enthusiastic clapping and cheering (a local jubilant sound, known in Tanzania as *vigelegele*) could be heard from inside the delivery room. On the other hand, the birth of a girl is met by a conspicuous silence and restrained emotion (Gruenbaum, 2001; Talle, 1993). Talle (1993) suggests that these responses symbolize the making and re-making of gender.

Traditionally, to rework the process of gender making involves the trade of senior women who are believed to have learned the trade from female relatives, mostly their grandmothers (28TooMany, 2017; 2013; Kisaakye, 2002). These female experts make their livelihoods and depend on their job as circumcisers (Alradie-Mohamed et al., 2020). In principle, any woman who has the right talent or sufficient courage may take up work as a circumciser (Africanus, 2012). One

important ability that is required is that she should not be 'afraid of blood' (Talle 1993: 85). Even though they are women who have themselves undergone the operation, when performing the cut they act as men, chiefly because they draw blood by handling the knife (Gruenbaum, 2001; Talle, 1993).

In Tanzania, the Kuria are known to be warriors and aggressive in drawing human blood, mainly in fighting, which is strictly a male preoccupation. According to Africanus (2012), the job of a woman circumciser in the Kuria community is somehow surrounded by ambiguity and, in a sense, is regarded as degrading. In some societies, such as Somali where FGC is practiced, the circumciser is seen as a mysterious being who appears like a spirit to do her job, collects her ransom and disappears again (28TooMany, 2017; Gruenbaum, 2001; Dorkenoo, 1995; Koso-Thomas, 1987). African feminist anthropologists and activists such as Dorkenoo (1995) and Koso-Thomas (1987) hold that FGC remains in the female space: women are largely the excisors and direct perpetuators of the practice. Alradie-Mohamed et al. (2020) have also reported that in many places, FGC is considered a "women's business" as, in most cases, mothers or grandmothers organize and support the cutting of their daughters.

However, it must be understood that FGC occurs in the context of patriarchy, as evidenced by the social norms and values attached to the ritual and the reasons proffered for its origins. It is widely believed that women practice FGC to please men (Boyle, 2009; Tuyizere, 2007; Bond, 2005; Gruenbaum, 2001), as it is perceived to ensure virginity until marriage (Alradie-Mohamed et al., 2020). Among the Kuria ethnic group for whom FGC facilitates 'a passage to adulthood', the practice holds such a high cultural significance that anyone who refuses to submit herself to FGC is considered an outcast (Yusuf, 2013). The practice is a symbol of social control of female sexual pleasure which is linked to the female reproductive role in society (Alradie-Mohamed et al., 2020).

In spite of their ingrained sense of culture and tradition, the Kuria have shown a degree of openness to change. What is evident from past research, and the findings of this study, is that if traditional practices such as FGC are to be challenged and changed, the patriarchal power underlying them must be challenged and changed by both women and men.

Interrelation of Personal Experiences and Cultural Norms

The foregoing analysis is very telling about how power is used over the vulnerable in a patriarchal society like the Kuria. It is not just who perpetuates the cycle of FGC, but also how it is practised by women who have been cut themselves and continue to promote the practice (UNFPA, 2020; Africanus, 2012). Elderly women in these communities have the power to challenge the traditions that violate women's rights, but instead they use that power to uphold the traditions. The women participants' understanding of the practice of FGC reflects 28TooMany's (2013: 43) view that "there is a link between male circumcision and FGC, and this link is associated with traditional Animist beliefs." This is consistent with past and

current research that show that circumcision for men and the genital cut for women are considered obligatory in the rural areas among practicing communities in Tanzania and other African countries. The belief is that uncircumcised men and women are not allowed to participate in important clan meetings (28TooMany, 2013; Akintunde et al., 2002). The procedure is the rite that introduces youth to adulthood and transforms them into respected members of society (Nandutu, 2004; Talle, 1998). Uncircumcised women and men are not seen as 'full' women and 'grown' men. Therefore, refusing to comply could result in social sanction, disgrace, and ridicule for a non-conforming mother or for uncircumcised girls. In such communities, the chances are that uncut women or men will lose the opportunity to be married (Africanus, 2012; Talle, 1993). In Somalian culture, for example, men often emphasize the value of being 'the first' to open a girl. To leave a girl 'uncut' is regarded as disgusting and 'unnatural' (Talle, 1993). An uncut woman is an anomaly, which simply does not exist among those who practice FGC (28Toomany, 2016; Abdi, 2010; Talle, 1993).

The narratives in this chapter have revealed that elderly women are implicated in performing roles in the interests of a male-dominated community. The data has shown that to subjugate women, the males enforce rules and use their power over influential women. When the male parent makes the final decision, he passes on the information to the female parent. If a mother succeeds in convincing the girl child, then the male figure becomes invisible. However, if the girl child turns out to prove difficult and resists undergoing the cut, for example, then the male parent uses his power to pressure the girl child. Male pressure often comes in the forms of threats, which puts the girl child in a situation where she feels trapped and would have no option but to undergo the ritual.

The elderly women stated that when the man gives such instructions to his wife, it is considered the final word has been spoken. It is up to the mother to do what society demands of her daughter. Acquiescing to these demands is acquiescing to male power, the control of men over women's sexuality, patriarchal constructions of femininity and to stereotypical gender roles. While the women in the study saw this, the normalized and naturalized gender discourses and practices, their imbuing FGC with positive connotations and fears of societal reprisal, precluded the possibility of giving up an age-old tradition they deem sacrosanct.

In this context elderly women, as custodians, have control over both the weak and the strong women. They also believe in their responsibilities as protective measures for the common good in the society. On the other hand, because they have the power over their young girls and the vulnerable women, they use it to accomplish what the males could not otherwise achieve. For example, as mentioned earlier, discussions on sex and sexuality are taboo in the Kuria society. Therefore, the male feels the elderly women who have influence on fellow women would be in the position to discuss sexuality with their fellow women. Hence, elderly women are entrusted with the tasks of preparing their daughters or granddaughters for the ritual cutting and to socialize them into knowing what a "good", chaste, subservient wife is. The elderly women in this study felt com-

fortable talking about the cultural values of FGC practices. They gave examples of how the girl child becomes pure and beautiful and how she is respected and given responsibilities in society. They also explained how, after the cutting ritual, the woman is freed from promiscuity and remains faithful to her husband.

During the group discussion on the disadvantages of the practice, participants concluded that the rate of polygamy is high in the Kuria community because of FGC. The women continuously shared about the abuse they experienced from their spouses due to the tension and frustrations about their failure to be sexually aroused. They believed that this contributed to men taking on other wives. A number of the males in the group also shared how they also became frustrated with the a 'cut woman', hence they married younger women in the hope of fulfilling their sexual desires. There was a long debate on this issue, which prompted me to ask: "Who then benefits from FGC?" I also noticed how the elderly women felt reluctant to speak about the negative aspects of the practices. A 68-year-old woman expressed, "A good woman endures pain and goes about her duties diligently."

Participants shared that the negative feelings and the psychological implications of the genital cut were never discussed before or after the procedure. It was a taboo to even imagine that FGC would have any harmful effects. The pain, and all that goes with it, becomes a mystery and lives in the woman's short and a long-term memory without her questioning anything about it. Moreover, women have neither the space to reflect on their pain, nor the mental strength to address the pain. The reality in Kuria society is that most of the women were forced into marriage shortly after the FGC procedure. The elderly women said that in the Kuria context, the cultural norm of FGC demands that the girl child reaches puberty before she undergoes the cut so that she is ready for marriage shortly thereafter.

Some informants, particularly clan elders and elderly women, who served as custodians of FGC, highlighted the positives of FGC, which are reflected in the Table below.

Table 3. 2 Custodians' claims about the positives of FGC

Reason	Custodians' Beliefs
Prevents promiscuity	The clitoris, left uncut, promotes promiscuity. FGC is beneficial to women and society.
Maintenance of cleanliness	Genital cut promotes cleanliness. Secretions produce by the clitoris glands, labia minora and majora are foul-smelling and unhygienic.
The enhancement of fertility	The cut enhances fertility and the cut girls become pregnant within a short time after marriage. The secretions produced by the glands of the genitalia kill the spermatozoa deposited in the vagina by the penis.
Maintenance of good health	Cut women are always healthy and never complain of any physical ailments except those brought about by supernatural causes.
Promotion of social and political cohesion	The practice of the FGC ritual conferred full social acceptability and integration of the female. The practice leads to identifying with ones' culture and growing into acceptable members of their society, with full social rights.
Promotes purity, beauty and softness	FGC practice enhance a change in the character of the girl, making her disciplined, decent, calm, respectful and respected.

Health workers and activists disputed the claims by the custodians as unfounded. They said that the health benefits and other reasons given by the custodians had no scientific or logical basis. For example, they pointed out that some cut women were promiscuous, and many cut women in Kuria society were not respected and were treated unfairly. The health personnel questioned how maintaining cleanliness could be a reason for FGC. They argued that the scarred tissue, which replaced the clitoris, was not beautiful. They also explained that depending on the severity of the cut, the scar could block the urine and menstrual flow, which could lead to retention of urine and menstrual blood, which could cause body odours. The health workers denied any link between FGC and fertility or good health, rather they warned of the health risks of FGC.

Summary and Discussion of Key Findings:

The practice of FGC amongst the Kuria in the Ryamisanga ward was found to have multiple social and cultural functions: such as being an important determi-

nant of a social bond among community members not only living members, but also departed Kuria ancestors (28TooMany, 2020; Africanus, 2012). Informants shared how FGC is a necessity in the Kuria society, the idea being that its values are beneficial to women. The study participants understand the practice as a sign of adulthood and consider the ritual as a valuable means for generational ordering which symbolizes a person's maturity, making FGC a commonly accepted norm from the point of view of the community and a vital requisite for marriage. Hence, in the study, FGC is seen as a primary rite of passage to prepare girls for marriage despite the violation of the women and girls human rights as a result of coercion, the pain the cut inflicts on them, the health risks, the humiliation that they are exposed to and the violation of bodily integrity.

Custodians of FGC, and even those who subject themselves to the procedure expressed the dominant societal view that FGC grants men and women respectability, affirmation and identity within their communities, with sanction for the continuity of a clan in their society. The dominant view among supports of FGC was that Kuria men respect cut girls and do not take advantage of their bodies because sexual assault offenders are named, labelled and fined thereby being shamed, and stigmatised in society. However, this view was countered by health professionals and activists and by the personal narratives of the women in this study, who talked about cut women being ridiculed by husbands who chose to take on additional wives on account of the cut women's lack of sexual arousal.

The research participants stressed that individual families practice FGC because there is a widespread belief that if they do not, their girl children are likely to pay a price that could include social exclusion, criticism, ridicule, stigma or the inability to find suitable marriage partners. The informants expressed that family members, especially parents, felt dignified and honoured when their girl children went through the cutting ritual gracefully. The fear of bad omen befalling those who did not adhere to FGC to appease the ancestral spirits was strong among the women. The elderly women believed that a sufficiently large segment of their social group believed that they ought to cut their daughters, the failure of which might engender negative sanctions from their community (Sanneh, 2022; UNFPA, 2020).

The stigmatization and intimidation do not apply only to the uncut woman, but the husband as well. It was highlighted that community members believed that the husband of an uncut woman cannot eat certain parts of meat at the circumcision celebration and cannot perform some community rites. While an uncut woman suffers isolation from community duties, her husband undergoes a similar fate because he is 'looked upon as a child' (28TooMany, 2016; Africanus, 2012). The uncut Jita wife, in this study, narrated how she could not participate in cooking food for community celebrations with other women folk, and her Kuria husband occasionally suffered a similar fate. However, the informants claimed this stigma is decreasing and becoming history in the Kuria society.

These informants revealed that in ancient times among the Kuria, a woman who has not undergone FGC is segregated from the wider community and cannot participate in specific domestic tasks, such as fetching water from the community wells. "There is a belief that the wells are sacred places and will dry up if an uncut woman goes there. An uncut woman cannot collect firewood or open the gates of a homestead" (Waritay et al., 2014: 17). Hence, my finding underscores that the FGC practice among the Kuria is considered a prerequisite license for social duties/obligations and there are sanctions for non-conforming societal members.

Participants indicated that some parents still believe that cut girls will secure higher dowries (Sanneh, 2022; UNFPA, 2020; 28TooMany, 2016; Africanus, 2012). In the study, informants described 'parents' as the chief benefactors. It came up in the narratives that FGC is an income-generating opportunity for women and girls and those who benefit from the practice, such as parents, traditional leaders and cutters. According to reports by 28TooMany (2020/2013), a charity that works to end FGC in Africa, the Ngariba is paid in cash or in kind by the parents of the girls who undergo the cut. The payment varies depending on the type of cut, the number of girls, and the economic status of the family. The 28TooMany (2013) reported that:

> The payment for Type II FGC excision for example ranges from Tsh. 15,000 to Tsh 25,000 (USD 4.5 to USD 9) per girl. The practitioners called Ngariba kept promoting the 'cut' as they are paid 10,000/= and in some communities 15,000/= Tanzanian Shillings for each girl 'cut.' A portion of this is paid to the traditional leaders.

The study also found that peer pressure was high amongst young girls especially those in the secondary schools. In some other readings, it was highlighted that "men do not like FGC, the women do not like it," but the young girls had resorted to cutting themselves with razor blades because of peer pressure (28TooMany; 2016/20; Waritay and Wilson, 2014).

Social pressure is another factor that contributes to the on-going practice. Those who support FGC believe that undergoing the practice will reduce women's temptations to engage in sexual relationships and protect their virginity before marriage. To them, a woman being virtuous is linked to family pride and honour during marriage, and it is expected for a girl to remain a virgin to uphold her reputation and that of her family (Sanneh, 2022). Hence, a girl who does not undergo the ceremony is often viewed as an 'outcast,' 'unsuitable for marriage,' or impure.' The shame and stigma often associated with a girl who has not undergone FGC by her community is usually unbearable, and many parents understandably want to avoid such social pressure (Sanneh, 2022: 7).

The study highlighted some taboos that are associated with FGC, some believe that FGC purifies the woman's body as the clitoris is not only considered a dirty organ, but also that it needs to be removed to protect girls from sickness. Another taboo is sexual urges in women. It is thought women who have not undergone FGC have a stronger urge for sex. FGC is performed to control their sexual desires and prevent them from being promiscuous. Again, women who have not undergone FGC face constant stereotypes and discrimination in the Kuria society. Name-calling and teasing, such as 'uncircumcised', are derogatory terms which are used on those who have not undergone FGC and could lead to exclusion from participating in important community functions (Sanneh, 2022).

The study emphasized that it is not the Kuria man who prepares the girl child for the ritual nor does the male perform the actual ritual of cutting the genital of the girl child. Sanneh, (2022); UNFPA, (2020); and Africanus, (2012) also came up with similar research findings that in the Kuria tradition, the elderly female in the home arranges with their daughters and external female relatives for their girl children to undergo the 'cut'. Moreover, the FGC procedure is performed by a woman, the Ngariba, a role she either inherited or learned from a female relative (Africanus 2012; Kisaakye, 2002). The Ngariba is highly respected and believed to possess supernatural powers from the ancestral spirits (Sanneh, 2022; Kisaakye, 2002; Talle, 1993).

Participants, in this study, expressed the view that the continual influence of foreign religions, such as Islam and Christianity, brought a set of religious values in addition to the values of the existing traditional religion to the communities researched. The fear of ancestral spirits could be seen as a deep-rooted belief in the life after death in the African traditional religion. Judging from the empirical data, the Kuria research participants did not share those Islamic religious beliefs influenced their lives. In addition, while the representatives of Islam formed part of the community actors' group, they neither contributed nor commented on the importance of the traditional practices of women in their community. For this reason, the Muslim religion is silent in this study.

Christian institutions, such as the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in the Musoma rural district gave their viewpoints on the harmfulness and some immoral aspects of the FGC practice. In many ways, the values of the Christian religion oppose the values, norms, and beliefs of the Kuria social constructions. For example, the religious organisation indicated that the rituals are immoral and inflicts physical harm on the bodies of those women and robs them of their human dignity. However, given the patriarchal ordering of the RCC, some of its values and beliefs also promote and reinforce the subordinate position of women in Kuria communities.

Boyle (2002) pointed out that in Tanzania, where 20 of the 120 ethnic groups practice FGC, the regions that are predominantly Christian have the highest percentages of FGC. Although, Boyle (2002) also noted that being Christian in some African communities was a reliable predictor of women rejecting the practice

of FGC both in attitudes and in behaviour. There are many controversies surrounding FGC practices in connection with Christian beliefs and values, with the misinterpretation of Christian beliefs and values contributing to the continuation of patriarchal violence. One such controversy can be observed in the study of Tuyizere (2007) regarding the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian view that Adam was God's initial creation and Eve was made from Adam's rib. This idea is rooted in the creation story of Genesis 2:18–24. For some, this belief serves as a justification of the subordinate position of women in relation to men. Moreover, because the mythological justifications are words from the holy books, no woman dares to have authority to debate it. Hence, it is considered the final word (ibid). In fact, as observed by numerous researchers, this 'rib belief' has often been used to place women as second-class citizens.

Conclusion

FGC, a practice intended to promote the general well-being of a girl child for many social-cultural reasons, is physically invasive, emotionally damaging and associated with serious complications affecting the reproductive health of women (UNFPA, 2020; Ahmad et. al, 2016; Africanus, 2012). Some older and influential women, such as mothers, grandmothers and elderly women in the Kuria communities use power over young and vulnerable women to preserve the rituals that support the patriarchal structures (Opoku, 2017). Countless efforts made by government, NGOs, community actors and religious groups to eliminate the practice of FGC remain unsuccessful. The intersection between patriarchal power and the socio-economic contexts of the practice of FGC must be acknowledged, as some participants indicated that FGC was used as an income-generation strategy.

Gendered power relations that support FGC cutting among the Kuria were underpinned by Kuria values, norms and beliefs, which are the social constructions of the Kuria themselves. Both Kuria male and female proponents of FGC upheld the values, norms and beliefs regarding genital cut as normal and lived experience. The continuation of FGC, despite activism, reflects how deeply embedded the practice is in the Kuria society. This situation is also a reflection of the non-implementation of the law against the practice at the local context. While the passing of the law against FGC and other harmful cultural practices in 1998 is a step in the right direction, the Tanzania government must accompany this with persuasive approaches in the local context. The law that criminalizes FGC has not been able to bring about the desired rate of social change. Change must occur in the mindsets of the people in the practising communities.

This study highlighted the meanings that participants attached to FGC, and it is such locally-specific meanings that human rights activists and local social change agents must engage with. The elderly women believed that FGC is a duty and a responsibility to be fulfilled for the betterment of the community, and the women participants who narrated their direct experiences of the FGC

rituals, also normalized dominant societal views to construct FGC as core to their cultural identity that they found affirming and validating. Some members of the practising communities against FGC saw it as a health risk that could cause death. The Kuria informants were also aware of these possible life-threatening consequences although they had different explanations for what caused them. The pattern supports the argument that the strategies of delivering messages were ineffective because "in the local context, people may already be aware of many of the consequences, and the risks that are said to be associated with the practice may be thought light compared with the consequences of not undergoing the procedure" (Africanus, 2012: 171). Some proposed recommendations in respect of FGC are discussed in chapter 8.

The Interpretation of *Nyumba Ntobhu* Marriage in Kuria Society

Introduction

Marriage which is a key institution in many, if not all, societies, is typically a union between one man and one woman, and in polygynous societies a union between a man and more than one woman. In this chapter, however, I focus on woman-to-woman marriage in Tanzania among the Kuria in the Mara Region. Such marriage is known as Nyumba Ntobhu marriage meaning empty house without a man or house of women (Makoye, 2019 in Hadithi Africa, 2019) Nyumba Ntobhu marriage in the Kuria context, refers to the institution whereby an older woman pays the bride price to marry another woman (very often a young woman) and assumes control over her and her offspring (Starace, 2009; Cadigan, 1998; Krige, 1974). It must be noted that the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is not the same as a gay marriage, which is not governed by traditional beliefs, where individuals identify as being gay and share sexual relationships, and where individuals exercise a choice to enter the union in countries where gay marriages are legalized.

In the Kuria world view, importance is attached to a male child more than the female child, or indeed any full-grown woman. The obsession for a male child in Kuria families, and in Africa generally disadvantages women, constrains their development and self-actualization and restricts women's contributions to development (Nwoko, 2012). The Nyumba Ntobhu marriage in Kuria land has its genesis in this obsession with having a male child. "In many African countries, if women become widows and they don't have any male descendants, they risk losing everything they own in favour of another man from their husband's family, even if they have never met before. This issue is especially relevant when it comes to land ownership in a country like Tanzania, where agriculture is still the basis of the economy and essential for people's survival. Women who represent 51 percent of the agricultural workforce, yet only 19 percent of them are land owners. Hence, an increasing number of the Kuria ethnic group in northern Tanzania are resorting to the tribal Nyumba Ntobhu" (Hadithi Africa, 2019: 1).

The complexity of this marriage institution unfolds in this chapter based on ethnographic research. While the focus is on the Mara Region, it highlights that many African societies have practiced woman-to-woman marriage and some still do (Cadigan, 1998; Oboler, 1980; Krige, 1974). The experiences of violation, health risks, and the socio-cultural factors that compel the Kuria women into Nyumba Ntobhu marriage are addressed. Of particular salience is the need for power and control over economic resources of women who are involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage. The symbolic meaning of the African woman-to-woman marriage is explained. The chapter concludes by discussing the clan elders and community actors who shared concerns about the practice of Nyumba Ntobhu marriage in modern Kuria society and their reflections on the limitations of Tan-

zanian societal structures and the Tanzanian marriage law. I begin with the area's socio-historical and geographic backgrounds.

The Historical and Geographical Background of Woman-to-Woman Marriage

Since the beginning of this century, woman-to-woman marriages have been recorded among more than thirty different ethnic groups living in four regions of Sub-Saharan Africa (Opoku, 2016).

One of these regions are in the Transvaal[11], in north-eastern South Africa (O'Brien, 1977). Kjerland (1998: 4) argues that the first time that woman-to-woman marriage was recorded from Southern Sudan was when O'Sullivan's article 'Dinka Law and Customs' appeared in 1910. Since then, a number of terms have been used to describe marriage between two women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Kjerland (1998) and Evans-Pritchard (1951) described the marriage as 'Kinship and Marriage' among the Nuer in 1951. Among the Nuer people of South Sudan, ghost marriages are performed to provide a male heir for a man who dies without sons. His kin will marry a woman to his name, and she will bear children who are considered his offspring. The woman's male partner is usually her husband's brother or another close relative, who acts as a genitor. The woman has full authority over her children and her husband's property (Krige, 1974). The rain queens are also the heads of a matrilineal system that traces descent through the female line. Krige discussed woman-to-woman marriage with special reference to the Lovedu. According to Krige, the Lovedu are of a Southern African ethnic group, known for their unique institution of "rain queens", who are female rulers believed to have the power to control the rain and fertility of the land.

Legend has it that in Tanzania, the Kuria patrilineal Bantu groups, occupying the country extending across the Kenyan-Tanzania border to the East of Lake Nyanza, had the practice of woman-marriage. Kjerland (1998) shows that Kuria land is between the Migori River in Kenya and Mara River in Tanzania. Tarime is the district headquarters on the Tanzanian side of the border and Kehancha holds the same position in the Kenyan side in the Kuria district (Kamau, 2020; Starace, 2009 and Chacha, 2004). In their studies on the Tanzanian region, researchers such as Kamau (2020), Starace (2009), Chacha (2004), and Kjerland (1998) have called the marriage between two Kuria women as "daughter-in-law-marriage or *mokanmööna*". When researchers first discovered this form of marriage, they found it confusing and provocative as marriage between women was unheard of in Europe at the time (Kjerland, 1998; O'Brien, 1977). Hadithi Africa (2019), Chacha (2004) and Cadigan (1998) hold that woman-to-woman marriage is a predominantly African institutional form of marriage, which is unfamiliar to most people outside Africa and to many Africans.

According to Njambi and O'Brien (cited in Chacha, 2004), historians and social scientists only vaguely understand this specific form of woman-to-woman marriage. In some societies, such as among the Nandi people of Western Kenya,

11 A province of north-eastern South Africa originally inhabited by Africans who spoke Bantu, which was colonized by the Boers. This province existed from 1910-1994, it is no longer called Transvaal. It was restructured into different provinces post –apartheid.

women who are beyond child-bearing age or never married and have no children are most likely to engage in woman-to-woman marriage and thus become female husbands (Nyanungo, 2013). A marriage contracted between women normally involves an older one (a widow or one who is still married to a man) and a young one, but sometimes three or more women are involved. The concept remains relatively obscure, and in family studies discourse, the topic is pushed to the extreme margins by an historical fixation on western nuclear families as a universal ideal (ibid). Questions about biological fatherhood, sexual rights and duties dominated the discussion in Lord Lugard's study in 1965.

In his earlier work, "The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa", Lugard (1922) stated that he did not regard woman-marriage in Nigeria as "normal". In that study, he recorded the marriage under the title "Slavery in British Africa" as he did not believe that young girls entered such unions willingly (cited in Kjerland, 1997: 2–3). Researchers such as Oboler (1980) and Krige (1974) concluded that a marriage between two women in which the younger gave birth to children implied repulsive sex, as sex for procreative purposes is 'contracted out.'

Some researchers describe this type of marriage as 'woman marriage' or marriage involving a 'female husband'. Osiki and Nwoko (2014) illustrated a modification of female husband in the woman marriage institution amongst two ethnic groups (Ilorin and Asaba respectively) in Nigeria. They demonstrate firstly that the driving force behind the practice of female husbands in Ilorin were, in a sense, economic rather than social considerations. They explain that in olden days, Ilorin wealthy women considered their 'wives' as slaves who were exploited for their sexuality and their reproductive capacity. The labour of the young men who were employed to serve as the biological fathers of the children born to the female husband was also exploited. Secondly, Osiki and Nwoko (2014) revealed that colonial records point to the occurrence of female domination or control among the Asaba Division. According to these researchers, in a Confidential Report of No. C. 195/1915 of December 2, 1915, addressed to the Colonial Secretary's Office in Lagos, the Commissioner of Benin Province agreed that "the custom of women marriage was formerly prevalent in many parts of the Asaba Division." Osiki and Nwoko (2014: 28), quoting from the Benin Province File/461/1915 report, stated that:

> There used to be in Asaba Division a practice of marrying woman-to-woman. A barren woman would pay dowry for a girl who should bear children for her or a woman of position would pay dowry for young girls in order that they might bear children and strengthen her house. These girls did not marry and their children belonged to their mistress. This practice has been, to a great extent, suppressed through the medium of the Native Courts.

In an earlier study, Nwoko (2012) talks about a different form of woman marriage among the Igbos of Nigeria and explains that when a man was unable to have a male child, he appointed one of his daughters (in most cases the first daughter) to stay back in the family and procreate. In such communities, a man who did not have a son could pass land and trees to his daughters if the daughters were recognized as sons. According to Amadiume (1987), this passage from womanhood to manhood and the rights of 'sons' could only be acknowledged and accomplished through rituals.

Nwoko (2012) gave another example among the *Mbaise* Igbo of Nigeria. In this case, the female children of a family collectively pay the bride price of a younger woman after the death of their father in the name of their eldest sister so that the new bride can procreate and raise male children to preserve the family lineage (Nwoko, 2012: 76). Quoting Emefiene (2006), this researcher highlighted that the young bride is expected by her female husband to identify a well-behaved young man from amongst the kinfolk to be a bedmate. This was done for various reasons, such as the preservation of the blood tie of that particular family, to ensure that the children born from that relationship are not fathered by miscreants, thieves or persons with illnesses, and to prevent the introduction of unwholesome and undesirable traits into the family (Nwoko, 2012: 76).

Studies claim that in the African patrilineal societies, most older women involved in woman-to-woman marriage wanted sons to secure their inheritance (Hadithi Africa, 2019; Nwoko, 2012). According to researchers of 28TooMany (2013) and Hadithi Africa (2019) sons are the primary motive for woman-marriage, but they pointed out that the older woman could marry a younger woman because she wanted someone to tend to her in her old age. Kjerland (1997) held that women also took wives in communities where political power and motherhood were mutually exclusive. He also maintained that some women used the girls to earn money, as the young girls were hired out to men, and fees were claimed for their sexual services. Nwoko (2012) and (Aliyu, 2018) contended that many researchers have highlighted that some influential African women became female husbands to help traditional heterosexual couples find a way out of barrenness. The power imbued in woman-to-woman marriage is highlighted by Aliyu (2018: 1) who argued that "these influential women were regarded as men, by paying the bride price for other women their statuses were elevated ... Woman-to-woman marriage allowed for greater freedom of sexuality for the wives, they could have boyfriends, anonymous men whose only duty was to supply sperm, … and this was socially accepted. Any child the wives had was taken care of by their female husband and carried her name, and this was legitimate in the eyes of society".

While some see woman-to-woman marriage as an asset in order to have an heir, others believed that the practice was a customary way for pre-colonial single wealthy women who could not have their own children to procreate (Nwoko, 2012). Starace (2009) and Chacha (2004) concluded that woman-to-woman marriage is beneficial mostly to the female husband more than any other persons

involved in the marriage. Moreover, Cadigan (1998) specifies that women in the practising communities take wives under three circumstances: 1) barren women and widows take wives to obtain rights over children produced; 2) rich women accumulate wives to gain prestige and wealth in the same way men do through polygamy; and 3) women without sons can exercise their rights to a daughter-in-law by marrying a woman and giving her to an unborn son (Cadigan, 1998). Scholars hold that in some societies, the woman marriage makes it possible for women to gain social status as the head of the household (Hadithi Africa, 2019; Nyanungo, 2013; Nwoko, 2012; Kjerland, 1997). Many examples of the motivation for this form of marriage unfolded in the clan elder's interpretation of the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, which is discussed below, followed by the narratives of the women involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage.

Clan Elders' Interpretation of Nyumba Ntobhu Marriage in Kuria Society

In a group interview, four Kuria clan elders aged between 68–73 years old explained the meaning of Nyumba Ntobhu marriage in the Kuria context. According to these research participants, the Kuria society understands marriage as the union of male and female. However, in some Nyumba Ntobhu marriages, the male figure is '*invisible.*' These elders explained that in this type of marriage, the 'supposed mother' of the 'invisible man' takes the responsibility of paying the bride wealth of the bride. Hence, she plays the role of the 'male figure' in the marriage. Again, the clan elders explained that the literal meaning of Nyumba Ntobhu is an 'empty house.' They clarified that in Kuria society, a sonless woman who has only daughters is given the name '*Umwiboki wa baseke*', which expresses the ideology of Nyumba Ntobhu marriage as 'cut down a tree and plant another one'.

The idea implies that the sonless couple, having married off their daughters, acted as 'cutting down trees', making their homestead *empty*, and their domiciliary *poor*. According to the clan elders, the primary aim of the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is to provide a son for the '*empty house*' into which the young woman is socially married. Therefore, to ensure the survival of the family name, '*another tree*' needs to be planted. A 68-year-old clan elder explained.

> In our Kuria tradition, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is enforced when a particular married woman fails to bear children, particularly a son and has passed a childbearing age. Alternatively, in some circumstances, the married woman may have only girl children in her marriage.

The idea of a sonless house that was described as '*an empty and poor house*' shows the importance of a son in the Kuria society and highlights preference of sons over daughters. These realities illustrate the vulnerable position of an infertile or sonless woman in this patriarchal community.

An informant, Matambalya (an elder Kuria and a researcher) felt the significance of Nyumba Ntobhu practice goes beyond a mere '*empty house*'. Matambalya expressed the view that "Nyumba Ntobhu" as an arranged marriage between an elderly woman and a younger woman or girl, initiated by the parents of the young woman or girl. He explained:

> The young bride in the relationship is perceived as "*mokamöön*a" meaning (a daughter-in-law), is not married to the elderly woman. The marital relationship is between the young married woman and the "non-existent" son.

As told by the clan elders, this study confirmed that the elderly woman who paid the bride price chooses a man (sexual partner) to impregnate the young woman. In some cases, however, the young woman in the relationship is given the freedom to choose her sexual partner. In both cases, any child born becomes the grandchild of the elderly woman. The child is given the surname of the non-existent son or takes the surname of the family of the woman who paid the bride price.

I asked the clan elders to list those involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu household: They noted the elderly woman who paid the bride wealth, the young married woman, the sexual partner (biological father of the children born to the Nyumba Ntobhu household), and the social father. For the purpose of clarity, the Table below illustrates those in the Nyumba Ntobhu household/marriage institution and how they are addressed in this book.

Table 3 Names of those involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu household

People involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu household	Traditional names and the English translation of the names	How these people are addressed in this Book
The childless/sonless woman who paid the bride price	*Mamamkwe* i.e.- mother-in-law	Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law or Female husband
The young woman married in the Nyumba Ntobhu household	*Mokamööna* i.e.- daughter-in-law	The young or younger woman
The husband of the childless/sonless woman	*Babamkwe* i.e.- father-in-law	Social father – father-in-law and the grandfather of the Nyumba Ntobhu children
The man who impregnates the young married woman	*Umutwari* i.e.-the sexual partner	*Umutwari* or biological father (of the Nyumba Ntobhu children)

While the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is perceived as a marriage contract between two women, there are also two male figures involved in the marriage. The '*Babamkwe*' – the father-in-law (the husband of the female husband if alive) who is the social father and the sexual partners the biological father in the gender and kinship context (Opoku, 2016).

The clan elders talked about Kuria society being organised in a patriarchal and patrilineal kinship system, where the family name and property follow the male line of descent, and marriages are often patriarchal. Among the Kuria, the one who pays the bride price to marry a woman controls the economic resources of the home, as well as the married woman and her children. The payment of bride price legalizes marriage in the societal context. These elders claimed that divorce in the Kuria society entails the return of the bride wealth, hence divorce remains rare in the society (Sibiga, 2019; Starace, 2009; Chacha, 2004).

In this book, I refer to *Umutwari* as the '*maker*' - the biological father and *Babamkwe* as the *social father* – the '*giver*'. The social father in this marriage, therefore, is the '*given figure*' and the alleged father-in-law of the young married woman. He is to offer financial and material help to support his wife (the mother-in-law/female husband) in the upbringing of the children (their grandchildren) from the marriage.

The second male figure is the '*Umutwari*' - who is the sexual partner, an agnate from the female husband's family. The clan elders revealed that when the newlywed arrives in the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead, the elderly woman chooses an *Umutwari* (the sexual partner) for her. With some families, the newlywed is given her freedom to befriend a man of her choice, who might be from another clan. Whatever situation the newlywed finds herself in, she becomes the concubine of the *Umutwari.* A 73-year-old clan elder clarified that:

> Traditionally, Kuria custom demands that the preferred *Umutwari* should be a close relative from the lineage of the husband of the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law/female husband. This is to ensure that children born into the household have the same blood connection with the clan members and to have legitimate rights to the clan's name and enjoy equal opportunities as other children born in the household.

While the *Umutwari/*the biological father, according to the Kuria tradition, has neither legitimate rights over the young woman he impregnates nor the children he *makes*. The reason is that he did not pay the bride wealth to marry the young woman. As such, his role in the relationship is limited only to impregnation of the young woman on behalf of the invisible son. Hence, any children born take the surname of the non-existent son, in order words, the children bear the clan's name into which the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law is married. However, the children could be given the maiden name of the woman who paid the bride price, if she is not a married woman (Makoye, 2019; Matambalya, 2015; Chacha, 2004).

In an interview, Matambalya explained that in an ordinary Kuria married life, an *Umutwari's* aim is to keep the friendship with the woman as his mistress or concubine. And if children were born in the relationship, just as the *Umutwari* in the Nyumba Ntobhu household, he too would have no claims over the children, because he has not legalized the relationship with bride price payment. The clan elders explained that in the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead, tradition demands the *Umutwari* could only enter the house of the young woman late in the evening and must leave very early in the morning.

Other scholars such as Nyanungo (2013), Nkowo (2012), Starace (2009), Cadigan (1998) and Krige (1974), who researched woman-to-woman marriage among the different ethnic groups in Africa, explained that to portray the essence of the woman marriage, the female husband remained the social father of all offspring born of the marriage. This means that the children from the woman's marriage belongs to the lineage of the female husband who is unmarried or widowed, not to their biological father. Consequently, the female husband plays the role of the father, provider, protector and indeed all the functions and responsibilities enshrined in the patriarchal concept, which includes physical protection of the family and its territory, the male economic sphere, the spiritual sphere, the social sphere (Aliyu, 2018; Nwoko, 2012; Starace, 2009; Cadigan, 1998). Nyanungo

(2013) notes that in the traditional African context, woman marriage serves as an avenue through which women exercise influence and patronage in societies where inheritance and succession typically pass through the male line.

Drawing on my field research and the voices of the participants, I discuss the violation of young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage in the next section.

Experiences of Violation in the Nyumba Ntobhu Marriage

For the purpose of clarity, Table 4. 2 below illustrates the status of three young women (whom I name: Young Woman **Ghati, Boke** and **Nyangi**). Table 4. 2 also provides data on when these Nyumba Ntobhu wives were married, the name of the elderly women who paid the bride price to marry them, the number of men they have been involved with, and the children they have had at the time they were interviewed. Table 4. 3 shows the status of three elderly women who paid the bride wealth for marriage to their fictitious sons. These women are known as Female Husbands or Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law. The demographic information of **Robi, Nchagwa,** and **Mbosiro** reveals that they had different marital and motherhood statuses, which reflect their social and economic situations. A study by Tungaraza (2005) suggests that the older women enter the Nyumba Ntobhu marriages for various reasons, such as securing their inheritance, fulfilling their social obligations, or expressing their love and care for the younger women.

Table 5 The Martial Status of the Nyumba Ntobhu Wives

The Nyumba Ntobhu wives	**Age at the time of marriage**	**Age at the time of interview**	**Number of children at the time of interview**	**Number of biological fathers of their children**
Young woman **Ghati's** parents received bride price from Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law **Robi**	15 years	30 years	Six	Two
Young woman **Boke's** parents received bride price from Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law **Nchagwa**	18 years	38 years	Four	Four

The Nyumba Ntobhu wives	Age at the time of marriage	Age at the time of interview	Number of children at the time of interview	Number of biological fathers of their children
Young woman **Nyangi's** parents received bride price from Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law **Mbosiro**	19 years	28 years	Five	Three

The three young women **Ghati, Boke and Nyangi** aged between 28–38 years old narrated their stories of how they ended up in the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead as wives of the (invisible husbands). Yet, they had to have sex with men who fathered their children, whom they could not claim as husbands. These women said that they had experienced violation from their sexual partners, and at times the wives of their sexual partners. They also talked about having many other people involved in their married life that made the Nyumba Ntobhu household difficult to maintain, and in many ways complicated their lives especially as newlyweds. Their narratives revealed issues of violent encounters.

These issues are discussed in three sections as: 1. Forced to marry; the workload experiences; physical and verbal abuses. 2. Humiliating experiences of name-calling and stigmatization by some community members and the wives of their sexual partners, and sexual harassment. 3. Health risks due to unprotected sex with multiple sexual partners and the danger of contracting STD and HIV/AIDS.

Table 6 Marital and Motherhood Status of the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law (Female Husband)

Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law (Female husbands)	Marital Status	Motherhood Status
Robi 58-year-old	Married	Sonless woman, had two girl children
Nchagwa 90-year-old	Married but separated	Childless
Mbosiro 42-year-old	Widow	Childless

As indicated in the above, two of the three elderly women had no children; either these women or their husbands could have been infertile. They shared that their motivation for engaging in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage was because infertility is a taboo in their society. Hence, they paid a bride price to marry the young women. Robi had given birth to two girl children. Her reason for engaging in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage was to have a daughter-in-law who would give birth to a grandson. These women shared a common interest in the practice. All of them paid the bride price to engage younger women to bear children so that they have grandchildren to inherit their properties (livestock and land), thus fulfilling the elderly woman's legacy.

Poverty and Enforced Marriage

The young women narrated how they were forced into the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and spoke of the fears and anxieties that they experienced. They thought that they had no option in negotiating their rights. It emerged in the narratives that, ever so often, their parents applied force, intimidation and even physical abuse to marry their daughters off into a Nyumba Ntobhu household. Some parents also believed that when a barren woman approaches them and asks for the hand of their daughter in marriage, denying her the gift of their daughter could bring their family bad luck. However, giving their daughter into marriage to fulfill the obligation of childbearing would bring blessings, good luck, and prosperity to their household. Considering how deep-rooted the superstition and traditional beliefs are in these communities, some parents might mean well and arrange what they are convinced to be the in the best interests of their daughters and their households. In addition, these arranged marriages were presented to the young women in a mysterious way that made them have a binding commitment to remain faithful. However, the narratives of all three women in this study, reflect the inter-connectedness between superstition and socio-economic realities as poverty was an underlying driving factor. Some of their sentiments are expressed in the following phrases:

> "Fear gripped me when my mother told me that a bad omen would befall me if I refuse to marry the childless woman" (Nyangi).
>
> "I could not refuse. I would have been beaten and cursed. The childless woman brought 10 cows. My family needed cows" (Ghati).

The young women's fears of being cursed or beaten if they opposed the will of their parents were strongly expressed in their stories. The curse of a parent has a huge psychological impact on a young woman because it instils fear of a bad omen befalling. The fear of a bad omen is so strong that the girl child would obey whatever she is told to avoid the consequences of the curse. In most African societies, children are mindful of the fact that the parents' wishes for them in serious matters such as marriage are considered a blessing. Nyangi expressed such belief saying:

> My father gave me his blessings. He told me all would be well with me in my married life. The childless woman paid six cows and two goats. My father assured me of his support. Unfortunately, he died shortly before I had my third child. He is not here to see me suffering and struggling to be the mother, father and the breadwinner for my five children.

Even though the marriage did not work out the way she had envisioned, and she acknowledged the violations she suffered in her marital life, this woman held no bitterness toward her father who planned the marriage. She believed in her father's blessings and understood her father was poor and needed the cows at that time. She, on the other hand, was 19-years old and was still at home. In their community context, she had passed the usual age of marriage because her peers were all married off. Therefore, there was the possibility that men in her community were not interested in asking for her hand in marriage. In such circumstances, the risk of parents losing on receiving their daughter's bride wealth was very high.

In her interview, Boke reported that she gave birth to a baby boy at the age of 17 when she was in secondary school. She explained that shortly after giving birth, she was forced to marry into a Nyumba Ntobhu household. Her mother-in-law was barren. When her parents married her off, the bride wealth they received extended to the male child. By marrying, she had given the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law rights over both herself and her son. The boy became a legitimate member of the Nyumba Ntobhu household and was recognised and considered a son and a future heir of the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead.

> "I resisted, fought back and cried but in vain. My paternal grandmother had it all arranged. The childless woman paid 11 cows to my parents as the bride price to marry me without consulting me" (Boke).

In Kuria society, it is not a breach of custom that the parents of Boke did not consult her while negotiating her marriage with the barren woman. It is considered normal in the community where she lived. In these patriarchal societies, parents involved in this kind of marriage arrangement might mean well in finding the best partner for their girl children. However, Boke explained that she was forced into the marriage because a fellow student impregnated her, which contributed to her dropping out of school. While she pleaded, resisted and fought back, she realised that she had to accept the situation, even if it was against her wish.

Boke disclosed that she was made to feel inferior when her grandmother cautioned her to spare herself the disgrace of losing on the bride price that the childless woman was offering. She was also made to believe that after having given birth out of wedlock, she was not worthy of receiving bride price from a Kuria man. She had initially hoped, and had the assurance of her father, that she would go back to school to complete her education. Her father had told her she

stood a better chance of a bigger bride price if she completed her secondary education. But she said:

> "After I gave birth, my father said I had wasted his resources and was not prepared to pay for my education any longer. He said that should he run out of resources, he would send my younger brother to live with his brother in the city so that he gets education. I cannot blame him but I feel sad."

Boke's narrative highlights that plight of many African societies where teenage pregnancy out of wedlock precludes access to further education and where the education of boys are privileged over that of girls. In The father's statement that if he ran out of resources, his male son would be sent to a relative in the city to have a higher education is telling. The statement makes the distinction between the privileging of a male child over a female child and highlights what most adults in the Kuria community would do.

The economic reasoning of the father was that his daughter's marriage will enrich him with more cows when he received the bride wealth. He therefore did not risk wasting more money on a girl child who got pregnant. The paternal grandmother also pressured her into the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage for the same reason. The grandmother might have also wanted to save her from societal stigma by forcing her into the marriage. Going into a Nyumba Ntobhu marriage was perceived as right for Boke as a single mother, giving her a chance to regain her status in the community.

Ghati was made to believe, by her parents, that it was her responsibility to help them fulfill a family obligation. She reported that this put her in an extremely vulnerable position as she could not resist; nor could she question what her parents planned for her. She explained that she was 15-years old when her parents arranged her Nyumba Ntobhu marriage. There was no question or arguing. While she had cried and wished to stay with her parents, instead of leaving home to live with people she did not know, she obeyed her parents because she was their daughter. She said:

> "My family needed cows to marry for my eldest brother."

This woman was aware that her brother was getting on in life and had to marry as his peer group did in the village. She was conscious her parents did not have the adequate number of cows, and it would have taken a few more years before her brother could have gotten married if she declined the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage offer. Thus, the ten cows her parents received helped them to solve her brother's marriage problem. While she felt forced into the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, she also saw her vulnerable situation as a gain and beneficial for her family.

She expressed the view that it was her duty at that time to support her parents in finding a solution to the family's financial problems. She repeated many times; "*what could I have done? My parents are poor; they have no property to sell.*" Poverty was the core factor that got her into, and held her trapped in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, as was the case of the other women included in this study.

All three young women felt the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage was abusive by nature as they were reduced to reproductive roles and to house-hold workers, and were not valued. They saw themselves doing all the hard work in the homestead and so felt violated in many ways. Their sentiments are expressed in the section below.

Exploitation of Labour

The three women married into Nyumba Ntobhu households talked about work being unfairly shared and how they did most of the work.

> "I am treated badly. I feel very much unloved and my labour exploited. The workload is too much; I start my daily tasks early in the morning and go to bed very late" (Nyangi).
>
> "My Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law expects me to do all the house chores. I feel tired always" (Ghati).
>
> "I feel tired and overworked all the time. When I complain, I am verbally abused" (Boke).

The experiences of these women were almost identical as noted from the excerpts. Each one of the women were asked what house chores their female husbands/ mothers-in-law did daily. Two of them said their Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law looked after the livestock a few days during the week and assisted them on the farms occasionally. The third woman said that she hardly got any help from her mother-in-law. She said that while there was no livestock in the homestead to take for grazing, in addition to her daily chores she sold vegetables in the local market. She found this additional task very demanding. She had this to say:

> "… I grow the vegetables for sale in my mother-in-law's garden; however, there have been many occasions where I had run short of supply. When this happens, I had to take a daily supply on credit from neighbours. If the vegetables sold, it was good news, however, if they did not sell, I do not only lose the daily profit but get into debt. Most women in my community experience this typical type of problem" (Boke).

All three women felt that their daily chores were time and energy consuming, which made them tired. In the interviews, I asked each of them what they would normally do day-to-day, and the kind of jobs they considered as weekly and periodic jobs. Their answers are captured in **Table 4. 4** below.

Table 7 Daily, Weekly and Periodic Tasks of the Young Women in the Nyumba Ntobhu Household

Daily Chores	Weekly work	Periodic Jobs during the Year
Fetching water – often many miles away	Taking the cattle and other animals for grazing	Building a house
Cooking and feeding the family	Going to the mill with the maize	Mending/Repairing leaking roofs
Taking care of their children and at times the sick in the household	Collecting firewood	
Washing the utensils		
Sweeping the house		
Working on the farm		
Milking the cows		
Selling in the local market - (shared by one woman)		

The above chores are considered to be feminine tasks in Kuria society. Therefore, every girl child is taught her gender roles and responsibilities at a very tender age. However, while these young women expected to work, they did not expect to do such exhausting jobs day after day. For example, walking for long distances to fetch water and firewood were two very demanding tasks. Depending on the number of people in the household, a woman could take half a day, making several trips, before bringing in enough water for daily use. She would then have to cook for the members of the household, feed her children and tend to other chores, such as sweeping the yard, washing clothes and the dishes, taking the animals out for grazing, etc.

In this community, women mostly do farm work. Therefore, these young women had to cultivate their vegetables and other food crops such as cassava, maize, millets and sweet potatoes to feed their children. They also shared that because their huts are made of mud and thatch, during the rainy seasons, they usually have cracks in the walls and leaking roofs. In a typical Kuria society, the roofing or mending of leaking roofs, as well as repairing cracks in a building are considered a male job. However, these women said they had to do this maintenance by themselves. On the occasion that the repair work was too demanding or when they had to build a new hut, they hired a man and paid him for his services. I asked whether their sexual partners could not help with such services.

Nyangi said that she once asked the biological father of her two children for such help, and he said: "*I do not render my services to develop other people's homes*." Ghati confirmed a similar view in another interview. She said that when she asked her sexual partner to assist her in the building of a new hut, he replied, "*I do not build a house that will be for other people*." These expressions imply that while the men fathered their children, they were not prepared to help their children's mothers with tasks; neither did they consider their biological children as part of their family due to the custom.

These the sexual partners did not want to use their energy or invest their resources into homes they will never belong to or be part of in reality. Similarly, they were aware that they had no control over the children, nor any claims to property in the Nyumba Ntobhu household. Thus, these men (the *Abatwari*) recognised their vulnerable position in getting involved with the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead. While they might have a point, their attitude towards the young women does not solve the women's problems, nor does it lessen the burden of their workload. Rather, the young women said they felt 'used' by these consorts – the *Abatwari.*

It emerged in the data that both men who refused to provide their services to the young women were not the *Umutwari* –the sexual partner chosen from the clan. The observation explains why tradition demands that the *Umutwari* be selected from among the Nyumba Ntobhu clan. Presuming that if they were from the clan, they would have fulfilled responsibilities beyond being sexual partners. In the interviews, the three young women said that they had spoken to their Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law and made occasional complaints to clan members about the workload, but nothing was done to lessen the burden. Instead, they endured verbal and emotional abuse on a regular basis and physical abuse sometimes. They said these experiences stressed them and made them anxious, which affected them psychologically.

Verbal and Physical Abuse

Each of the three young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship reported that they sometimes lived in fear. It may be fear of their Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law or fear of other men (the men of the house), but most probably fear of both. These women were often disciplined if they did not live up to the female husband's expectations. In the words of the women:

> "I live in fear most often when I do not complete my daily chores. I fear I would be disciplined either verbally or hit physically" (Boke).

> "I have often suffered verbal and occasional physical abuse. I decided to return home. My mother told me a bad omen would befall the family and would not have me back" (Nyangi).

It seemed that complaining and nagging over what was considered as a married woman's contractual obligation in the Kuria patriarchal context could be perceived as rebellious behaviour needing correction. Beating a wife to keep her in her place is commonly considered as a form of discipline to correct a misdemeanour not to be repeated. In other words, it is an accepted norm that a man beats a woman if she 'deserves' to be disciplined. According to the young women, the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law not only acknowledged the male presence but also affirmed his position as a mediator of the use of power and authority in the Nyumba Ntobhu household. One of the young women shared an example:

> "My Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law accused me of infidelity to the *Umutwari*, and he came in with the cane to discipline me. He gave me one stroke. I screamed so loud that he let me go...." (Boke).

Discipline was seen as a form of controlling the woman by hitting her. In trying to examine an aspect of this control concept as it relates to physical violence, other dimensions like emotional stress, fear and intimidation were identified in the data. All three young women shared that the constant verbal abuse by the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law, and the occasional hitting (by the man of the house), threatened their inner peace and left them emotionally stressed.

The 28-year-old woman shared how in desperation, she attempted to return home to her parents, but her mother would not have her. Here again, the fear of a bad omen was the reason. Her mother threatened and frightened her with a bad omen befalling her. There are some presumptive reasons for her mother's action. Firstly, she was not in the position of refunding the bride wealth received. Secondly, in case the young woman had returned to her birth home with her five children, which could be an option, there would have been the burden on the young woman's family to feed six extra mouths. Whatever the mother's intentions, it cannot be overlooked or underestimated that her statement left a severe psychological impact on her daughter. This fear of a bad omen, which seemed to be used as a mechanism of social control, kept her tied to the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship.

The young women disclosed that their experiences with the clan elders were not always supportive; in fact, some of their encounters had left them more distressed. An example of such an experience is described by Boke below:

> "When I was in financial need, and I approached the clan elders for help, they told me that they did not marry me. How would I educate my four children?"

After her marriage, Boke began experiencing financial hardships mostly regarding the education of her children. When she got no help from the clan members, she thought of returning home to her parents. However, she reconsidered this idea saying:

> "My lifestyle would not be any different from what I am experiencing here. I would still have to fend for myself and my children at my parents."

In her most distressing moment, Boke learnt to fight the societal challenges, seeking justice for her children and herself. In desperation, she took a bold initiative and broke the tradition, which many in similar situations would not dare to do. She took the decision to send her firstborn son, whom she had before being married into the Nyumba Ntobhu household, to his biological father. His father accepted him, and as at the time of the interview, the boy was about to complete his secondary education.

By sending her male child out of the Nyumba Ntobhu home, Boke acted in a way that would have been unheard of in the Kuria society in ancient times. The bride price paid to marry her is believed to have been paid for the son she had before the marriage; hence her son had the name of the Nyumba Ntobhu household. Boke understood her Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law could no longer support her children's education since two of them had already reached secondary level.

Ghati and Nyangi had similar experiences. Their children were often out of school because they either had been sent home to get copybooks or they had no school uniforms. Once these children were home, they were made to help on the farm and do other house chores, until the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law or their mother managed to provide them with their educational needs. As a result, these children were left behind in their academic work. Some of them began to truant and eventually dropped out of school. Some of these children are believed to disappear to the urban towns to seek a better life. Unfortunately, while in the city, they face a lot of challenges, and most of them end up living on the street.

The young women lamented that most often when their children fell ill, they did not take them for treatment due to financial constraints. Nyangi shared this in the interview:

….as I talk to you now, my little girl is at home sick. She has not been well since last week. I asked my female husband for financial help to take her for medical treatment, but she said she has no money. Neither the social father nor the biological father gave me any money when I approached them for help.

The other young women told similar stories. All three women felt their experiences left them in a dilemma. They questioned their children's fate during the interviews, and expressed worries about the future of their children. They also expressed uneasiness about their future within the Nyumba Ntobhu household when the mother-in-law (female husband) dies. Moreover, lacking any support from the clan elders deepened their concerns about the future. Their anxieties and fears were palpable during the interviews, as was their feelings of being trapped in a humiliating situation that they longed to be free from.

Humiliation

Other traumatic experiences shared by all three women were the stigmatization they suffered from fellow women in their communities, which they said humiliated them on various occasions. These women said that they kept their sexual partners or consorts anonymously. However, in a small village setting where the research was conducted, everyone knows what goes on in her neighbours' compound. One cannot be discreet enough:

"…. my sexual partners were married men. I suffered humiliation and name calling from their wives. One of them gave me the mark on my chin. I was hurt when the wife of my sexual partner shouted at me that if I wanted a man for a husband, I would not have been married to a female husband" (Boke).

"The biological father of two of my children is a married man. His wife calls me names each time our paths cross in the community. I am emotionally stressed and feel stigmatized" (Nyangi).

These two women claimed that they were not aware of the fact that the men they had chosen as sexual partners had wives. One of them said:

"When I met him, he said he had no wife. I heard later that he had a wife and two children" (Nyangi).

The other woman lamented her sexual partner told her he had only one wife, but she discovered later that the man had three wives. The claims of these young women could be genuine, considering that they were not locals of the village where they lived. They might also have had their reasons for choosing the men they wanted as secret lovers.

> "I was young and naïve; I thought by falling in love with a mature man, he would be in the position of assisting me financially" (Nyangi).

Whatever their motives, all three women suffered humiliation and intimidation from their lovers' wives. With all indications from the data gathered, the sexual partners (*Abatwari*) had been mean and deceitful in many ways both towards their wives and towards the young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu household. These men spent more time with their sexual partners, neglecting their family and their obligations in their homes. Naturally, their wives had to know about their concubines. While Kuria society is polygamous, these lawful wives do not accept the Nyumba Ntobhu young women as their co-wives. Instead, they perceive these Nyumba Ntobhu women as loose, and interfering to destabilize their homes. The women said they were called names like, '*malaya*' – meaning 'prostitute,' 'man snatcher,' 'and homewrecker'.

The young women claimed they felt belittled and put down each time when they came across the wives of their sexual partners in public places, such as at the market, on the way to the stream to fetch water, or in other locations in the village. This name calling and labelling the young women as loose, tainted their image and dignity in the community. Boke explained that she was traumatised because of the name calling. She decided to fight back the wife of her sexual partner with aggression. Unfortunately, in the course of the fight, her *Umutwari's* wife left her with an ugly mark on her chin. She said it was an experience that left a scar, not only on her face but also in her heart.

The women also spoke about the sexual harassment they encountered in the Nyumba Ntobhu household, which they found humiliating and a societal taboo that they could not discuss with others. They said that, at one time or another, they faced sexual harassment with some family members. For example, traditionally, it is a taboo in Kuria culture for the husband (if any), of the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law, to have any sexual contact with the young woman who is married to the Nyumba Ntobhu wife. This is because he is considered the father-in-law to the married woman. Issues such as these are very complicated, and could not be captured wholly through the kind of fragmentary analysis used in this book. However, the complexity could be captured partially through the narrative of Ghati, which reflects the continual sexual harassment and other violations she endured from her the father-in-law.

Ghati's Narrative of Sexual Harassment in the Nyumba Ntobhu Household. Ghati demonstrated the complexity of her experience and showed her vulnerable position in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage institution. (In this narrative, Mzee Peter is the husband of Robi and the father-in-law of Ghati. Robi is the female husband of Ghati).

Ghati was married into the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead at the age of 15 years. Robi her Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law, told to her that the house was poor because it did not have a male child. Unlike most other Nyumba Ntobhu young

women, Ghati was given the freedom to choose her own sexual partner in the community with whom she would have children. She soon found her consort – the *Umutwari*. In less than ten years, she had four children, two girls and two boys with him. There was great joy at the birth of the third child who was her first son. She decided to introduce her sexual partner to the Nyumba Ntobhu household. Shortly after she had the second baby boy, her consort moved to a far-off village. Thereafter, she got involved with a new *Umutwari,* and in the following three years she had two baby girls, bringing the total number of children to six. All was well and happy for her in the Nyumba Ntobhu family, until shortly after the birth of her fifth child.

Ghati told that Mzee Peter called her one evening to discuss his plans for her. However, before disclosing the plans, Mzee Peter thanked Ghati for giving the Nyumba Ntobhu household two sons and also for being such a hard-working woman. He then told Ghati that he wanted to establish a foodstuff and animal rearing (maize, goats and sheep) business for her in Musoma city, the regional capital. Mzee Peter went on to say he would rent her a house in the city and he would be visiting with the supplies occasionally. Ghati thought the idea was excellent because it would help her financially to care for her children better. She also felt her children would have a good education in the city.

Before Ghati could discuss her good news with Robi (her Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law), Mzee Peter visited Ghati's hut that night to initiate a secret love relationship. Thinking that he was drunk and might have missed his way, Ghati decided to lead him to his hut, but Mzee Peter began sexually harassing her. Ghati reminded him he was her father-in-law. Moreover, it is a taboo to have a sexual relationship with him because she was not married into the homestead to be his lover. Mzee Peter became annoyed and said he would teach her a lesson for refusing him. What followed next was misery and sadness: life was never the same for Ghati after that night. Her problem became worse when she told Robi about this encounter with her husband.

The poorest young women in most communities are the most vulnerable to rape. On this occasion, it is was 'father-in-law' exerting his power. Mzee Peter tried using his power over Ghati to manipulate her and abuse her sexually. When he did not get his way, Ghati not only suffered intimidation and verbal abuse but unbearable economic hardships. The privations were extended to all those connected with her – Robi and her children had a share in Ghati's suffering. Mzee Peter evicted them from the homestead, destroyed Ghati's hut and deprived her of farming on the land. Above all, Mzee Peter cursed and forbade both Robi and Ghati from eating the crops they had harvested the previous year, threatening them that a spell had been put on the foodstuff.

Ghati said that her experience affected her psychologically. She cried a lot during the interview and felt hopeless about how to redeem herself. Besides, she realised that her female husband was in a weak position and could not protect her. She said: *Mama mkwe wangu hana uwezo wa kupigania haki zangu ndani ya hii ndoa ya Nyumba Ntobhu*. Meaning – "My mother-in-law hasn't the power

to fight for my rights in this Nyumba Ntobhu marriage."

Robi admitted that she was powerless in the household when it came to decision making. 'Her husband rules.'

> "When I sought help from the police station, the police on duty told me it was a family matter and that such problems should be resolved within the family" (Robi).

According to Ghati, the clan elders summoned Mzee Peter but he refused to co-operate. He sat in silence without answering any questions. The clan elders took the case to the '*Baraza la Kijiji*' - the village council members and later to the '*Baraza la Kata*' - the ward council members. At both council meetings, Mzee Peter refused to cooperate. Ghati went to seek justice for her children from a community-based organisation (CBO) known as '*Nguvu Kazi Kyanyari*', which advocates for children and women's rights. The CBO activists intervened. The case was still pending when I interviewed Ghati.

Health Risks: Sexuality, Fertility, and Procreation

The three Nyumba Ntobhu wives - Ghati, Boke and Nyangi - shared their fears of health risks that may affect their sexuality and reproductive health in the long and short term. Nyumba Ntobhu marriage should not be seen in isolation from other marriage practices, but rather in the context of other issues related to marriage codes, such as sexuality, procreation, and morality. In Kuria society, it is generally understood that a dignified married woman reproduces and remains loyal and faithful to her male partner. On the other hand, a woman who lives a 'loose' life is perceived as a 'slut' and promiscuous in her community. Therefore, a sexual partner – an *Umutwari* – is chosen for the newlywed to avoid any promiscuous behaviour, with the hope that children could be born through the relationship and have blood ties with clan members for future inheritance.

The young married women in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship said that this precondition led to forced reproduction. They shared their experiences of the multiple sexual partners they had to deal with, which they perceived as abuse of their sexuality. These women claimed the constant use of their bodies made them feel they were abused sexually, which affected their fertility. One of them said that she was accused of using contraceptive pills because after two years of marriage she did not have children.

> "My Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law complained to my parents that I was not getting pregnant. My mother told me to do whatever it takes to get children for the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead" (Nyangi).

In most societies nowadays, the belief is that a woman should have control over her sexuality and her body. However, in the community studied, public opinion has a large influence on the sexual behaviour of the young woman in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship, regardless of how discreet or secret her sexual be-

haviour may be. This public interference is illustrated by the example of Nyangi in the excerpt above. Her Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law did not confront the young woman directly when she suspected that her daughter-in-law was taking contraceptive pills. Instead, this elderly woman spread her doubts, which led to false accusations and forced the young woman to have multiple sexual partners. Nyangi questioned her fate:

> "How was I supposed to get pregnant when the *Umutwari* only visited my hut thrice in two years?"

This young woman was secretive about the absence of the clan *Umutwari*. She later learned from some clan members that the *Umutwari's* mother forbade her son from getting involved with a Nyumba Ntobhu woman, fearing it would hinder his future marriage prospects. It seems that in recent years, the role of the *Umutwari* in the Nyumba Ntobhu household has lost respect and admiration among clan members in Kuria society. This is a stark contrast from ancient times when a man chosen as the 'breeding bull' felt proud and was envied and esteemed, especially by other male clan members.

Nyangi was secretive about the absence of the clan Umutwari, but she grew tired of waiting for him. She fell in love twice, but her Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law disapproved of her lovers and banned them from her hut. The mother-in-law was worried that the young woman would become promiscuous. The unwanted men made the young woman seem loose and immoral in the Nyumba Ntobhu household. The female husband started to question and judge her morality. Yet, Nyangi had to prove her fertility by giving birth to fill the 'empty house'. The mother-in-law ignored her privacy and reported her behaviour to her parents and the clan Umutwari, who punished her. This shows how much power and control the mother-in-law had over the young woman's sexuality and the birth of Nyumba Ntobhu children.

Having children is the paramount goal of the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage. The young woman faced the fear of HIV/AIDS and other infections while trying to fulfill her duty. Boke said that she had no control over her sexuality. She felt that her sexuality was exploited in the Nyumba Ntobhu household. Ghati and Nyangi also shared the opinion that the woman's sexuality and health issues were irrelevant in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage.

The next section presents the views of the three elderly women Robi, Nchagwa, and Mbosiro who paid bride price to marry for their invisible sons. They explained the socio-cultural factors that drove them to participate in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage. This section also discusses the power dynamics and challenges among the women.

Socio-cultural Factors that Compel Kuria Elderly Women into the Nyumba Ntobhu Practice

To comprehend why **Robi, Nchagwa,** and **Mbosiro,** who participated in the study, paid bride price to marry young women I engaged them in in-depth interviews. These women are addressed as Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law or female husbands interchangeably. Their marital status and age at the time of the interview are illustrated in **Table 4.3.**

In Kuria communities, infertility can be a stigma and an issue that most community members looked down upon as a social vice. Generally, in the communities where the interviews took place, a married couple's infertility continues to be perceived as the woman's inability to conceive and have children. Therefore, it is very common that a woman who has not conceived within a year or so after her wedding does everything, she possibly can to get pregnant.

In a casual conversation with one of my informants, I learnt that a woman who feared that she was infertile usually took some measures by first visiting a witch-doctor (who is supposed to have magical powers) in a sacred place. The community believes that the witch-doctor will be able to predict the unforeseen, give diagnoses, and find solutions to the predicaments of people. Some infertile women also seek advice from local midwives who prescribe a special diet to increase their fertility.

One of the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law said that if these measures proved unsuccessful and the woman in question feared that her inability to conceive may be her husband's fault, fellow women in the community would always be there to pressure her with popular advice: '*taichaba wiibore*' meaning – 'go aside and have a child', giving permission for the woman to have a baby outside her marital home. Advising a fellow woman seemed normal in the studied community, especially when there was the suspicion that the husband could be infertile. When I questioned another Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law on this issue, she laughed and said *"who would ask which bulls had impregnated a cow?"* Her answer implied that rather than having a childless house, the imperative of the married couple was to have children, and it did not matter who fathered the children.

From the data gathered, it was obvious that the female husbands in this study felt compelled to take 'wives' because of the social pressures in their communities. They believed that going into Nyumba Ntobhu marriage would be beneficial. Firstly, to themselves and their clan members; secondly, the young women they marry; and thirdly, the parents of the girls they marry. The female husbands also held that their motive of marrying females was to '*get help*' with their domestic chores.

However, as would be explained later, the clan elders did not agree about the

idea of getting 'help' as a motivation for marrying a young woman into the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead. The clan elders claimed, '*help*' is not the core objective of the Nyumba Ntobhu practice. These clan elders asserted that the objective of the practice is to maintain the lineage by bearing grandchildren for the woman who paid the bride price. '*Help*' they said, could only be a '*trickle-down*' effect, but not the main objective of the practice.

In the interview, Robi explained how she got involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship to reclaim her survival in her husband's clan.

> "When my two daughters were married off, I used (with the consent of my husband) the dowry received for our second daughter to marry a 15-year-old (Ghati) who is now my 'daughter-in-law' and I, her 'mother-in-law'. She has given me grandchildren: among them are two boys who will inherit my wealth. She helps me with the household chores" (Robi).

Taking a Nyumba Ntobhu wife was nothing extraordinary to the people in Robi's community. It was an expected thing to do and considered normal, especially after her two daughters were married and left home. Traditionally, in Kuria society, when daughters are married off, the father has the right to receive and keep the bride price paid to marry the first girl child. However, with the consequent girls' marriages after the first, the mother has the right to receive the bride price. Therefore, a woman could be very rich in cattle if she has many girl children married off. Nonetheless, it is culturally accepted that she has to obtain authorization from her husband on how she uses this property. While a woman in the Kuria society becomes rich in cattle from the bride price received in return for her girl children, she could soon be poor if she had sons and had to use the cattle as payment to get them wives.

Robi said that she also had a co-wife who had four sons. In addition, she explained that they lived as a family on the same homestead. This could endanger her future and cause her to lose her share of inheritance to her co-wife's sons. However, having two grandsons as heirs from Ghati (her Nyumba Ntohbu marriage) placed her in a good position, not only in her husband's household but also in the community where she lived, even though Mzee Peter chased Robi and Ghati from the homestead. Robi's status as a grandmother brought her respect and her lineage was assured in the community.

In another interview, Nchagwa discussed why she married Boke for her Nyumba Ntobhu home. She explained that while her husband was alive, they were living in separate homesteads, but were not divorced traditionally. While their marriage had been on the verge of breaking, they remained husband and wife because Nchagwa had not returned the cattle, the bride wealth her parents received from her husband's family when she was married. Hence, she remained indebted to her husband; the couple were old and at a ripe age at the time of the interview. Nchagwa was in good health but her husband was frail and bedridden. The ex-

planation given for their separation unfolds later in this section. When asked what motivated her to be involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu practice, she said:

> "I am old and almost blind. I cannot do much for myself, and I have no child to look after me. I paid 11 cows as a dowry [meaning bride price] to marry her. I am happy to have her as my daughter-in-law. She is my confidant and friend. She does all the house chores for me and I love her" (Nchagwa).

Old age is generally perceived as a blessing in the Kuria society, as being elderly is respected and associated with wisdom. However, old age in some communities often comes with its problems, making the aged vulnerable and dependent on relatives and friends. Being a Kuria, gave Nchagwa, a childless woman, the opportunity of choosing a Nyumba Ntobhu marriage as a way of solving her problems. The married young woman, therefore, plays the role of a care provider, as a daughter would usually do for a mother. This female husband in the relationship considers the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage a positive and beneficial practice. She highlighted that marrying a young woman solved her problems. This is because the bride price paid made the young woman feel responsible and committed to her duties as a wife. She also believed the married girl would work hard on the land in order to provide food in the future.

Unlike the 58-year-old Robi who had the full cooperation and support of her husband, 90-year-old Nchagwa had to find the bride wealth to marry the young woman. It appears that her husband did not contribute to the payment of the Nyumba Ntobhu wife. Nchagwa shared that she travelled to a distant village where she worked to acquire her wealth that enabled her to pay the bride wealth to marry for her fictitious son.

Nchagwa disclosed that while she did not have any children, she had managed her affairs and did not consider taking a daughter-in-law for many years. However, as she advanced in age, she felt the need of taking a Nyumba Ntobhu wife because she suffered stigmatization and helplessness in her community. Her husband married a young wife while she was away working to acquire the bride price. On her return, her husband moved to live separately from her, accusing her of infidelity and claiming that she would influence his young bride negatively with her bad behaviour. Nchagwa solved the problem of her infertility by marrying a young woman, an act that is accepted and respected in her society. However, there were criticisms about the way she accumulated her wealth to resolve her problem. The husband she was trying to please, accused her of infidelity and immoral behaviour. Nchagwa said she was stigmatized, which made her position in her community more vulnerable.

The third Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law, Mbosiro, explained her motive for engaging in Nyumba Ntobhu marriage:

> "What can I do? I am infertile and not blessed with children. It was lonely when my husband died. I live alone on the farmland, and it was becoming difficult to take the huge herd of cattle for grazing. Hence, I paid dowry [bride price] to marry a young woman with the hope of getting grandchildren. They could help me with the household chores."

Mbosiro understood her infertility as an unfortunate plight beyond her control. She expressed her sentiments in a very passionate way as being lonely and needed not just companions but helpers to care for her possessions and to solve her domestic problems. In desperation to solve her problems, she paid a huge herd of cattle to marry for the son she did not have. She said the marriage did not last and that she lost the bride price to the family of the first daughter-in-law.

For the engagement of her current daughter-in-law Nyangi, Mbosiro said that she paid six cows and two goats to marry an 18-year -old girl. She explained that she considered the payment as an investment and appreciated the young girl as a daughter-in-law. Moreover, she perceived her as a friend with whom she could share her world. During the interview, this Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law, repeatedly recalled how lonely her life had been since her husband died about fifteen years ago. As mentioned in the excerpt above, Mbosiro explained that, as a widow and having no children in the homestead, it had been extremely difficult for her to cultivate the land and tend to the pasture of the cattle all alone. The domestic and social help received from the younger woman contributed to the bond between the two women.

It could be observed that while the connection between these elderly woman and young women are of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law kind of relationship, the women shared unequal positions of power. Following this observation, the discussion of power difference between the two women in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is discussed.

Power and Control for Economic Gain

The internal dynamics of control and the use of power by the elderly woman over young women exists in the narratives offered by the women involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage institution. It was obvious that the relationship between the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law and the young married women is highly unequal. Power played significant roles in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage system. Power, as a pervasive act, reaches the very grain of individuals who are vulnerable in society (Opoku, 2017). It emerged in the data that both the powerful and the vulnerable individuals understood the technology of power as discipline. The stories of the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law reflected that they used their wealth and position of power to get wives for their invisible sons in order to fulfil their personal needs and deeds.

In addition, the elderly women benefited from the spouse of their imaginary son in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage to get free labour and fertility/reproductive capital (Low, 2024). It is obvious that the use of power to control affairs in the Nyumba Ntobhu household is for their economic gain. For example, the young women had to work on the farms and at home for long hours. Additionally, in Kuria society, newlyweds in the normal sense of marriage, as with the Nyumba Ntobhu brides, have their gendered roles designed for the welfare of the marriage. Moreover, considering the age gap between the women, the younger women were compelled to obey and do whatever chores were assigned to them, often without resistance. As shown in their narratives, each one of the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law expressed that they married the young women to get help with house chores; a view that the clan elders claimed was not the objective of the practice.

In the studied Kuria communities, every household depends on the produce from their farms. Not having enough of one's own labour force, for example, means hiring workers and paying for their labour costs, which are expensive. Moreover, unlike the use of power to control a young wife, these female husbands would not have similar control over a paid worker. The hired man or woman might demand more money compared to the actual amount of work done. Therefore, they felt that in order to get more work done in the fields for a good harvest, it was better to marry a woman one could control. In addition, the children (particularly the male children) born into the homestead would add to the labour force. In this context, the relationship between the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law and the young women in the marriage are observed in terms of their hard work/labour, economic support and social help. These female husbands also stated that they needed grandsons to inherit their wealth. In return, however, they expected more services from the male children/grandsons. These issues are essential because all three Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law mentioned them as motives for their involvement in the practice.

Traditionally, through the transaction of bride wealth, the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law acquires some rights over the young woman. The payment gives her privileges and the use of power over the young woman she marries for her imaginary son. The younger woman, on the other hand, is to be obedient and to take instructions from the elderly woman without any resistance. Two of the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law shared that on some occasions, married women who had male children also took wives. This is because their male children left home and never came back, and may not have provided the needed support for their mothers. This statement is true of those male children who, after securing employment in the cities, do not give financial help to their parents back in the village. In such cases, infertility is not the issue that compels the elderly woman into the Nyumba Ntobhu practice. Rather, the son's lack of responsibility towards the parents interrupts the kinship relations.

Courtship and Marriage in the Nyumba Ntobhu Homestead

Each one of the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law talked about how they obtained wives for the Nyumba Ntobhu household, and what happened when the newlywed entered their homestead. Their narratives gave a picture of the administration of the Nyumba Ntobhu household. It appears that when an infertile or sonless woman decides to marry a young woman, she goes looking for a girl in the village where she lives or in neighbouring villages. The hunt for a bride could take a few weeks, months or even years. When she finds her, an important aspect of the marriage process begins with the courtship. There is a social system that brings the two families together to negotiate the bride price payment and fixing of engagement dates, just as it is in the usual Kuria marriage system.

One of the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-laws, Robi, said that her husband accompanied her each time she visited the young woman's family during the time of courtship. The bride price was negotiated during this period of courtship, and the *Umutwari* (the sexual partner), if already chosen from the clan, is introduced to the young woman's family. As soon as the two parties reach an agreement on the bride wealth, the bride price is paid. The young woman moves to the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead after the marriage ceremony.

The Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law explained that when the bride enters the Nyumba Ntobhu home, she gets to know her *Umutwari*; the sexual partner who could be either a single or a married man with a wife or wives. If, for whatever reason, the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law fails to choose an *Umutwari* among her kinsmen, as explained already, the newlywed looks for her sexual partner by befriending a man in the village. The young woman lives with the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law in the same home and she does the chores assigned to her in the household and looks after the livestock. However, if the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law is rich and has the resources, she could build her a hut to live separately from the main house where she can continue with duties assigned to her in the main homestead.

From the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law narratives, it was evident that while the marriage contract is between the invisible son of the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law and the young woman, the man of the house (husband of the mother-law, if alive) dominates decision-making and the economic affairs of the homestead. He acts as the administrator and controls all members of his household, including the total subjection of his wives to the males in the clan. An interpretation of the Nyumba Ntobhu institution (if seen from the perspective of the expression of power and masculinity) is a way of increasing men's power and control over women in the homestead.

In their interviews, the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law acknowledged that the presence of a man, such as having a husband in the household, instills fear in the young woman and helps to keep her disciplined and under control. These female husbands affirmed that the *Umutwari* has the power to chastise the young woman

if she does not do her house chores or if she disobeys the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law. When asked whether the *Umutwari* has the power to discipline the young woman, Mbosiro said:

> "Yes, at times I ask 'the man of the house' to beat her if she deserves it. I also discipline and deny her and the children their needs when she misbehaves."

In answer to the question about how the younger woman misbehaves, Mbosiro explained that there are set of roles and responsibilities assigned to the younger woman. For example, the young woman is assigned to take the cows out to pasture for grazing and to do the house chores. However, she faces punishment and deprivation of her basic needs if she refuses to obey and neglects her duties.

In the community where the study was conducted, a young married woman is appreciated for her hard work and contribution of labour to the Nyumba Ntobhu household. This is essential since her labour enriches the harvest and increases the resources of the household. Therefore, to ensure a flow of economic gain through the labour force, the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law developed ways to keep the young women under control. One of the key ways used to keep the newlywed under control was to assign an exhausting list of household duties to them. Hence, those young women who opposed their duties were disciplined in various ways.

Robi said that her husband regarded the young married woman married in the household as his daughter-in-law. Therefore, he had the right to discipline her with the *fimbo* (the cane), the same way he would discipline his biological daughter if she misbehaves. She emphasized that the presence of men in the Nyumba Ntobhu household helps to keep the younger woman submissive and under control. These female husbands felt that they do not have the kind of authority as men over their women or wives. One of the female husbands said that when it came to discipline or correcting a fellow woman, she found the act difficult and improper. However, she stressed that a man's presence in the household would discourage certain kinds of misbehaviour of the newlywed. This female husband believed that the young woman would fear to be beaten or chastised by the 'man of the house.' Therefore, she would be more cautious and behave well, especially in a situation where the young woman stayed out at night and came home late.

The Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law thought that, as women, they could only discipline or correct their daughter-in-law verbally for her misconduct. One of the female husbands explained the seriousness of the behaviour of a young woman hanging out with friends and coming home late at night.

> "In Kuria society, it is not culturally acceptable for a married woman to habitually stay out late; this would encourage neighbours to gossip about the young married woman" (Nchagwa).

In some African patriarchal communities, such as the Kuria, beating a wife is rather internalized as a solution to problems between couples and it is not considered a violation of human rights. The idea that one's mistakes deserved a beating is intertwined with other kinds of cultural practices with moral codes of behaviour (Opoku, 2017). In the Kuria societal context, for example, a good and well-behaved woman is one who endures pain and does not challenge the authority of dominant patriarchal power in a married relationship.

The Symbolic Meaning of the African Woman-to-Woman Marriage

In Tanzania and on the African continent as a whole, marriage is a cultural and social construct (Otiso, 2013). According to Nyanungo (2013: 61), cultural norms, beliefs and values set the rules for various aspects of marriage, which include who we marry, when we marry, how we marry and what is expected of us in the marriage. While this is universally applicable, marriage defines gender roles more decidedly in the African context. Defining the symbolic representation of the African woman in married life, Idumwonyi (2002: 100) asserted:

> "…the woman's importance is derived from her role as mother. Motherhood is the focus of her economic activity and her life. It is as the bearer of children, especially males, that a woman defines her status especially in the polygamous family and forges lasting ties to her husband, home and kin. She earns more respect with a secure status compared to the woman with a female as her eldest child."

A woman with a female child may console herself about not being infertile, although she does not earn the same recognition as those with sons. Most studies reveal that African society has no place for infertile women (Ugbabe, 2013; Nwoko, 2012; Starace, 2009; Chacha, 2004; Sewpaul, 1999). Hence, researchers have highlighted the choice of woman-marriage for those in this category. However, the implications for women's lives in specific traditional African marriage and customs, practiced across the continent, may either support and or challenge systems of patriarchy as the women struggle for gender equality and recognition (Nyanungo, 2013).

Among the Igbos of Nigeria, for example, the female husband in theory enjoyed equal status with her male kin, though this was not the general practice in Igbo land (Osiki and Nwoko, 2014). Among her female mates, the female husband was regarded as a man and equal to her male counterparts. She was treated like a man and her opinion was sought in decision-making. In any ceremony, she enjoyed equal privilege with her male counterparts, and in some Igbo communities she could break kola nuts, but only among her female folks. She

combined both secular and spiritual functions and obligations. She participated in secret rituals and sometimes associated with the male elders in the communal rituals (Nwoko, 2012: 76).

According to Nyanungo (2013: 62) an anthropological study conducted by Oboler (1980) found that the Nandi female husband is considered culturally male and thus allowed to take on male roles. For instance, a female husband may be allowed to take on political roles that women are typically not allowed to adopt. A female husband is also unlikely to carry things on her head[12] and so on. Oboler interviewed a female husband who described the typical male role she played when entertaining visitors:

> When a visitor comes, I sit with him outside and converse with him. My wife brings out maize porridge, vegetables and milk. When we have finished eating, I say, "wife, come and take the dishes." Then, I go for a walk with the visitor (Oboler, 1980: 77).

Another area of symbolic importance is the fact that the children born in a woman-to-woman marriage belong to the dead husbands which, according to Oboler (1980) and O'Sullivan (1910), was peculiar to the Dinka tradition. O'Sullivan (1910) explained that if a Dinka man died and the widow was inherited by his brother, any child born to the widow was considered the offspring of her dead husband. This was similarly the case if the widow married a young girl. The bride wealth was paid for from the dead husband's wealth and therefore the child belonged to the deceased (O'Sullivan, 1910). In another study among the Dahomey (or Fon) in West Africa, Herskovits (1937) wrote, "the women who took wives were independently wealthy. They paid the bride wealth themselves for their 'wives' and the 'children' were their property (O'Sullivan, 1910: 181 cited in Kjerland, 1997: 5). Evans-Pritchard (1951) observed that woman-to-woman marriage occurred among the Nuer ethnic group of Sudan if a female was infertile. The infertile woman took a wife, and in the Nuer context, she became a 'cultural man'.

Researching among the ethnic groups in Southern Africa, both van Wermelo and Phophi (Venda Law, 1948) found that wealthy females provided the bride wealth themselves and were considered 'fathers' to the children born. Some female husbands among the Venda had inherited wives from their fathers, others from their mothers. In such case, the children 'belonged' to the deceased parent who had provided the initial bride wealth. Kjerland (1998) maintained that when O'Brien's (1977) article "Female Husbands in Southern Bantu Societies" appeared, he argued that it was common practice that a woman who provided bride wealth, with no reference to male kin, was considered an autonomous female husband. She could be a political leader, a trader or a female in a community where women had a large say over property. This woman was seen to be a patriarch for the children – given birth by her wife/wives. O'Brien emphasizes that if a widow or wife married another woman in order to give her dead or living husband children, and her husband or his family provided the bride wealth, the widow/wife was

12 A symbolic gesture to show she is a 'male'. Traditionally, the females carry things on their head.

a surrogate female husband (a stand-in husband). Such a woman may function as the patriarch for the children, or may be merely a stand-in for a deceased or fictitious male (O'Brien, 1977).

While woman-marriage occurred in different forms in Africa, debates have emerged on whether the marrying woman attains a transformed status or not. Furthermore, the idea of a same-sex relationship has spurred discussion of the sexuality of women in these marriages (Hadithi Africa, 2019; Chacha, 2004). In some African societies, researchers found young girls who preferred to marry other women, and married women/widows who had given birth to sons and yet took wives. Thus, custom and tradition might provide the legitimate means for gay relationships, in a context where these are abhorred and criminalized. Last but not the least, most of the important authors have been anthropologists such as Svensson (1991) and Kjerland (1997) who have called for more studies because they claimed this field is biased. They further expressed that the source of the practice is still problematic and it is complex to fully grasp the meaning of woman-marriage practice in Africa. These scholars requested that it would be good for researchers, especially historians, to study woman-marriage in the African context before it is too late.

Shared Concerns: Limitations in the Societal Structure and in the Tanzanian Marriage Law.

Both the female and the male participants in the study acknowledged that there are limitations in the Law of Marriage Act of Tanzania, which discriminates against the Nyumba Ntobhu practice. They also noted limitations in the societal structures of the Nyumba Ntobhu practice that promoted many abuses against the young women in the marriage. The participants identified the shortcomings within the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage system as negligence on the part of clan elders. In addition, there was poor implementation of the traditional sanctions used in ancient times to safeguard and protect the young married women and their children from any form of abuse in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage institution.

This raises an important question: do Tanzanian policy makers understand the Kuria Nyumba Ntobhu marriage structure? A better knowledge and understanding of the uniqueness of Nyumba Ntobhu marriage by policy makers could effect change in the Tanzania marriage law. On the other hand, policy makers could create an atmosphere to aid the tribal leaders to restructure the old Kuria marriage system. From the discussion of the community actors, I could foresee that if the marriage structure works properly there would be less negligence in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage system that violated the young married women and denied both mother and children their basic human rights.

A clan elder explained that he thought the confusion regarding the Tanzania marriage system was that the Tanzanian government is trying to create a modern state, which is not easy. It meant, in many ways, there will be compromises forced on the Kuria community to forget about their tribal laws. The Tanzanian policy makers have to educate the Kuria ethnic group to accept a common Tanzanian

marriage law, which embrace all Tanzanians. Another 68-year-old clan elder said that:

> "I see the problem we have in our nation is that we do not have a system in place that reconciles with the tribal laws and values of state laws which ensures that conflicts do not arise. Because of that, we have many situations that intersect and cannot solve problems that are woven within customary laws and state laws."

The excerpt is an example of Ghati's experience discussed above where her Nyumba Ntobhu father-in-law violated her rights and the rights of her mother-in-law. It shows the complexity of the Kuria marriage code of conduct and the endless battles fought by the young women in trying to resolve marital problems. Moreover, the state marriage legislation has no alternative law in place to protect women involved in Nyumba Ntobhu practice. Hence, the police could not help neither Ghati and her children, nor her mother-in-law when they sought justice from the criminal justice system. An activist in the group highlighted the abusive situations surrounding the modern practice of Nyumba Ntobhu marriage:

> "Some clan elders are careless and not protective of the young married women these days. The elders are aware that the state modern law does not recognize Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, prosecutes, and convicts' offenders. For example, in ancient times, a man was severely punished by clan elders if he neglected his parental role as the provider for his family. This same rule was applicable to the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law. Some clan elders these days even demand payment or a fee to listen and help the young women facing hardship in their marriage. Moreover, men who take sexual advantage of woman in the village receive higher sanctions" (An activist).

There were sanctions in the traditional system in ancient times that allowed the clan elders to punish offenders of tradition. The clan elders explained that the community elders had so much power in ancient times that they would flog wrongdoers in public, ostracize, or banish them from Kuria society. Some Kuria became outcasts because of certain misconduct. However, a 68-year-old clan elder said:

> "… in today's Kuria society, a lawbreaker could decide to move away from the tribal land and live in the city, for example, Mwanza or Dar es Salaam where he or she would not feel an outcast."

In their narratives, the young women also identified limitations in the cultural practices under study and suggested that there is the need for the government to assist the clan elders and policy makers to reform the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage system. However, the elderly women perceived the Kuria societal structures surrounding some cultural practices, like FGC, good because they claimed it guided them to teach the young to be responsible citizens. They gave

the example that, in Kuria society, before the youth became adults, they were grouped in camps. They underwent training and were taught adult roles and how to be responsible citizens. The youth were also taught good moral conduct, a teamwork spirit and tolerance of community members. The clan elders said the youth were even taught the secrets of the land and how to be faithful and loyal as Kuria. After the graduation from the circumcision camps, (*yes, circumcision for both boys and girls, because we Kuria do not see the difference*), the youth returned home as adults. Another clan elder a 73-year-old connected the values of Kuria cultural practices to the nation building of Tanzania after her independence from colonial rule in the following way:

> "Being a Kuria, the first president of the Republic of Tanzania, Mwl. Nyerere, inculcated the Kuria idea of nation building in the Tanzania policy. Because a law was enacted that after secondary school education, the youth from all the different ethnic groups in the country were put in camps with no gender differential. These youth live under the same conditions, eat the same food, and dress the same way. At the camp, they were taught how to be patriotic citizens of Tanzania regardless of one's ethnic background. Unfortunately, this programme too did not last; there was an outside interference. The government of the United States of America stepped in and said the programme was too expensive for the New Republic State of Tanzania to run such camps."

Other community actors explained that the ancient community structures were interrupted by the colonial masters, followed by the missionary groups and lastly by the Tanzanian government. The clan elders observed that the children in their society were too young when they started formal education, and the educational system was structured in a way that they did not have the opportunity to grow and learn the traditions of their ethnicity. They were also deprived of the chance of belonging to a peer group because after the training the youth took an oath, swearing allegiance to their tribesmen. The elders explained that other ethnic groups in Tanzania also have this youth training according to their cultural beliefs. However, if these traditional trainings were dying or no longer exist then there should be a national preparatory programme to integrate the youth into the notion of a one united Tanzania. Hence, Mwl. Nyerere foresaw the importance of the national service training for six months through military training regardless of the ethnicity of the youth. They are all Tanzanians aspiring for one thing – participating in nation building was a priority. For this reason, the teaching of patriotic songs, and war songs during the six months training were enforced.

However, after the abandonment of the national service system, the youth were left without any tribal or national training with the exception of only the modern school system. There was nothing in place to help the youth to integrate into society as they turned into adults. The clan elders concluded that there was lack of moral training in the communities, hence the creation of cultural gaps. The

elders claimed these cultural gaps caused limitations in the upbringing of children in the Kuria society. Hence, the youth grow up without the proper knowledge of their responsibilities as adults, which widens the cultural gap and creates gender discrimination. The group concluded that girl children and young married women suffer the brunt of these cultural gaps and discrimination. Their reasons were that without meaning any harm, some older women in the Kuria society put fellow women through the rituals of the practices under study in trying to maintain and preserve the customs and traditions in a changing Kuria society.

Similarly, some studies show that the Christian churches banned polygamists (male and female) in the African communities from taking communion during colonial times. With Western influence emphasizing that girls have the right to choose their own husbands, woman-to-woman marriage may be dying out (28TooMany, 2019; Msuya, 2017; Cadigan, 1998). An example has been given in a recent study of the Western Igbo, which shows that women are becoming less tolerant of woman-to-woman marriage (Ugbabe, 2013; Cadigan, 1998). However, this institution of woman-to-woman marriage, which has existed from at least as early as the eighteenth century (O'Brien, 1977 in Cadigan, 1998), is still practiced among the Kuria ethnic group of Tanzania where this research was conducted.

Major Findings

The narratives of the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law indicated that it is the women, rather than the men who provided the bride wealth to marry a young girl or woman to produce a male child for the Nyumba Ntobhu household. However, the young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship feel sexually abused because they are pressured by their female husbands to have multiple sexual partners in order to have children. They also felt their Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law exploited their labour by forcing them to overwork with household chores as well as with the cultivation of the land (Starace, 2009), which cause them physical pain.

Public humiliation was the experience of violation felt by those young women involved in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship. They talked about the humiliation they felt when confronted and made a mockery of in public by the wives of their sexual partners. Those Kuria women who might be infertile or have only girl children have to bear the ordeal of cultural violence imposed on them. Related traumatic experiences were encountered in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage that made the young women stubborn and their display of disrespectful attitude often towards their Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-laws. These young women also developed resentment towards their parents for pushing them into a relationship that trampled on their liberty.

The husband of a sonless house does not have the hassle of going into Nyumba Ntobhu marriage to provide a male son and heir for the empty house, even though the children born from the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage belong to the grandparents of the sonless house that paid the bride wealth. The mother-in-law

of the empty house is responsible for choosing the suitor – the *Umutwari* for the young married woman. She usually chooses someone in the lineage of her husband and overpowers the daughter-in-law as a surrogate mother to procure a son (Rwezaura, 1998 cited in Tungaraza, 2005: 303). The obvious patriarchy and gendered nature of power relationships in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage were evident in this study.

Similarly, the daughters-in-law in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship were forced against their will into Nyumba Ntobhu marriages. Addressing themselves as victims of circumstances that compelled them into the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship, they felt they had been, and continue to be deprived of their voices in the decision-making regarding their sexuality and family planning. What is clear in the narratives of all three of the women was that poverty was a major push factor into the marriages, and a major factor that retained them in such difficult positions.

Consequently, the research finding highlighted that these young women are deprived of their voices in the decision concerning their social and sexual rights. The findings also showed a limitation in the definition of Law of the Marriage Act 1971 which does not acknowledge Nyumba Ntobhu marriage (Msuya, 2017). Hence, the young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship felt they and their children were denied the full legal protection as Tanzanian citizens if they should encounter a serious form of injustice. Ghati's experience reflects such an unjust encounter in the Nyumba Ntobhu practice. The poor implementation of the customary law impacts them and their children negatively and increases their vulnerability in the society. Msuya (2017) and Sikira, Chingonikaya, and Ringo, (2012) also reached a similar conclusion with their research findings. They added that nothing has been done so far to condemn Nyumba Ntobhu marriage. While the Kuria society seems to accept this kind of tradition and no legal action is taken against it, there is no legal protection for women in such marriages. The lamentations of these women have raised concerns beyond the violation of their rights in decision-making. The long and short-term health hazards, and the psychological impacts must be given serious consideration.

The Nyumba Ntobhu marriage practice allows elderly women to marry younger women to have grandchildren of their 'own' and to receive assistance with household chores (Majani, 2014). The purpose of woman-to-woman marriage is "an improvisation to sustain patriarchy, and simply an instrument for the preservation and extension of patriarchy and its traditions" (Nwoko, 2012: 69). Among the Kuria, the idea is to get a male child – an heir for the empty house, particularly to carry on the family legacy and continue with the lineage of the clan (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2012; Starace, 2009; Chacha, 2004). Among the Kuria of Tanzania, the practice is perceived as a way to maintain and continue the lineage for the political stability of the clan.

Conclusion

There are unequal power dynamics between husbands and wives in marriage arrangements in strictly patriarchal societies and these dynamics are mirrored in the woman-to-woman marriage. The Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law (female husband) represents empowerment of sonless women in the Kuria society. However, this ideology and practice constitutes a contradiction, because the patriarchal arrangement is maintained in the woman-to-woman marriage institution. The female husband gets to enjoy legal and social privileges over *her wife* (the young woman), the same privileges enjoyed by any male husband over his wife. For instance, the rights over children are not shared between the female husband and *her wife*, and where the female-husband has a husband, both she and her young wife are dominated by the man of the household. Hence, the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage institution which could be perceived as "women's institution and space" in fact maintains patriarchy in Kuria society.

Another phenomenon of women-to-women violence observed in this study is that the system of patriarchy is maintained to the extent that the female husbands only marry female wives, and not male wives. It was also noted that the sonless woman who marries a wife in the hope that she will give birth to a male heir is keeping and securing her own family's interests. Accordingly, this notion affirms the cultural preference for male heirs over female heirs. Many African countries have made a notable inroad into making it possible for daughters to inherit property. However, the cultural battle has yet to catch up with legal mandates for women's inheritance and property rights in many contexts. Proposed recommendations on the subject matter is discussed in the concluding chapter.

Ukerewe Island and the Widow Cleansing Ritual

> *"Death is always shocking to those close to the dead person, whether it is sudden or the result of a long illness" (Adefemi, 2015: 10).*

This empirical chapter presents the practice of widow cleansing ritual amongst the ethnic groups on the Ukerewe Island. It explores the cleansing ritual as a rite some Tanzanian and African widows undergo after the death of their spouse and highlights that for most women, in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa countries, "the death of a husband or a partner has an extra significance because it represents not simply the departure of a partner, a friend and breadwinner, but also results in a radical change in a woman's social status and lifestyle" (Azumah and Nachinaab, 2018: 44). The chapter gives the historical and geographical background of the widow cleansing ritual. It presents the data from ten widows, shared in a focus group discussion (FDG), which reflect their experiences of violation, vulnerability, humiliation, and the health risks of the cleansing ritual they underwent. The chapter also discusses the beliefs, understanding, and the symbolic meanings clan elders and community actors attached to the cleansing ritual that they shared in a FDG. The chapter concludes by highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of the ritual as perceived in the society where the practice in on-going.

Introduction

Boateng and Sottie (2021) and Adefemi (2015) explained that the death of a husband can be very devastating, stressful, and traumatic for a wife, since it involves a physical, emotional, and psychological break in their union. This should be a period to sympathize with and care for the widow, but unfortunately, it is often not the case. Instead, in many African countries and among the Kerewe ethnic group, culture demands that a widow go through certain traditional mourning practices, before and after the burial of her husband (Munala, Mwangi, Harris, et al, 2022), some of which are harmful. Customary and formal law often vary in their legal protections, which can perpetuate gender-based discrimination and leave widowed women with few paths of redress (Hayes, 2021: 1).

For women in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the death of a husband represents not only the loss of a partner, protector, provider, and breadwinner, but also marks her relegation to the margins of the society and her subjugation to discriminatory, oppressive, and humiliating widowhood rituals (Dube, 2022; and Adefemi, 2015). The rites the widow has to observe vary from place to place among the different ethnic groups in Tanzania.

In Tanzania, this traditional practice is known as *kuosha kifo/kusafisha kuondoa mkosi wa kifo* locally referred to as *Kutakasa/Kusomboka* meaning "to be

cleansed/purified." (Death cleansing/removing death jinx). The cleaning takes place through unprotected sexual intercourse (Dube, 2022; Mwanga, Mshana, Kaatano, 2011). The sexual encounter for the cleansing ritual can either occur for a short-term period or just once (Adefemi, 2015; Saguti, 2016; and Otiocha, 2011). Some researchers such as those of 28TooMany (2020) and Tungaraza (2005) maintain that in some Tanzanian ethnic groups, a widow is cleansed twice. First, a widower from her husband's clan cleanses the widow sexually four days after her husband's burial. Second, two to three months later, the widow has to be cleansed by having sexual intercourse with a stranger. Additionally, a widow in these communities must be cleansed not only by a stranger, but also in a village where she is not known and her identity cannot be traced (Adefemi, 2015: 64; Sikira and Urassa, 2015: 331).

With some ethnic groups, widows are cleansed by a village cleanser or a close relative of the deceased husband of the widow. The cleansing ritual is sanctioned by clan elders and the man who is involved in this 'ritual purity' is paid a cow, a goat or money' (Mwanga et al., 2011). Members of the different ethnic groups in Tanzania determine what is 'pure' or 'impure' (dirty) and the consequences of 'purity' and 'dirtiness'' may be viewed differently from other cultures. Among the African ethnic groups which practice widow cleansing rituals, there is a belief that death rituals are performed to re-establish lost purity (Munala et al., 2022; Mwanga et al., 2011; and Tuyizere 2007).

Widowhood is considered a bad omen, leading to the social alienation and stigmatization of widows and can be remedied through various rituals in many societies in Africa and Asia (Munala et al., 2022). Bergenholtz (2013) asserts that in Tanzania, traditional beliefs hold that a widow who has not been cleansed can cause the entire community or her deceased spouse's 'inheritor' to be haunted by the dead man's spirit. The explanation is that widows in the practising communities have the obligation to undergo the ritual to receive inheritance (Dube, 2022; Munala et al., 2022). It is also believed that omitting the cleansing ritual angers the spirit of the dead, which may make sexual intercourse with any other man dangerous in the future. Researchers of 28TooMany (2016) and an NGO research group known as "Broken Bodies – Broken Dreams" (2009), reported that traditional beliefs in Africa hold that a widow who has not been cleansed can cause the whole community to be haunted.

Olaore et al. (2021) and Adefemi (2015) associated widow cleansing with inheritance rights and the levirate marriage (where the widow must marry her deceased husband's brother), which is a practice followed in parts of Africa. Adefemi (2015) contended that the act of widow cleansing called '*isiku*' by the Igbos permits a man from the widow's village or her husband's family (usually a brother or close male relative of her late husband), who is regarded as a widow cleanser, to force the widow to have sex with him. The ostensible objective of the ritual is to allow her husband's spirit to roam free in the afterlife (Dube, 2022; Adefemi, 2015). The widow cleansing practice is also rooted in the belief that spirits

haunt a woman after her husband dies or that she is thought to be 'unholy' and 'disturbed' if she remains unmarried and abstains from sex. In a nutshell, widows have a unique set of challenges that they must endure. Such challenges include disinheritance, land grabbing, discrimination, and challenges with bureaucratic systems that aren't designed to address the needs of widows.

The Historical and Geographical Background of Widow Cleansing Ritual

Widowhood is a global phenomenon, affecting almost every society, and widows worldwide have their own unique stories that must be heard (Hayes, 2021). Literature on the traditional practice of widow cleansing in Tanzania has shown that its origin is unknown. Although it is prescribed for both widows and widowers, the latter goes through less harsh rituals than the former (Boateng and Sottie, 2021). Widow cleansing rituals are found in many communities in Africa, and the harsh treatment meted out to widows stems from the husband's family, traditions and the society as a whole (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; Opoku, 2016). Researchers such as Mwanga et al. (2011); Tuyizere (2007); Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007); and Tungaraza (2005) attest that widow cleansing dates back centuries and is practiced in African countries such as Angola, Benin, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia to mention a few.

In a United Nations publication by the Division for the Advancement of Women (2001), (hereafter will be addressed as Women2000), the authors underscore that substantial information exists on the ages and numbers of widows in developed countries. However, the data available on widowhood for developing countries such as Africa and Asia are extremely limited (Women2000, 2001). The report highlighted that in many developing countries, the exact number of widows, their ages and other social and economic demographics are unknown. Just as other African researchers on the subject have explored, Women2000 (2001) explained that widows in Sub-Saharan African countries are subjected to patriarchal customary and religious laws and discrimination in inheritance rights. The document noted that an uncountable number of widows suffer exploitation and abuse often in the context of property disputes at the hands of family members (Women2000, 2001). Unfortunately, widows are perceived as a burden to the extended family and they experience a deep sense of social isolation and loneliness, while dealing with their grief and loss (Motsoeneng and Modise, 2020).

Mwanga et al. (2011) contend that the rites a widow has to observe vary from place to place on the African continent. They claimed that in Tanzania, the inheritance of widows on the death of a husband used to be a common practice among many ethnic groups. A woman whose husband died is to get married to another man from the family of the deceased to provide security for the widow and her surviving children as well as to ensuring the lineage of the clan (Bukuluki

et al., 2021; Mwanga et al., 2011). Some research in recent years claims that this traditional practice has undergone some modification, and might be diminishing through the influence of Christianity and several initiatives by NGOs to try and change the situation (Curnow and Watts, 2013).

Widows' Experiences of the Cleansing Ritual

Ten widows aged between 31-69 years old in one of the wards on the Ukerewe Island opted to share their experiences in a group interview. These widows were from the three ethnic groups known as the Jita, Kara, and Kerewe, which make up the population of the island. Munala et al., (2022) and Sikira, and Urassa, (2015) hold that, traditionally, both men and women of these ethnic groups undergo a cleansing ritual after the death of a spouse. Although both men and women do the ritual cleansing, it is the widow, and rarely the widower, who bears the responsibility to carry out the purification rituals upon the death of the spouse.

Before sharing their personal experiences, the widows were asked to explain from their point of view what they understood by the cleansing ritual, namely, the origin of the practice and why they think the practice persists in their community. In a group discussion, clan elders and community actors also gave their understanding of the widow cleansing ritual and the beliefs attached to the ritual as practiced on the island. The widows most commonly shared understanding of the cleansing ritual was: "*a widow is cleansed to prevent her from ill health after the death of a husband. The cleansing ritual is performed by having sexual relations with a man who is not otherwise your sexual partner*", reflecting the popular cultural beliefs of the local people on the Ukerewe Island. This coheres with White's (2013) finding that locals in the Malawian context are indoctrinated into the notion that the rite of cleansing is the only way for widows to survive after the death of a spouse. The widows further explained how firmly the belief is embedded in their society. They maintained it is a widely held belief in their community that people would die in the deceased's household if the living spouse did not fulfill the obligation of the cleansing ritual. Such beliefs instill fear in the bereaved spouse. Thus, the widows have a little freedom to decide and are compelled by the tradition to undergo the cleansing ritual.

The issue of the origin of the practice on the Island was addressed. Some widows said that they did not know about the origin of the practice because no one ever told them about how and when it began in their communities. Others said that the cleansing ritual has always been part of their culture. While their personal experiences varied, they all disclosed that they were exposed to the cleansing ritual during their bereavement after the death of their spouses.

Their answers reflected, on the one hand, their lived experience as widows; and on the other hand, their culturally bonded understanding of the cleansing ritual. These widows acknowledged that their traditional beliefs taught them *the cleansing ritual purifies and drives away the bad spirit of the deceased spouse*, dominant cultural norms that they had inscribed into themselves, despite their

direct negative experiences in undergoing the cleansing ritual.

The Widows Narratives on their Experiences

The 10 widows shared their experiences of the ritual they had undergone and their opinions on what they considered to be sustaining the practice in their community. The widows relayed their experiences of violence associated with the cleansing ritual. The issues discussed were very emotional and sensitive, with the themes of force, vulnerability, and humiliation having emerged strongly in their narratives. Other themes such as health risks and matters of concern unfolded and were addressed in the FDG with the widows.

Pressures to Undergo the Cleansing Ritual

In sharing their individual stories, some of the widows spoke about how they had been forcefully pressured to undergo a cleansing ritual. The majority of the widows used the phrase: "I was forced to be cleansed against my wishes." Some of them shared that they initially stood against the ritual, but had to reconsider their decision for various reasons. The statement below reflects a 52-year-old widow's dilemma:

> When I lost my husband, I made two attempts to undergo the cleansing but I did not have the courage to undergo the ritual. I refused to be cleansed because of my Christian faith. My in-laws threatened me that my children would lose the legitimacy of their inheritance. I stood my ground and remained in my marital home with my children. After two years, I re-considered my decision and I decided to go against my Christian faith for the sake of my children.

The future position of widows' children in relation to their rights to inheritance was often a crucial factor in influencing decisions. Their mothers' decisions not to undergo the ritual could cause the loss of their rights to inherit. The widow, in the above excerpt, was threatened by her in-laws that her failure to undergo the ritual would not only deny her children the right to inherit, but that she would be buried with all her possessions, including her cooking utensils, when she dies. The widows said that such situations left them with no option but to comply as they did not want to deprive their children the right to inherit. Another 53-year-old widow gave this testimony:

> I refused to undergo the cleansing when my husband died in spite of the pressures and intimidation I underwent. After a year, I reconsidered it and had it done to enable my children a right to claim the clan property.

In the ward where the study took place, the widows were beginning to reflect on the different forms of violence and exploitation that they endured because of the cleansing ritual. Some of them were exploring avenues such as Christianity and modern culture to resist the sexual form of cleansing. It emerged in the FGD that some widows had used these avenues as a means to fight against the cleansing ritual. For example, the Christian members in the group shared that they had

undergone the cleansing symbolically. They claimed that three to five days after the mourning period, they went to the church for a blessing.

They believed that indulging in sexual relations outside of marriage was immoral and sinful, and that it went against their Christian faith. However, some traditionalists in these widows' communities did not always recognize and accept the Christian form of cleansing. Some family members, including women of their deceased spouses, did not consider the symbolic form of the Christian cleansing as being capable of chasing away the bad spirit of the deceased spouse. Therefore, widows continued to suffer social isolation and intimidation within their communities.

Some widows stated that because of the experience of social isolation, they had reconsidered their standpoint and had gone to be sexually cleansed in the traditional way against their Christian faith in order to regain their freedom, respect, and dignity in society. The few widows in the group who said they refused to undergo the sexual cleansing ritual happened to be Christians. They said that while they had no problems associating with their fellow Christian women, they did not always associate with women in the community during certain customary ceremonies. They felt stigmatized because they had not been sexually cleansed and some women in the society constantly reminded them of their uncleanliness

A 42-year-old widow said she was caught in a similar dilemma between her Christian faith and tradition, and shared that her parents had stood firmly by her and did not allow her to go through the sexual cleansing ritual. She said it had been a long fight between her in-laws and her parents. She counted herself as lucky because while she did not undergo the sexual ritual, her in-laws allowed her to live in the homestead with her children.

Most of the widows expressed that to be cleansed sexually required a lot of courage. A 63-year-old widow said that she was escorted to the cleanser but she refused because she did not have the courage to have sexual intercourse with a man she did not know. After the first escort, her in-laws gave her the freedom to find her own cleanser. She explained:

> "I made two more attempts on my own but could not go through the ritual. I didn't have the courage; my spirit just refused."

This widow lived with her in-laws, although it was not clear in the FGD whether she eventually underwent the cleansing ritual. Some widows revealed that they had refused initially but reconsidered their decision and underwent the sexual cleansing, while others stood their ground and refused to be cleansed. Another 69-year-old widow disclosed that when her husband died 11 years ago (at the time of the FGD) she refused to undergo the ritual in spite of the intimidation and pressures by the females in her in-law's family.

> I refused to undergo the sexual cleansing ritual. I am still living in my late husband's homestead and have not encountered any problems. My children are doing well in life and no ill omen has befallen me nor my deceased husband's clan members.

This widow explained further that she did not only stand her ground but also spoke out and told her in-laws that the cleansing custom is an outdated practice that has no place in today's society. Others also stood up against the practice and refused to undergo the ritual in spite of the family and societal pressures, thus reflecting the agency that women do possess. Women who resisted, refused to undergo the rituals and live to tell the tale of no ill-luck befalling them, must be encouraged to become local champions and serve as role models in their communities. Their voices can have a huge impact on those governed by superstition and fear. A few of the widows said that they were not forced to undergo the cleansing ritual, rather they themselves had asked to be cleansed. One of them, a 39year-old shared this:

> I wanted to have it done and be over with. I asked my sister-in-law when the cleansing ritual would take place.

Those women who had willingly asked to be cleansed stated that they had witnessed and seen how some widows on Ukerewe Island had suffered forms of abuses, humiliation and stigmatization in the community and their homestead. The widows also said that they knew about the impact of the cultural implications on widows who refused to undergo the cleansing ritual. Because of these cultural implications, some widows, including the 39-year-old, got scared of the consequences they might suffer should they refuse to undergo the ritual. Hence, they asked to be cleansed so as to be free of societal prejudice and to maintain their dignity and respect.

Two widows, a 43-year-old and a 50-year-old, wanted to follow the tradition because of the deep rootedness of the cultural belief. These widows perceived the sexual ritual as a necessity because of what they presumed might happen to them if they refused to be purified in the traditional way. They shared:

> No one forced me to undergo the cleansing ritual. I went on my own and then informed my in-laws that I have undergone the ritual.
>
> I was not escorted to be cleansed. I was given the freedom by my in-laws to find my cleanser.

The excerpts suggest that some family members in the Ukerewe communities were beginning to refrain from forcing women into the cleansing practice. Hence, the widows were given freedom to make decisions about it. I questioned these two widows as to why they chose to undergo the ritual when they were not compelled to do so. They indicated that they chose to endure the fear and anxiety associated with the sexual cleaning in order to secure their wealth and to maintain the position of their children in their deceased husband's family.

Children in these communities are counted as part of their father's lineage to have claims to his land and property following the death of their mother. As long as the mother is alive and remains in the homestead, she holds the property in trust for the children. Therefore, integration into the patrilineage is an essential strategy for securing a child's future, and most widows I interviewed tried to stay on the safe side or be in good terms with their deceased husband's family. Some of the widows' stories portrayed how the future of their children's fate was used to get them to undergo the ritual. Widows in the studied communities are put in a vulnerable situation due to societal pressures and the fear of depriving their children of their inheritance. They felt coerced into the cleansing ritual, reflecting an awareness that their children's positions in the family were used to entrap them in more vulnerable positions.

Vulnerability: Blaming and Dispossession

While they shared similar experiences and identified with each other's ordeals, there were some differences in the stories of the widows. Their different narratives shed light on the complex issues, violence and vulnerabilities that widows experience. One of the widows aged 32, at the time of the interview, narrated that she was two months pregnant with her fourth child when her husband died. Despite her pregnancy, she was compelled to undergo the cleansing ritual against her wish, as she explained:

> I pleaded with my in-laws to delay the cleansing until I had given birth, but they lent a deaf ear to my plea. Instead, my female-in-laws constantly accused me of bewitching and killing my husband. My father also pleaded on my behalf but his plea was not heeded. He became frustrated in the end, and told me that undergoing the ritual was the only way out to prove my innocence of my in-law's accusations against me. He added that the act of the ritual is performed only once. I took my father's advice and did as custom demands.

Both the widow and her father felt the female in-laws would have continually mocked her as the witch and the killer of their son and brother, if she refused to undergo the ritual. She also feared her reputation would be tarnished in the homestead and community if she did not undergo the ritual. Unfortunately, after the cleansing ritual, her mother-in-law and sister- in-law (both widows) kept insisting that she had bewitched and killed her husband. She felt trapped and helpless. She could not defend herself because culturally a widow is not supposed to be argumentative or quarrelsome during the mourning period. Tradition demands that she must be humble, quiet, and show signs of bereavement at all times until the mourning period is over.

This widow explained further that she observed tradition and suffered her ordeal in silence, stomaching the verbal abuse and intimidation with each passing day. Three weeks after the death of her husband and just before his property was shared among his kinsmen, she was sent away from her marital home while pregnant. All her possessions and her three children were taken away from her.

> After my traumatic experience, my understanding of this practice of the cleansing ritual is that it is cultural violence. My in-laws are enjoying what my husband and I worked hard to acquire. I am poor and struggling to start life all over again. The clan elders who were supposed to protect widows from any unjust act such as my predicament, as custom demands, did nothing to stop and prevent my in-laws from dispossessing me.

After going through the required ritual, this widow was still evicted from the homestead. As emerged in her narrative, there is no guarantee that widows, who have been subjected to the cleansing ritual, would have freedom from the violence and intimidation by their in-laws. Such is the depth of oppression experienced by some widows, that elements of self-blame could be detected in their narratives. Others too felt that the way widows are treated is a pure violation of human rights.

In the FGD I observed that most of the widows were beginning to talk openly about their ordeals. The blaming of widows for the death of a spouse is quite common in many African patriarchal societies for various reasons, and the communities on Ukerewe Island were not an exception. Some of the widows said that they were blamed even when the family of the deceased knew the cause of death, as stated by this 43-year-old widow:

> My sister-in-law knew the cause of the death of her brother (my husband), but she still blamed me when he died. I have suffered a lot of verbal abuse and intimidation.

Frightening the widows that their failure to undergo the ritual would not only bring a curse to haunt the whole community, but that they would lose all of their properties and their children were the hardest fears and threats experienced.

> If I fail to undergo the ritual, there is the danger that in the near future, I could be chased away from the homestead. Moreover, all the properties, including the livestock, could be taken away from me because I have broken the tradition.

The above excerpt of a 34-year-old widow shows her understanding of women's vulnerability to various forms of cultural abuse that shape the choices that women make. The threats of destitution are, indeed, real as discussed above and customary mourning practices mean that the women remain unheard and invisible. The women talked about how widows are expected to remain in a confined room for a few days and could only talk to fellow widows. The widows reported lack of social support after the death of their partners and to being subject to humiliating cultural stereotypes which, according to Hayes (2021), are recurrent widowhood experiences in rural settings.

Quoting Houston et al. and Manala, Dube (2022: 1) explained that "isolation of widows includes social isolation where the widow is left disengaged in social interactions and village events due to stigma association with the spirit of the dead be it in her natal family and friends or community members. This remains in place until rituals are performed to purify her from associated evil spirits of the dead." In addition, the culture demands that widows remain silent and refrain from asserting her rights. Some participants of the group discussion said that the family members of the deceased make decisions over the widow and her children during this period of mourning. Widows in the study felt that some of their in-laws deliberately accused them of bewitching and killing their spouses. The intent of the accusations was to intimidate and dispossess them and their children and their property.

It is clear that power and control, combined with fear of poverty and dispossession, were powerful factors in forcing widows to undergo the cleansing ritual. The relatives of the deceased used these strategies to manipulate the widows at the time they were in the most vulnerable positions - during the bereavement period. As power and control work in complex ways, it is understandable that despite the women's recognition of the humiliating and violating consequences of these rituals, some of them internalized these dominant societal norms and saw them as a source of women's identity and recognition in their societies.

Humiliation: The Feeling of Guilt and Being Immoral

Widows undergo humiliating rituals following the death of their husbands, and are routinely subjected to painful, dehumanizing public treatment as a result of the continued application of discriminatory laws and practices in Tanzania (Olaore at el., 2021; Sikira and Urassa, 2015). In the FGD, a few of the widows shared that they experienced the ritual as humiliating and embarrassing, and that it was disrespectful of their bodies. One of them, a 45-year-old widow, said she felt not only humiliated but:

> …having sex with a strange man I have no feelings for made me so sick. I felt dirty!

Some of the widows in the group were of the opinion that been compelled to having sex without consent was equivalent to rape. Others also said that they had been embarrassed and ashamed when asked by their sisters-in-law: *"Did you do it?"* Implying that - they had had sex with the cleanser, and they had to answer truthfully "*yes*." The shame and embarrassment caused by the ritual was distressful and undignified which affected the widows psychologically. A 32-year-old widow said she felt humiliated after she had her hair shaved and her sister-in-law asked her to wait outside the house while people in the neighborhood stared at her, knowing that she had undergone the ritual. She was the only one who said that her hair was shaved after the ritual.

The widows said traditionally the sister-in-law played a symbolic and important role in the cleansing ritual. The sister-in-law sings a jubilant tune (known locally as *vigelegele*), when a widow confirms to her that she has undergone the sexual act. Her *vigelegele* alerts and invites other women in the escort group to celebrate the widow. It is a symbolic gesture, which signifies that the widow is cleansed and can resume the enjoyment of her social rights.

Some of the widows also expressed that the act of the cleansing had made them feel immoral and guilty, which they considered sinful and violating of their human dignity. These widows explained that in their culture, good and modest women are not expected to engage in immoral acts. Yet, paradoxically, their tradition also requires them to be purified from uncleanliness by engaging in what is considered *'proper behaviour',* which would be frowned upon in any other circumstance. The widows were in a dilemma over these issues. Some women did begin to question the contradictions. Research shows a disproportionate burden of HIV among women within the Kuria community is strongly associated with sexual cleansing (Munala et al., 2022; Opoku, 2016). The widows in this study were aware of this, and most of them were concerned about their health as discussed below.

Health Risks Associated with the Cleansing Ritual

Research has revealed that widowhood rituals have negative health implications for women (Azumah and Nachinaab, 2018). Widows shared that the cleansing ritual affected their bodies and their sexuality. The first concern expressed by the widows was the unhygienic way the ritual was performed. Those widows cleansed by the '*village cleanser*' – known as the '*Omwesya*' –said that he was dirty, drunk, and unkept. Others revealed that they were taken to the bush to be cleansed, and these experiences induced trauma and affected them emotionally and psychologically.

Based on the above experiences of the widows, I asked them how they understood the cleansing ritual and what meaning it held for them. A few of the women explained the meaning of the cleansing ritual as: "*… to be cleansed from the deceased's spirit*." Others said: "*…to be cleansed and be free from any bad omen*." I gathered from their answers that the cleansing ritual was considered necessary to purify the widow from the spirit of her deceased husband and to free her from the threat of any bad omen as noted by a few of the widows. As affirmed by Munala et al., (2022) the majority of the widows mentioned sexual cleansing removes impurity ascribed to her, protects the children and homestead, and upholds tradition. However, most of the widows shared that undergoing the sexual act as part of the cleansing ritual is disadvantageous because they felt the practice promotes sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The sentiments below reflect a 69-year-old widows' fears and anxieties about the impact of the ritual on her health:

> Personally, I feel cleansing by the sexual act is no medicine to purify me, neither will it cure or protect my children or myself from any ill health. Hence, I refused and resisted all forms of pressure from my in-laws.

This woman did not believe that the sexual cleansing could purify and protect her and her children from a haunted spirit. She explained further that, in her opinion, the sexual act involved in the ritual pollutes and infects the body of a woman. Some of the widows held a similar belief. They said that normally their in-laws pay cleansers who are drunk, dirty, and smelly. Another widow, a 42-year-old said:

> "…I was infected and suffered for years before I got cured. It puts me in deep thought anytime I reflect what happened to me."

Talking about the cleanser infecting them, I asked the interviewees if they could not have used any protective measures for the cleansing. The widows explained that traditionally, to ensure the objective of the ritual is achieved, the cleansing is accomplished through unprotected sex. This issue was debated for a while with two widows aged 36 and 45-years-old, sharing their views and concerns about how unsafe the act was:

> … I see no advantage in the cleansing ritual; it only brings us syphilis and gonorrhea.
>
> Widow cleansing increases especially STDs, I see no advantage in the cleansing act.

Fear of STDs was commonly shared among the widows. Some of them asserted that they were infected and that it took them years to be cured. The most worrying issue raised during the FGD was the concern about the possibility of contracting HIV/AIDS.

The widows, including those who shared that the ritual protected them from bad omens, agreed that they stand a high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS or other STDs through the practice. According to these widows, the whole experience of the cleansing ritual was traumatic for them. Some said that the impact has affected them physically and psychologically, as one 53-year-old stated:

> I was depressed when my husband died, and when I was kept in isolation it added to my emotional stress to the extent that I have been battling with high blood pressure ever since.

Isolation has been condemned for causing mental ill-health and psychological disorders in widows (Dube, 2022, Sekgobela et al., 2020). The death of a husband can be very traumatic for a wife, and the impact of various forms of isolation affects their health, especially in low-resourced communities (Dube, 2022). Widowhood rites in Tanzania are considered outdated for contemporary

times and are detrimental to women's wellbeing. Therefore, part of the cleansing rites, exposing women to starvation or confinement, is evidence that a widow is genuinely aggrieved and violated (Lenette, 2014). Some of the negative health effects after the widowhood rituals include: swollen feet, headaches, black pains, body aches, lack of concentration and trauma as the widows had to sit for days on grass mats (Azumah and Nachinab, 2018). The health issues, the socio-cultural understanding and implications of the cleansing ritual and many other issues surfaced in the widows' narratives in the FGD.

Ritual Sexual Practices: Matters of Concern Raised by the Widows

On Ukerewe Island, social life is considered an important and integral form of community living. The majority of the widows shared their fear that other women in the community would not visit a widow's home or share any meal with her if she had not undergone the cleansing ritual. Widows in the study detailed the fears and anxieties, as well as the values attached to the cleansing ritual that left them with little or no option but to undergo the ritual.

I asked the widows what they thought would have happened to them if they had told their in-laws that they had undergone the ritual without actually going through it. There was a general response that they would have been too frightened to do this. The widows explained that to say they had undergone the ritual while they did not, would have meant deceiving not only the living but also the dead as well as the ancestral spirits of the land. The ritual was seen as sacred and the fear of a bad omen befalling them were such that widows were afraid of the possible consequences of lying and of non-compliance. Furthermore, the setting of the sexual ritual often made lying about it impossible.

The widows who had been cleansed by a village cleanser disclosed that there were elderly women and even young sisters-in-law that accompany or follow them to make sure that they have been cleansed. One of them explained that as part of her experience of the ritual, a male relative of her deceased husband shaved her hair and a female relative prepared water for her bath. After that a special meal was prepared for her and her children. From the moment of her cleansing to the next two days, she could only communicate with fellow widows until the ritual leader considered her as cleansed, after which she was free to communicate with other members in the community.

Another widow, a 34-year-old, had a different experience of the cleansing ritual in the same community. She shared that the cleansing ritual could be performed differently depending on the in-laws of a widow in a particular family. She then shared her experience:

> After the cleansing, my female-in-laws told me to go to bed and lie flat on my tummy with my face down. An elderly widow kept watch over me to make sure I remain in the same position in bed. Neither

> my three little children, aged between 4 and 8 years-old, nor I had any food to eat. My in-laws restricted us and confined my children indoors until the following day. For the next two days after the cleansing, I was only allowed to communicate with fellow widows.

This 34-year-old widow felt her in-laws deliberately starved her children and her, and kept them in isolation. Whist widows need support after the death of their husband, their yearning for such support is not always met as people that should be providing support, isolate them (Dube, 2022). Other widows in the group, assured the 34-year-old that it was part of the traditional ritual to be isolated since it is believed to be a taboo to communicate with community members or other outsiders during the cleansing period. Moreover, a widow can only communicate when she is purified from all that is considered pollution associated with her widowhood.

I wanted to know more about the role of the escorts so I asked the women to describe what they do and who they are. A 50-year-old widow explained that traditionally, three to five days after the death of a husband, two female in-laws of the widow, or in case the deceased has no female relatives, the widow's sisters or cousins and a male relative of the deceased, escort the widow to be cleansed. One of the widows, a 69-year-old, shared in detail about the escort and the cleansing:

> …. selected members of the clan escort the widow looking for a cleanser – very often, the widow is taken to a public place like a drinking bar where men would gather. The female-in-laws will dress her up in a way that is noticeable to the locals of Kara, Jita and Kerewe as a woman whose husband 'has passed away' and needs cleansing. In the public gathering, one of the female escorts announces, "there is '*msimbe*' here": meaning there is "an unclean woman here." Upon hearing this, any of the men present could approach the widow and take her for cleansing. The cleanser in this case is not paid, neither is it permissible to pay the widow for having sex with her. If on the other hand, no man approaches the widow, the escorts pay a village cleanser known in the community to do the cleansing. Some families too pay the cleanser and bring him home to the widow for the cleansing ritual.

Among the Jita and the Kara, the beliefs surrounding the cleansing rituals are that neither the widow nor the cleanser should fall in love with each other. The act of the ritual is performed only for that day as explained earlier. This same belief holds for a widower, because the woman he uses for the cleansing ritual could never remain his sexual partner, lover or wife. The widows asserted that the traditional way of cleansing, deriving from ancient times among the Jita and Kara ethnic groups, is that a widow or widower undergoes a cleansing ritual performed through sexual relations by a cleanser.

One of the widows said that the Kerewe, on the other hand, used to practice a different form of cleansing ritual. She explained that amongst the Kerewe when

a spouse dies, selected groups of male and female members of the deceased family escort the widow or widower and their children to an anthill on the outskirts of the village. As part of the ritual, the widow or widower carries a cloth of the deceased and places it on an anthill. The widow or widower and their children are encouraged to urinate on the same spot on the anthill. The deceased's spirit is then invoked, and the widow or widower calls his or her name thrice, saying: "*I have come to be cleansed*." After this ritual, the living spouse and children immerse themselves in the river and take a bath. The ceremony symbolizes the cleansing of the haunted spirit. A medicine man, known popularly in the community as '*mganga wa kienyeji*' (a 'witch doctor or traditional healer'), prepares an herbal concoction for the widow or widower and their children to drink. They use the remaining herbal water to wash their hands on the grave of the deceased. This final ritual symbolizes "a goodbye to the dead" who now belongs to a different world from the living.

A few days after the ritual has been performed, the clothes of the deceased are shared among their relatives. The give-away of the clothing symbolizes the closure of an era for the dead and begins a new life for the widow or widower and their children. However, according to the widows in this study, this traditional practice by the Kerewe has died out completely. They claimed that this was because of intermarriage amongst the three ethnic groups on the island. Additionally, they said, those Kerewe who marry outside the island into other ethnic groups of Tanzania are inclined to follow the traditions and cleansing rites of their spouses.

It is believed in the Ukerewe community that children born after the death of a spouse may be denied a share of the inheritance after the death of their mother. Therefore, rights to inheritance is only there for these children as long as the mother is alive. I became concerned and asked the participants whether, as a result of the ritual, the cleanser could impregnate the widow. The participants said that there is the possibility, and they emphasized that there have been such incidents in their communities. They explained that children born after the cleansing rite and those conceived during the cleansing ritual are called 'Mruswi' –meaning 'the child of that place.' Historically, it is believed that these children have the same rights of inheritance in the deceased's family, as the children born before the death of the spouse. However, as explained earlier, when their mother (the widow) dies they lose all rights of inheritance in that family.

Throughout the interviews, these widows made a strong appeal to help the Kivulini women's rights organisation in Mwanza city and a rights activist's group on the Ukerewe island called "Kikundi Cha Mila na Desturi Ukerewe", which means the "organisation of customs and traditional norms in Ukerewe", which is known by its abbreviation KUMIDEU. Most of them felt that in their community no one, including the Tanzanian government, is doing enough to protect widows' rights. Hence, they had formed an autonomous support group for solidarity known as 'The Change Makers.' They explained that the aim of their organisation is to fight the stigma attached to widows and to uplift their image in their communities. As

change makers, these widows take a critical stand against the cleansing ritual. Accordingly, their sentiments and thoughts might have influenced the data I gathered during the interviews. These widows' views may be more critical than the views of other widows in their community who are not members of their association.

The widows' group wanted the cleansing ritual to be stopped. They thought that clan elders in their community perpetuated the practice of the cleansing ritual because the beliefs are deep rooted in traditional practices. The widows also made pleas to their government and rights' organisations to promote educational activities in communities that practiced sexual rites of cleansing. They added that they hoped to see a society where widows are free from the sexual cleansing ritual.

We wondered why the less offensive cleansing ritual by the Kerewe ethnic group disappeared on the Island, while the offensive and humiliating sexual cleansing rituals persist. The uncertainties that arose in the widows' narratives were taken to the focus group discussion for detailed deliberations of the views and understanding of clan elders, health workers, activists and community actors in a focus group discussion.

Clan Elders', Community Actors' and Activists Understanding of the Widow Cleansing Ritual

In order to understand the socio-cultural meaning of the cleansing ritual, as well as why the practice persists on the island, I held 3 group interviews of key informants aged between 55–73 years. The group was made up of clan elders, community actors, and two activists. Some of the concerns that emerged in the widows' group interview were discussed. The community leaders and activists said that the cleansing ritual has always been part of their culture. They affirmed that they heard of the cultural practice as young children and it is still ongoing in their communities. The cleansing is done within three days to about a month after the death of a spouse. The timeframe depends on the different families, but generally, the cleansing ritual period does not exceed a month after the death and burial of a deceased spouse.

Clan Elders' Understanding of the Cleansing Ritual

A female 67-year-old community elder said:

> *Kutakaswa* – the cleansing ritual has been in our communities for ages. My understanding of the ritual is that once a spouse dies, it is believed in the community that the deceased has inflicted '*mkosi*' – (filth/dirt), and it would continue to haunt the living spouse. Therefore, the filth and haunted spirit is cleansed in order to avoid any bad omen or ill-health befalling the deceased's household. The cleansing purifies the

> widow or widower and enables them to be free, in order to eat and associate with other family members. In our community, the widow is inherited and accepted back into the deceased's family after she has undergone the cleansing ritual.

In Ukerewe communities, there is the belief that death is the most devastating enemy of society, and it is a deep-rooted belief among the Kerewe, Kara and the Jita that the ghost of the deceased will continue to haunt the living spouse. Other members also believed that without the cleansing of the living spouse, the spirit of the deceased spouse will not be able to roam freely in the 'life after death'. For such reasons, the cleansing is an obligatory ritual to wash away what has become unholy, dirty, and haunted. In addition, the community leaders shared that the cleansing ritual is to drive the haunted spirit and all the ill luck that is associated with it to the next world. Another 73-year-old elder explained:

> People in our communities believe that the death of a relative is infectious. Therefore, the impurity of the deceased person, if any, affects close relatives and above all, the spouse, who becomes contaminated and thus untouchable and associated with a taboo. It is feared that the living spouse could infect members of the household because of the close relationship s/he had had with the deceased.

My informants also explained that before a widow could resume her sexual and social life, an 'Omwesye' (a cleanser) must ritually cleanse her through a sexual act. The sexual ritual is a precondition for the widow as an indication for her deceased husband's clan members to have control over her fertility and sexuality to restore the continuity of the lineage. I asked the group how the cleanser is chosen. They explained that because of the sexual act attached to the cleansing ritual, it is against their custom to select a cleanser from among the kinsmen of the deceased. A male, a 65-year-old clan elder, gave the following account:

> .... it is in accordance with our tradition that the one who does the cleansing should neither fall in love nor marry the widow or widower. Unlike the Luo ethnic group in Tanzania, who choose the cleanser among their close relatives, it is a taboo for us to select the cleanser from the deceased's relatives. We believe that a cleanser cleanses the widow or widower, and secondly, drives away the haunted spirit of the deceased. The widower is free to remarry whomever he chooses from any clan and continue with his sexual life after the ritual. In the case of a widow, she remains in the deceased family after the purification. However, she could either be remarried to a clan member or choose to leave the deceased homestead and remarry elsewhere.

The options explained above for the widow to remarry depends on the treatment the widow receives from her in-laws. The same informant explained that to keep the family lineage, a close relative of the deceased, for example, his brother or a nephew inherits the widow. This heir is given a definite role in the relationship,

which is to protect and provide for the widow and her children to meet their basic needs. Often, the relationship leads to marriage; some widows choose to remain unmarried. In case children are born out of this relationship, the belief is that the deceased husband fathers the children and, therefore, they are given his name.

Female informants explained, in a group discussion, that while both widows and widowers undergo the cleansing ritual, only the widows' cleansing is made public. They claim that the widower cleansing is done in a discreet way to protect his privacy. Whereas women shared their life experiences, none of the male participants said whether they were widowers. They also did not share their personal experiences of the cleansing ritual; however, they shared their understanding and opinions on how the widower cleansing ritual was done in their communities.

The informants shared, as previously discussed, that among the ethnic groups on Ukerewe Island, both genders undergo the cleansing rituals. They explained that men undergo the cleansing ritual within a period of three days to about two weeks after the death and burial of their wives. A 61-year-old female community elder highlighted some of the practices that are associated with the rituals:

> …. the widower's relatives (clan's members) give him money to pay for the cleansing ritual. He then goes off on his own to a far-off town or village with the intention of seducing a woman and using her for the ritual. For example, if he finds it difficult to get a woman in an open market, he could find a woman in a bar and buy her an alcoholic drink into get her drunk. This makes it easy for the widower to have the woman agree to his sexual act.

I asked the informants whether the cleansing would be valid if the woman was under the influence of alcohol. A male clan elder 65-yesr-old informant said:

> The widower needs a woman for the cleansing, and that is all that matters for the ritual to be valid.

It was obvious that there are no taboos attached to the widower's act of getting the female drunk, and then using her for purification. It was further explained that the woman used for the ritual did not have to be aware of the fact that the man proposing to her was a widower, nor did she have to know that she had been used as the cleanser. When the widower goes home after the sexual act an elderly man shaves his hair. His female relatives, who are widows, prepare a special meal for him. Another clan elder, 73-years-old, explained more about the widower cleansing ritual:

> … nothing luxurious is encouraged; hence, the food is served on banana leaves. Some families serve the food on plastic plates. The widower dines with his young male children and the bachelors in his clan.

The widower has more agency in selecting his cleanser, which reinforces how patriarchy works in this studied community. At dawn the next day, the widower's male relatives escort him to the lake for a ritual bath. When they return home, a male relative who is also a widower strangles a rooster and either boils or roasts the meat. The widower and his children eat the plainly served meat without any sauce, as part of the ritual. Later, some special herbs are prepared for the widower and his children to have a bath. After the bath, the widower and his children use the remaining herbal bath water to wash their hands on the grave of the deceased. Informants attest that this whole ritual is a symbolic way of saying their goodbyes to the spirit of their beloved. Through the ritual, they say that they have nothing to do with her any longer, and that from that moment forward they belong to two different worlds.

Beliefs Attached to the Cleansing Ritual

In a group discussion, the elders explained that while most community members no longer subscribe to superstitious beliefs attached to the cleansing rituals, they could not rule them out. Traditional beliefs and superstitions are very strong among the ethnic groups on the Island. For example, when things go wrong, leading to many deaths in the communities, many questions are asked and oracles are consulted in the attempt to discover the reasons. Often, there is a prevailing idea that somebody caused the death. The informants stated that the eldest of the community investigate for clues of who might have caused the harm. There are always solutions after such examinations and they find a way to put things right. According to the activists in this study, beliefs in witchcraft and black magic or juju are strong among the indigenous communities in Tanzania. They explained that from the villagers' perspective, there is no distinction between the two. The community members are terribly afraid of witchcraft and juju and, therefore, any death associated with it must be cleansed through rituals. Most people on Ukerewe Island still believe that ill health will befall them if they do not undergo the cleansing ritual when a spouse dies.

They believe that if a household was not purified after the death of a husband or wife, any form of calamity may occur in that household. This implied that people in the community shared equally in the sorrow inflicted on a particular house. Clan elders confirmed that generally, when death occurs, no single human or spirit agent is blamed as being the mystical cause. They stated that in some communities, people believe that God was punishing them for the wrong they had done. While these superstitious beliefs were still very strong in the communities on the Island, it was very difficult for outsiders and researchers to verify the authenticity of such claims empirically.

Superstitious beliefs surrounding death were a great concern in the focus group discussion. The community actors said that the cleansing ritual of both widows and widowers is a custom that is still widespread in their communities for a number of reasons. They identified three major driving forces for the continuation

of the rituals: a strong belief in superstition and uchawi or witchcraft, the lack of Christian faith and formal education; and economic reasons due to poverty and health issues.

The Christian leader in the group was initially very reticent in talking about witchcraft but as the conversation advanced, he entered into the discussion and gave relaxed, informative and philosophical ideas that were very helpful in the study. According to him, witchcraft beliefs are still present on Ukerewe Island, though mostly in the villages and among the uneducated. He believed that community members with formal education did not believe in witchcraft because they have two sources of knowledge: traditional knowledge that believes in witchcraft and the knowledge of formal education. This Christian leader, a 57-year-old, said that superstition reflects an imprisoned mind, stating:

> Through my interaction in the village community, I have become aware that superstitious people accept things as they are. They say, …*this is my lot and I can do nothing about it*. I have also learnt that the building block of superstition is fear. This fear compels one to surrender to a power out of fear and this power takes over him/her. Hence, when something goes wrong, people with such mindset begin looking for something or someone to blame. Finally, I have come to understand that mistrust in the community and in households is one of the causes of witchcraft accusations.

The participants in the group discussion were most concerned about the deep-rooted superstitious beliefs attached to the cleansing ritual. They explained that people in the community believe that witchcraft is a mixture of traditional medicine, certain spells, paraphernalia and some rituals. They held that these beliefs-controlled people in their communities. Although, the majority of widows and widowers did not willingly undergo the cleansing ritual, they were compelled to be cleansed (like '*slaves*') because of the social conditioning in their community. These community actors were of the opinion that the widowers undergo the cleansing ritual to free themselves from a haunted spirit. Through the purification rite, they also sought protection against any evil person who might want to bewitch or cast a spell on them. The widows, on the other hand, were often accused of bewitching their husbands and causing their deaths, and therefore became more vulnerable, leaving them with no choice but to undergo the ritual.

Building on the above justification, a 55-year-old female ward elder, in the group discussion highlighted that people in her community remain in a dilemma and are often caught between the Christian faith and traditional beliefs. She explained:

> …there is an anomaly between traditional beliefs and religions like Christianity. This religion has been unable to address and explain extraordinary events. From my point of view, Christianity wants people

to leave behind their traditional beliefs. For most villagers in the Ukerewe area, this is impossible because in the community, those who have embraced modernity and the Christian faith still have fears of witchcraft and taboos associated with the traditional beliefs.

Members of the group agreed that people who were envious and jealous of one another misused the power of witchcraft. These community actors also believed that ignorance, isolation and traditional beliefs were key contributory factors to the pertinence and continuing power of the witchcraft ideology. According to a 39-year-old ward executive in the group:

> …community members claimed that it is always a neighbor or a relative – someone who knows a lot about you who can use or apply the power of witchcraft to harm you.

The above idea explained why in-laws often accused or blamed the wives for the death of their male relatives. People in the research communities associated witchcraft to female folk and tended to identify women as witches. Therefore, should the community suspect a wife of possessing the power of witchcraft, they also believe that she could bewitch the closest relative, namely a husband. There are various reasons for the continuing practices of the cleansing ritual in Ukerewe communities, which is discussed below.

The clash between Tanzanian customary and conventional law

A 61-year-old male rights activist said; "widow cleansing is a traditional custom that continues on Ukerewe Island." He explained that in Tanzania, most cultural practices have the status of customary laws. Therefore, widow cleansing, known as '*kutakaswa* or *Kusomboka*' in the local dialect meaning 'to be cleansed/purified' is part of customary law. He emphasized that even though the law recognized widow cleansing as a tradition and custom of the people, the government and advocates (non-governmental activists), held that the cultural practices that are repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience are not acceptable by the Tanzanian law. One of the activists, a 61-year-old, explained further that:

> … any aspect of customary laws that are barbaric and dehumanizing, such as physical assault, psychological torture and the like are not accepted by our law.

These activists attested that the Penal Justice System, namely, the Criminal Offences Act of Tanzania and also the Domestic Violence and Offence Act of the country, provided various punishments for any form of human rights violation arising from cultural practices. According to a 65-year-old female activist in the group:

> ……what used to be a cultural demand for both widows and widowers in our community could be seen today as a crime in our legal system.

Making a woman to go through a widow rite just because she is a woman disrespects her personhood and is a gross violation of women's fundamental rights and freedoms, which perpetuates gender inequality (Olaore et al., 2021; Makama, 2013). Also, the intensive emotions associated with isolation from decision-making and social isolation cause stress and depression for the widows. This is attributed to the lack of social and legal support needed during the time of loss, bereavement, and mourning (Dube, 2022; Houston, et al., 2016) In their study, Olaore et al. (2021, 50) argued that widowhood burial rites include isolation, confinement, and hair shaving, among others. Such rites are modified for widows who are educated, have an active career life, or live in urban areas. They stressed that for such women, the rule for extended seclusion is adjusted to accommodate the need to return to work (ibid). Unfortunately, on the Ukerewe island the rules are strictly enforced on the widows as the majority of them were uneducated and they live in the rural areas where people are predisposed to customary practices (Olaore, 2021).

Economic Factors and Health Issues

The death of their husbands seems to spell doom for the economic resources of the widows in low-resourced communities (Dube, 2022). Before the death of their husbands, widows seem to have accrued some resources that helped in meeting their economic needs. However, upon the death of their husband, widows cannot access the economic resources as they are generally side-lined by in-laws as they grab the resources from the excluded and vulnerable widows (Dube, 2022: 16), as was evident in the FGD with the widows in this study. The majority of the widows expressed their grief over the many economic losses after their husbands' death, and fears of destitution should they not undergo the sexual cleansing rite.

Similarly, the leaders and activists expressed grave concerns about poverty as a contributing factor to the continuing cleansing ritual. First, some mentioned that because of economic hardship, the ritual cleansers were always ready to do the '*dirty job*.' As one of the respondents, a 53-year-old clan elder, said:

> The culture of the cleansing ritual has changed so much over the years in our society. In the past, cleansers were secretly pre-selected. The chosen man considered himself a hired man who does his job for an unknown benefit to the public. As time went on, men in the community began refusing to do the job, they were afraid of contracting sexual transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS. The community elders went public during that time, looking for men who were willing to do the job for a fixed fee. The money paid to the cleanser was between Tsh. 1,000 and 2,000 (*Tanzanian Shillings - US $1-2 at the time of the interview*). The men who opted to do the cleansing job were people known in community. These men held no post but became the *Omwesye* – the village cleansers, and considered the cleansing job as their profession.

> Unfortunately, I did not have the privilege to meet and interview any of the *Omwesye*, I would have asked him why he does the '*dirty job*.' Meeting a cleanser was not possible because my informants felt they might not be willing to be interviewed. It was obvious though that they are financially motivated; the low fees show that they are desperately looking for money. The 44-year-old gynecologist in the group commented that:
>
> …most of the *Wamwesye* (plural) are strange, dirty, and 'good for nothing' community members who behave as if they are mentally disturbed. They are alcoholics and drunks who spend any money they earn on alcohol.

The widows who had been cleansed by the *Omwesye* raised similar concerns. The widows expressed their distress over the *Omwesye* as deprived men who are disregarded in the communities because they have many problems. The widows also thought that the *Omwesye* are not mentally sound and their behaviour could be influenced by the excessive use of alcohol.

While these cleansers are not regarded as normal, they are always willing to do the cleansing. However, in recent years, it appears that there are some who try to protect themselves before performing the act of cleansing. A 53-year-old health worker gave an account of what he observed at the health care centre:

> The *Omwesye* secretly insert some local herbs – medicine into the vagina of the widow before the cleansing ritual. Some of the cleaners are beginning to be aware of the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, but because of poverty they continue to do the job for the money. I have seen such cases brought to our hospital where widows were badly infected because the herbs used as preventative by the cleanser.

In their study, Shoki, Nyenga, and Kasongi, (2017) argued that risk perception is a core construct in many behaviours change theories in public health. How one perceives or assesses one's risk for a particular situation is grounded within a cultural framework based on one's experiences within that culture or society (Shoki at el., 2017; Kubicek, et al., 2009). Many people in the Ukerewe community, who long embraced the tradition of the cleansing ritual, are beginning to frown on it because they are educated about the health consequences. Hence, the cleansers were also beginning to take precautions to protect themselves, albeit in sometimes ill-informed ways that were harmful to themselves and to the women.

Some respondents mentioned that the *Omwesye* were lower class citizens who had no wives or secure jobs. According to these participants, due to the unhygienic nature of the *Omwesye* in the community, some widows who were not pressured by their in-laws were beginning to look for their *Omwesye* privately to cleanse them.

The elder women in the group discussion informed that some widows in their communities preferred to pay for their cleansing to avoid the curse of widowhood. Moreover, widows on the Island are now conscious of the health hazards associated with the cleansing ritual. The men involved in the private secret cleansing could charge the widow up to Tsh. 40,000 (*USD 25 at the time this data was collected*) depending on the financial capability of the widow. Men who demanded and received monetary value were not related to the widow or deceased family, but rather community members whose profession was solely to cleanse widows in the community. However, community leaders informed that while widowers pay the women they use as cleanser, the women involved did not consider themselves as professional cleansers, as almost all of them were unaware that they were been used for this purpose.

I asked the participants whether any aspect of the cleansing ritual is considered a crime. In addition, I wanted to know whether the Tanzanian legislation and the Constitution protect widows. A 51-year-old police inspector said the following:

> It is against human rights to force anyone to have sex against his/her will – culture or no culture. It is also wrong to pay any man to have sex with a woman against her wish. This is a form of a bribe; it is a crime because it involves a sexual relationship without the consent of the woman. It must be noted that in Tanzanian criminal law, it is only when such violations take place and are brought to the attention of the law enforcement institutions that remedies may be provided.

The police inspector continued to explain that if violence is meted out on a person under the pretext of cultural beliefs or custom and a complaint is not made, then it will go unpunished and an impression might be created that there are no laws to prevent such violations:

> Unfortunately, offenses such as cultural practice crimes are not reported to the police and so far, as I know, we have not convicted perpetrators for such crimes on the Island.

The above explanation spurred argument and serious discussion among the focus group participants. In the end, the group members concluded that the community is not educated enough to identify what constitutes a crime in connection with traditional beliefs. The ward executive officer, a 39-year-old, in the group, added that:

> …I am the secretary of the ward tribunal, which is a local court where matters from the community or villages are referred to and resolved. Since I took office in December 2007, officials from Kivulini NGO have given training to our members of the tribunal on marriage laws, human rights, domestic violence, sexual offenses and skills on the provisions of Legal Aid and social counseling, etc. We have collaborated with local leaders to mobilize the communities and given workshops on

many occasions to raise consciousness in the community on human rights and the harmfulness of some cultural practices like the cleansing ritual.

The community had been educated on human rights and aspects of traditional practices including the sexual cleansing ritual that violates the rights of widows. The community actors claim that the violation that widows endure from traditional practices continue in spite of the community education given by human rights activists. Yet, the 39-year-old executive officer noted that since her election in 2009 until 2012 when this interview was conducted, she has not come across any case of widow cleansing ritual. No such incident was reported to her office.

A female 55-year-old street leader stated that ever since she was elected five years ago (at the time of the FGD), she had neither encountered any such incident nor had she heard of the cleansing ritual in her community. The second male street leader from the island district capital, a 51-year-old, also confirmed that he had not heard or seen any cleansing ritual done since he became a leader. He thought that the tradition of cleansing was dying out in this modern time because of the multiethnic group that made the island population. However, the majority of members of the group believe that the cleansing ritual secretly persists in the community. They also believed that the bereaved families were keeping a low profile about the cleansing ceremony to avoid community gossip. What is the driving force of the persistence of the cleansing ritual?

The Symbolic Meaning of Widow Cleansing Ritual

Just as every ritual of traditional practice has a symbolic meaning and implication, so too has the widow cleansing ritual. In the context of this study, a 'cleansing ritual' literally means the process of making clean what was considered dirtied and/or defiled (Munala et al., 2022; Dilger, 2006). This implies that the death of her husband makes the widow dirty. The widow therefore needs purification to be fully accepted as a woman in society until she is 'cleansed' (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; White et al., 2002). To the villagers, the widow is 'unclean' by virtue of the death of her husband, which portrays a sign of ill-luck or a bad omen, and therefore she is expected not to touch herself, her children, or anyone else to avoid defiling them (Adefemi, 2015; Tungaraza, 2005). In describing the symbolic meaning of the procedure of the rituals among the Igbos, for example, Adefemi (2015) holds that during the period, the widow observes the mourning rites, she is stripped naked, her hair, pubic hair, eyebrows, and armpits shaved. This researcher explained that symbolically, the shaving represents the removal of all links between the widow and her deceased spouse. Munala et al. (2022) affirms this and added that the shaving of hair presumably takes the ghost/spirit of the deceased away.

According to Dube (2022) and Onyekuru (2011) the isolation of the widow during the period and the expectation from her in-laws to wail loudly every morning is

taken as a sign of agony and deep pain at the demise of her spouse. The widow is confined during the period of grief and is not allowed to perform any household chores. She is served and fed from an old broken pot, and denied the right to sleep (Dube, 2022; Azumal and Nachinaab, 2018). In parts of Africa, especially among some ethnic groups in Nigeria, Adefemi (2015) and Onyekuru (2011) state that the widow is made to put 'bitter kola nuts' in her mouth as a symbolic reminder of the bitterness of her husband's death. Again, in that society, the widow is dressed in black attire and denied every form of hygiene. According to Adefemi (2015: 22) the mourning attire of the widow is deliberately designed to make her appear distasteful and repulsive to the spirit of her deceased husband who, it is believed, would still want to perform his marital and conjugal duties with her.

Scholars such as Munala et al. (2022), Mwanga et al. (2011), and Atere (2001) assert that the symbolic meaning of the practice is lost, and that widows are subjected to serious health hazards and other dehumanizing conditions. These scholars point out that in some African patrilineal societies, the mourning ritual can sometimes be very abusive and degrading, which could affect widows' health. The cleansing rituals sometimes include seclusion, prescribed dress code, walking barefoot, fasting for a period, and in more extreme cases, enduring the application of pepper to her eyes, sleeping in the same room where the corpse is laid, and bathing with water used to wash the corpse (Boateng and Sottie, 2021; Korang-Okrah, Haight and Gibson, 2019). It is believed that in some African communities, a widow has to crawl all the way to the graveyard, no matter how far. White et al. (2002) revealed similar dehumanizing rituals observed in Botswana and Malawi.

White et al. (2002) reported that a widow is not allowed to enter the house and had to sleep on the veranda after the burial of her husband. The next day, she would be stripped naked and made to lie down while other widows proceeded to rub ointment provided by a 'witch doctor' all over her body in the presence of everyone. The widow is later taken into the house but is made to walk while facing backwards, and wearing only one shoe. As she walks, she is made to chant: "I am walking backwards because I am a child; I am wearing one shoe because I am a child." Then she is made to hit the walls of the house with a pestle while shouting 'I am pounding the walls because I am child…" (White et al., 2002: 62). On such an occasion, the widow is only told what will be done, how and by whom. The instructors of such rituals in most African societies are a group of women considered 'experts' of the cleansing ritual (Atere, 2001).

According to Munala et al. (2022) and Dow and Kidd (1994), the rationale behind the cleansing ritual is that a child or a lesser human being could not be entrusted with property in the absence of a man. Besides, in her situation, the widow is under the total control of her-in-laws and has to comply with the customs and traditions of her ancestral land (Munala et al., 2022). White et al. (2002: 62) hold that the widow doing as instructed must exhibit "a manifestation of 'obedience',

to which the widow committed herself at the time she was getting married." On the other hand, these researchers argued that "...men do not practice this ritual. This raises the presumption that due to the patriarchal male status, unlike the subordinate female status, the male is regarded as '*clean*' by nature. The male possibly recognizes the ritual as a form of punishment and ... cannot punish themselves." That there are no extensive widower rites for men clearly shows the inequality between men and women (Boateng and Sottie, 2021). The widows' lives and decisions were scrutinized by community members and they felt constantly on their guard; consequently, the women could develop a lower sense of worth (Lenette, 2014).

Historically, the justification for discriminating against women in inheritance, namely that male clan members care for widows and daughters, is no longer viable in Tanzania as more women enter the labour force. As such, it is unjust to put the widow through a dehumanizing situation and then deny widows their right to inherit property using the customary rules when the reciprocal systems of care no longer exist (Magoke-Mhoja, 2005: 256). Very often, a mystery is built around certain traditional practices and not fulfilling their requirements is a taboo in the practicing communities, which leads to ostracism or even death (Lenette, 2014; Akintan, 2002). The fears created in the mindsets of women subject widowed women to dehumanizing widowhood rituals. Due to such experiences, most female members in Tanzania and some communities view the mourning ritual as a punishment (Tuyizere, 2007; Akintinde et al., 2002; White et al., 2002). However, clan elders and community actors observed the advantages and disadvantages of the cleansing ritual as discussed below.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Practice as Perceived by Clan Elders and Community Actors.

The community actors in the group discussion were asked whether they saw any advantage to the sexual cleansing ritual. According to some of the clan elders, there are advantages in the custom of ritual cleansing. They said that in the olden days, their ancestors saw no disadvantage to this ritual because the widows/widowers underwent cleansing to be marriageable. Thus, the cleansing makes them pure and holy, freeing them from evil torments and making them acceptable in the communities. These claims are believed to keep the lineage intact and to expand the clan, and because the widow is inherited, she might be given a husband in the same clan if she chooses to remain in that family (Opoku, 2016). As already explained by the widows, the children born from this new relationship bear the name of the deceased husband. The continuity of the deceased family could not be possible without having first been cleansed. Again, the clan elders attest that the cleansing rites that the widows observe and undergo give their children the rights of inheritance from their late father's property. These findings cohere with the study conducted by Bukuluki et al. (2021: 214) who revealed that the cleansing ritual is rationalized on several grounds, including protecting

the family property from being taken over by a 'stranger,' ensuring continuity of the family lineage, 'rescuing' the bride price paid, enabling continued care for the widow, and preventing a scenario where a widow would leave the children and remarry, or bring a man from another clan into the deceased's house. The inheritance process is known as *kuhungula* in Kerewe dialect and this tradition is still on-going in the communities of the island.

While the community actors and clan elders spoke about the advantages and values attached to the cleansing ritual, they were also very clear about the disadvantages of the practice. The pastor said, in his opinion, there are no advantages and he saw the practice as a violation of the widows' human rights. Even though he understood that the widowers make their choice of the woman they use as cleansers, he felt widowers' rights are also violated. The pastor believed that the widowers are also compelled to have sex with women who are not their sexual partners. He explained further that, as a pastor, he had witnessed the plight of some widows among his Christian community who were chased away from the homestead by their in-laws because they had refused to undergo the cleansing ritual.

In the group discussion, most of the informants' views were that widowers did not suffer the same fate as widows. They gave their reasons that widowers were not bothered by the relatives of their deceased wives about the sharing of property. These widowers did not suffer any form of stigmatization before the cleansing, even though, the relatives of the deceased believed they are also unclean. On the other hand, some of the leaders thought that widows suffered a lot of humiliating situations before and after the death of their spouses. Olaore et al. (2021) said that men are not required to go through widower cultural rites, while women are expected to mourn their husbands in traditionally prescribed ways. The widows themselves have explained the extent of their humiliation and vulnerability because of the cleansing rituals.

It was the general feeling among the FGD members that the creation of awareness in the community by cultural advocates must be intensified. The majority of the participants perceived the cleansing ritual as the "doorway" of contacting sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDS. Both the community actors and the clan elders identified the health hazards associated with the cleansing ritual.

The informants in the discussion group held that the cleansing ritual 'tarnishes' the image of the Kerewe people. A 42-year-community actor said:

> … it is a humiliation for the widow – it brings her shame! The whole village gets to know she has had sex with an *Omwesye* after the death of her husband. It tarnishes the widow's image and those ethnic groups who do not practice sexual cleansing make fun of us because of the cleansing ritual culture on Ukerewe Island.

There were many contradictory comments in the FGD with both the widows and the community leaders. For example, comments such as widow cleansing tarnishes the image of the widow because of the immoral act of having sex with an *Omwesye*, while considering the cleansing ritual as a good practice because it purifies and makes the widow holy, that bring the convictions and standpoints of the informants into question.

The clan elders and community actors made their plea towards the end of the discussions. They argued that education on the advantages and disadvantages of cultural practices should be intensified in communities and schools. They suggested that awareness creation networks should be formed, especially in societies that practice the cleansing ritual. For example, they proposed that a local network be created – not only with NGOs but also with educators, health workers and community leaders – to raise consciousness/awareness in the community. These entities should work in collaboration with the Tanzanian government to fight against the perceived harmfulness of the cleansing ritual. These informants and community actors thought that since the cleansing ritual is a cultural practice, deeply rooted in the traditions of the Jita, Kara and the Kerewe on the island, members of these ethnic groups are the rightful people to join in the fight in the eradication of the practice.

Summary of the Discussions and Findings

The findings from the widows' narratives demonstrate that the perpetuation of sexual cleansing reinforces the patriarchal system which subjugates women and has several implications for the health and wellbeing of widows in the Ukerewe community and many other women on the African continent. In their narratives, the widows shared that it is fellow women, not the male, who put them through appalling conditions which perpetuated inhumane treatment during the mourning period. Akintunde et al. (2002) and Atere (2001) held that those women who are usually found to perpetrate the harsh rites of widowhood to new widows are widows themselves. While a male cleanser performs the ritual to purify the widow, on Ukerewe Island, it is fellow women considered to be 'experts' who dress the widow, accompany her and make sure she undergoes the cleansing ritual in the required and appropriate traditional way. For such reason, Atere holds that "women often pose obstacles to their own ability to claim rights instead of using their advantage as caregivers and custodians of cultural values to effect change" (Atere, 2001: 68).

Cultural beliefs surrounding death and the ill-treatment of widows are associated with dire negative emotional and psychological effects (Munala et al, 2022; White et al., 2002; Atere, 2021). The clan elders justified widows' sexual cleansing ritual as a required purification to enable the widows to resume their societal duties. The ethnic groups on Ukerewe island have clearly defined regulations and prescriptions based on concepts of purity and danger that are a reflection of their social order (Dilger, 2006; Douglas, 1966). Dilger's (2006) finding confirm the accounts of the widows' experiences stressing the importance of the sexual

cleansing, when they explained that without undergoing the ritual, they would be segregated in the community and accused of bewitching and killing their spouse by their in-laws at the homestead. Their children would also be deprived of their rights to inheritance. Hence, the community actors and the widows contended that the sexual cleansing for a widow is a ritual requisite for inheritance. A widow is expected to marry another man from the family of the deceased husband to provide security for the widow and preserve the deceased clan lineage (Mwanga et al., 2011; Dilger, 2006; White et al., 2002). The ethnic groups on the Ukerewe Island believe that the death of a husband must not be the end of his life and legacy. Furthermore, the entrenched bride price system, which is patriarchal in nature in the Ukerewe communities, influences the in-laws to view a widow as property who should be inherited (White et al., 2002) for the continuity of the lineage.

The testimonial account of widows on the Ukerewe Island highlights that sexual cleansing practice in their community is a socio-cultural norm believed to provide purification of a polluted body of a living spouse after the death of a wife or a husband. Boateng and Sottie (2021) and Mwanga et al. (2011) also found that rituals are performed to re-establish lost purity. Bond (2005: 270) affirms that the custom of widow cleaning requires that a recently widowed woman undergo certain rituals to purify her. The reason for the sexual purification is that death is contagious so the impurity of close relatives, and above all spouses of the deceased person, can be carried over to others (Dilger, 2006). Widowhood represents not only the spousal loss and personal grief, but the loss of social status, financial strain and social isolation.

The associated meanings and values reflect how cultural practices are socially constructed and reinforced through social pressure and social obligation within the community (Munala, 2022). It is increasingly important, therefore, to protect the rights of widows in securing their inheritance and ownership of land, because being landless in a rural area is a guarantee for poverty. According to Munala (2022) a large portion of the global population relies on individual land tenure for their livelihoods, a link that has been acknowledged in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Goals 1, 3, 4 and 8). This cultural practice persists even though most practicing communities are aware of the social, psychological and health consequences. The widow cleansing ritual is internationally recognized as a violation of human rights (Munala, 2022; United Nations, 2013), but it is often justified as a protective mechanism to uphold and maintain family and community values of honour, marital fidelity, and spiritual cleanliness.

Conclusion

It is understandable from the psychological point of view that a living spouse would feel haunted by the ghost or spirit of a deceased spouse. For the widow or widower to cope with the bereavement of their loss, I suggest that the sexual cleansing be replaced by a symbolic ritual as described by the Kerewe widows.

Thus, a widow or widower may undergo a symbolic cleansing such as have a bath in a river, and a final blessing of herbs from a witch doctor to rid her of evil spirits, without being sexually cleansed and exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

The findings reveal deep and complex socio-cultural and economic challenges that increase the vulnerability of widows and the risk of HIV transmission on the Ukerewe Island and in Tanzania as a whole. The findings suggest that interventions to transform beliefs that privilege men and control women will need to be mainstreamed into programs that address risk behaviors to reduce transactional sex, HIV risk, and gender-based violence (Shoki et al., 2017). Generally, there is a strong link between HIV/AIDS and GBV. Thus, the need for concerted efforts to address this twin pandemic and, as the results of this and other studies show, the cleansing ritual bears links to both. Advocacy and lobbying, through networking with traditional/clan leaders, human rights activists, health workers, policy makers, and religious organisations that challenge some of the binding – and blinding - cultural norms, are essential.

Based on the pleas of the widows in their narratives, I also propose that whatever non-harmful rituals the community adopts must challenge the idea of the wife being guilty of the death of the spouse. Finally, I support Tungaraza (2005: 313) who points out that "scientific counselling or counselling by traditional healers, who are respected by the community", and widows who have successfully resisted sexual cleansing rituals serving as activists and advocates, would ease the fears and anxieties of the widows. Other recommendations born out of this empirical chapter are discussed in the conclusion chapter.

Similarities and Differences of the Three Practices in their Social and Legal Context

This chapter highlights the similarities and differences of the key elements that emerged in the women's personal experiences from the socio-cultural point of view. Some legal implications are addressed and discussed. The personal experiences of the women concerning the common kinds of violations, health risks, and fears associated with the practices are addressed. Detailed discussions on the socio-cultural norms and the Tanzania legal norms are unearthed, highlighting the contradictions that exist in the socio-cultural values and the legal norms of the three practices. I provide an overview of the legislation in Tanzania on the three practices, the international human rights conventions, and African treaties. A critical investigation of the reproduction of the clash of socio-cultural norms and legal norms is also analyzed. The chapter concludes with the traditional views on the socio-cultural norms that challenge the human rights norms of the three practices.

Introduction

The empirical chapters provided me with an understanding of the Kuria and Kerewe cultures, which helped me identify two significant ways of how an individual woman can perpetuate tradition in society, as Abdi (2012) also noted in her studies. The first is that the individual mind and the social mind are deeply interlinked in the African context, making it impossible to separate them. The second is that the individual woman builds her identity as a Kuria or Kerewe woman by embodying the social views within her thoughts and actions. Through in-depth research, I discovered that the rituals associated with the three practices were not merely physical processes, but rather they enabled the individual woman who underwent them to "embody the cultural beliefs" (Abdi, 2012: 148) as Kuria and Kerewe people. Sewpaul, Kreitzer, and Raniga (2021) assert that cultural norms are not isolated phenomena, but rather they have roots in Africa's devastating colonial history. Mbiti's (1994) statement: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" captures the African conception of individuality, where the 'I' and the 'we' are interdependent and constitute the individual's identity in the community. The results of this study confirm that, in addition to economic drivers, a key factor in women-to-women violence is that women have to meet the cultural expectations of loyalty to male folk in an honour and cultural context where gender is a huge source of discrimination. In the section below, I discuss the personal experiences of women being violated by the three cultural and traditional practices.

Personal Experiences of Being Violated by the Cultural and Traditional Practices

On a personal level, the young women and widow victims and survivors of the traditional practices, had similar experiences of violation in spite of the different rationales of the rituals they had undergone, and some conspicuous nuances in the purposes of the practices.

FGC among the Kuria marks the transition of girl children into womanhood. Once girls had been cut, they were matched with partners for marriage. The results of this study confirm the belief that once a girl has been cut, she has the right to marry and produce a family; a right which an uncut girl is denied. The elders in this study stressed the importance of the rite in transforming girls into 'complete' women, making them acceptable and prepared for marriage. The FGC practice in the Kuria context is intended to establish the cut girls socially and empower them politically in their communities for the stability of the clan and the maintenance of the lineage.

The Nyumba Ntobhu marriage practice allows elderly women to marry younger women to have grandchildren of their 'own' and to receive assistance with household chores. The purpose of woman-to-woman marriage is "an improvisation to sustain patriarchy, and simply an instrument for the preservation and extension of patriarchy and its traditions" (Nwoko, 2012: 69). Among the Kuria, the idea is to get a male child – an heir for the empty house, particularly to carry on the family legacy, continue with the lineage of the clan, and provide for political stability of the clan (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2016; 2012; Starace, 2009; Chacha, 2004).

The participants in this study confirm that the popular explanation for the sexual cleansing ritual is to purify the widow from the haunted spirit of the deceased husband to re-establish lost purity. Among the Kerewe ethnic groups, the spouse of a deceased person must be ritually cleansed before they can resume their sexual and social lives, through unprotected sexual intercourse with a village cleanser. Only in this way is control over the fertility and sexuality of the lineage restored (Dube, 2022; Dilger, 2006). Hence, a male guardian (*misimamizi wa mirathi*) is appointed to inherit and thus take responsibility for providing security and financial help for the widow and her children. As with other research findings, the participants claimed that the ritual is intended to free the living spouse mentally and psychologically from the haunted ghost of the deceased spouse.

While the objectives of these three practices are different and have distinct functions in the Kuria and Kerewe societies, they end up serving the same purpose in promoting the continuity of lineage. From the point view of the similarities shared by women experiencing these three cultural practices, it should be highlighted that, regardless of the cultural practice, the young women felt they had been abused. The experiences of these young women and widows

were that the practices disabled and violated their social and political freedom and mental well-being. An illustration in Table 6.1. below highlights the three key elements identified as similarities in their narratives. The common experiences of these young women and widows are conceptualized in three categories as the experiences of violations, health risks, and the experiences of fears as shown below:

Table 6.1 The Key Elements in the Three Cultural Practices the Women Experienced

Experiences	Female Genital Cutting (Kuria)	Nyumba Ntobhu Marriage (Kuria)	Widow Cleansing Ritual (Ukerewe)
Violations: physical, social, mental, and political	Violation of sexual and bodily integrity Physical pain Public humiliation Deprivation of protective rights Psychological and emotional stress Deprivation of voice in decision-making regarding customary laws and Socio-economic deprivation and poverty		
Health Risks: effect on the body and mental well-being	Short and long-term health implications Risk of contracting infections from unhygienic instruments and environments Danger of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS The risks of damaging the reproductive health system.		
Fears: social, political, and mental torture	Fear of stigma and name-calling Fear of losing social rights Fear of social isolation Fear of being cursed by community elders Fear of being cursed by the ancestral spirits Fear of bad omens befalling them		

Violations and the Differential Treatment of Women and Men in Cultural Rites

Health Risks

A whole human being is made vulnerable to a wide variety of pathogens and unhealthy conditions as a result of how the person is treated by society – and how this affects human rights and dignity (Bukuluki, 2021: 211). Mann et al. (1994) emphasized that health is at variance with "dignity violation" hence, promoting and protecting health depends upon the promotion and protection of human rights and dignity. These researchers argue that a health and human rights analysis requires uncovering the rights violations, failures of rights realization, and burdens on dignity that constitute the societal roots of health problems. Bukuluki (202: 211) quotes Jonathan Mann who said that "people could not be healthy if governments did not respect their rights and dignity as well as engage in health policies guided by sound ethical values. Nor could people have their rights and dignity if they were not healthy." Human rights, freedoms, and dignity are related to the social determinants of health, which are influenced by the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age. The systems that deal with illness also affect the inequalities in health. Examples of a human rights violation that affects women's health and dignity are the traditional practices of FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and Widow Cleansing Rituals.

Some of the young women's narratives revealed that FGC had no known health benefits for girls and women. On the contrary, research has demonstrated that FGC could cause serious harm, such as death from blood loss and haemorrhaging, severe pain, shock, genital ulceration, childbirth complications, and newborn deaths, as I discussed in an earlier chapter. Therefore, scholars and human rights researchers have concluded that FGC is a major violation of the human rights of girls and women, and constitutes violence against women that is deeply rooted in gender inequality, ideas about purity, modesty, and aesthetics, and attempts to control women's sexuality. FGC was not the only harmful practice that affected the young women in the study. The widow cleansing ritual and the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage were also associated with various short and long-term health risks. These practices involved forced sexual relations, exposure to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, psychological trauma, and social stigma.

The traditional practice of using a common blade or knife to perform FGC has been abandoned due to the health risk of transmitting blood-borne diseases among the initiates (28TooMany, 2020). The *Ngariba* (practitioner) claimed that the current method of operation was safe from such risk, but they still adhered to the traditional belief of passing on the blood from one person to another during the cut to ensure solidarity. The young women who had undergone FGC recounted their anxieties as they watched the *Ngariba* perform the 'cut' on them without gloves and without cleaning the blood when moving from one initiate

to another. They also reported that the environment where the cut took place was unsanitary, and the instruments used by the *Ngariba* were not sterilized. Previous research has indicated that operating under these unhygienic conditions increases the risk of bacterial infection (28 TooMany, 2020; 2013; Human Rights Report, 2012).

The widows on Ukerewe Island also viewed the sexual cleansing ritual as a threat to their health. Some of the village cleansers stopped practicing the ritual due to the fear of contracting HIV/AIDS, while others have continued to offer their services for economic reasons. According to a United Nations Women (2021) report, widows face many challenges after the death of their spouses, such as grief, loss, trauma, economic insecurity, discrimination, stigmatization, and harmful traditional practices that adversely affect their health. Lenette (2013) argues that customs and beliefs about how widows are expected to live are deeply ingrained. She emphasizes that widowhood rituals can have significant effects on women's overall health, mental health and well-being. The young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage also expressed their worries about the health risks they faced from having multiple sexual partners in their quest to conceive and give birth to a male child for the empty house.

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the impacts of all three practices affect the psychological and mental well-being of the women who undergo the rituals. However, instead of freeing them from anxiety and promoting their mental well-being as intended by the Kuria and Ukerewe communities, the young women said they encountered health hazards. According to Rebouché (2009: 103), "research suggests that the spread of HIV to women is largely due to women's lack of power in negotiating when and how sex occurs, including practicing safe sex." The widows in Ukerewe who underwent the sexual cleansing and the young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship had similar experiences. Through the rituals, these vulnerable widows and young women lacked the power to choose and negotiate safe sex, and they faced a high risk of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

Mabeyo (2014) and Dilger (2006) found that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is one of the most serious problems facing the communities in the Mara region and most of Tanzania. The epidemic affects mostly the young and energetic population group in these communities. It causes trauma, grief, increasing death rates, and a large number of vulnerable children and orphans (Mabeyo, 2014). The three cultural practices studied are among the factors that fuel the persistence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which Mabeyo estimates to be the second leading cause of death (17%) after malaria (22%).

The Kuria and Ukerewe societies claim high standards of sexuality and morality – hence the justification for enforcing FGC to prevent premarital sex and married women from being unfaithful. However, the same ethnic group practices Nyumba Ntobhu, where the younger woman is pressured to have multiple sexual partners

in order to conceive children, Similarly, widows are forced into cleansing with unprotected sex with unknown men. Yet, those who support these practices do not seem to question the morality thereof. The widows and the community activists in the study depicted the sexual cleansing ritual as rape and sexual violence, which are widely accepted as major public health and social problems.

The young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, the widows who undergo the cleansing ritual, and the young girls who are subjected to FGC were deprived of their sexual and reproductive rights. For example, the Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law selects the sexual partner and plans the family for the young married woman in the relationship. With the FGC practices, the girl child is denied her right to womanhood, as she cannot decide whether to undergo the genital cut or not. She also cannot exercise her right to use her sexuality, for instance or to choose when to get married and start a family life. This is because she is too young to understand the responsibilities and the consequences of the cutting ritual.

Adjetey's (1995: 1) asserts that people have the right to: reproduce, regulate their fertility, practice and enjoy sexual relationships, safe pregnancy and childbirth, fertility regulation without health risks, and sex without harm. The results of this study show that these rights are violated with all three practices. For example, the method used to cleanse widows and the marriage and sexual life of the young women in the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship show that they have no right to choose their sexual partner or to consent to sex. To protect the reproductive rights of women, specific legislation must be passed to ban traditional practices that affect their health and to ensure their reproductive autonomy (Eche, 2022; Djankpa, 2021; Bond, 2005). With the three practices in this study, women's health interests often overlap with different legal rights. Thus, violating women's health and reproductive rights means violating other rights.

Djankpa, (2021) and Boyle (2002) claimed that traditional practices are promoted and transmitted by the women themselves. Their claims are consistent with my research findings. This study revealed that in the Kuria communities, it is the female relatives, such as mothers and grandmothers, who subject their girl children to the harmful ritual acts. However, as also found by Djankpa (2021) and Boyle (2002), these mothers and grandmothers said they loved their daughters and wanted the best for them. Nevertheless, the results of the study showed that the main force behind perpetuating the three cultural practices was fear of the curse and ostracization, which is discussed in the next section.

Fear of the curse and ostracization

Practices that are founded on religion and culture are difficult to eliminate as indigenes of those communities have much more trepidation about chastisement by the gods for contraventions, than punishments by the law of the land which is human-made and affects only the person who committed the crime (Boateng and Sottie, 2021: 117). According to Banda and Masengwe (2018), Africans fear

good spirits because they can punish them for any offense or disobedience. They believe that harm can come not only from evil spirits but also from angry good spirits. This notion of ‘fear’ as a threat to social order and the ‘ideal’ family life is exemplified by the experiences of widowhood (Lenette, 2014). The research participants from the three cultural practices expressed their fears of stigma, name-calling, social isolation, the wrath of the ancestral spirits, or the possibility of a bad omen if they did not fulfill the societal obligations. The fear of not being able to fulfil societal obligations leads to societal isolation in the Kuria and Ukerewe communities. Very often, the community members anticipate that their failure to fulfill societal obligations will cause a bad omen to befall them as a punishment by the ancestral spirits. Locals in the studied community believe that if a girl child, for example, does not drop blood on the ancestral land through the genital cut, her womb will not be blessed with children (especially a male child) in her marriage (Africanus, 2012). Therefore, should a woman refuse to undergo the cut, the belief is that a bad omen may befall her as a married woman.

Women who are infertile in this society are labeled and called names like ‘dry womb,’ those women who do not have a male child are equally labeled for not having an heir (Majani, 2014; Starace, 2009; Chacha, 2004). The informants explained that to avoid such name-calling women enter into the Nyumba Ntobhu relationship. Again, women who do not undergo the required procedure of the cleansing ritual are called names like ‘untouchable,’ ‘unclean,’ or ‘a witch’, implying that they have bewitched and killed their husband. These name-callings intimidate women and compel them to undergo the rituals in order to preserve their dignity.

The women in the study expressed their fear of being isolated from their fellow women. They explained that a woman who does not undergo FGC cannot join other women in singing and dancing the day their daughters are cut. Similarly, a widow who is not cleansed is socially isolated and cannot mingle with other women freely because she is considered unclean. She could infect ‘clean’ women, for example, if they dine with her. A woman who has no male child is also not considered a proper woman because she lacks an heir. Such women are socially isolated and cannot compare themselves with women who have a male child to carry on the lineage of their husband’s clan.

The fears of the women in the research communities made them vulnerable and left them with little or no choice to resist the traditional practices. Mathias (2011) cites Thomas (2009: 9) who defines “vulnerability as a state of high exposure to certain risks, combined with a reduced ability to protect or defend oneself against those risks and cope with negative consequences.” The social conditions pressured these young women and made them defenseless against the rituals they had to undergo to gain the respect of the community and avoid stigmatization. For instance, the girl children and women who had not undergone FGC were looked down on and were seen to be dirty, immoral and unfit for marriage. With the practice of FGC, there is also the issue of giving identity to the individual,

attaining the benefits of 'belongingness,' one's morality and material gains. The fears of losing these benefits were strong among women in the practicing communities.

In the Kuria rural context, where the illiteracy rate among the women and girl children is high, there is a strong cultural tie to rules. The fear of ostracization and the limited choices available to women make women more susceptible to harmful traditional rituals. The informants, in the study, held that girl children in the Kuria tradition suffered such a fate in the olden days and some girls are still suffering in today's Kuria society. They gave an example that if a girl child gets pregnant before undergoing FGC ceremony she would be ostracized. Researchers of 28TooMany (2016) and Bond (2005) had similar findings, with Bond (2005: 279) adding that "the girl is not only ostracized but is liable to be banished from home and disowned by her parents."

The three practices persist in the studied communities as women harbor deep fears of being cursed by the ancestral spirits. Therefore, to avoid the bad omen befalling them, they do all in their power to appease the spirits of the land, even at the expense of their health. Thus, some widows who initially refused to undergo the cleansing ritual reconsidered and were cleansed, believing that refusal to undergo the cleansing ritual could cause a calamity for their clan and themselves. In both the group discussions, the fear of the curse was an enormous concern.

According to Kelsall (2003), anyone can deliver a curse, although certain categories of persons, for example, certain deceased historical figures, clan elders, infertile women, or people with disabilities are believed to have special cursing power. This example, in my understanding, explains why the young women chose to remain in the abusive relationship with their Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law. They fear the curse the female husband may pronounce on them and hence, to avoid any ill omen befalling them they accepted their situation as a normal way of living. It is a belief in these communities that while curses are normally uttered without any accompanying rituals they are, however, thought to be extensions of one's personality and contain a person's power, strength, force vitality, virility, or ability (Harjula, 1989, cited in Kelsall, 2003: 177). The Kuria and Ukerewe ethnic groups hold that the power of the curse is based on the idea of *power at a distance*. The elders, in this study, explained that a curse is not spoken out often. However, the use of curses makes members of society accountable and responsible citizens. The Kuria and Kerewe clan elders gave examples that the fear of the curse instilled in the community members made them refrain from committing crimes like rape. In spite of these positive aspects of the curse, the fear inculcated in community members has a negative impact on people and makes women vulnerable.

These fears have led women to become doers and promoters of traditional practices without questioning them. These practices are believed to validate

cultural identity and dignity as well as promote cultural continuity and socio-political stability. However, the socio-cultural, economic and gender injustices of the traditional practices studied far outweigh these perceived benefits. There are many prosocial ways that can affirm cultural identity, and ensure cultural continuity and stability (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). Far from affirming dignity, these practices strike the very heart of violation of human dignity and personhood, as the results of this study confirm. The next sections focus on the socio-cultural and legal norms embedded in these practices and underline the complexity and contradictions of these practices in the communities under study.

The Socio-Cultural Norms and Legal Frameworks Regarding the Three Practices

In order to achieve the cultural legitimization of human rights, there needs to be a harmonization of universal rights and cultural rights (Olare et al., 2021). The socio-cultural norms of the Kuria and Kerewe people have influenced the practices of FGC, the cleansing ritual, and Nyumba Ntobhu marriage for decades (Opoku, 17). These practices are seen as part of their cultural identity and social order, as well as a way of pleasing their ancestors. Frémont (2009: 150) argues that people in African communities are connected and value group harmony above all. The informants in this study shared this view and expressed that "*these practices are embedded in our traditional beliefs*." The clan elders, the elderly women, and even the young women who claimed to be victims of the practices used collective and possessive terms such as '*our* traditional beliefs' and '*our* culture' to justify their continuation. Generally, cultural values and norms recognize human rights by identifying notions of human feelings, empathy, intuitions, and concerns toward specific groups of others (Msuya, 2020; Hunt, 2007). However, different customs and traditions, which reflect various cultures across the world have, to a large extent, impeded the promotion and protection of women's rights.

The clan leaders who participated in the study expressed that they value social harmony, solidarity, and community values above everything else. They said that they want to preserve these values by adhering to the rules and norms of their society. Some researchers, like Dube (2022); Boateng and Sottie (2021); Ndulo (2011) and Frémont (2009, who studied the traditional practices of African indigenous communities support this view. They argue that the duty of solidarity is very important for creating and maintaining social norms, which are often very strict and demanding. Ndulo (2008) and Frémont (2009) explain that the social norms regulate the life of the family, the clan, and the community as a whole. However, the young women and widows who shared their experiences in the study revealed that the social norms are not always beneficial for everyone. They highlighted some of the challenges and limitations that they faced because of the social norms.

The participants' experiences expose the contradiction between the social norms that are supposed to create harmony and unity in the community and the legal

norms designed to protect and promote women's rights. This is a serious problem that reveals the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of the legal system. I agree with Frémont (2009) that the legal norms and legal values should be aligned with each other, but this is not the case in Tanzania. In Tanzania, legal norms are the basic rules that often come from the cultural norms and form the basis of the state law (Daci, 2010). However, these rules are often incompatible with the international laws, the African Charter, and the customary laws that Tanzania has agreed to follow. These laws are meant to protect and promote women's rights in Tanzania, but they are often ignored or violated by the authorities and the society (Human Rights Report, 2013; Bond, 2010; Daci, 2010).

Based on this, the discussion examines the socio-cultural and legal norms embedded in the three practices studied. It also shows the significance of the cultural practices in the study, which highlight their role in the communities. Moreover, the legal norms of the state are presented and analyzed to capture the implementation of the state laws that either support or oppose aspects of the socio-cultural norms of the practices under study. An illustration of the socio-cultural norms and the Tanzania legal norms related to the practices in the study are in four categories below:

Table 6. 2 The Key Cultural Norms and the Legal Implications of the Three Practices

	FGC Traditional FGC Traditional practice in the Kuria society	Nyumba Ntobhu Traditional practice in the Kuria society	Widow Cleansing Traditional practice in the Kerewe society
Socio-cultural Norms	Social acceptance Social bonding Sign of adulthood Requisite for marriage Start of a lineage Prerequisite license for social duties	Social acceptance Requisite for a sonless house and an infertile woman Continuity of lineage Guarantee of old age security	Social acceptance Purification of polluted body Requisite for inheritance Continuity of clan lineage
Tanzania Legal Norms	Respect for the law FGC – Criminalized in Tanzania Legal sanctions, including fines and imprisonment.	Respect for the law Nyumba Ntobhu marriage -invisible in the Tanzania Law of Marriage Act 1971.	Respect for the law Widow cleansing and inheritance – Customary law in Tanzania The State law protects widows' rights of inheritance.
Reproduction of the socio-cultural norms. **A clash with legislation**	State laws are largely ignored in practicing communities Practice ongoing secretly in communities.	Practice is ongoing in the Kuria communities. Practice not outlawed by state law.	The practice involves witchcraft accusations and inhumane acts against women. Property dispossession of widows - ongoing.
State legislation frame	Implementation of state law is poor. Few convictions of the perpetrators of FGC.	Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is non-existent in the legal sense.	Poor implementation of state laws to protect widows. Few convictions of perpetrators of widow dispossession.

The table above conceptualizes the socio-cultural norms and the legal norms into four categories. First, the community's internalized norms that purportedly exist to ensure inclusion, cultural identity, and clan and cultural continuity, as discussed in the empirical Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Second, the existing State laws that are meant to protect women and girls from human rights abuses. Third, is the contrast between the community norms and the state laws. Fourth, is the clash between some aspects of the socio-cultural norms and the state legislation. The research participants' narratives reflect attacks on some parts of the state laws. The next sections discuss the intersections and conflicts between these socio-cultural and legal norms.

The Kuria Socio-Cultural Norms of Female Genital Cutting

Participants shared how FGC is considered a necessity and accepted in the Kuria society, as shown in Table 6. 2 above. They believed that its values are beneficial to women. According to researchers of (28Too Many, 2016), FGC has multiple social and cultural functions among the Kuria in the Ryamisanga ward: it is an important determinant of a social bond among community members. Africanus (2012: 159) also found that FGC establishes a social bond with the departed Kuria ancestors. Participants in the study viewed the practice as a sign of adulthood and maturity and a valuable means to marriage and procreation. FGC is a commonly accepted norm and a vital requisite for marriage from the perspective of the community. The findings from a WHO multi-country study on FGC showed that in traditional societies, adulthood is not determined by biological age alone but by the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. These rites, which include FGC, are seen by the community as a preparation for marriage, regardless of the girl's biological age (Equality Now, 2011: 10). The Human Rights Watch (2014: 56) report on Tanzania also found that FGC is closely related to child marriage.

FGC is a social norm in the Kuria communities if it meets certain conditions. First, the individuals know the rule of behaviour regarding FGC and that it applies to them (28TooMany, 2020; UNICEF, 2013). Second, they prefer to conform to the rule because they expect FGC to enable them to start a lineage and maintain their clan identity. For example, elderly women expect their social group to cut their daughters for the stability of their Kuria identity. Also, parents are reported to feel dignified and honoured when their daughters undergo FGC gracefully.

My research finding shows that FGC is a prerequisite for social duties among the Kuria and that non-conformers face sanctions. Africanus (2012) and Talle (1993) also found that there is a social obligation to practice FGC. They emphasized that families practice FGC because they believe that, without it, their daughters will suffer from social exclusion, criticism, ridicule, stigma or the lack of suitable marriage partners. For example, participants revealed that in ancient times among the Kuria, an uncut woman was segregated from the community and could not participate in certain domestic tasks, such as fetching water from the sacred wells, collecting firewood or opening the gates of a homestead. This

study showed that an uncut woman and her husband can both face isolation and community ostracism; and be "looked upon as a child" (Ahmed et al., 2016), although some participants claimed that this stigma is fading in the Kuria society.

The Kuria Socio-Cultural Norms on the Practice of Nyumba Ntobhu Marriage

The research participants in Chapter 4 explained how Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is peculiar to the Kuria ethnic group. Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, which is not mentioned in Tanzanian law, is a custom among some for a sonless house and for infertile women. This pronatalist culture socializes people to believe that the ultimate goal for anyone is to marry and have children. Childlessness has major psychological and social implications for the affected person. The Nyumba Ntobhu is a practice of marriage between a married woman of a sonless house, called the mother-in-law, and a girl who is used as a surrogate mother to procure a son, called the daughter-in-law. Nyumba Ntobhu relationship is part of the Kuria culture and not conceptualized as an abnormal practice. The clan elders shared that there are three types of marriage ceremonies in Tanzania: traditional marriage – which usually occurs soon after the initiation ceremony as mentioned earlier in the study. It also includes Nyumba Ntobhu marriage in Kuria society. The second type is civil marriage, which is conducted by a government official. The third type is religious marriage, which consists of Christian and Islamic marriages following their religious tenets.

From the above understanding of marriages in the Kuria context, this study explored the socio-cultural implication of Nyumba Ntobhu marriage as an alternative family structure for older women who lack sons to inherit their property. According to the Kuria patriarchal traditions, a man's genealogy and lineage are preserved by his sons (Nkowo, 2012: 75). Therefore, married couples who have only daughters also practice Nyumba Ntobhu. The Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law in the study said that traditionally, the elderly woman in the relationship pays the bride wealth to the young woman or girl's family. She also takes care of the newlywed and brings money to the home, as a heterosexual husband does. Starace (2009: 64) added that the Nyumba Ntobhu wedding is similar to a female-male marriage. The research participants' presentation of the relationship between the two women shows the senior woman's role as a husband, a mother-in-law, and a mother. These different concepts reflect the complexity and the power of the elderly woman in the relationship.

The study participants explained that the main significance of Nyumba Ntobhu practice among the Kuria ethnic group is the continuity of lineage. Traditionally, woman-to-woman marriage allows women to exercise social influence and patronage in societies where inheritance and succession are through the male line (Aliyu, 2018; Nyanugo, 2013: 62). For example, in this study, the female husbands in the relationship saw Nyumba Ntobhu marriage as a guarantee for them to have grandchildren. This study also shows that the practice provides a form of security for elderly women in the relationship so they do not have to live

alone in their old age.

From the data I gathered, I agree with Cory and Ruel's observation in the 1940s and 1950s about the important role of the children in the Nyumba Ntobhu homestead (cited in Kjerland, 1997). However, it seems that they did not, in the 1940s and 1950s, fully understand this marriage institution. For example, they did not see that children were not recognized as the offspring of the young wife, or that she was "married to" the fictitious son of the female husband. They also did not realize that the children became the female husband's grandchildren. Some researchers, like Kjerland (1995) and Cory (1940), believed that the young woman was married to the widow's dead husband and that she was the older woman's co-wife. Cory also assumed that the young wife could leave the house after the birth of the desired son. In the Kuria socio-cultural context, according to the female husbands in the study, the children born from Nyumba Ntobhu marriage provide resources for the "empty house" and they ensure the continuity of the clan lineage. They also enable the Nyumba Ntobhu mothers-in-law to gain social status in their community.

The Socio-cultural Norms of Widow Cleansing Among the Ethnic Groups on the Ukerewe Island

The testimonies of widows on the Ukerewe Island highlights that sexual cleansing practice is a socio-cultural norm believed to provide purification of a polluted body of a spouse after the death of a wife or a husband. Several researchers, like Dube (2022); Olare et al., (2021); and Mwanga et al., (2011) on widowhood had a similar finding. The reason for the sexual purification is that death is contagious and so the impurity of close relatives and, above all, spouses of the deceased person can be carried over to others. White et al.'s (2002) research findings underlined that in most African communities where widow cleansing is performed, the ritual includes sexual intercourse with one partner or several, depending on the specific practices of the tribe concerned.

According to the clan elders in Chapter 5, widows must undergo a sexual cleansing ritual to purify themselves and resume their social roles. The ethnic groups on Ukerewe Island follow strict rules and norms based on ideas of purity and danger that reflect their social order. This supports the widows' stories in the study, which emphasize the need for sexual cleansing. They said that without the ritual, they would face isolation and accusations of witchcraft and murder by their in-laws, and that their children would also lose their inheritance rights.

The community actors and clan elders in Chapter 5 explained that widows must marry another man from the deceased husband's family. This is to provide security for the widows and preserve the clan lineage. According to Korang-Okrah et al. (2019), in the African communities, men are seen to be the providers of the family and their deaths mean the dwindling of financial resources for women and their children. This traditional practice has encouraged and promoted property grabbing and evictions of widows following the death of their husbands, as

property ownership is patrilineal (Dube, 2022). Thus, the widow does not have the power to own property after the death of her husband, resulting suffering for widows and their children. Among the ethnic groups on Ukerewe Island, a husband's death should not end his life and legacy. Moreover, the patriarchal bride price system in Ukerewe communities makes the in-laws see a widow as property to be inherited for the sake of lineage continuity.

In the next section, I discuss the Tanzania legal norms in the three practices. The relationship between the legal norms and the customary laws that support or oppose the traditional practices are also be examined.

Tanzania Legal Frameworks and the Three Practices in the Study

The State Legal Norms Embedded in the Three Practice

Before discussing the legal norms of these three practices, it is important to understand how the legislation was formed and what constitutes Tanzanian legislation, which serves as the nation's civil law as discussed in chapter two. Yusuf and Fessha (2013: 370) contended that "the Tanzanian Constitution is founded on the principles of freedom, justice, fraternity and concord ... As the supreme law of the land, the Constitution is also referred to as the 'basic law', from which other laws derived." The discussion below focuses on what constitutes Tanzanian legal norms binding the practices of FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage and widow cleansing as indicated in Table 6. 2.

I critically discuss how the Tanzanian legal norms fail to protect and promote women's rights in respect of the three practices. Therefore, the main aim is to explore ways and means of enhancing the rights of women in Tanzania and sub-Saharan Africa. This is because many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including Tanzania, have diverse cultural practices that are socially accepted, but negatively affect women's human rights and well-being. These harmful cultural practices have reinforced women's low status within the family and society, preventing them from escaping abuse and from seeking legal protection (Msuya, 2020). This largely ignores the Sustainable Development Goal 5 which focuses on eliminating all forms of violence against women (Ajayi et al., 2019). In recent years, intersectionality, which has slowly taken root as a legal norm at the national level, has entered law and policy practices through local government's adoption of international norms (Davis, 2022; Nwokike, 2017).

In Tanzania, the practice of FGC as a socio-cultural norm is illegal under the state law of "the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act No.4 of 1998." As amended by the Penal Code, specifically Section 169A (1) of the Act provides that anyone having custody, charge or care of a girl under 18 years of age and who causes her to undergo the procedure, commits the offence of cruelty (Msuya, 2018; Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, 1998 cited in Africanus, 2012: 157). The individual citizens are expected to respect the state laws, hence there are sanctions for non-conformity. The statutory penalties for performing FGC on girls under the

age of 18 include the maximum sentence of fifteen years and no less than five years imprisonment, a fine not exceeding 300,000 Tanzanian shillings (128 USD) or both for the promoters and perpetuators of such a criminal act. The prime suspects for such crime, liable for conviction are the girl child's parents and the traditional practitioner – the *Ngariba* (UNICEF Report, 2013; 28TooMany, 2020 and 2013; Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2012; Tanzania Constitution (Cap. (15) 2002).

While Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is socially accepted among the Kuria ethnic group, the practice was considered illegal by colonial authorities and national leaders who forbade it (Starace, 2009). The Tanzania Law of Marriage Act 1971 was written as "an act to regulate the law relating to marriage, personal and property rights as between husband and wife, separation, divorce and other matrimonial reliefs and related matters" (cap. 29 R. E[13].2002,). In the Constitution, the nature of marriage is explicitly stated:

> Article 9 (1) Marriage means the voluntary union of man and a woman, intended to last for their joint lives. (2) A monogamous marriage is a union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. (3) A polygamous marriage is a union in which the husband may, during the subsistence of the marriage, be married or marry another woman or women.

Msuya, (2021) and Wanitzek, (1994), hold that the objective of the Law of Marriage Act of 1971 was to harmonize the several marriage systems present in Tanzania up to then, making a uniform legislation. Following this analytical description of marriage in the Tanzanian legislative norms, it is noted that Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is invisible in the legislation of the Marriage Act. The description of what constitutes legal marriage in Tanzania does not reflect the meaning of the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage nor its concepts in the Kurian context.

In the Tanzanian legal framework, the practice of the widow sexual cleansing ritual is invisible. However, Magoke-Mhoja holds that "customary law provides for widow inheritance. Pursuant to this custom, a widow is required to marry a male relative of her dead husband" (Magoke-Mhoja, 2005: 258). Accordingly, Rule 62 of the Customary Rules provides that the deceased's relatives may ask a widow whether she wishes to be inherited (ibid). While, the widow inheritance and cleansing are recognized as customary law of the Kerewe people, the state legislation frowns on the repugnancy and discriminatory aspects of the practice. African human rights researchers such as Ndulo (2012) and Bond (2010) have highlighted that the violation aspects of the cleansing ritual are practices that are repugnant to equity, good conscience, and natural justice, which oppose the legal norms of the State. These researchers contended that customary law is the common law for the members of the community. They, however, cautioned that for the customary law to be lifted to the position of the state laws, the traditional practices should promote fairness, equality among sexes, and promote natural

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justice for community members.

In Tanzania, some laws have been criticized as repugnant. Repugnant laws are laws that are contrary to public policy or natural justice, equity and good conscience. According to Tanzanian human rights researchers, these repugnant laws include provisions in the following laws: *The Citizenship Act (cap. 356), section 11(1), the Law of Marriage Act, (cap.29) Section 114(2), the local Customary Law (Declaration) Orders (cap364), The Penal Code Section 169A, (cap 365), The Probate and Administration of Estates Act, Section 92(1)*.

The researchers identified these repugnant laws as infringing on constitutional rights of equality between men and women. These laws also create a power relationship between men and women and propagate gender violence towards women (Tanzania Human Rights Reports, 2021; 2018; 2012; Ndulo, 2011; Bond, 2010). Tamar Ezer (2006) holds that the Tanzanian government identifies the main legal problem facing women as including property adjustment after the death of the male spouse. The government also notes that under the Local Customary Law, widows contend with widespread property grabbing, eviction from their homes due to witchcraft accusations, and sometimes even the loss of their children (Equality Now Report, 2020; 2018; 2011; Ezer, 2006).

Mesaki (2009) asserted that under the Tanzanian statutory law, the penal legislation of the Witchcraft Ordinance 1928 (cap. 18) R/L 1974 is visible and enforced. The final report on the designated legislation in the Nyalali Commission Report explained that the Witchcraft Ordinance, enacted in 1928, was reformed in 1979 to provide for the punishment of witchcraft and of certain acts connected to it. The law was enacted to curb activities of people engaged in sorcery, bewitching, the use of instruments of witchcraft, the purported exercise of any occult power, and the purported possession of any occult knowledge.

According to Ezer (2006), the Witchcraft Ordinance is a law that aimed to suppress witchcraft and related practices in the country. It is based on a previous ordinance from 1922, but it expanded the definition of witchcraft to include the holding of beliefs in the mediums and charms associated with it. He argued that the law also criminalized both black and white magic, and prescribed punishments such as imprisonment, fines, and banishment for those who practiced or consulted witchcraft practitioners. The law was influenced by the colonial government's view of witchcraft as a backward and superstitious phenomenon that hindered the development and modernization of Tanzania (Nwokike, 2017; Mesaki, 2009).

The section under which a person shall be punished is section 5, which is imprisonment for a period not exceeding ten to seven years or to a fine not exceeding 4000/- Tanzanian Shillings (1.70 USD) or to both such fine and imprisonment. Section 8 of the Witchcraft Ordinance declares: *The District Commissioners may order persons practising witchcraft to reside in certain places after due inquiry* (The United Republic of Tanzania Law Reform Commission, 1996: 37–49).

Ajayi et al., (2019) explain that in the 1990s, activists began to argue that the failure of a state in the protection of women from violence is a form of human rights violation, while researchers such as Ghani (2014), Falk (2004) and Cook (1994) have shown that numerous forms of gendered violence and sexual assault are done by private persons rather than states. Abraham and Tastsoglou (2016: 516) argued that "the role of the state is dualistic, both as agent of justice and an instrument of domination and oppression particularly in regard to the implications for policies and practices aimed at addressing issues of violence against women." Therefore, the states that fail to protect their citizens, including women from any form of violence abdicate their responsibilities towards their citizens (Ajayi et al., 2019).

The discussion in this section has so far explored the tension between the legal norms of the state and the socio-cultural norms of some Kuria and Kerewe ethnic groups in Tanzania, especially regarding the three traditional practices. It has been argued that the state's legal norms are meant to guide good governance and protect women and girls' rights as human rights. Therefore, the state expects its citizens to respect and follow its laws. However, the ethnic groups in the study have their own worldviews and norms that value these traditional practices. The study shows that these three practices are legally problematic, as the state criminalizes FGC, while Nyumba Ntobhu marriage and widow cleansing are not addressed in the state laws. However, these practices can be seen as human rights issues that are covered by various international human rights conventions and regional treaties.

International Human Rights Conventions and the African Treaties

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, established a framework of norms, processes, and institutions to define, promote, and protect human rights (Davis, 2022; 28TooMany, 2013; Bond, 2010). Since then, the world leaders have agreed that women's rights are human rights. This was affirmed in 1993 and later reinforced by the global community in various conferences held in Cairo, Copenhagen, and Beijing (Kisaakye, 2002). While many causes have adopted the language of rights (Ajayi et al., 2019; Mutua, 2008) this has not led to a shared understanding and consensus on the scope, content, and philosophical foundations of human rights (Mutua, 2008). Internationally, the practices of FGC, Widow Cleansing Ritual, and *Nyumba Ntobhu* marriage are recognized as forms of torture and violence against women and girls. Political, social and economic forces shape the conditions in which people live and die (WHO, 2008: 3). According to Bukuluki (2021), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the most prominent documents that promote and uphold human rights, especially sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).

I mentioned earlier in the study that the Tanzanian government has signed several international human rights conventions, some of which are listed below. These provide a strong basis for the characterization of the practices in the study as

violations of international human rights (Msuya, 2020; 2013; Ndulo, 2012; Bond, 2010; Mutua, 2008).

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR), 1976.
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990.
- Maputo Protocol to African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), 2003.
- African Charter on Human and People's Rights (the Banjul Charter) 2007.
- The African Union declared the years from 2010 to 2020 to be the Decade for African Women.

CEDAW and the CRC prohibit traditional practices that discriminate against women and harm children (Ajayi et al, 2019; Bond, 2010). CEDAW Article 2 requires State parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate customs and practices that discriminate against women. CEDAW Article 5 obliges State parties to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct between men and women, with a view to eliminating prejudices and practices based on the idea of sex-based inferiority or superiority. The right to health is enshrined in numerous international treaties. The ICESCR guarantees everyone the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and mandates governments to implement the right without discrimination based on sex, age, or other prohibited grounds (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Rebouché (2009) explains that the advocates of the Maputo Protocol looked to the international human rights documents as a way to enable African governments to fulfill their international commitments. The protocol goes beyond the existing international standards and requires legislative measures backed by sanctions (Rebouché, 2009). Moreover, "other provisions of the protocol criminalize certain practices and invoke the power of the law (or the state) to protect women, a strategy often aligned with dominant feminism because it casts men as perpetrators and the state as the entity responsible for holding them accountable" (Rebouché, 2009: 103).

Yusuf and Fessha (2013) argued that the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Women's Protocol) is the only regional human rights instrument that explicitly prohibits female genital cutting (FGC). The Protocol requires states to enact laws banning all forms of FGC and its medicalization, to impose sanctions on perpetrators,

to promote awareness campaigns and to provide support to victims through health, legal and judicial services. Bond (2010), however, contends that the African Charter does not adequately protect women's rights. She cites Ndashe (2005) who claims that the African Commission has neglected cases pertaining to women's human rights for a long time, and that the charter has unclear and potentially ambiguous provisions relating to women's rights. Article 14(1)(d) of the protocol grants the "right to self-protection and to be protected against sexually transmitted infections." Article 14(1)(e) reinforces this right by specifying the 'right to be informed on health status of one's partner, particularly if affected with sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS' (Rebouché, 2009: 103). Similarly, the CRC recognizes children's rights to health, access to health and protection (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Article 24(3) of the CRC requires state parties to take all effective and appropriate measures to abolish traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children (28 TooMany, 2016; 2013; Bond, 2010; White et al., 2002).

On a national level, the Law of the Child Act, 2009, establishes a legal framework for child protection. Moreover, the Tanzanian government developed the National Plan of Action (NAP) to guide the provision of high-quality services for preventing and responding to violence as part of the national child protection system through multi-sectoral collaboration (Human Right Watch, 2014: 68). The next section examines the reproduction of the socio-cultural norms by Kuria and Kerewe community members and the reactions of the Tanzania legislative body.

Reproduction of the Socio-Cultural Norms as a Clash with Legal Norms

Reaction to the Legislation on FGC

The Tanzanian government, law enforcement bodies in the country, rights activists and NGOs, have long recognized that the Kuria ethnic group and other groups in Tanzania who practice FGC are insensitive to the state legal norms that prohibit the practice (Opoku, 2017; Yusuf and Fessha, 2013). Despite the government's ban on FGC, which aims to safeguard the rights of women and girls, the Kuria people still adhere to their socio-cultural norms of FGC. The government and law enforcement agencies' attempted crackdowns on FGC following the Arusha declaration in early 1970s which led to a change in the way FGC was practiced. For example, in the Mara region, the Kuria began to perform FGC in secret to avoid prosecution (28 TooMany, 2013; Africanus, 2012).

As discussed earlier, the study participants had strong beliefs in the values of FGC in their society, but they were also aware of the negative aspects of the practice and the government's position on the issue. For instance, some research participants such as clan elders, elderly women and parents acknowledged that the practice causes harm and could be fatal. They also realized that by subjecting girls to FGC, they risked not being able to seek medical help if they encountered any health problems. Furthermore, they knew that both perpetrators and

perpetuators of FGC practice could face arrest, fines or imprisonment or both. Despite this knowledge, the practice persists secretly in the Kuria communities. In Tanzania some communities have passed by-laws against FGC. For example, Equality Now (2011) reports that the Maasai village in Kilimanjaro enacted a by-law to punish the perpetrators of FGC, which led to a court action against the parents of an 18-year-old who was cut. The parents were fined and imprisoned. According to the report, the community no longer practices FGC (ibid). By criminalizing FGC, the Tanzanian government affirms that the practice violates the integrity and dignity of the women and girls who undergo the ritual.

The legal norms that prohibit FGC practice could be seen as moral norms. However, the community members in the study may argue that they know and do what they think is best for their girls, as some participants in this study argued. Ajayi et al., (2019), the Tanzania Human Rights report (2012) and Equality Now (2011) argue that the socio-cultural norms have enormous power in influencing individual and collective behaviour and choices. Moreover, the moral norms, which are based on internalized values of right and wrong, interplay with self-gratification and the use of good conscience (Equality Now Report, 2013). Therefore, to assess how these norms interact in harmony, reinforce each other or conflict with each other, it is necessary to examine the interrelationship of the socio-cultural, legal and moral norms. That is, an intersectional analysis must consider the relationship between moral and socio-cultural norms, between socio-cultural and legal norms, and between socio-cultural norms and human rights (UNICEF, 2013). The relationships of these three norms could be best leveraged to improve the lives of women and children, and the entire communities (ibid).

Africanus (2012) and the Tanzania Human Rights Report (2012) had similar research findings as those highlighted in this study. Africanus added that some politicians in the Mara region were uncooperative in the fight against FGC. Furthermore, community members were reluctant to provide evidence and support when needed (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2012; Africanus 2012). Waritay and Wilson (2014), on the other hand, argued that while politicians' denunciations of FGC had caused Kuria communities to cut girls in secret for a brief period, the lack of law enforcement or consequences for practitioners had led to the resurgence of FGC being practiced openly. This finding differs from many other reports in other regions in Tanzania where the practice has gone underground (28TooMany, 2013). Unfortunately, the secret nature of the cut ritual makes it difficult for law enforcement to arrest the perpetrators.

As mentioned earlier, FGC is a criminal offence under the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act, 1998 (SOSPA) if performed on a girl below the age of 18 years. However, this does not apply to women over the age of 18 years (28TooMany, 2016; 2013). According to some sources, there have been proposals or recommendations to amend the SOSPA to extend the protection against FGC to women above 18 years of age. This indicates that the current SOSPA has limitations and prosecution is rare, even though it clearly criminalizes FGC (Tanzania Human

Rights Report, 2012). In 2012, the Children Dignity Forum (CDF) conducted a survey on FGC in the Mara region, including Ryamisanga ward where this research was conducted. The report indicated that more than four thousand schoolgirls were to undergo the cut during the long school holidays in December 2012. According to the report, some of these girls managed to escape to different rescue camps set up by religious organisations and other NGOs. However, many of them underwent the cut ritual. None of the research participants mentioned any arrest made during my fieldwork. Though, according to an article published in a Swahili daily newspaper, the Mwananchi Newspaper, on 15 November 2012 by Mayunga, a 49-year-old *Ngariba* in the Mara region was arrested and charged for operating on two girls in the locality where this research was conducted. According to the article in the newspaper, one of the girls reported their ordeal to the police.

Despite the state law's poor implementation to change attitudes and eradicate FGC, various religious organisations, NGOs and activists are raising community awareness in the studied area. However, as Table 6. 1. shows, the elderly women in this study uphold the socio-cultural norms that support FGC. They also fear social exclusion more than legal consequences if they do not conform to these norms. Therefore, the custodians in the studied community seem indifferent or resistant to the legislation that prohibits FGC.

Reaction to the Legislation on the Nyumba Ntobhu Marriage

The Tanzanian Law of Marriage Act, enacted in 1971, is a family law that still applies in Tanzania (Msuya, 2020; Starace, 2009; Rwezaura, 1990). This law allows girls as young as 15 to get married, does not recognize marital rape as a crime, and discriminates against women in other ways (Equality Now Report, 2021). The report also updates on the 2016 High Court ruling that declared the minimum age of marriage for girls unconstitutional and ordered the government to raise it to 18 for both genders. However, the state law neither acknowledges nor criminalizes the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage among the Kuria people as shown in Table 4. 3. Chacha (2004) argues that the exclusion of the Nyumba Ntobhu custom from the 1963 Customary Law Declaration Order in Tanzania was either intentional or based on the assumption that it was obsolete.

The Human Rights Report on Marriage Law states that the law allows communities to follow their own customary or religious laws for marriage (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2012). Starace (2009) cites Rwezaura (1998: 190), who claims that this fusion was meant to adapt to the changing times without completely abandoning the existing community practices. However, this fusion also creates legal complications when some customary laws conflict with the Law of Marriage Act (Starace, 2009: 86). For instance, Chacha (2004) notes that the Customary Law Declaration Order in 1963 banned the practice of woman-to-woman marriage among the Simbiti, a subtribe of the Kuria in Tarime district. Chacha contends that "the practice, therefore, ceased to be binding among the members of the

ethnic group as of the date the Declaration came into force in Tarime district and as such cannot be adjusted by courts" (Chacha, 2004: 144). Chapter 4 illustrates such a legal dilemma with the case of Ghati and her Nyumba Ntobhu mother-in-law (Mama Bhoke) who faced trouble with Mzee Peter in their Nyumba Ntobhu household.

The clan elders and community actors in Chapter 4 narrated that Mwl. Nyerere, the first president of the Republic of Tanzania, established a secular state. However, the Tanzania Human Rights Report (2012) highlighted that Nyerere also co-operated closely with the Catholic and Muslim marital values in practice. These religious values influenced the Law of Marriage Act (LMA) 25, which allows Muslim, Christian or Customary marriage. According to Article 9 of the LMA, there are two types of marriages in Tanzania – polygamous and monogamous – based on these two religions. These marriages are also sanctioned by customary laws, but they are exclusively heterosexual and thus exclude other forms of marriage such as Nyumba Ntobhu marriage (Starace, 2009; Chacha, 2004) or gay marriages. The ruling class at that time argued that Nyumba Ntobhu marriage did not conform to the morals and integrity of civilized marriages that followed the colonial masters' principles and the Christian values of marriage (Ndulo, 2012; Bond, 2010). Starace (2009) observed that the LMA made the discrimination against Nyumba Ntobhu practice even more evident.

The national ruling class claims to steer the State away from traditional practices that they deem 'backward' and 'primitive' (Ndulo, 2012; Chacha, 2004), such as woman-to-woman marriage. Anthropologists like Starace (2009) and Bond (2010) argue that the ruling class tried to abolish this pre-colonial custom legally. Boshe (2008) also found similar results in his research. The Tanzania Human Rights Reports (2010; 2011; and 2012) point out that the LMA does not reflect the socio-cultural norms of the Kuria woman-to-woman marriage. Moreover, the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) in Tanzania views this form of marriage as a violation of women's rights (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2012: 157). Therefore, the clan elders and the female husbands in this study expressed that the Kuria woman-to-woman marriage has been and continues to be condemned and despised as immoral and illegal by missionaries, colonial and post-colonial governments, NGOs and rights activists in Tanzania. However, the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage does persist among some in the Kuria society.

Starace (2009) researched woman-to-woman marriages among the Simbiti in the Mara region of Tanzania and found that the colonial messages were influenced by Christian values, which regarded same-sex marriage as unnatural and immoral. Boshe (2008) also noted that the Tanzanian Law of Marriage Act, which regulates spousal relationships, excluded same-sex couples from the legal definition of marriage by stating that marriage is a voluntary union between a man and a woman intended to last forever (Boshe, 2008: 2). Therefore, to be valid and recognized by the law in Tanzania, a marriage must be between two persons of opposite sexes. Boshe (2008) added that this view was shared by "the

courts and lawmakers in prescribing punishment related to homosexuality and by limiting the definition of marriage to a union between a man and a woman" (Boshe, 2008: 2). The Tanzania Human Rights Reports identified gaps in the Law of Marriage Act and pointed out that the Tanzania Penal Code, Cap 16, sections 154–157 criminalized sexual activity between men, with a maximum sentence of 14 years imprisonment. However, sexual acts between women were not mentioned in the Penal Code (Tanzania Human Rights Report, 2012; Tanzania Penal Code, Chapter 16).

The participants in this study maintained that the Tanzanian Law of Marriage Act, which prohibits same-sex marriage, does not apply to the Kuria woman-to-woman marriage because of the socio-cultural values embedded in the Nyumba Ntobhu practice. Similar research findings on woman-to-woman marriage in some African societies by Aliyu (2018), Nyanungo (2013) and Nwoko (2012) show that the custodians of the practice argue that the marriage is legal and social, and it does not involve a sexual relationship between the partners. Rather, it is "a traditional way of legalizing what ordinarily would have amounted to the birth of illegitimate children, who, traditionally, would have been denied inheritance" (Nwoko, 2012: 78). Furthermore, in the Kuria communities, the Nyumba Ntobhu practice is not motivated by sexual emotions or attractions of the female couples (Sibiya, 2019; Sikira et al., 2012). The main reason for this practice is the need to have a male child to continue the lineage (Aliyu, 2018; Ugbabe, 2013).

NGOs and activists denounced Nyumba Ntobhu marriage as immoral and exploitative. They claimed that female husbands forced their young wives to have sex with chosen men and treated them like servants. They said this violated their human rights and created an unfair power relation. They also considered woman-to-woman marriage unlawful. Despite these observations by the various entities, the Tanzanian Law of Marriage Act (1971) has not been reformed to outlaw the practice, and Nyumba Ntobhu marriage is ongoing among the Kuria. Of particular concern is the results of this study, which show that the young women were coerced into these marriages, with threats of ill luck befalling them if they did not comply. Also very disconcerting is that the young women were traded as commodities for a few cows (in the case of Nyangi, as described in chapter four, six cows and two goats as the bride price) in an attempt to alleviate their family's desperate poverty, and it was this bride price that held them in perpetual bondage even in the face of gross abuse and violations in the Nyumba Ntobhu household.

The Nyumba Ntobhu marriage among the Kuria people in Tanzania faces legal and human rights challenges. The young women in these marriages reported discrimination and abuse from their female husbands and their relatives. They also said they did not receive any support or protection from the police or the clan elders when they sought help. According to an article by Florence Majani in the Tanzanian Mail and the Guardian News Paper in November 2014, some women enter Nyumba Ntobhu marriages to escape domestic violence, but they

end up being treated like slaves. Another article in the Mwanachi News Paper, cited by the Tanzania Human Rights report (2012), highlighted the problem of children from Nyumba Ntobhu households ending up living on the streets in Musoma and Mwanza cities. These children lack parental care and face many risks. Rights organisations, researchers, and various NGOs have expressed their concerns about the situation of these women and children.

Several researchers (Mulama, 2021; Sikira et al., 2012; Starace, 2009; Chacha, 2004) examined the issue of formal education in Nyumba Ntobhu marriages. They found that the government discouraged the practice after independence because it believed that the female husbands were not capable or willing to educate their 'grandchildren'. The government also questioned the legitimacy of the family structure without a male head. The young women in these marriages confirmed this challenge, as discussed in Chapter 4. They said that the male consorts or *abatwari* who fathered their children did not take any parental responsibility for them. They were only interested in biological reproduction and were not bound by law to assume any other roles.

Nyumba Ntobhu marriages and their children face legal and social challenges. Some female husbands neglect their parental responsibilities and fail to provide adequate support to their wives and children. These factors create inequalities and difficulties for the Kuria women and their children in the Nyumba Ntobhu family. While socio-cultural norms endorse the marriage, the young women are shunned and provided with no help or support from the same communities.

Reaction to the Legislation on the Widow Cleansing Ritual

Despite the existence of treaties that aim to protect women's rights, some traditional practices that harm widows, such as those in Tanzania, continue. Widow dispossession in Africa has been a concern for the United States Congress, which passed a resolution which expressed concern that: "Throughout Africa, customary and religious laws under which widowed women do not inherit housing and land traditionally have regulated property rights. While some African countries *like Tanzania* have changed these laws on the books, in practice these changes have had minimal impact on women's inheritance rights" (Millar (*House Resolution*), 2002: 421 cited in Gordon, 2008: 1). As evident in this study, the widowhood rites have been used to oppress women in the communities on the Ukerewe Island despite Tanzania's commitment to international and national human rights instruments. This section discusses the reasons why Kerewe widows still face sexual cleansing and discrimination under the customary law of inheritance.

Drawing on Douglas's (1966) concept of cleansing as a way of removing dirt or pollution, the participants in this study saw the widow sexual cleansing ritual as a valued norm of maintaining purity. Msuya (2020) and Dilger (2006) argue that the concept of purity and danger for widows and widowers reflects the need to preserve social order. The sexual cleansing ritual involves strict rules on when and how sexual intercourse is allowed or required. The ethnic groups on Ukerewe

Island also apply these rules to the reproductive life of the widows. Participants in this study attested that these rules are considered essential because breaking them could cause illness or death in the deceased family. However, with the spread of HIV/AIDS, the practice has lost its appeal among urban dwellers. It is also slowly disappearing in some rural communities. Many community actors, including some participants in this study, on Ukerewe Island have called for the end of the ritual.

Ezer (2006: 603) cites a report of the Ministry of Community Development, Women Affairs and Children, Community Development Policy 41(June 1996), which calls for the elimination of customs and traditions that hinder development, such as gender discrimination in inheritance. The report also recognizes the need to revise and abandon outdated laws. This was also reported in Child Development Policy 32 (October 1996). Bond (2005) and Kisaakye (2002), who have researched women's rights in Tanzania, contend that the local customary law (Declaration) (no.4) Order, Government Notice 436/1963, needs urgent reform. The customary law generally denies widows inheritance rights, as confirmed by the widows' narratives in Chapter 5. Even though the Protocol to the African Charter on Rights of Women in Africa, which has been effective in Tanzania since November 2005, addresses the widows' issues of inheritance as follows:

> A widow shall have the right to an equitable share in the inheritance of her husband's property and to continue to live in the matrimonial house. Women and men shall have the right to inherit, in equitable shares, their parents' properties (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 2003, Article 21).

The widows in the studied communities have not yet benefited from this Protocol; they have instead suffered eviction and grabbing of their husbands' property. Tanzanian statutory laws meant to protect women are ignored with impunity. There is, indeed, growing evidence that traditions linked to widows being cared for amongst the kin of a deceased husband are manipulated to justify the disinheritance of women's right to property.

The widow participants in this study said that the laws favoured male administrators, even if they were distant relatives of their deceased husbands. Makaramba (2021) and Ezer (2006) claim that Tanzania's inheritance regime violates women's rights to equality and an adequate standard of living, family, and dignity, which are assured under the Tanzanian Constitution and international conventions. Ndulo (2012) and Bond (2010) report that the Tanzanian government amended its Constitution in 2000 to prohibit gender discrimination and that modifications are required of Tanzania's inheritance laws. The CEDAW committee, which is responsible for implementing the Convention, instructed that the unequal inheritance shares for widows and daughters contravene the Convention and should be abolished (Ezer, 2006).

Widows also faced harassment, accusations of witchcraft and accusation of at-

tempts to take their husband's property by their female in-laws. As stated earlier, the Witchcraft Ordinance 1928 (cap. 18) was renewed in 1974 and is still enforced in the Tanzanian legislation. This explains why the widows accused of bewitching and killing their spouses by their female in-laws had to prove their innocence by undergoing the rituals. These widows expressed fear of the consequences they would face, such as being relocated far away from their villages. However, the Nyalali Commission argued that the Ordinance violates Article 17 (1) of the State Constitution because it restricts freedom of movement and residence of individuals. It recommended that the ordinance be repealed. Yet, after a long debate in a workshop held in Dar es Salaam on 12th of April 1996, participants of the workshop, including members of parliament, recommended the retention of the law on witchcraft ordinance (Mesaki, 2009).

According to the Nyalali Commission report, the committee was advised to revise the definition section, remove the power of consent of the Director of Public Prosecution and review the provisions relating to sentencing. Several adjustments and recommendations were made, which are not relevant to this study. However, sections 4 (6) and 5 (3) of the Constitution are explored to examine their impact on widows accused of possessing witchcraft magic and using it to bewitch and kill their spouses. Section 4 (6) states:

> "...the Law Reform Commission is of the opinion that the Witchcraft Ordinance is valid and justified. It is justified because there are still fears arising from beliefs in witchcraft among the people." Section 5 (3) reads, "the following amendments are recommended: 1. Section 5 on sentencing should be reviewed, i.e., life imprisonment and increased fines of 10,000/-, 15,000/- and 40,000/- Tanzania Shillings respectively. 2. The District Commissioners should retain the powers under section 8 of the Ordinance. 3. The Director of Public Prosecution should dispense with the power of consent for the purpose of speeding up trials of witchcraft offences."

Msuya (2020) and Mesaki (2009) explain that the Tanzanian legislation against witchcraft poses the problem of evidence that is challenging in legal terms. On the other hand, legislation against accusing others (such as the widows in this study) of witchcraft invites criticism that the state protects alleged witches, rather than their victims (Mesaki, 2009: 137). The Tanzanian Human Rights Reports (2013; 2012; 2011 and 2010) also indicate that these laws have rarely led to convictions of perpetrators of widow dispossession in Tanzania. This is because of the poor and weak implementation of state laws to protect widows who might be accused of witchcraft. As a result, the rights of many widows and their children continue to be violated. Despite the condemnations by international organisations or the ratifications of treaties by the Tanzanian government, gendered violence is still very much on the increase as the sanctions to address these issues have been inadequate (Msuya, 2021; Ajayi et al., 2019).

Traditional Practices Versus Human Rights in the African Context

According to African human rights researchers, Msuya (2020) Ajayi et al. (2019) and Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021) harmful traditional practices have enabled extensive violence against women in Africa. They emphasized that although African states have enacted legislation to develop a modern economy and new practices suited to a modern democracy, they have been very slow to change their attitudes towards women's rights. They attributed this to the reluctance of African states to interfere with cultural practices. Similarly, Davis (2022) and Bond (2012) argued that there is a major debate between human rights activists and traditionalists on whether customary norms are compatible with human rights norms contained in international conventions and national bills of rights in national constitutions. This study confirmed Mutua's (2008) research findings, which highlighted that traditionalists argue that customary law makes a positive contribution to the promotion of human rights by preserving traditional values. However, activists in this study contend that certain customary laws undermine the dignity of women and are used to justify treating them as second-class citizens.

Ndulo (2012) and Mukasa (2008) argue that most African constitutions contain provisions guaranteeing equality and human dignity and prohibiting discrimination based on gender. However, Ndulo (2012) noted limitations in many African constitutions, which are applicable in the context of the Tanzanian Constitution. In earlier research, Ndulo (2012: 89) explains that the same state constitutions that address women's protective measures recognize "the application of customary law and do this without providing a mechanism for resolving the conflict between some customary law norms and human rights norms where these arise." This, according to Ndulo (2012: 4), "results in clashes between human rights and the customary law norms." He raises a fundamental question on how to reform customary law so that the norms that discriminate against women could be eradicated, and suggested that a strategy is needed because opposition to reform the discriminative customs by those who benefit most from maintaining the customary system should not be underestimated.

African human rights researcher Mutua (2008: 119) has a different opinion. He holds the view that the constitutional and legal norms adopted on the eve of independence, as well as subsequent laws and policies, continue to suppress African cultures and religions. In this study, custodians of the studied cultural practices such as the clan elders and the elderly women shared similar views about the role of the international human rights advocates who promote the legal norms. These custodians perceive human rights activists who lobby against the practices as attackers on their socio-cultural norms. However, the young women in the study felt that aspects of the studied cultural practices, which are embedded in socio-cultural norms, have violated their human rights. According to Msuya, ((2020) and Ajayi, (2019), mere criminalization of harmful cultural practices has resulted in resentful resistance in Africa. These women research scholars emphasize that women's rights abuses persist despite CEDAW and the Maputo

Protocol, suggesting that the law alone cannot control human beings' harmful behaviour. Therefore, focusing on available international human rights laws to eradicate harmful cultural practices appears, to custodians of these practices, as Western pressure and perceived as culturally imperialistic in African countries.

Conclusion

The chapter began with the analysis of the similarities and differences of the three cultural practices as experienced by the young women in the study. Having thoroughly analyzed the socio-cultural norms of the three practices studied against the legal norms, there is evidence of contradictions between the two. As pointed out by Africanus (2012: 164) understanding the socio-cultural meanings of traditions, values and beliefs regarding the practices does not mean downgrading the importance of the human rights and legal approaches in addressing the violations that the young women had endured. Despite comprehensive international and national legislations and policies that prohibit discrimination and inequality on the grounds of sex/gender, women still experience systematic denial and marginalization with respect to property rights, and other human rights' violation that are a result of patriarchal standards that have filtered into different traditions, such as FGC, the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and widow cleansing.

Some cultural norms and traditions that affect women's rights in Africa are not inherent to the continent, but rather influenced by its devastating colonial history. As argued by Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021: 1) culture has been variously defined through different disciplinary lenses and incorporates elements such as: values, beliefs, symbols, customs, traditions, and practices of groups of persons. Culture is often used to justify the violations of women's rights, especially in the areas of marriage and property that reflect deep-seated patriarchal structures and harmful gender stereotypes. However, culture is not a static concept that cannot change in response to social, economic, and political developments. Customary law has a significant impact on personal status law matters such as marriage, inheritance and traditional authority: however, because customary law developed in a patriarchal era, some of its norm's conflict with human rights norms that guarantee equality between men and women. State legislation and the courts have important roles to play in ensuring that customary law conforms to human rights norms that promote gender equality.

In Tanzania, the justification of the law being informed by "the norms of society" is akin to the tail wagging the dog, and the state abrogating its responsibilities. Legal reform is no guarantee of the protection and promotion of human rights, but it does play a huge role in enabling the achievement and protection of rights (Opoku, 2017). It is hard to confront, challenge, and change harmful cultural practices when there is legal sanction for them (Ntshwarang and Sewpaul, 2021).

Despite the growing global concerns and efforts to protect women's rights to land and other tangible assets with economic value, various studies, including

this one, reveal that women still encounter challenges with respect to these rights (Rutagumirwa and Bailey, 2022; Anyogu and Okpalobi, 2016; Adekile, 2010). Religious doctrines and cultural norms are two forces that have overwhelming influence on human rights in general. In fact, all extant religions in the world acknowledge the inherent dignity of humanity, and people's mutual responsibility towards each other, and they, in principle, support values of equality, non-discrimination, solidarity and inter-dependence. Yet, religious injunctions and institutions are often major sources of gender discrimination. These religious ideas are also used to inform customary laws that violate women's rights. Religion, as a double-edged sword, in this

context can have both positive and negative effects on people and society. On one hand, religion can provide moral guidance, spiritual comfort, social support, and a sense of identity and belonging. On the other hand, religion also causes conflict, violence, intolerance, discrimination, and oppression.

Gender equality must include land rights and ownership, otherwise, the agenda for Sustainable Development in 2030 would become impossible because landlessness is "among the best predictors of poverty" (United Nations, 2018). Patriarchal systems and institutions are the underlying causes of the discrimination that women experience concerning their rights to property and inheritance in general. Some scholars opine that more specifically religion, customs, and traditions are causal factors in the violation of women's rights that cannot be over-emphasized (Msuya, 2017; Obioha, 2013; Mulama, 2021; Sulumba-Kapuma, 2018). Although men are in undeniably privileged positions compared with women, the questions that remain are: Does patriarchy disadvantage men, and if how? and 'Are men really at an advantage by using power over women and remaining in control?' This is addressed in the following chapter.

Disadvantaged Male

The recognition that gender inequality harms all genders is an important one, but it requires a mindset shift or even a generational shift. (Dr. Robert Blum, 2019).

In this chapter I argue that while men hold inordinate power compared with women, the system of patriarchy also disadvantages men. I look at how gender stereotypes often preclude men from experiencing the full range of human emotions because it is culturally more acceptable for men to display aggression rather than pain, hurt, or tears (Sewpaul, 2020). Sewpaul (2020: 240) argues that "Men who deviate from the narrowly boxed-in construction of masculinity often face backlash from an unkind society that labels them sissy or worse. As a society, we often set double standards that place men in invidious positions" This chapter unearths the realities of men in a patriarchal setting, despite their use of power and control over women. It will conclude by highlighting the argument the that "men are unlikely to give up their positions of power if they do not realize the limitations imposed on them by gender discrimination" (Sewpaul, 2020: 241).

Introduction

The chapter analyses the gendered blind spots in the context of patriarchal societies in Africa, especially the Kuria and Ukerewe communities, which are the target areas of this study. These gendered blind spots do not only work against women, but also against men. Blum (2019), emphasized that the recognition that gender inequality harms all genders is an important one, but it requires a mindset shift, or even a generational shift. Research has proven that gendered blind spots are aspects of gender that are overlooked or ignored in a given context, often due to dominant or normative assumptions about gender roles and identities. In this study, the focus is on how male and influential women use their power over vulnerable women and girls, which may seem to benefit the men but in fact disadvantages them as well. In the context of patriarchal societies, where men hold more power and privilege than women and other genders, gendered blind spots can result in various forms of discrimination, oppression and violence against those who do not conform to the patriarchal norms. In our everyday reality, emphasis is on how women in Africa face many challenges including economic exclusion, financial systems that perpetuate their discrimination, limited participation in political and public life, denial of inheritance, lack of access to education, poor retention of girls in schools, gender-based violence, harmful cultural practices, and more.

Gender equality is a global goal under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which explicitly calls for ending all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful practices against women and girls everywhere. However, harmful practices remain a 'silent and endemic crisis' that affects many women and girls,

as reported in an article by the Women U. N. (2020). Despite legal and policy efforts to curb violence and harmful practices, some of them are still invisible, misunderstood or tolerated by society. For example, some harmful practices have adapted to modern times, such as the 'medicalization' of female genital cutting by trained medical personnel; the use of reproductive health technology to select sons over daughters (Erken, 2020), the Nyumba Ntobhu practice among the Kuria that forces women to marry other women; and the purification of widows by the Kara ethnic group on the Ukerewe Island. These examples are worrisome signs of how harmful practices, despite often ancient origins, are translating into the modern world (Erken, 2020; Opoku, 2017). To eliminate harmful practices, we need to accelerate our progress and mobilize society-wide efforts, involving everyone who can play a role in stopping these traditional practices. We also need to address the diverse factors that drive harmful practices and women's disempowerment (Urassa, 2023; Erken, 2020).

Although the consistent campaign for awareness of girl's empowerment is working, it is at the cost of the boy child (Moraa, 2018). For decades, human rights advocates have been calling for the empowerment of girls and the emancipation of women. Communities are urged to protect their daughters, while girls are encouraged to stay in high-quality schools, learn about their rights and choices, and speak freely about their wants and needs. The goal has been to fight for equal rights, but some argue that the efforts to promote gender equality have become imbalanced (Moraa, 2018; Opoku, 2017). In a speech, a Kenyan preacher and human rights activist made this plea to the world:

> …… everyone talks and sings about girl empowerment, women emancipation. Girl child empowerment has a lot of funding. However, in our efforts to empower the girl child, we often neglect the boy child and men. Boy preference! Yet, no one is talking about boy child empowerment. No one talks about the male species - it has been completely neglected either deliberately or out of ignorance of those doing the emancipation or empowerment. There is nothing wrong with empowering the girl child, but it's been done at the expense of the boy child in a way that creates an imbalance in the genders (Njoya, 2010).

The problem arises when a boy who has not been empowered marries a girl who has been empowered. It is difficult for him to live with a woman who is independent-minded because he has not been taught how to do so. Men encounter women who are empowered and struggle to stay with them. These men cannot see or reason beyond their own perspective.

The activist suggests the below in her speech:

> ……as we empower our girls, we must also empower our boys. The boys must also learn how to live with an independent-minded woman, otherwise we are losing families. We have already lost many families around the globe for this reason. And some women are beginning to

> feel they can do without a man because they cannot discuss issues with them reasonably. How then does society expect them to live happily together as married couples for forty years or more? When an issue is on the table, the unempowered man cannot reason. For example, some women are beginning to find marriage life boring. They are married and living with men who cannot see what they see, they cannot think beyond their nose (Njoya, 2010).

The boy and the girl child must be educated and empowered on the same level. Moraa (2018: 16, citing UNESCO, 2010) argued that we should focus on the child as a whole, not on the gender, because boys and girls each have unique challenges and potentials in the society. These include cultural and biological factors, among others. It is not that men cannot think, but that efforts have been biased towards one side, while the other side has been neglected. Moraa (2018) and Njoya (2010) observed that this is causing problems in families, because some men feel threatened by the achievements of women and say things like, … this is not on! It is because you have gone to school, - because you have a Master's degree, because you have a PhD! "If we allow the boy child to continue to struggle with poverty, unemployment, and dependency, we will lose the contribution of a major part of the society and our continent will suffer economically" (Moraa, 2018: 17).

As a society we must ensure that boys and girls are raised and empowered equally. It has often been said, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual and if you educate a woman, you educate a society!" As we continue to emphasize this saying, we weaken the foundations of humanity. Both genders should be taken care of in equal measure. In her speech, Njoya further argued that:

> …I beg to differ and say, 'educate both genders equally.' Empower both genders with cultural understanding and provide both with formal education that equips them with tools and skills that would benefit them as individuals and help them contribute equally to society for the benefit of humanity. It has been overemphasized that naturally, the man is the foundation of any family, community or society as God ordained it! One could easily ask, 'What is the community, society and family without a man?' The same question could be asked, 'What is the community, society and family without a woman?' Those who say they can do without a man or woman are constantly struggling with different forms of loneliness and incompleteness, in short, emptiness in a whole of humanity. I can do life myself without a man, but then what becomes of the reproductive system? How does one procreate as a man alone or as a woman alone? (Njoya, 2010).

Humans are sexual beings, and we live in a heteronormative world, which means we need a male and a female gamete to procreate, even though there are some techniques that can allow men and women to procreate without a partner of the opposite sex. Globally, on account of gender role stereotypes and construc-

tions of dominant masculinity and dominant femininity, men and women are constrained in narrow gendered boxes. This has huge ramifications for women and men, especially in patriarchal societies. While men are advantaged from a material and power point of view, there are also numerous disadvantages that men experience on account of patriarchy and gendered blind spots (Sewpaul, 2020).

Gendered Blind Spots

Gendered blind spots are aspects of gender that are overlooked or ignored in a given context, often due to dominant or normative assumptions about gender roles and identities (Hamilton, Armstrong, Seeley et al., 2019). In the context of patriarchal societies, where men hold more power and privilege than women and other genders, gendered blind spots can result in various forms of discrimination, oppression and violence against those who do not conform to the patriarchal norms (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021; Shriver, 2018). An example, of a gendered blind spot is the tacit condonation of gender-based violence and hegemonic views of gender that are deeply entrenched in patriarchal mindsets (Messerschmidt and Messner, 2018). These blind spots can prevent the recognition and redress of the diverse and complex harms that different genders suffer in patriarchal societies, and also hinder the transformation of gender relations towards more equality and justice.

Gendered blind spots are not only detrimental to women, but also to men, because they are based on rigid and narrow stereotypes of what it means to be a man or a woman in a patriarchal society. These stereotypes can limit the choices, opportunities and freedoms of both men and women, and can also expose them to different forms of violence and harm (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021). For example, one gendered blind spot is the assumption that men are strong, aggressive and dominant, and that they cannot be victims of sexual violence or other forms of abuse. In the African culture, it is the tradition to see a boy child, from an early age, as being independent. We often use the phrase, "he's a boy, he can take care of himself", especially when things go wrong on the side of the boy child (Moraa, 2018; Ngoe, 2014). This assumption can prevent boys and men from seeking or receiving support or justice when they experience violations, and can also make them feel ashamed or stigmatized for not conforming to the masculine ideal.

As Moraa (2018) states, quoting the Kenyan Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2014), the society assumes that the boy child is an aggressor and does not need someone to help him transition into manhood. However, in current modern society, the argument is that 'what a man can do a woman can do better'. The intersection between modernity and traditional practices has put the boy child into a wilderness (Moraa, 2018: 18). Until the African continent wakes up to realize that all genders can be equal and deserve equal opportunities, the boy child will continue to be neglected.

Another gendered blind spot is the expectation that women are always nurtur-

ing, submissive and dependent, and that they cannot be leaders, perpetrators in conflict, or agents of change in post-conflict situations. This expectation can deny women their agency and voice in shaping their own lives and futures, can overlook their contributions to society and justify their involvement in human rights violations. Most people still see gender issues as women's issues, even though the strict definition of gender encompasses male, female and other gender identities.

According to Blum, Mmari, and Moreau, (2017), gender inequality is often seen as a problem that affects only women and girls, but Blum (2019), a public health expert with four decades of experience, challenged this misconception. He and his colleagues Jamie and Marjorie Ireland, conducted a study in 2003, where they examined how harmful gender norms emerge in early adolescence and how they influenced the health of young people in 14 low-income countries (many of them in Africa). They discovered that boys reported more adversity than girls, such as physical neglect, sexual abuse and violence victimization. They also found that boys who faced adversity were 11 times more likely to be violent, while girls who faced adversity were four times more likely to be violent.

Again, in 2019, Blum, Mmari, Moreau, and Group for Global Early Adolescent Study (G.E.A.S.) conducted a global study on how rigid gender norms affect the lives of young adolescents. They showed how the stereotypes that boys are dominant and girls are submissive are harmful to both genders. These gender norms limit the potential and well-being of both boys and girls. Blum and his colleagues argued that these stereotypes persist into adulthood and have serious consequences for men. They pointed out that: the only group where life expectancy has declined is white men over 50, mainly due to self-harm and access to guns (Blum et al., 2019).

To address these blind spots, some scholars and activists have advocated for a more inclusive understanding of gender in transitional justice and other fields, which includes masculinities and queer perspectives (Urassa, 2023; Hamilton et al., 2019). They have also called for teaching boys to examine gender in patriarchal societies and to challenge the harmful stereotypes and expectations that are imposed on tem (Messerschmidt, and Messner, 2018). Moraa (2018: 17) argues that the focus on the girl child has neglected the boy child, who is now in danger of losing value in the society. Moraa (2018) urges the family unit, religious and learning institutions, policymakers, mentors, and the society as a whole to support the boy child and equip him with the strength to handle the challenges and hardships of life. These efforts aim to create more awareness and sensitivity to the multiple dimensions and dynamics of gender, and to foster more respect and solidarity among different genders through both formal and informal education. A saying often attributed to Aristotle affirms that "educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." Both genders need the education of the mind and the heart to value and respect each other in their respective gender roles. Sewpaul (2021) argues that people should learn to appreciate and respect the diversity of people and their cultures and to challenge the stereotypes and

prejudices they encounter.

According to Schulz (2020), in Africa, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was the lack of gender-sensitive responses, which failed to address the disproportionate impact of the virus and the lockdown measures on women and girls, especially in terms of health, education, livelihoods, violence and participation. In a very different context, the marginalization of sexual and gender minorities (SGM) such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people, considered as taboos, faced stigma, discrimination, violence and criminalization because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. These practices are foreign or unrecognized in most countries on the African continent due to the deep-rooted cultural beliefs. The underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making positions, especially in politics, governance, peacebuilding and security sectors, which limits their voice and influence in shaping the development agenda of their countries is largely linked to gender role stereotypes (Scharnick-Udemans, 2017). These are some examples of gendered blind spots in the African context.

To sum it up, it could be argued that gendered blind spots work against both women and men, because they reinforce unequal and oppressive power relations between different genders, and prevent them from realizing their full potential and dignity as human beings. Within dominant patriarchal discourses, structures and practices men normalize their privilege and control. Men do not see themselves as perpetuating gender inequality, and they do not recognize that while patriarchy empowers, it also disempowers them. Writing about the need for us to liberate ourselves from gendered blind spots, Sewpaul (2020: 185) argues that "privilege creates its own blind spots, wherein a lifetime of becoming accustomed to deference inhibits seeing one's own role in perpetuating prejudice and inequality … It is not only malice or disregard for others that inhibits ethical growth." Hence, the need to include both women and men. Men have become so accustomed to their privileged positions and deference from women, that they may not recognize their complicity in reproducing gender discrimination, as much as women do not recognize their complicity in reproducing sexism and patriarchy.

Dominant Constructions of Masculinity

Morgan (2015) explains that dominant constructions of masculinity are the socially and culturally defined norms and expectations that shape how men and boys should behave and relate to others. In all societies, masculinity often represents strength, dominance, competitiveness, independence, and aggressiveness, and men and boys are often socialized to possess these characteristics. These dominant constructions of masculinity are also known as hegemonic masculinity, which refers to the most influential and powerful form of masculinity in a given context. Masculinity, as a socially constructed term, keeps changing accordingly in place and with time. It is not an intrinsic characteristic. It is not developed naturally or genetically; rather it is taught and learned. The term itself relates to "perceived

notions and ideals about how men should or are expected to behave in a given setting" (Morgan, 2015: 5).

Global academic research and advocacy groups often link violence to dominant masculinity, which is associated with homicide, men's violence against female partners, and other forms of violence. Men are the main perpetrators of physical and sexual violence against women, and they are the vast majority of perpetrators and victims of homicide (Opoku, 2017; WHO, 2014a). However, violence by adults against children shows different patterns across regions and countries in Africa. Boys are more likely to be victims of physical violence or severe punishment in the home, while girls are more likely to experience sexual violence and harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriage, female genital cutting, (WHO, 2014) Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and widow cleansing ritual. These practices reflect the social and cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity, which are not fixed or natural, but rather influenced by changing societal norms (Schulz, 2020; Moraa, 2018; Opoku, 2017). In South Africa, for example, the construction of masculinity has been stressed as a social factor, rather than an essentialist assumption, which dominated academic thought on the configuration of masculinity (Schulz, 2020). However, the socio-cultural constructions and essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity are inextricably inter-connected.

According to Opoku (2017) and Allen-Collinson (2009), while male perpetrated domestic abuse is the mainstream academic and policy norm, research on female-perpetrated abuse is not only sluggish or limited but often the target of controversy, and deliberate resentment and attacks by feminist and women groups. Female-perpetrated violence remains an irrelevant subject, and has been termed by George (2007) as a 'Great Taboo.' Male victimization is often disbelieved and not encouraged to be taken up as a serious subject for critical academic and policy discussions and interventions (Morgan and Wells, 2016). Instead, it has often been referred to as a strategy by men to maintain existing patriarchal control (Opoku, 2016). Most cultures positively portray women as the so-called 'gentle sex,' who cannot be involved in violence or destruction (Opoku, 2016; Straus, 2009), and issues related to men's predicaments or disadvantages are deliberately understudied and underrated (Stoet and Geary, 2019). Upsettingly, the effect and extent of domestic violence against men is not really acknowledged by society, even though such violence, which is often similar to violence against women, may bring multiple forms of physical, psychological, emotional, social, and economic consequences for men, including alcoholism, stress, frustration, isolation, shame, extreme control and suicide in worse cases (Moraa, 2018; Morgan and Wells, 2016).

In the above context, one might say that gender discrimination disadvantages men in various ways, such as affecting their mental and physical health, limiting their access to healthcare, and increasing their risk of violence. According to a report by Sundaram (2018) traditional gender stereotypes, that keep men in the

role of breadwinner, prevent women from equally contributing to their households and participating in the workforce, and can put additional stress on men, increasing their risk of health issues. This view is supported by Sewpaul (2020: 241) who argued that, "the entrenched provider role of men has a profound impact of men's sense of self in the face of unemployment and poverty. If he cannot provide materially, he is less of a man. An emasculation that is reinforced by a society that spurns his dependent position. If a woman does not work outside the home or loses her job and is dependent, it is culturally accepted."

A study by Blum, Ireland, and Blum (2003) found that boys were more likely than girls to report adversity, including physical neglect, sexual abuse, and violence victimization. As indicated earlier, Blum et al. (2003) highlighted that boys facing adversity were 11 times more likely to be engaged in violence, compared to four times among girls. Gender discrimination can limit peoples' access to healthcare, increase rates of ill health, and lower life expectancy (Blum et al., 2003). On the other hand, while the belief is that women live longer than men on average, they experience higher rates of ill health during their lifetimes. According to Blum et al. (2003), men commit much more violence than women do and, apart from rape, they also suffer a much higher rate of violent victimization. They die earlier than women and are injured more often. In his bid to find his bearing, the boy child has now turned to vices such as drugs and substance abuse, sexual abuse, and dropping out of school. Moraa (2018: 18) warns about the severe negative consequences of excluding boys from empowerment programmes in Africa, pushing them to an underground world of criminal activities.

Gender Role Stereotypes in Africa

Gender role stereotypes in Africa can be limiting for both men and women. Gender role stereotypes are prevalent in Africa as well as other parts of the world (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021; Noge, 2014). "African society had norms in the past, which had great impact of infringement on the rights of the girl child. She had no place in the all-male dominated fields of employment and handling issues of great concern to community. She was a house manager" (Moraa, 2018: 16). Women are often expected to be caregivers and homemakers while men are expected to be providers and protectors (Wood, 2019; Hearn, and Collinson, 1994). These stereotypes can delay progress and limit opportunities for both men and women.

In "*Evaluating Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in an Era of Democracy*" Noge (2014) discusses how patriarchy is still a permanent force in South Africa that hinders the implementation of policies and acts. Mushunje and Sewpaul (2021), discuss the power of gender stereotyping and the need to challenge the notion that information deters stereotyping, on account of normalized and naturalized gender ideologies and taken-for-granted assumptions which underpin societal stereotyping, oppression and privilege.

Globally, we all know and understand that women are on the disadvantaged end; from material, income, sex harassment, prosperity point of view, but men are also disadvantaged. They are expected to be the financial providers for their families, but they face high rates of poverty and unemployment in many African countries (Wood, 2019). They may feel ashamed or inadequate if they cannot fulfill this expectation. Even though we focus so much on the woman, it does not mean that men are not subjected to these things. Sewpaul (2020) argues that gender equality is beneficial for both women and men, and that men should also be aware of how gender discrimination affects them negatively. She asserts:

> For the sake of both women's and men's well-being, the pendulum needs to shift towards greater equality, and an acceptance of gender diversities in all their fullness. It is both women and men who need to be liberated. In our struggles for gender equality, we tend to prioritize the disadvantages of gender discourses and practices on women. Understandably so, as women are disproportionately more disadvantaged than men with the impositions of the glass ceilings on women; women's greater economic dependence; higher rates of poverty in female-headed households; the greater subjection of women and girls to rape, sexual abuse and violence; some of the less universal, cultural aspects of in-utero sex selection and the abortion of female fetuses; practices such as wife inheritance; and the murder of women simply for being women. But men are unlikely to give up their positions of power, if they do not realize the limitations imposed on them on account of gender discrimination (Sewpaul, 2020: 284-285).

According to Moraa (2018: 18), "as the world cries gender equality in favour of the females, a question goes unanswered, how equal is a striking line in between." This implies that equality has been achieved, which is not so, and that the cry needs to shift to favour both genders. Moraa (2018) and Tella (2017) explain that there has been a traditional thinking of the natural strength of the boy child and men in the African society today. They are expected to handle the challenges and hardships of life, and to face all the menaces of humanity. However, as the focus has shifted to the girl child, with talks of empowerment and all sorts of support, the boy child is now in danger of losing value in the social set-up.

The limitations of chauvinist-type masculinity

Chauvinism is an irrational belief that one's own group or people are superior or dominant over others, who are seen as weak, unworthy, or inferior (Wawrytko, 2019; Curry, 2017). This belief influences domestic violence by creating an inflexible gender hierarchy that gives men more power and control in the home.

Some possible limitations of chauvinist-type masculinity are:

- It can lead to violence, discrimination, and oppression against women and other marginalized groups.

- It can prevent men from expressing their emotions, seeking help, or developing healthy relationships.
- It can create a sense of entitlement, arrogance, or insecurity among men who feel threatened by challenges to their status or authority.
- It can hinder social progress and equality by reinforcing rigid gender roles and stereotypes.

Gender and Grief

According to Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe (2019), grief and bereavement are the emotional and psychological responses to the loss of a loved one or something of value. In their study, the concepts of gender and grief were used to explore how gender influences the expressions and experiences of grief and bereavement among different groups of people. Gender affects the coping strategies, social support, and access to services for bereaved people. Furthermore, gender interacts with other factors, such as culture, religion, age, kinship, and social status, to shape the diversity and complexity of grief and bereavement. This concept is important for understanding the similarities and differences in how people grieve and heal, and for developing appropriate and effective interventions and policies for supporting bereaved people.

For instance, some studies in Africa have suggested that men are expected to be strong and stoic, while women are expected to be emotional and expressive in the face of loss (Kapinga and Su, 2018; Makama, 2013; Moyo and Müller, 2011). These gender norms may influence how people cope with grief, seek support, and access resources. The dominant message is "tigers don't cry", implying that brave and strong-hearted macho boys/men do not display emotions (Sewpaul, 2020). The phrase is a common expression that is used to tell men and boys that they should not show their emotions or vulnerability by crying. It is based on the notion that tigers are strong, fierce, and fearless animals that never cry. This concept is prevalent in many cultures and societies around the world, especially in Africa and Asia, where masculinity is often associated with toughness, resilience, and self-reliance. However, this may also have negative consequences for men's health and well-being, as it may prevent them from seeking or receiving emotional support or help when they are grieving or struggling (Oyugi, 2016; Selman et al., 2013).

Secondly, this expression implies that crying is a sign of weakness or inferiority, and that boys and men who cry are not strong or brave. This is a harmful stereotype that can prevent males from expressing their feelings and seeking help when they need it. Crying is a natural and healthy human response to emotional stress, sadness, grief, joy, or relief. Crying can help release tension, reduce pain, improve mood, and enhance social bonding (Kapinga and Su, 2018; Makama, 2013).

Thirdly, this expression reinforces the gender norms and expectations that men and boys should not cry or show their emotions, while women and girls are allowed or expected to do so. This is a form of gender-based violence that can have negative effects on the mental health and well-being of both men and women. Men and boys who are told not to cry may suppress their emotions and develop depression, anxiety, anger issues, or substance abuse problems. Women and girls who are permitted to cry may be seen as weak, irrational, or manipulative and face discrimination, harassment, or abuse (Stroebe et al., 2019).

Gender in Child Custody

Child custody is another area where the dominant discourse of women being more nurturing and caring disadvantages men. According to a discussion paper by UN Women (2019), gender equality and women's rights in the context of child custody and child maintenance are influenced by various factors, such as domestic violence, patriarchal legal and cultural systems, and gender-biased interpretations of the best interest of the child. The paper identifies some of the most prevalent custody and child maintenance regimes in cases of divorce, dissolution of a civil union, and separation of parents.

Sole custody is where one parent has exclusive legal and physical custody of the child, while the other parent may have visitation rights or pay child support. This regime may be based on the presumption that one parent (usually the mother) is the primary caregiver of the child or that the child needs stability and continuity with the mother. Based on this assumption, in child custody disputes, more often than not, even loving caring fathers who can provide a good environment for their children are denied custody. Men hardly get custody when such disputes end up in court; even judges and social workers carry blind spots, believing that children need to grow up with their mothers because mothers are more caring. In the face of this fathers are advocating for themselves, for example, with the Fathers for Justice campaign in South Africa and the United Kingdom, and the Fathers Justice Movement in the United States of America.

Blum (2019) raises some important questions that require careful reflection and consideration: On what basis do we determine who is a parent? What are the criteria for good parenting? How do we define and balance the rights and responsibilities of parents? What kind of support do parents need from society and from each other? These questions are not easy to answer, and different philosophical, religious, and cultural perspectives may have different arguments and views on them. Regardless of these differences, both genders should recognize the value of male and female roles and advocate for socio-cultural justice, socio-economic justice, respect, fairness and equality for both genders in their society. The belief that children need to grow up with their mothers because mothers are more caring may also disadvantage women who have less economic resources or face domestic violence from their former partners.

An example of such dominant beliefs is given by Vishanthie Sewpaul in her memoir, entitled "The Arc of Our Paths: Growing into Wholeness", which was published in 2020. Sewpaul shared that once while serving on the South African Council for Social Service Professions, she chaired a disciplinary hearing in a case brought against a social worker by a father. The story reads: -

> ......The taken-for-granted assumption that women make better nurturers than men is perhaps one of the greatest sources of disadvantage to men. This assumption means that loving and caring fathers are often denied custody of children, even when there is evidence that they can provide more stable environments for their children. Once, while serving on the South African Council for Social Service Professions, I chaired a disciplinary hearing on a case brought against a social worker by a father. In this case it was his 13-year-old daughter that he was granted custody of. In each of the social worker's process recordings, she detailed the loving, caring and stable environment that the father provided, but in her plans of action, consistently recommended that the child be returned to the mother, who, by the social workers' own accounts, did not provide a conducive environment for the child. She was found guilty. She cried, realizing her folly. The sentence was that she works under supervision in custody cases for a period of two years. I told her that I could've so easily been sitting in her chair, and that many of us carry blind spots that we need to be more mindful of (Sewpaul, 2020).

Gender and Domestic Violence

Violence Against Men

Domestic violence against men is a global issue that affects people from different regions, cultures, and backgrounds. However, there may be some specific factors and challenges that influence the prevalence, causes, effects, and responses of domestic violence against men in the Tanzanian or African context. In this section, I discuss the myths and the facts related to domestic violence against men, and the difficulties and barriers that men face in reporting and seeking help for domestic violence.

According to research by Muganyizi et al. (2014), violence against men (VAM), including both domestic and sexual, are prevalent and serious problems in Tanzania and East Africa. VAM is a form of gender-based violence that affects men and boys of all ages, backgrounds, and sexual orientations. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, as well as discrimination, harassment, and neglect. VAM can have negative impacts on the health and well-being of men and their families, as well as on the development and peace of the society. Muganyizi et al.'s. (2014) study found that 9.5% of men in Tanzania had experienced physical violence from a female partner, and 3.6% had experienced

sexual violence from a female partner. The study also found that VAM was associated with alcohol abuse, low education, and witnessing parental violence.

Another study by Mugisha, Wandera, and Kwagala (2016) on VAM also found that 13.8% of men in Uganda had experienced physical violence from a female partner, and 5.6% had experienced sexual violence from a female partner. The study also found that VAM was associated with poverty, unemployment, and childhood abuse. In a similar study, Mwakikagile (2017) examined the cultural and historical factors that contribute to VAM in East Africa, and identified colonialism, patriarchy, and witchcraft. The study discussed the challenges and opportunities for addressing VAM in this region, such as legal reforms, media campaigns, and community interventions.

However, despite the high prevalence and severity of domestic violence against men, many men do not report or seek help for their abuse, due to various factors, such as social stigma, gender stereotypes, legal biases, and lack of awareness and support. For example, in a study conducted in rural Kenya, the researchers found that men who suffered from domestic violence from their spouses were reluctant to openly talk about it, because they feared shame and ridicule from society (Mugoya, Witte, and Ernst, 2017). The researchers also found that the men did not want to be seen as weak or un-masculine, and that they faced societal pressure to provide for and protect their families. Moreover, the researchers found that the men did not have access to adequate resources and services that could help them to cope with and heal from domestic violence. These findings suggest that the cultural and structural factors that shape the lives of men in the African context may hinder their ability and willingness to report and seek help for domestic violence. According to Hawkins and Humes (2002) this is because of the following:

- **Societal stereotypes and stigma**. Many people believe that men are always the aggressors and women are always the victims in domestic violence situations. They may not take male victims seriously, or blame them for the abuse. They may also question their masculinity or sexuality, or ridicule them for being weak or cowardly. This can make men feel ashamed, isolated, and reluctant to seek help.
- **Lack of awareness and resources**. Many domestic violence shelters and services are designed for women only, or do not have the capacity or training to accommodate male victims. In developed nations like America and Canada, some shelters may turn away men, refer them to batterer's programs, or give them inaccurate or unhelpful information. There are very few shelters that cater specifically for men, and they may be located far away or have long waiting lists. For example, in Northern Ghana, where elderly women are accused of being witches, some elderly men are also accused of being wizards. In this context, the witch camps or shelters provide refuge for these women from mob attacks, while the male-identified

wizards are left in the communities without any protection.

- **Legal obstacles and discrimination**. Men may face difficulties in obtaining legal protection, custody of their children, or financial assistance from the courts or the government. They may also encounter bias or disbelief from law enforcement, social workers, or health professionals who may assume that they are the perpetrators, rather than the victims of abuse.

One of the common myths about domestic violence against men is that it is rare or does not exist (Hines and Douglas, 2010). However, this myth is contradicted by the empirical evidence that shows that domestic violence against men is more common than many people think. According to a global review by the World Health Organisation (WHO), about one in three men (35%) have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2013). In the United States, about one in four men (24.8%) have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (CDC, 2017). These statistics indicate that domestic violence against men is a serious and widespread problem that deserves attention and action.

Sexual Abuse

Another important factor is that we go on the general assumption that is girls that are subjected to sexual abuse. However, sexual abuse against boys is a serious and widespread problem that affects the health and well-being of millions of children and adolescents worldwide (Drijber, Reijnders, and Ceelen, 2013). Sexual abuse against boys is often underreported, underestimated, and overlooked, due to various socio-cultural constraints and barriers. According to a global review by the World Health Organisation (WHO), about 18% of boys and 36% of girls worldwide have experienced some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18 (WHO, 2014). However, these estimates may vary depending on the definition, measurement, and reporting of sexual abuse.

Some of the factors that may affect the reporting of sexual abuse among boys are:

- Societal norms and expectations that boys should be strong, independent, and resilient, and that sexual abuse is a sign of weakness, vulnerability, or femininity.
- Stigma and shame associated with sexual abuse, especially if the perpetrator is male or the abuse involves homosexual acts.
- Fear of negative consequences, such as retaliation, rejection, isolation, or discrimination from family, peers, or authorities.
- The lack of awareness, recognition, or support services for male victims of sexual abuse.

Some of the sources that provide statistics on sexual abuse against boys are:

- The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), which publishes the Child Abuse and Neglect: The International Journal and conducts the ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tools (ICAST) surveys in different countries and regions (ISPCAN, 2021).
- The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which publishes the Hidden in Plain Sight report and the Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS) in collaboration with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other partners (UNICEF, 2014; CDC, 2021).

Patriarchal Dividend

Connell (1995) holds that the patriarchal dividend is a term coined to describe the benefits that men, as a group, receive from maintaining an unequal gender order. These benefits include higher income and status, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, and control over one's own life. The patriarchal dividend is not only about money, but also about other forms of privilege and advantage that men enjoy in societies that favour men over women. However, Hamilton, et al, (2019) argue that the patriarchal dividend also comes with costs for men and society. It prevents the optimal use of human resources, imposes expectations and pressures on men that limit their potential and well-being and makes gender equality and harmony impossible.

The patriarchal dividend also reinforces stereotypes and norms that justify violence and discrimination against women and girls (Hamilton et. al., 2019; Connell, 1995). Therefore, challenging the patriarchal dividend is essential for transforming gender relations and creating a more just and inclusive society for all. Hamilton et al. (2019) and Moraa (2018), propose some examples of the costs of the patriarchal dividend as:

- Poor health outcomes for men who are expected to be strong, tough, and invulnerable, and who may avoid seeking help or expressing emotions.
- Reduced life expectancy for men who are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as smoking, drinking, driving fast, or being violent.
- Limited personal growth for men who are constrained by rigid gender roles and norms that prevent them from exploring their interests, talents, and identities.
- Missed opportunities for men who are excluded from certain fields or activities that are considered feminine or inappropriate for men, such as caregiving, teaching, nursing, or arts.
- Social isolation for men who are discouraged from forming close and supportive relationships with other men or women, and who may lack intimacy and trust.

- Gender conflict for men who face resistance and backlash from women and other men who challenge their privilege and dominance, and who may feel threatened or insecure.

According to Hamilton et al, (2019), these are some of the possible costs of the patriarchal dividend. They, however, predicted that there may be more negative consequences of the patriarchal dividend for men in society depending on the specific context and situation.

Role of Men in Promoting Gender Equality

Men can play a crucial role in promoting gender equality by taking leadership roles in increasing understanding of the gains of gender equality for themselves as individuals and as a group, as well as the benefits for society as a whole (Mwemezi, 2022; hooks, 2004). This requires identifying the constraints men face under the current "gender order" – i.e., the way relations between women and men are structured in different societies - and the current definitions of masculinity in different contexts. According to Wawrytko (2019), many efforts focus on men who are already committed to gender equality and can offer positive role models to other men and boys, while others give attention to young men who are less firmly entrenched in their attitudes and behaviour.

Blum (2019) advocates for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to gender conversations, one that does not neglect the roles and needs of men and boys. He believes that engaging men and boys early on is crucial for achieving gender equality and for empowering women and girls. Blum also promotes the participation of more young men in courses and research on gender issues. In his report, Blum criticizes the existing indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals, which he claims ignore the realities and challenges of men and boys. He proposes a more balanced and holistic way of measuring progress towards gender equality by 2030, along with other recommendations in the report. He rejects the idea that focusing on men and boys would detract from the serious problems that women and girls face. He says, 'there are those who see this as a zero-sum game—that if you acknowledge the importance of men and boys, it is diminishing the importance of women and girls. But this is not a zero-sum game at all.'

Although individual men may have different ways and opportunities to challenge these patriarchal norms and expectations, there are some possible ways men can challenge these patriarchal norms as suggested below by researchers such as Wawrytko (2019); Curry (2017) and hooks (2004):

- Recognize and acknowledge the existence and effects of patriarchy, both on themselves and on others, and to question and critique the dominant or normative assumptions and narratives about gender roles and relations. Some men have participated in campaigns and movements that raise awareness and they educate themselves and others about gender issues and violence.

- Express and embrace their emotions, feelings and vulnerability, and to seek and offer support and care when needed, without fear of being judged or ridiculed as weak or feminine. Some men have engaged in spaces and activities that allow them to share and explore their inner lives and experiences.
- Celebrate and respect the diversity and complexity of their own and others' gender identities and expressions, and to avoid or challenge the stereotypes, labels or pressures that are imposed on them or others by the patriarchal system.
- Support and ally with women and other genders who are marginalized or oppressed by patriarchy, and to listen and learn from their perspectives and stories, without trying to dominate or speak for them.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on gendered stereotypes that rest on socially-constructed dominant masculinity and dominant femininity that dictate that men should be dominant and assertive, while women should be submissive and nurturing. Gendered blind spots, which derive from dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, contribute to discrimination, inequality and injustice for both genders (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021). The persistence of harmful traditional practices, such as FGC and widow cleansing rituals, disproportionately violates the rights and health of women and girls, but they also have harmful consequences for men (Darkwah, Thorsen, and Pambè, 2022). Another practice that exploits women and does not benefit the man is Nyumba Ntobhu marriage among the Kuria, where a young woman is impregnated by a man who has no claim over the child, while an older and influential woman benefits from becoming a grandmother (Opoku, 2017). These practices in some African patriarchal societies undermine gender equality. Although the men are not direct beneficiaries in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, older women engage them in the practice in the interests of perpetuation of patriarchal norms and values, that privilege boys over girls and support the male line of descent.

Generally, women's narratives of abuse indicate clearly why they do not readily claim the rights to protect themselves from violence in the home or elsewhere. The way in which men exert power and control over women in abusive relationships threatens the constitutional rights of women, including their right to dignity, bodily integrity, and freedom of expression, association, and movement, as well as the right to be free from all forms of violence from either public policy or private sources (Rasool, 2021: 161). What this study highlights is the normalizing power of patriarchy, particularly within the so-called private sphere. While the women, across all three of the traditional practices – FGC, women-to-women marriage and widow cleansing, are on the receiving end of abuses and violations, it is women who are the ardent defenders and direct enforcers of such

harmful practices. As torchbearers of the said practices, women's oblivion to their reproduction of patriarchy remains stark. Therefore, until patriarchy is challenged at the root, that is, within the "private sphere", public policy and political gains will have limited impact on the lives of abused women. These stereotypes occur within the context of patriarchy, and it is patriarchal power relations that must change. The truth is that as long as we go on reinforcing the dominant discourse about how powerful men are, men will not be willing to give up their power. There are a range of consequences, as indicated in this chapter, that men suffer on account of patriarchal norms. Women's plight is not going to change without men changing, and men are not going to change if they do not see the disadvantages of patriarchal norms.

Major Conclusions And Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the research and makes recommendations for education, practice, and policy within the designated research focus areas. Given the inter-related nature of the human rights violations, embedded in patriarchal or cultural violence, and the biopsychosocial impacts that underscore the practices, they will be dealt with in their totality. On the basis of preceding arguments about the role of taken-for-granted, common sense assumptions being central to the reproduction of such cultural practices, much of the recommendations rest on the use of emancipatory praxis. However, given that socio-cultural norms are inextricably linked with socio-economic and political conditions, the chapter makes recommendations regarding socio-economic and political governance as well. It concludes with the argument that we need to build better for both women and men if we are to realize the dream of a gender equal world.

The study delves into the intricate discourse surrounding women-to-women violence within the socio-cultural context of the Lake Zone regions in Tanzania. The complexities revealed extend beyond individual powerlessness, as power manifests in complex ways at multiple micro, mezzo and macro levels of society. The patriarchal violence that women disproportionately encounter defies simple categorization into right and wrong; it is not a binary phenomenon. Moreover, it transcends the dichotomy of victims and perpetrators, as women and men are both victims and perpetrators. Instead, the study reflects the dynamics of intersectionality, where gender intersects with other key social criteria, such as age, class, education, social position, marital status and ethnicity. Rooted in critical theory, "intersectionality enables us to examine the social divisions and power relations that affect people's lives" (Sewpaul, 2013: 118). In this chapter, I discuss the key findings of my study on how women-to-women violence is perpetuated and resisted in the patriarchal communities of the Kuria and Kerewe ethnic groups of Tanzania. The power of gender stereotyping and the need to challenge the notion that information deters stereotyping (Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021) are addressed. The cultural practices of female genital cutting (FGC), Nyumba Ntobhu (woman-to-woman marriage), and widow cleansing ritual reveal how some older and influential African women use power over young women in vulnerable circumstances to preserve the rituals that support patriarchal structures.

Using the qualitative research paradigm and ethnomethodology, and informed by critical theory, I delved into the mechanisms and driving forces that sustain these three practices within the socio-cultural context of the Lake Zone regions in Tanzania. By engaging with participants, I uncovered complex gender dynamics. Traditional societies, influenced by various socio-cultural and economic factors, provide the context for women-to-women violence. Both men and women seek to maintain harmony, viewing gendered roles as God-given and inviolate, reflect-

ing a belief in a primordial essence of what it means to be male or female (Sewpaul, 2013; Mushunje and Sewpaul, 2021). Gender and race are socio-political and cultural constructs and people add significance to biological manifestations of race and gender, attaching to them social descriptors and cultural extensions that are accepted as normal (Sewpaul, 2013: 117). This normalization and naturalization perpetuate gender role stereotyping and justifies human rights violations with the refrain, "it's in our culture."

I analyze how the torchbearers, who are the women who perform FGC, widow cleansing rituals and Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, have internalized and reproduced the patriarchal norms and values of their culture through their bodies and actions. These women have used their bodies as spaces in which the dominant ideologies and beliefs of their culture are imprinted (Opoku, 2017). In establishing themselves, these women have constructed and expressed their identity in accordance with the norms and values of their culture (Abdi, 2012; Talle, 1993) as Kuria and Kerewe women. The torchbearers have further imposed the studied practices on the flesh and lives of their people (Opoku, 2017). However, these practices are not only harmful to the physical and psychological well-being of the women involved, but also reinforce the gender inequality and oppression that pervade the Kuria and Kerewe societies. Kisaakye (2002) argued that culture has both positive and negative aspects, as it represents the identity, beliefs, norms, values, and acceptable behavior of a given group. Crentsil (2007) also claimed that customary practices, linked with a rights, duties and roles, are the backbone of social organisation in traditional societies, and a threat to these structures threatens the very fabric of society itself. On the other hand, the patriarchal structures in traditional societies, which are influenced by various socio-cultural and economic factors, not only put women at risk of violence from men; they foster women-to-women violence.

Portraying African traditions, values, and beliefs as timeless and primordial denies African people the capacity for reflexivity, rational thought, and agency – a perpetuation of colonial constructs that Afrocentricity vehemently rejects (Molefe, 2017; Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). In the African traditional practices, there is a pre-eminent respect for authority, elders and customs, and there is a tendency to conflate fear with respect -and thus the misuse of values like Ubuntu (Ntshwarang and Sewpaul, 2021). Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021) reinforce this perspective, emphasizing the impact of cultural constraints. These constraints include claims to a primordial essence and an essentialized cultural identity, which underlie human rights violations, socio-economic deprivation, and the consumerist ideology fostered by neoliberalism. Importantly, these intersecting constrains affect each other. The Afrocentric paradigm, rooted in human dignity, mutuality, reciprocity, and respect, stands in stark contrast with those discriminatory values that underlie patriarchal violence and violating traditional practices. It rejects the inferior treatment of women, children, and individuals with mental or physical disabilities—groups often subjected to human rights violations. Despite the strides made by women's movements in Tanzania to challenge patriarchy and promote gender

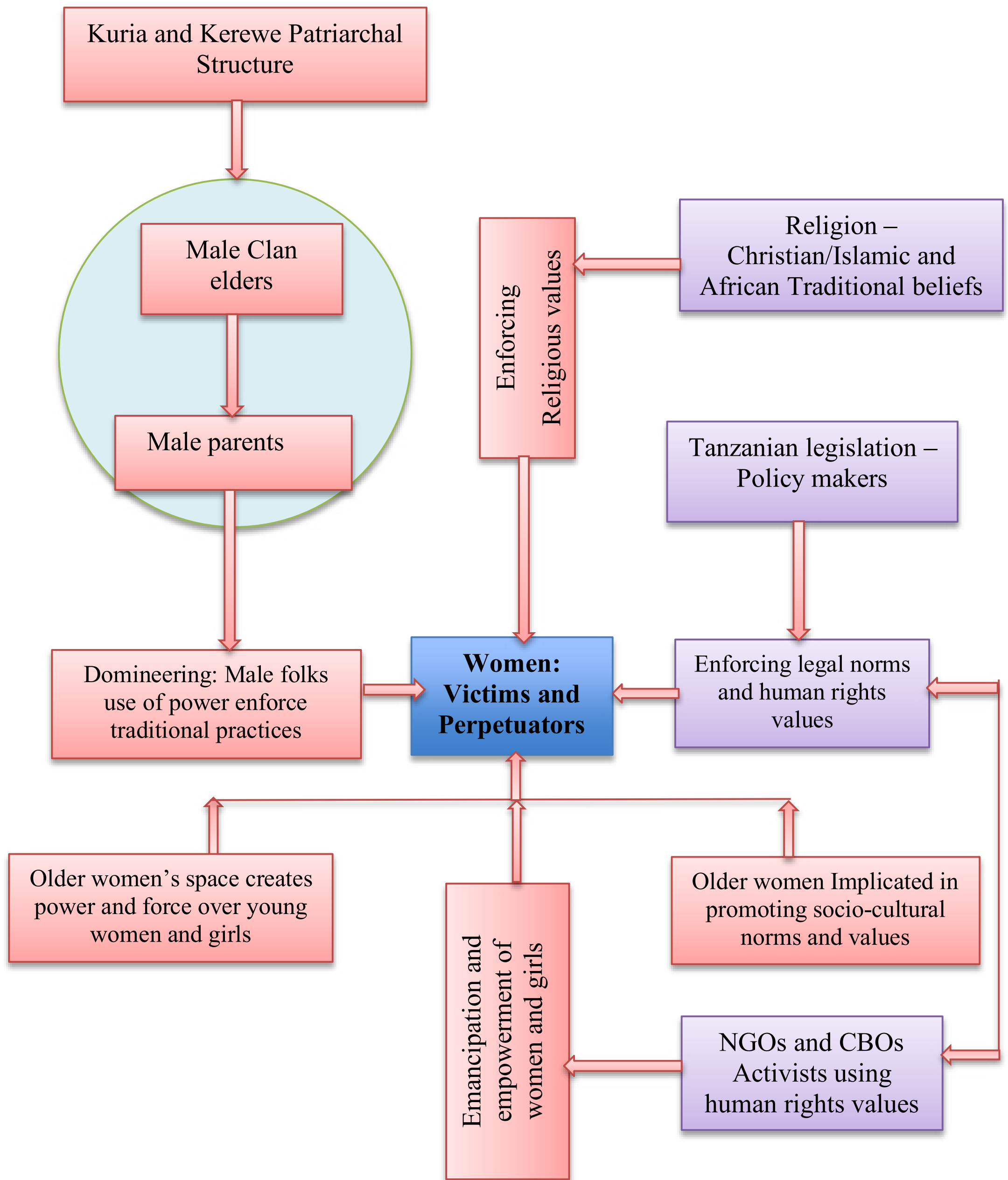
equality, many abused women continue to suffer from harmful practices such as the FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and widow cleansing rituals (Molefe, 2017).

The narratives of abuse shared by the women in this study underscore a critical gap between Tanzania's constitutional rights and protective legislations and their practical implementation. In cases of domestic violence, these rights can often feel like mere words on paper. Bridging this gap remains an essential task for achieving genuine justice and comprehensive protection for all (Molefe, 2017). Furthermore, the power wielded by certain men and influential women over those in abusive relationships and vulnerable positions violates women's constitutional rights. These rights include dignity, equality, bodily integrity, freedom of expression, association, and movement, as well as the right to be free from violence in both the public and private spheres, (Rasool, 2021; Opoku, 2017) with the distinction between the private and the public being, all too often, blurred.

The regulations and sanctions surrounding traditional practices have ensnared women in the studied communities, leaving them to suffer in silence. Consequently, a culture of silence prevails in most patriarchal societies regarding the types of violence embedded in these practices. The crucial question arises: *'Do women recognize their role in perpetuating violence against other women?'* The study's findings suggest that while elderly women acknowledge the harm inflicted on a woman's body through the traditional rituals, they consider it their duty to promote these practices, largely on account of them naturalizing the world around them. The study also revealed that men, particularly clan elders, who were also aware of the actual and potential harms, had normalized patriarchy and gendered roles. Thus, the argument by Mushunje and Sewpaul (2021) that imparting information, in itself, is unlikely to deter people from maintaining the practices. The women did not recognize their involvement as perpetuating violence due to the weight of tradition. To combat violence against women within this socio-cultural context, it is imperative to challenge Kuria and Kerewe women to reflect on their roles in preserving and perpetuating these practices.

These findings raised ethical dilemmas regarding my role as a researcher, particularly in facilitating participants' deconstruction and reconstruction of gender norms, as was the experience of Mushunje and Sewpaul (2021). The study underscores the profound influence of culture, generational dynamics, community norms and poverty. Furthermore, it highlights how religious beliefs and human rights values shape individual identities. Notably, gendered violence in this socio-cultural context emerges as a social problem deeply rooted in patriarchal structures that perpetuate harmful norms. Thus, my adoption and use of hook's (2013) concept of patriarchal violence. Figure 8.1 below illustrates a conceptual summary of the empirical findings.

Figure 8. 1 Mechanisms and Driving Forces in Kuria and Ukerewe Patriarchal Structured Communities



The above illustration depicts the patriarchal structure within the Kuria and Ukerewe communities, specifically focusing on its impact on women and girls. It is a simplistic portrayal that does not depict how the perpetuation of harmful

cultural practices intersect with socio-economic deprivation in powerful ways, as is evident in the empirical findings of this study. The empirical findings revealed that dominant males and influential females exert power over young women and girls, particularly those in poor and vulnerable positions, in the studied communities. Religious organisations also perpetuate the three practices studied by using socio-cultural norms and religious values as mechanisms. Other factors that influence the practices include the actions and policies of government officials and the interventions and campaigns of NGO and CBO activists. These actors aim to eradicate the practices and empower women and girls through legal norms and human rights values. However, these efforts sometimes reinforce the patriarchal structures that underlie the practices.

Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021) argue that there is a richness and value to the African philosophical world view that, if abided by, would prevent the reproduction of customs and traditions that violate human rights. While culture may have negative aspects, it also serves as a way of life, representing identity, beliefs, norms, values, and acceptable behavior (Kisaakye, 2002: 282). My understanding of Kuria and Kerewe cultures aligns with Abdi's (2012) perspective: individual women can perpetuate tradition. Abdi identifies two ways they do so. First, by constructing an identity that reflects embedded social views after undergoing rituals that "embody cultural beliefs" (Abdi, 2012: 148). Second, by recognizing the inseparable link between individual and social minds in the African context—echoing Mbiti's (1994) statement: '*I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am*.' Researchers such as Mbiti (1994) and Gyekye (1996) have delved into the African understanding of individuality, conceptualizing it as a delicate interplay between the *'I'* and the communal *'we.'* This dynamic explains how individual identity coexists within the broader community context. Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021), drawing on the thesis of Bauman and Levinas, confirm that in the African context, to be responsible means to make oneself available in service of the other in such a way that one's own life is intrinsically linked with that of others. Thus, Afrocentricity, inscribed with Ubuntu and being for the other, is supported by Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021) as an authentic cultural basis which, if reclaimed and upheld, can contribute to stemming human rights abuses that happen in the name of tradition.

The harmful aspects of the rituals of FGC, widow cleansing, and Nyumba Ntobhu marriage have profound impacts on the people involved, and they involve many actors. Cohen (2013: 14–15) calls this an "atrocity triangle": a situation where there are victims, perpetuators, and bystanders. Victims are those who suffer from the atrocities, either by chance or by design. Perpetuators are those who commit or support the atrocities, but often deny or justify their actions. Bystanders are those who witness or learn about the atrocities, but do not intervene or report them. Cohen argues that these roles are not fixed, and that bystanders can become victims or perpetuators, and that perpetuators and bystanders can share a culture of denial. The narratives show that there are deeply entrenched cultural beliefs that sustain these practices in the communities. The bystanders

face a dilemma between following the legal regulations regarding their duty to report what they see and staying silent and complicit. These issues remain unresolved and contentious in a context where the preservation of tradition and custom is privileged over human rights violations.

Cohen (2013: 5) described this psychology of 'turning a blind eye' or 'looking the other way' as a tricky matter. He said that this implies that we have access to reality, but choose to ignore it because it is convenient to do so. We know, but at the same time we don't know. He called this form of denial implicatory denial, and it can be seen in how the rituals of FGC and widow cleansing are carried out and understood in the Kuria and Ukerewe socio-cultural context. For example, all the rituals of the practices are presented to the society members in a mysterious way that reflects implicatory denial. Lastly, Cohen (2013) asserted that cultural denials are not entirely private or officially organized by society. Whole societies may fall into a collective mode of denial without being instructed what to think about (or what not to think about) and without being punished for 'knowing' the wrong things. Societies reach unwritten agreements about what can be publicly remembered and acknowledged (Opoku, 2017). Hall (cited in Sewpaul, 2013) asserts that although ideology is non-conscious, it is, unfortunately, about the only consciousness we possess. It is, therefore, understandable that women and men live in denial and are unaware of their roles and complicities in reproducing patriarchal violence. This dynamic, which makes people obscure to themselves, calls for Freireian-Gramscian forms of emancipatory praxis, rather than mere information giving (Sewpaul, 2013).

Freire (1996) argued that pedagogy is constantly created and recreated through struggle. His thesis on the internalization of oppression and its manifestations, resonate with the question I posed in the introduction chapter: "How come the oppressed becomes the oppressor?". He claimed that only when women realize that they are 'hosts' of the oppressor, can they participate in the 'midwifery' of their liberating pedagogy. However, this participation is impossible as long as women live in a contradictory duality, where to be is to be like the oppressor, and to be like is to be the oppressor (Freire, 1996: 48). Dominated by fear of freedom, they reject appealing to others or listening to the appeals of others, or even to the appeals of their conscience (Opoku, 2017; Freire, 1996).

The analysis of these practices revealed the importance of social work practice that respects cultural diversity as a core value and engages with the debates on universal human rights and cultural relativism (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021; Opoku, 2017). Patriarchy and stereotypical gender roles are not fixed but vary across contexts and are influenced by both women and men and inter-twined with socio-economic factors (Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). Therefore, the socio-economic and political structures within neoliberal capitalist constraints that limit women's agency and choices must be examined and addressed. For instance, educating women about how FGC violates their rights and harms their health may have little impact if FGC is the only source of income for the *Ngari-*

ba. Likewise, fear of dispossession and destitution are huge factors that coerce widows into engaging in non-consensual, unprotected sexual cleansing rituals with strange men under humiliating circumstances. Poverty is also a factor that influences men to serve as cleansers. The commodification of young women's bodies to be traded in the interests of older women (who themselves fear poverty and lack of care in their old ages) and the perpetuation of patriarchy was most poignant in the Nyumba Ntobhu marriages, as the young women were sold into these marriages to try to alleviate the dire poverty of their families. Under conditions of deep socio-economic deprivation, it is easier to manipulate the consciousness and identities of people and, as the results of this study show, instilling fears of ill-luck and bad omens for non-compliance prove to pay dividends for the perpetrators of traditionally harmful practices. It is thus critical that while the taken-for-granted, normalized assumptions around gender and culture are challenged and changed, there is equal attention to the socio-economic circumstances that play huge roles in sustaining these practices.

Recommendations

Recommendations that relate to all the three practices in this chapter bring together the discussion on gender and patriarchy. Afrocentricity and emancipatory social work, as antidotes to colonial power and dehumanization, are advocated for by Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021) to challenge cultural practices that violate human rights, such as female genital cutting, widow cleansing rituals, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, witchcraft accusations, and homophobia. These authors also affirm Indigenous knowledges and practices, and explore the intersections of politics, economics, race, class, gender, and cultural expression in Africa. Some of the recommendations in this section are drawn from their work.

Empowering Women in Tanzania: Leveraging Indigenous Knowledge and Grassroots Approaches

To transform this landscape, it is essential to address cultural imperatives tied to the Kuria and Kerewe families (in the lake zone region of Tanzania) and clan honour, particularly within the male collective. By challenging these norms, we can pave the way for a more equitable society—one that upholds individual and family honour while dismantling harmful power structures. Recognizing the importance of Indigenous knowledges, as proposed by Freire (1996) and Sewpaul and Kreitzer (2021), is crucial in understanding and addressing these practices within their specific contexts. Freire's approach, which created social awareness among oppressed peasant groups in Brazil, emphasizes the need to appreciate local traditions without judgment. In seeking social justice for oppressed and marginalized women in these socio-cultural contexts, adopting a bottom-up approach (as proposed by Larsen et al., 2014) and leveraging Indigenous knowledges (following Freire's principles) can lead to more sustainable solutions for the socio-cultural challenges faced by women in the lake zone regions of Tanzania.

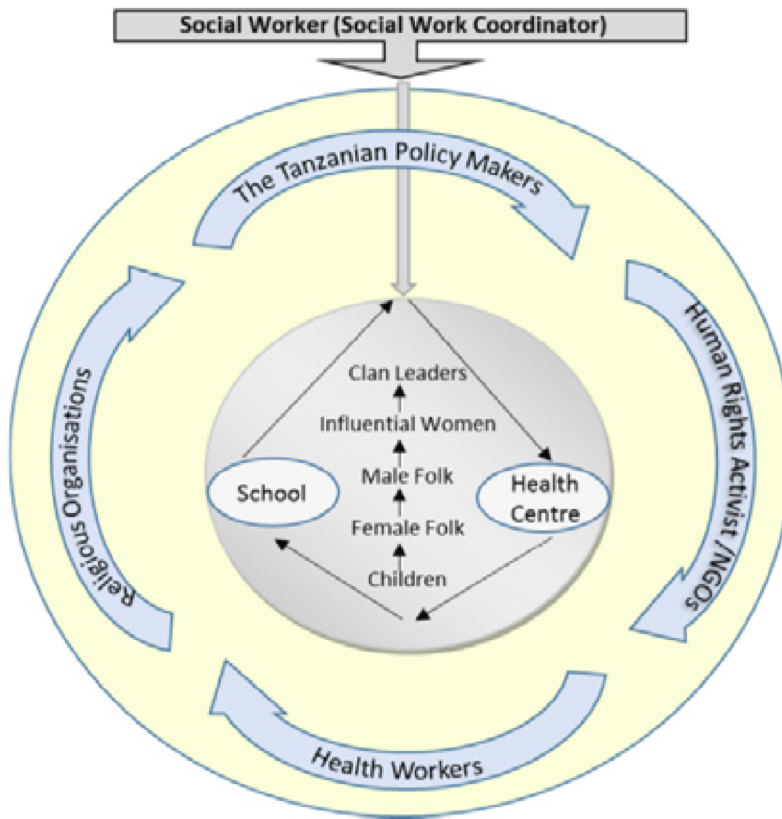
Larsen et al. (2014: 9) emphasize that "…change from below is based on the principles of participation and citizen's involvement." My observation reveals that despite numerous efforts over the years by religious organisations, Tanzanian policymakers, NGOs, and human rights activists to eradicate harmful practices, success has often eluded them. These well-intentioned endeavours have inadvertently overridden local communities and disrupted the very foundations of community-based living (Opoku, 2017). The impact of colonization and contemporary globalization has been particularly detrimental to Indigenous people, as Larsen et al. (2014) aptly describe.

To address this, endorsing participatory grassroots approaches becomes crucial, emphasizing a community's collective agency and recognizing that participation holds inherent power. Drawing inspiration from the theses of Freire and Gramsci, Sewpaul and Larsen (2014) advocate for social workers to assume the role of organic intellectuals. They contend that development often requires skilled facilitators due to the internalization and normalization of oppression and privilege. Ideology, shaped by social, cultural, and political constructs, plays a pivotal role. Social workers can disrupt dominant thinking by providing formal and informal learning opportunities, employing consciousness-raising techniques. The social work profession, bound by ethical conduct and collaborative decision-making, equips practitioners with the knowledge, skills, values and personal qualities needed to address complex human challenges where solutions may vary significantly (Foote et al., 2013).

Social Work and Emancipatory Praxis

To combat these harmful traditional practices, a holistic approach involving collaboration with existing organisations working on awareness creation and heightening critical consciousness is essential. Additionally, tackling issues within families (e.g. pressures to conform to customary norms) and outside communities (potential isolation for non-compliance) requires innovative strategies. Social workers, well-versed in conflict-resolution and mediation skills, ethical standards and legal frameworks, can play a crucial role in community building within the Lake Zone regions. Sewpaul, Mdamba and Seepamore (2021: 42) assert that, "social workers have the requisite skills in empathy, active listening, facilitation, mediation, and interpersonal relationships to build bridges across cultures, to engage people in such a way that the harmful aspects of culture are confronted while retaining those aspects that are positive, and that allow for intergenerational cultural continuity and human flourishing." Therefore, I recommend short- and long-term networking with social workers as coordinators with all the entities involved in community building in the Lake Zone regions, as illustrated in Figure 8. 2 below:

Figure 8. 2 Social Workers Networking with all Entities Involved in Community Building.



Networking tries to connect interpersonal work with developing people's relationships within community work or micro practice (Payne, 2014: 202–203). Payne argues that it may be a basis for practice in developing partnerships with service users of a community with a multi-professional teamwork approach. He perceives social workers as potential community brokers, able to link users with a variety of community resources; this has links with empowerment practice, which could be used in networking as a recommended skill for the social workers in the studied communities. However, this alone is not enough to challenge harmful social norms and practices. Therefore, it is necessary to promote and advocate for more inclusive and participatory processes and mechanisms that can address the gendered dimensions and impacts of human rights violations. Based on my field experience, I make the following proposal for social workers in Tanzania:

> In previous years, social workers were not widely recognized as community brokers in the Lake Zone regions of Tanzania, primarily due to the shortage of personnel in the profession. As discussed in Chapter 2, I recommend intensive training and recruitment of social workers, emphasizing their role as fieldworkers, community brokers and change agents rather than mere bureaucrats. Their active involvement in wom-

en's and men's emancipation programs can drive essential changes in customary practices. A thorough understanding of cultural norms *vis-à-vis* universally recognized human rights endorsements will enable social workers to coordinate effectively and fulfil their role as cultural mediators, as Sewpaul (2016) suggested.

In order to fulfil their roles as change agents, community brokers and cultural mediators, social work education and practice need to make a radical shift to embrace an emancipatory praxis which, at its core, focuses on transforming common-sense, taken-for-granted assumptions into empirically tested good sense, primarily through Freireian-Gramscian forms of critical consciousness-raising and politicization of the self (Sewpaul, 2007; 2013; Larsen and Sewpaul, 2014; Sewpaul and Kreitzer, 2021). Sewpaul and Nkozi Ndlovu (2020: 109-110) assert that emancipatory social work focuses on "liberation from the constraints of one's own thinking, recognizing the inter-connectedness between individual consciousness and societal consciousness, and the importance of transforming both, directed towards deliberative, collective emancipatory action."

So important is this imperative that it is included in the International Association of Schools of Social Work's (2018) Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles with Principles 4.7 and 4.8 reading as:

> Social workers recognize that dominant socio-political and cultural discourses and practices contribute to many taken-for-granted assumptions and entrapments of thinking, which manifest in the normalization and naturalization of a range of prejudices, oppressions, marginalization, exploitation, violence and exclusions. (Principle, 4.7).
>
> Social workers recognize that developing strategies to heighten critical consciousness that challenge and change taken-for-granted assumptions for ourselves and the people we engage with forms the basis of everyday ethical, anti-oppressive practice (Principle, 4.8).

Possible direct ways in which a wide range of stakeholders, including policy-makers, various NGOs and civil society organisations, can work towards the emancipation and empowerment of women and men are:

1. Support and empower the voices and agency of those who are marginalized or oppressed by gendered blind spots. Some initiatives have used networks, platforms or movements to amplify and mobilize their perspectives and stories in the lake zone region of Tanzania. For example, NGOs such as Children Dignity Forum (CDF), Haki Sawa, Mikono Yetu, etc, have collaborated with local and other national entities to advance human rights.

2. Promote and advocate for more inclusive and participatory processes and mechanisms that can address the gendered dimensions and impacts of human rights violations. Some initiatives have used campaigns, dialogues or recommendations to foster dialogue, healing and reconciliation among different gender

3. Establish counselling services for women and girls directly affected by these practices, providing trauma-informed care, mental health support, and assistance in coping with the psychological effects of these practices. As the women heal, they can be trained and empowered to become educators, advocates and change agents in their communities. Sewpaul and Nkosi Ndlovu (2020) demonstrate the power of this approach in the area of HIV/AIDS.

4. Train counsellors and social workers on these and related issues to work with individuals, families, groups, and communities using culture—and gender-sensitive approaches in direct service delivery and community mobilization and prevention initiatives.

The above and the following proposals made by researchers of 28 TooMany (2012: 61-62) will yield maximum benefit when informed by emancipatory pedagogical strategies: i) community facilitators must adopt a non-judgmental human rights approach; (ii) community awareness raising of the harmfulness of the practice; (iii) a decision to abandon, for example, the studied practices, which would ideally be a collective decision by the entire community; (iv) the requirement of community public affirmation of abandonment of harmful practices; (v) intercommunity diffusion of the decision; and (vi) a supportive change-enabling environment, including the commitment of government. An emancipatory praxis would require that we critically interrogate the primary justifications provided for the continuity of these practices in this study. Sewpaul, Mdamba and Seepamore (2021: 42) argue that to attribute the negative aspects of these practices to "colonialism and, at the same time, claim a timelessness and primordial essence for (their practices) is a paradox. It is incumbent on Africans … to exercise agency, undo colonial legacies, and not remain slaves to colonial and imperialist impositions."

Sewpaul and Larsen (2014) argue that emancipatory praxis is directed at getting people to reflect on external sources of oppression and/or privilege, which holds the possibility of increasing people's self-esteem, courage and conviction so that they, themselves, begin to confront structural sources of poverty, inequality, marginalization, oppression and exclusion. The emphasis is on working *with*, rather than for people so that they become the agents of change and their own advocates. It will take joined-up social action at multiple system levels to engender and sustain socio-cultural, political and economic change that enhances human and planetary well-being and flourishing. There are no shortcuts to engaging in these initiatives and achieving these goals. They require huge investments of time, energy and resources and cannot be achieved within the dictates of neoliberalism

and new public management (NPM), that are increasingly characterizing health and social services. The neoliberal demands for deregulation, privatization and reduced state expenditure and intervention, erode education, health and welfare systems, accompanied by NPM emphases on standardization, check-lists, bureaucratic control and efficiency - meaning doing more with lesser resources in the shortest period of time, (Dlamini and Sewpaul, 2015; Ferguson and Lavalette 2016; Gatwiri, Amboko and Okolla, 2020; Kamali and Jönsson, 2018; Sewpaul, 2015).

Recommendations and Possible Ways to Combat FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu Marriage and Widow Cleansing Ritual

To effectively combat FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu, and Widow Cleansing Rituals, and to challenge and change patriarchal power, gender stereotypes and dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, and to promote awareness, I propose the following approaches:

1. **Addressing these harmful practices in the School Curriculum**: At all educational levels in Tanzania, the traditional ritual practices of FGC, Nyumba Ntobhu marriage, and widowhood cleansing should be thoughtfully integrated into the school curriculum. Boys and girls must receive education about their cultural heritage, including a comprehensive understanding of the values, implications, advantages, and disadvantages associated with these practices. Armed with this knowledge, girls and young women and boys and men can begin to recognize their complicities in reproducing gender stereotypes and harmful practices, and make choices to be part of the solution.

2. **Educational Curriculum Enhancement**: Simultaneously, we should enhance the educational curriculum by explicitly incorporating gender and harmful traditional practices as topics in schools. Recognizing that traditional rituals are deeply ingrained across generations, integrating them into educational resources demonstrates a deliberate effort by the government to break the cycle of harmful traditional rituals acceptability and normalization. By educating primary, high school and university students about the harmful aspects of traditional practices, we empower them to reject practices inherited from their parents and other perpetuators. Writing in relation to the social work profession, the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training specifically call for students to be schooled in a basic human rights approach (Sewpaul and Jones, 2005: 228), with the following footnote accompanying this standard:

> Such an approach might facilitate constructive confrontation and change where certain cultural beliefs, values and traditions violate people's basic human rights. As culture is socially constructed and dynamic, it is subject to deconstruction and change. Such constructive confrontation, deconstruction and change may be facilitated through

a tuning into, and an understanding of particular values, beliefs and traditions and via critical and reflective dialogue with members of that cultural group vis-à-vis broader human rights issues.

3. **Religious organisations** in Tanzania have utilized their places of worship to preach Christian and Islamic values and raise awareness about the harmful aspects of traditional practices. Religious discourses and practices must support and promote women's rights as human rights, and guard against injunctions that reinforce gender stereotypes and the subordination of women. Women and girls and men and boys must be sensitized to reflect on the pros and cons of traditional rituals. Religious spaces of influence can be used to encourage and support community members to replace harmful practices with meaningful symbolic, non-harmful, non-sexist rituals within their practising communities.

4. **Culturally sensitive and contextually informed interventions.** Based on the findings, I recommend implementing intervention programs informed by a deep understanding of the socio-cultural values, norms, and beliefs underlying this practice within the local context. Faith-Based Organisations, NGOs, and CBOs can play a crucial role in these interventions. As pointed out by Opoku (2017), Africanus (2012), and Gruenbaum (2001), efforts to combat harmful practices will only be effective if they are culturally sensitive and contextually informed. In doing so, we must remember that "continuity and affirmation of ethnic identities can be assured through cultural elements such as food, music, dance, dress, theatre, celebratory non-sexist birth and marriage rituals, and non-punitive, non-sexist cultural mourning practices. Developing critical consciousness through dialogue, rather than foreclosing debate on the grounds that 'it's in our culture,' may lead to critical action" (Sewpaul, Mdamba, and Seepamore, 2021: 41).

5. **Respecting the Institution of Elders**: Within the Kuria and the Kerewe community, the institution of elders commands immense respect. Believed to possess mythical powers, their words are considered the law of the land. To address these harmful practices, I propose that at the district level, the district government collaborates with elders and grassroots organisations. Together, they can challenge the social norms and behaviours perpetuating harmful rituals.

6. **Address Poverty:** Providing alternative income opportunities for the *Ngariba* (the practitioners of female genital cutting), the sexual cleansers, and the parents who rely on these practices as sources of income could reduce their prevalence. Poverty is one of the drivers of these harmful practices as well as of the practice of women-to-women marriages. Whether directly or indirectly, bride price is implicated in all these practices, so the whole bride price system must be called into question. Writing in relation to the lobola (bride price) system in South Africa, Sewpaul, Mdamba and Seepamore (2021), while ac-

knowledging the complexities, detail the socio-cultural and economic precursors to the practice and its detrimental consequences for men, women and children. Addressing unemployment and poverty, which are inextricably linked with these practices in Tanzania, would call for a fundamental reordering of the economy to support the International Labour Organisation's decent work agenda and to ensure social security benefits and rights for citizens.

7. **Gender rights, patriarchy, and infertility,** I propose an alternative to the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage practice. Instead of adhering to this tradition, sonless women could consider adopting male children through the legal process. This approach aligns with the Tanzanian law of adoption (as outlined in the Adoption of Children Act, Revised Edition, 2002) and prioritizes the best interests of the children involved. By adopting male children, women would avoid the burden of paying the bride price. Additionally, it would mitigate the risks associated with abusive marriages that women might be unable to leave due to the bride price (Tungaraza, 2005: 313).

8. **Legal Reform in Tanzania:** Unfortunately, the Tanzania Marriage Act neither recognizes nor protects women and children involved in the woman-to-woman marriage institution; neither does it outlaw the practice. This must be addressed through inclusive community dialogue and decision-making. I also recommend that policymakers create an atmosphere conducive to assisting tribal leaders in restructuring the old Kuria marriage system. Furthermore, educating Kuria tribal leaders about the nuances of the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage system might enhance their ability to inform policymakers. Additionally, Tanzanian laws should be accessible to all members of society and presented in a clear and understandable manner across local languages and dialects.

9. **Implementing the EAC Act**: As a member of the East African Community (EAC), Tanzania should fully enforce the EAC Act. Strengthening the national legislation involves aligning it with the comprehensive content of the EAC Act. This alignment ensures protection for women and girls of all ages, not just those under 18 years. Additionally, the law should hold all perpetrators accountable, including medical professionals. Addressing cross-border FGC and widow cleansing and dispossession, criminalizing the failure to report such incidents, and safeguarding uncut women and girls and widows who do not undergo the cleansing rituals from dispossession, exclusion, name-calling and abuse are critical steps emphasized by researchers from 28TooMany (2020).

10. **Acknowledge and celebrate change at the local level:** Showcase and promote the stories and voices of women and men who are making a positive difference for gender balance in Africa, especially in the Kura and Ukerewe communities in the Lake Zone region of Tanzania.

CONCLUSION

FGC, widow inheritance and cleansing and the Nyumba Ntobhu marriage reflect complex dynamics against the backdrop of patriarchal values and beliefs that enable the maintenance of these harmful practices. While women in this study were the torchbearers and direct enforcers of these practices, they enacted their roles within the framework of patriarchal power and imperatives. The normalization and naturalization of dominant gendered discourses that disproportionately impact women means that both women and men remain unaware of their complicities in recreating the same power structures that they might want to dismantle. While there are patriarchal dividends for men, there are, undoubtedly, huge disadvantages that patriarchy engenders for men too. The problem is that women and men are, all too often, unaware of the constraints of patriarchy, particularly on males. Thus, skilled in the use of Freireian-Gramscian forms of emancipatory praxis, much of our efforts must be directed at challenging and changing constraints on thinking at the individual and societal levels. As television, radio and social media are powerful mediums in shaping values, beliefs and choices, these must be monitored to ensure challenges to gender stereotyping and to promote gender equality. By heightening the consciousness of women and men, we can begin a process of challenging dominant socio-cultural and political constructions of gender and the traditional practices that are violating human dignity and human rights. Some of the benefits of these is that they will:

- Improve the well-being and potential of women and girls. Challenging harmful social norms and practices can help women and girls overcome barriers and risks that limit their health, education, and development. It can also empower them to make their own choices and pursue their own goals.

- Advance gender equality and human rights. Challenging harmful social norms and practices can help reduce gender gaps and discrimination that undermine the rights and dignity of women and girls. It can also promote respect and equality for all genders and foster a culture of diversity and inclusion.

- Enhance economic growth and development. Challenging harmful social norms and practices can help unlock the economic potential of women and girls, who account for more than 50 per cent of Africa's population. It can also increase productivity, innovation, and competitiveness in various sectors and markets.

- Contribute to social change and progress. Challenging harmful social norms and practices can help create positive change and progress in society and in the world. It can also inspire others to challenge or change the norms or practices they face and create a ripple effect of transformation.

The recent eradication of the tradition of refunding the bride price in case

of divorce represents a positive step toward protecting the rights of women. By eliminating this practice, young women can avoid being trapped in undesirable circumstances where their rights are violated, whether in a conventional or a Nyumba Ntobhu marriage. However, as this marriage is absent in the Tanzanian Marriage Act, the rights of women married into this institution might be overlooked. In Uganda, where the Supreme Court declared the refund of bride price unconstitutional in the event of divorce, serves as a promising precedent. Given the geographical proximity between Uganda and Tanzania, it is plausible that such progressive initiatives could spread to Tanzania and other parts of Africa. Another instance is that the Women's Situation Room (WSR) has facilitated peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts in several African countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria by engaging women and youth in electoral processes. The WSR has provided a platform for women and youth to monitor, report, and respond to incidents of violence, intimidation, and fraud during elections. The WSR has also advocated for the inclusion of women and youth in decision-making and leadership positions at all levels of governance. I include this here to underscore the fact that achieving gender equality and freedom from violence and human rights abuses in the name of traditions cannot be seen in isolation. It requires a holistic approach to change and development. As discussed in chapter one, SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) is not going to be realized without dedicated attention to the other goals, as all the SDGs are inter-dependent. Sustainable development focuses on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships, which must be conceptualized as integrated and balanced to ensure holistic and cross-sectoral approaches to achieve cultural, economic, social, political and environmental goals.

Gender equality is a dream that can only be realized if both women and men work together to build a better world. Men have a significant role in striving for gender equality, as they can use their power and privilege to challenge the patriarchal beliefs, practices, institutions and structures that drive inequality between men and women. Some of the ways that men can contribute to gender equality are by:

- Acknowledging male privilege and listening to women's experiences and perspectives.
- Showing solidarity and supporting women's movements and organisations that work for gender equality.
- Understanding that the causes of gender inequality are universal and affect everyone.
- Challenging dominant masculinities and embracing alternative forms of masculinity that value respect, empathy, care, love, compassion, vulnerability and cooperation.
- Helping transform power dynamics and sharing their power and resources

with women.

- Supporting girls in taking the lead and providing them with opportunities and spaces to express their opinions and influence decisions.

By playing these roles, men not only help achieve gender equality but also benefit themselves from a more just and inclusive society, as patriarchy and gender role stereotypes do disadvantage boys and men. The importance of the inclusion and empowerment of boys and men is underscored in the previous chapter. Without realizing how patriarchy disadvantages them, men are unlikely to take the initiative to give up their positions of privilege and power. Striving for gender equality, which would eliminate or minimize FGC, widow inheritance and sexual cleansing ritual, and the woman-to-woman marriage, demands that we: challenge and change harmful social norms and practices that reinforce and perpetuate gender inequality; strengthen the legal frameworks that protect girls' and women's rights, ensure their fair and consistent implementation and regular monitoring; address poverty in meaningful and impactful ways; and foster a culture of diversity and inclusion that values both women and men.

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Regina Opoku's
Women on Women Violence in Tanzania:

Current Realities and Future Directions

There are a complex range of intersecting political, economic, and socio-cultural factors that contribute to the violation of women's and children's rights in the African context. Traditional norms and practices are one of them. Traditional beliefs, traditional faith healing and witchcraft are among the cultural beliefs that infringe on women's rights in Tanzania. These traditional practices occur within the confines of patriarchal power relations and dominant cultural beliefs. The cultural practices of female genital cutting, woman-to-woman marriage (locally known as Nyumba Ntobhu marriage), and widow cleansing rituals are less documented phenomena, and dynamics of violence perpetuated by women against women are poorly understood. These cultural and traditional practices are examples of cultural violence perpetuated by women on fellow women in some communities situated along the shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania where these practices are highly prevalent. These beliefs have led to intimidation, psychological isolation, abuse, violence and, in extreme cases, tragedy. Addressing the harmful effects of such practices requires a profound understanding of their enmeshing in cultural, economic, and political contexts, and above how some women remain implicated in gendered violence through attempts to preserve cultural heritage.

In exploring how elderly African women are implicated in this form of gendered violence, this book examines the role that older women in Kuria and Kerewe communities in Tanzania play in promoting traditional practices that are seen as important for political and economic stability and the social well-being of their communities. The physical and psychological implications as well as the exploitation of the bodies of vulnerable women, who undergo the traditional practices, offer significant areas to examine.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Regina Opoku (PhD) is currently a senior research fellow at RRPOA. She earned her PhD in Social Science and Humanities, specializing in Social Work and Policies, from the University of Tampere, Finland. She also holds a Master's degree in Applied Theology from the University of Middlesex (UK). Regina previously lectured in Social Ethics at St. Augustine University of Tanzania and has attended several International Conferences in Europe, Asia, and Africa, presented academic papers, and made poster presentations.

As a Catholic nun and a member of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles (OLA Sisters), Regina has dedicated three decades to missions in Tanzania (since January 1994). During this time, she has taught at various educational levels in Mwanza, Shinyanga, and Simiyo regions. Her involvement extends beyond academia; Regina actively participates in organisations such as the Catholic Women's Association (known in Tanzania as WAWATA), the Catholic Youth Organisation (VIVWWA), and Tanzanian Young Catholic Students (TYCS).

Regina's research interests focus on social and human rights issues within their socio-cultural context. She is particularly passionate about advocating for justice and women's economic empowerment. Her commitment to women's and children's rights has led her to collaborate with NGOs such as KIVULINI, CDF, and MikonoYetu.