The Transformation Ritual

*Discussing the roles of identity and belongingness as causal factors for the continued prevalence of female genital cutting*

Siri Haver
VID Specialized University
Stavanger

Master’s Thesis
Master in Global Studies

Word count: 26,442
May 2018
Copyrights

The author has the copyrights of the report.

Download for private use is allowed.
Abstract

Every year, 3 million girls are at risk of undergoing female genital cutting (FGC) around the globe. FGC has been a topic of interest for several decades, and efforts by governmental bodies, organizations, and researchers have proven effective in some geographies while making no impact in others. An exhaustive majority of girls in Samburu, Kenya, are cut despite the practice’s illegal status in the country and countless awareness campaigns. This study looks at the links between FGC, women’s identity and belongingness. It suggests that the practice is more than a ritual to people in Samburu and that it forms a critical component of their perception of reality. Based on 29 interviews with people of different age-groups, gender, and social class, in addition to observations from Maralal Town in Samburu County, I have tried to answer the following questions: How does female genital cutting influence women’s identity and sense of belonging to the Samburu community? Further, what meaning is attributed female genital cutting as a ritual in the context and what are women’s roles in the society? I have applied the concept of worldview by Paul. G. Hiebert (2008) that seeks to elucidate the idea of how things are presumed to be. People group their thoughts and experiences and organize these categories in a logical way that gives their reality meaning. For instance, as FGC prepares the girls for their primary roles as wives and mothers, it influences what the defining characteristics of womanhood in the community are. From their perspective, an uncut woman is still a child. This is confirmed by the positive change in the treatment of girls after the ritual, which also serves to verify their newly obtained identity and role in society. On the other hand, girls who are not cut, and therefore disobeying social norms, are isolated. Consequently, they lose their membership of the group. The study also argues that reflexive processes, claimed by Anthony Giddens (1991) to be an essential component of what characterizes modern society, have resulted in people questioning, evaluating, and potentially discarding practices that no longer make sense to them. Most of the youths in the study disregarded FGC to a tradition of the past and referred to their newly acquired knowledge of the potentially damaging health consequences of FGC that they had learned about in school. This information contradicts the traditional standpoint that the practice is ‘necessary’ for girls to become women. Most of the youths were of the opinion that the ritual contradicts the digital world they identify with and should consequently be eradicated.
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to all of those who have contributed to this master thesis - thank you.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my informants who shared their stories, knowledge, and experiences with me. You moved me by your openness, enthusiasm, and kindness. To Ismail Ali, thank you for providing excellent translations, help with the logistics, and giving me valuable insights into the culture and the society.

I would also like to acknowledge the support I received from the Ministry of Science and Technology for authorizing the research in Samburu District, as well as the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education in Samburu County for supporting my research. A special thanks to the Research Office of USIU- Africa and Dr. Francis W. Wambalaba.

My supervisor, Marianne Skjortnes, who throughout this process has offered constructive feedback, reflections, and support; thank you.

To Ine Larsen, who made me excited about going to the library in the mornings. Your support was invaluable. Thank you to Ingebjørg Finnbakk who, when I've felt lost, has offered advice.

Thank you, Sumer Homeh, for being my source of inspiration and for believing in me, and Hege Haver, for always offering supporting words of encouragement. A big thank you to the rest of my family and friends who have been there in this process.

A special thanks to Marc Anani-Isaac, for the moral support and help provided before, during, and after the fieldwork, and in the writing process that followed. For always pushing me, believing in me, and for reaching new heights together.

Siri Haver
Bryne, May 2018
Samburu County is highlighted in red (Google maps, 2018).
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Appraisal and research questions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1</td>
<td>Research questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Definitions of concepts</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Previous research</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Contextual backdrop</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Terminology</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Methodological approach</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Research design</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Qualitative approach &amp; observation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Choosing location &amp; respondents</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2</td>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Using a translator</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Interview guides &amp; execution</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>Analytical approach</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Reflexivity &amp; research ethics</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.1</td>
<td>Reflexivity</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.2</td>
<td>Research ethics</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.3</td>
<td>The quality of the research</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Theoretical framework</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The concept of late modern age and identity</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.1</td>
<td>The post-traditional society</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.2</td>
<td>The reflexive self</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.3</td>
<td>The presentation of self</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1.4</td>
<td>Shared identity</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>How people become who they are</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1</td>
<td>Worldview</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2</td>
<td>Cultural influences</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.3</td>
<td>Social conventions</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>A summary of the theoretical framework</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Presentation of data</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Description of the informants</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>How do people understand their reality?</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1</td>
<td>Culture, traditions and rituals</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2</td>
<td>Politics and the local authority</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Female genital cutting in Samburu</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1</td>
<td>The segregated women</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2</td>
<td>Poverty: A driving force?</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Gender dynamics</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Modernity &amp; knowledge</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Female genital cutting in Samburu</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction

There are an estimated 200 million girls and women who have undergone female genital cutting (hereafter FGC) globally, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) (World Health Organization, 2018a). It is unknown when, why, and where the practice originated from, and academics tend to disagree on this, but one can assume that it has existed for at least 2000 years in the area of Sudan and/or Egypt (Abusharaf, 2006; Talle, 2010, p. 30/31). Today, the practice is predominately linked to marriage, reproduction, fertility, sexuality, and complementary between the sexes (Talle, 2010). For instance, an uncut woman in Samburu is considered a child and is therefore not marriageable. Also, in many communities including the Samburu tribe, cutting is a way to safeguard women's sexuality and prevent them from engaging in inappropriate sexual behavior (Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2000, p. 50; Talle, 2010, p. 55/57). The short-term health implications of the procedure often include haemorrhage, infections, blood loss, while long-term effects include genito-urinary problems (Perry & Schenck, 2001, p. 158; Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2000, p. 14; Talle, 2010, p. 67).

It is important to note that collecting data on the medical consequences is challenging and might be misleading. This is due to people's inability to access health facilities, fear of legal ramifications, and since many only seek medical help if the complications are severe and prolonged (Dareer, 1982; Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2000, p. 15; Toubia, 1993).

The practice was labelled a human rights violation in 1993. The reason for this categorization was the apparent health repercussions the cutting of the female genitalia has on women's health, as well as the violence incurred by women during the procedure (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2013). Since then, a significant number of NGOs, IGOs and government bodies have dedicated resources to fight the prevalence of FGC across the globe. Campaigns and workshops are held to create awareness of the health implications of FGC and how it violates women and girl's universal human rights (Talle, 2010, p. 67/79). In some countries, the practice is illegal with stringent penalties, and the topic has been introduced into the educational system, informing children about the dangers and what to do if at risk (Ibid., p. 80). However, 25 years after it was categorized as a violation of women's rights, an estimated three million girls are in prospect of being cut every year (World Health Organization, 2018b).
In Kenya, the overall trend shows that the prevalence of FGC has fallen, however, in specific tribes such as the Somalis, the Kisii, and the Samburu, the numbers have barely declined (Too Many, 2016). While the government and NGOs have taken actions as mentioned above regarding integrating FGC into the educational, medical, and legal systems, these efforts have been successful with some ethnic groups, while having no influence on others. Much of the research conducted in Samburu tries to understand why this is. Different factors, such as men’s influence (Sjodin, 2017), the use and meaning of body ornaments (Khasandi, Mahero, Ndegwa, Mubia, & Wakoko, 2014), and education (Karanu, Hadija, & Joshia, 2015) are amongst those explored. However, in evaluating how external factors influence the practice, the focus has shifted away from those whose bodies experience it.

In this thesis, I argue that it is necessary to evaluate the link between FGC, womanhood, and identity. By examining social structures in a community, such as culture, poverty, and access to education, and their influence on FGC, it is possible to create a link between these and the community’s perception of womanhood. Through an understanding of the practice itself, what a woman is perceived to be, and how these influence and shape identity, we can better comprehend the prevalence of FGC in Samburu.

1.1 Appraisal and research questions

This study focuses on how FGC influences women’s identity and their sense of belonging to the group. Both FGC, identity, and collective identity are substantial subjects, and it has, therefore, been necessary to delimit the scope of the study. First and foremost, this research encompasses people living in, or on the outskirts of, the urban center of Samburu called Maralal. One can assume that these people are more exposed and have greater access to technology, education, and information than many of those living in more rural areas. This study seeks to contribute knowledge relating to how FGC relates to women’s identities, and the foundation of this research comprises of a social-anthropological approach combined with applications from sociological teachings. Consequently, material and information of the practice concerning the medical – or educational field is kept to a minimum. Further, the study does not take into account clan membership, polygamy and their potential influence on FGC, nor does it examine practices such as child-marriage (see Wanyoike, 2011). The sensitive nature of this study has resulted in a focus and emphasis on being thoughtful and
tolerant, and making room for intricate stories, and perceptions that differ from conventional Western views. I have wholeheartedly attempted to communicate culture, experiences, and backgrounds appropriately through this dissertation. Built from a micro-perspective, the study concentrates on the individual’s experiences, perspectives, and insights, as these reveal the link between FGC and the person. But as different factors, such as poverty and inadequate access to education, are covered in the study as potential influences of FGC prevalence, the study therefore also provides a macro-view of the topic. I have not included the psychological understanding of identity and identity-creation as this goes beyond the scope of this study.

1.1.1 Research questions

The prevalence of FGC in Samburu is a social challenge, as it accompanies young-marriage, children giving birth, school dropouts, poverty, and severe health issues. The prevalence of the ritual is still high in specific communities today, and there is no indication that this is about to change. Despite efforts at integrating an alternative rite of passage and holding workshops educating community members of all ages and genders on the dangers of FGC, these numbers seem to persist. The question then becomes how well we understand the meaning and function FGC has in the context it is practiced and for the people who obey this custom.

This study will carefully consider what encourages FGC’s continuation and women's stature in comparison to men's. By looking at the gender hierarchy, as well as other forms of social stratification, this study aims to explain how these factors influence decision-making and actions carried out, as well as the meaning these convey for personal and group identification. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the understanding of what encourages FGC’s continuation in specific communities, and thus help organizations working on the issue to become more efficient in their work.

Based on the knowledge gap described above, I will attempt to answer the following question:

i. How do female genital cutting influence women’s identity and sense of belonging to the Samburu community?
The following questions aim at providing context:

ii. What meaning is attributed female genital cutting as a ritual, in the Samburu context?

iii. What are women’s roles in the society?

Answering these questions will contribute to the scarce information available on FGC's influence on identity within the Samburu community. On a more significant scale, this information might prove valuable to understand why individual communities resist abandoning their traditions, despite awareness of the potential effects it has on women.

1.2 Definitions of concepts

**Beading:**

(..) Beading sanctions a non-marital sexual relationship between Samburu men in the ‘warrior’ age group and young Samburu girls who are not yet eligible for marriage. It involves Samburu warriors giving specialized beads to an uncircumcised girl to signify the commencement of a sexual relationship (Samburu Women Trust, 2016, p. 3).

**Culture:** This study understands culture as a dynamic concept; something that is continuously changing through human interaction. Thomas Hylland Eriksen defines culture as the interchangeable shared meaning-universe, that is recurrently established and re-created through human relations and communication (Eriksen, 1998, p. 25). Culture is thus, not something one has, but something one does. It is neither homogenous or bound by geographical boundaries, but continuously changing.

**Female genital cutting:** Female genital cutting (FGC) involves the partial or complete excision of external female genitalia, mainly the clitoris and labia minora and majora. WHO classifies FGC into four categories;

i. Clitoridectomy; partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce
ii. Excision; partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without the excision of the labia majora

iii. Infibulation; 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 the excision of the clitoris.

iv. All other harmful procedures to the genitalia for non-medical purposes

(World Health Organization, 2018a)

1.3 Previous research

Researchers have studied FGC for many decades, within different communities, and in a diverse range of academic fields. However, only limited studies have delved into the correlation between FGC prevalence and identity. Kjersti Larsen’s study (1991) on female gender identity and transitional rituals, religion, and modernity in a Muslim community in

---

1 In Samburu, type III infibulation is most common (28 Too Many, 2013)
Zanzibar is one of the few exceptions. She discusses how these aspects stimulate and foster female gender identity. Her findings disclose how rituals are used to convey knowledge from one generation to the next, and how women, through music and songs, attempt to normalize sexuality (Ibid., p. 143). It is an essential ceremony as it prepares the girl for her role as ‘wife.’ Due to the gender segregation that exists, the female community is important for the individual’s social life. Partaking in the ritual offers an invitation to this ‘secret’ community that cut women share, and living in accordance to traditions, expectations, and religion is consequently important to maintain their social status (Ibid., p. 193). Such findings correspond with those of Balk (2000, p. 55) and Bettina Shell-Duncan, Walter O. Obiero and Leunita A. Muruli (2000, p. 109), who also state that there is a connection between identity and the different types of FGC. Marriage and reproduction are seen as respected institutions in the societies where the ritual is prevalent and transform the girl into a woman who can bear children. Hence, it is a way of securing her marriageability (Ibid., p. 126). Infibulation, in particular, is a way of safeguarding women’s virginity and delineating their reproductive function, hence serving to control them (Balk, 2000, p. 69). Both of their views resemble my outcome in that women’s identities are closely tied to their roles as wives and mothers. On the other hand, they emphasize virginity and transferral of knowledge on sexuality, however, in Samburu the ritual is conducted in secret and has links to the practice of beading, which is widespread and accepted (Samburu Women Trust, 2016). In that respect, the girl is already ‘prepared’ and knows how to behave like a wife.

From an ontological position, it is unimaginable to separate a phenomenon from the context in which it takes place, as social properties are the outcome of the interactions between individuals in a society (Talle, 2010). Thus, the existence of different practices depends on how the community understands it and the meaning they have assigned the custom (Grønmo, 2004, p. 45/54; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). Consequently, to understand the prevalence of a tradition, it is necessary to identify the interaction between people and the context in which they reside (Geertz, 1973). According to Talle (2010), in the communities where FGC is prevalent, a girl who has not undergone the procedure is ostracized and not part of the community (p. 15). The reason being the value and symbolism attributed the ritual. For instance, these communities refer to regular vaginas as abnormal and inappropriate, and therefore inconceivable (Ibid., p. 16). She argues that the power of culture forces people into specific thought patterns and behaviour due to the internalized conceptions of morals, aesthetics, and beliefs adopted through communication and interaction with other cultural
beings. These habits do not necessarily serve the individual, such as in the case of FGC; however, nobody is inclined to question such customs (Ibid., p. 18). Her material has proven useful in my study, and I can draw parallels between a considerable amount of our respective data. Nevertheless, she does not look at how identity might impel FGC in specific communities.

The clear majority of research in Samburu explores the connection between FGC and health or education. The study available in the sociological and anthropology field on the link between FGC and identity in Samburu explores this link by examining the meaning attributed to the body adornments worn by the people in the community (Khasandi et al., 2014; Nyambura, 2015). They obtain these ornaments at different occasions and during the rites of passage, such as FGC, marriage, or the birth of a child. Thus, the adornments accompany a form of importance, power, and status in the society, which is desired by its citizens. As a result, the attainment of such ornaments is carefully entwined to the way in which a person perceives themselves, and their relationship to the community (Khasandi et al., 2014; Nyambura, 2015). Other studies conducted on FGC in Samburu examine the connection between the low level of primary school enrolment and completion, to socio-economic factors and traditions, such as FGC. As the procedure in Samburu tends to occur before the wedding ceremony, many of the girls tend to drop out of school because of the newly acquired responsibility (Karanu et al., 2015; Njogu, 2015). This is also inclined to lead to pregnancies, and due to many of the girls' young age; maternal health issues. Thus, the procedure is part of the circle that re-establishes and influences the adverse socio-economic and cultural factors, such as poverty, health challenges, and limited education (Beard, Earnest, Tomaska, Morgan, & Summerhayes, 2009). These studies provide information on different aspects of FGC and contribute to creating a more holistic understanding of the consequences and effects the practice has on a greater scale. However, by analysing the influence FGC has on women’s identity, I am exploring a relatively poorly developed field.

At the start of this chapter, I mentioned that three million girls are cut every year across the globe, notwithstanding the fact that countless studies have been conducted on the subject for more than four decades (Talle, 2010). The previous parts illustrate the shortcomings that exist within this field, and I hope that this study will present an analysis that will contribute information which elicits interest in the link between identity and FGC prevalence. And consequently, be a starting point for future research.
1.4 Contextual backdrop

Kenya is the regional hub for start-ups and information-technology companies, has a literacy rate of 78% for people above fifteen years, and is one of the fastest growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, 46% of its population lives below the poverty line, with almost 85% of those living in rural areas (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018; The World Bank, 2008, 2017; United Nations Children’s Fund). According to a report from 2009, only 29,000 of the 60,000 eligible children to access education, had enrolled in school in Samburu (Government of Kenya, as seen in Karanu et al., 2015, p. 62). In the area, the illiteracy rate is estimated between 75% to 85% (Simons & Fennig, 2018).

The Samburu people are semi-nomadic pastoralist and significantly influenced by the traditions and way of living transferred from previous generations. The tribe’s determination to defy modernity has left it one of the few culturally authentic tribes remaining in Africa (Kenya Information Guide, 2015b). The majority live in traditional manyattas (huts made from mud and cow dung walls with grass thatched roof), without electricity or proper sanitation systems. Both women and men dress in a colorful cloth wrapped around their bodies (shukas), with beautifully beaded body adornments. Circumcision for men marks the initiation into warrior life (moran), which generally last from when they are 15 to 35 years. In this period, they are not allowed to marry but can bead a young girl, often a relative. The girl, who can be as young as nine, will be given red beads as a sign of “‘engagement’ for sexual purposes only” (Samburu Girls Foundation, 2017). Pregnancies and the use of contraceptives are not allowed, and they carry out forced abortions or killings of the born babies, as the child is considered to be a bad omen (Ibid.).

FGC was traditionally practiced in correlation to marriage in Samburu when the girls were 12 years old or above. However, due to the new legislation that illegalized FGC, girls are often cut at a younger age to prevent them from reporting the matter and avoid detection (28 Too Many, 2016). A report from 2017 reveals that approximately 27.1% of Kenyan women between the ages of 15-49 are cut. Note that the prevalence of the custom varies amongst the 44 tribes, and from urban to rural areas (Ibid.). The official sources claim that 86% of Samburu women have undergone the procedure; however, an anonymous anti-FGC activist
stated that the number is probably much closer to 98% (Ibid.). The most common form of cutting in Samburu is type III, infibulation. This refers to the reduction of the vaginal opening by cutting and re-arranging the labia minora and/or the labia majora. It can also include the removal of the clitoris (28 Too Many, 2013, p. 25; World Health Organization, 2018a). FGC is a rite of passage into womanhood and has ties to a girl's marriageability, and the community's perception of her. Those women who have not undergone FGC are considered to be children, which restricts their movement and participation in public life. Thus, it is viewed to be a necessary part of life, which makes it difficult for girls and women to object the practice (28 Too Many, 2016).

The Children's Act of 2001 banned any form of cutting on girls below 18 years of age, however, in 2011 this law was reviewed and expanded to ban the practice entirely. The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation act (2011) strengthened the fine and imprisonment legislation to affect anyone participating in the practice. For instance, if a girl undergoes FGC, her parents might end up being prosecuted. A female doctor filed a case for legalizing the tradition based on cultural heritage and the right of female adults to choose for themselves. The hearing was held at the end of February 2018, but as of May, there has been no update on the case (Hodal, 2018).

1.5 Terminology

The language used when describing a cultural tradition plays a significant role, as it has the power to create barriers or build bridges amongst the people standing on both sides of the spectre. Many will say that the term 'female genital mutilation' creates walls between the communities where the practice is widely accepted, and those people trying to fight it. Those who choose to use this phrase claim that the definite removal of a healthy organ is mutilation and should, therefore, be referred as such (Dorkenoo, 1994, p. 33; Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2000, p. 6). However, using the word 'mutilation' to describe a ritual that carries vital importance in the communities where it occurs, implies that the societies and the parents, either intentionally or out of ignorance, choose to harm their children. This differs widely from the experience and understanding existing amongst the practitioners, as they view the ritual as a necessary rite of passage and tie it closely to womanhood (Talle, 2010, p. 61/73). As this phrase implies insensitivity towards the girls and women who have undergone the
procedure, as well as judgment towards the communities who practice it, 'mutilation' is intentionally not used in this paper.

Female circumcision is a term criticized for reducing the significance of removing vital genital tissues to the removal of the foreskin, and therefore diminishing the dangerous health effects damaged genital tissue has on a woman's reproductive system and overall well-being (Perry & Schenck, 2001, p. 181). However, female circumcision (Morata) is the term used in the maa-language spoken by the Samburu tribe. The wording used to describe the ritual refers to the reality in which people live and allows them to categorize the procedure in a way that has meaning for other people in the community sharing the language and experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 53). Therefore, the phrase 'female circumcision' will be applied in the study when referring to the findings, as it resonates with the informants understanding of the ritual. To conclude, due to the challenges that arise when labelling the tradition either a form of 'mutilation' or 'circumcision,' this study will primarily use the less value-laden expression, 'female genital cutting.'
2 Methodological Approach

Social sciences study humans, their relations, group dynamics, and societies as a whole. By evaluating people’s background, their opinions and their actions, social scientists can see the defining characteristics of a community (Grønmo, 2004, p. 6). The methodological approach applied in research have vital importance because they contribute knowledge and information about the social conditions, relations, and processes that exist (Johannessen, Christoffersen, & Tufte, 2010, p. 29). These assessments influence and contribute to how people understand, discard and change the different conditions that exist within a group. The methodological approach is organized into quantitative and qualitative methods, where the former map the prevalence of a phenomenon, while the latter seeks to understand or explain its specific characteristics (Ibid., p. 31 / 32). This study applied a combination of qualitative methods, as the aim of the research is to present information that will contribute to a deeper understanding of FGC prevalence in Samburu.

In this chapter, I present the methodological approach utilized in this research. The purpose is to provide a transparent account of the methodology, data collection, and the analysis. First, I explain the explorative single-case study as a research design. In section 2.2, I discuss the methods of qualitative interviews and observation. Part 2.3 describes why I chose Samburu for the location of this research, and how I recruited my informants. This section is followed by 2.4, that highlights the positive and negative aspects of using a translator. In part 2.5, I briefly explain the interview guides and how I carried out the fieldwork, while section 2.6 depicts the analytical approach I have used. Lastly, I elucidate the ethical considerations, reflexivity, and the quality of the study (2.7).

2.1 Research design

This study seeks to understand the influence FGC has on women’s identity, and whether this is a factor correlated with its prevalence in Samburu. The methodological approach utilized in the research is an interpretive and explorative single-case study (Bryman, 2008, p. 15; Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 58 / 199; Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991). This allows for an exhaustive description of the reality in which the practice occurs (Geertz, 1973). The most
common means of gathering data is through observation, text analysis, and semi-structured interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2004). This analysis builds on the material collected in April 2017, located in the center of Samburu county in the northern parts of Kenya, a small town called Maralal. The exception is Susan’s interview which took place in Nairobi.

I aim to understand the social world through an examination of how the respondents interpret their existence, and I seek to explain a traditional practice’s perseverance by looking at its strong influence on women’s identities (Bryman, 2008, p. 366). Therefore, 29 people of both genders, ranging from the ages of 13 to 65, participated in this research. The following subsections and part 4.1 provide a more detailed description of the informants. As the data was collected in a confined space and time, the conclusions made in this study are inapt to draw generalities that are relevant and appropriate within other contexts (Grønmo, 2004, p. 99).

2.2 Qualitative approach & observation

I collected data through qualitative interviews, participatory – and non-participatory observation. This combination of methods presented the opportunity to gather data on the narratives my informants had of their realities. I could then construe the meaning attached to the experience depicted (Kvale & Svend, 2009). It gave me insight into the nuances that existed within the socially constructed reality my informants experienced (Jacobsen, 2015, p. 30), and better positioned me to verify what people say they do, compared to what they actually do (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 119). Observations facilitated the collection of material that was not verbally communicated. For instance, examining how women and men interacted publicly strengthened the information I had gathered on gender dynamics. Understanding the relations between women and men is an essential component of comprehending women’s identity. It influences how women look at themselves, the roles they have in the society, and their social status.

The conversations I had with people were guided by a semi-structured interview guide (see appendix). Using this method gave the informants the chance to express themselves freely on a wide-range of topics relevant to the study (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 135), such as their childhood, perception of FGC, gender dynamic, and how external influences changed the community. Thus, disclose their experiences, attitudes, and understandings of a social
phenomenon. While some of the interviews lasted only 20 minutes, others went on for several hours. I learned about local politics, the issues that caused clashes between different tribes, and the socio-economic challenges that were present in Maralal. The cultural impact and importance which I had observed, were emphasized through these conversations as people continuously referred to their heritage and traditions. At the time of the fieldwork, I had lived in Kenya for over six years in total, and travelled extensively to small, remote towns in many parts of the country. However, I had never witnessed the cultural presence as seen in Maralal. Consequently, I granted this great importance. The way I interpreted and perceived it as valuable insight, is a reflection of how I viewed the context (Grønmo, 2004, p. 147; Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 119).

2.3 Choosing location and respondents

2.3.1 Location

When I was deciding the specific location for the fieldwork, I created a list of criteria that I evaluated the area by.

First, I felt it was necessary to conduct the study in a part where FGC is widespread, as the aim of this research is to understand how the ritual influence women’s identities. One can argue that conducting the research in an area where the prevalence has significantly reduced, might have revealed trends and patterns that are appropriate elsewhere. However, the limitations of this study, regarding funding, size, and time, would inhibit the likelihood of gathering data that would lead to generalizations relevant to other communities. I considered it to be more valuable to collect data in an area where my findings might prove beneficial to those local organizations who work on such issues in the given district.

The second criteria I evaluated the location according to, was security. The widespread drought had caused clashes between the local population and the white settlers over land (Mutiga, 2017). Furthermore, the fieldwork was to take place in the period leading up to the general election, which often causes tension and clashes amongst different ethnic groups (Mabatuk & Antony, 2016). I received an assessment of the situation in Samburu from the head of security in the United Nations. He provided me with alternate routes to use when traveling by car to avoid sensitive areas, specifically Laikipia County. In the town of Maralal,
there had been no recent incidents of clashes due to ethnicity or land. Thus, I calculated it to be safe.

The last criteria on the list were grounded in access to the field, as I did not know anyone in Samburu. By mobilizing my network, I met Ismail Ali, a man of Somali-Kenyan origin who grew up in Maralal. He served as my guide, translator, and gate-keeper to the community. Section 2.4 discusses Ismail's role and the challenges of using a translator.

All of the respondents lived in Maralal town or its outskirts with the exception of Susan, and the interviews were held in a variety of locations. To minimize the interruption, I met my informants at their workplace or in their homes. This proved to be beneficial for both parts, as they could continue working and I had the opportunity to observe their daily routines. It is important to note that this study depicts the reality of people living in a town with access to electricity, health facilities, and technology, and not the people living in the more remote parts of Samburu.

2.3.2 Respondents

The respondents were chosen through purposeful sampling to secure a broader variety amongst them. I considered this to be necessary to gather enough relevant data that displayed the trends in the community (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 106). I, therefore, created different target groups based on what information they could provide, and then found people within the specific units to participate (Ibid.). Initially, I intended to use the ‘snowball effect’ as a means to meet people eligible to participate in the study; however as neither my translator or I were part of the Samburu tribe, this proved to be challenging.

The criteria to participate in the study was to guarantee a selection of informants with maximal variations, to secure a holistic understanding of the community and the perceptions people had of women and FGC. Consequently, the informants consist of people from different age-groups, genders, and social statures in the society (Lamont, 1992). 29 women and men, ranging from 13 to 65 years, with different resources and educational levels were part of this study.
Before my arrival in Samburu, I had a preconceived idea that it would be straightforward to access women and adolescents. But, as Ismail was male and of a different ethnic group, my access to women outside of Maralal town was limited. The gender dynamic in the society restrain men and women’s socialization, and the Samburu people tend to only engage with other tribes for business. On the other hand, I anticipated accessing men would be problematic. However, Ismail introduced me to men whom I otherwise would not encounter. I elaborate on these challenges and opportunities in part 2.4. I conducted the fieldwork during April when the schools were closed for the holiday, and the youths were helping their families with the livestock and chores around the house. Thus, unavailable to me. Several people, including the County Director of Education, invited me to come back once the schools opened, as accessing adolescent would be easier. I also assumed I would have access to the morans (young men, see section 1.2) who play an essential role in maintaining traditions, such as beading, and influence what is considered as a desired and moral woman. However, due to the severe drought in the area, most of the morans had left the town to find water for their livestock (Government of Kenya, 2017).

While still in Nairobi, I met with Thomas, a man who works for an anti-FGC organization in Samburu. I have anonymized him and the organizations’ name to secure other’s concealment. Thomas advised me on what to anticipate, how I should behave, and the expectations I was held too, as a researcher in Maralal. His knowledge guided my decision to pay some of the informants in this study. I either purchased goods they were selling or offered them soda and snacks in return for their contribution. However, this did not apply to people working for the local authorities or who had higher stature in the community. Neither did I inform them about this beforehand. I am aware that this is highly controversial in social research, but I chose to act by local expectations, and I felt it was necessary to compensate people for their time. I don’t believe this had any significant impact on, or swayed my informants’ answers, as most seemed to be persistent in their replies.

Ismail introduced me as a Norwegian University student from Nairobi. This was to ensure that the respondents did not associate me with an anti-FGC organization that could have influenced their answers or participation.

I chose to include teenagers in the study to establish whether there is a generational difference in the perception of the ritual and womanhood. This permitted me to look at the
influence education and improved access to information has had on such views. However, their reflections on the topics discussed, were sometimes influenced by their young age. I examine the ethical considerations that arose by including youths in section 2.6.2.

The initial plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews, but in two cases they developed into a group conversation encouraged by the participants. In both cases, I adjusted the interview guides accordingly. The members of the different discussions, three women, and four men were part of self-help groups divided along gender lines. These conversations presented an excellent opportunity to gather data as I listened to their discussions about the different topics and observed how they interacted and behaved (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 106). They shared experiences of an intimate nature, at least in comparison to the one-on-one conversations I had. Thus, I assume that the group dynamic played an essential role in creating an atmosphere where the informant felt comfortable and saw the value of sharing such experiences (Ibid., p. 150/151).

I had two informal conversations with women who had worked on anti-FGC campaigns and in organizations tackling issues related to FGC, for many years. As these discussions went on for over four hours, I only recorded parts of them. The insights I obtained, regarding personal experience, campaign information, and collaborations with governmental bodies, are incorporated into this thesis. I also interviewed one of the very few female chiefs in Samburu, women who were highly educated, alongside laypeople of both genders and age-groups.

2.4 Using a translator

Ismail Ali, a local tourist-guide who served as my gatekeeper and translator, helped facilitate my fieldwork. A mutual friend introduced us, and as Ismail grew up in Maralal, he was familiar with the area and cultural practices. However, as he is Somali-Kenyan, and the Samburu’s do not associate with other tribes beyond business, his access was somewhat explicitly limited to the urban areas.

Ismail and I spoke on the phone before I went to Maralal, where I explained to him the purpose of the study and what I needed assistance with. Upon my arrival, we went through this again in addition to what I expected of him. Initially, I had several concerns using a
translator. First of all, I was worried that it might jeopardize what the informants said, as their experiences were construed and retold by Ismail. Thus, the answers might reflect his understanding of the topics instead of the informants. Second, I had concerns that Ismail was of a different tribe, as the Samburu community is very exclusive and do not associate with others beyond business relations. And lastly, as he was a male, I worried this would influence the information shared by the female respondents, especially as FGC was the topic of discussion. Once I realized that I would only have access to a male translator, I also became anxious about accessing women.

Ismail assisted me on several interviews, and despite my initial concerns, I feel that he translated to the best of his abilities. There was minimal repetition amongst my informants’ answers, and Ismail asked the respondents follow-up questions on his initiative and asked me to explain when I was not clear. As a result, I felt that the interviews reflected the informant’s opinion and understanding of the different topics discussed, without mirroring Ismail’s standpoint.

Ismail’s ethnicity resulted in some challenges accessing informants. Several of my respondents pointed out that the Samburu people do not want to associate with others, and many sounded surprised when Ismail said he grew up in Maralal. In the town, there is a range of different tribes living together, and most people who live in the area will, therefore, encounter different tribes regularly. For instance, I noticed through observations that the women who were together tended to be of the same tribe (the different color schemes of their clothes and ornaments worn by the Samburu and Turkana revealed this). Ismail approached one of these groups, and carefully asked if they were willing to speak to us. He also introduced me to several men, which was helpful in securing the study’s variations. My perception of these interviews is that they were open and willing to share their experiences across a number of personal topics. I assume that Ismail knew these men and had told them about my study beforehand. This might explain why they felt comfortable talking about sensitive issues. For example, one stated his point through a comparison of how the sexual relationship differed when being with a Samburu woman (cut) to one from Turkana (not cut).

Ismail participated in the group conversation I had with the three women. During this conversation, I noticed that he would answer my questions instead of translating it to Kiswahili. These were mostly FGC-related. On the other hand, the women initiated a
conversation that mentioned sex and seemed open to answer questions about the gender dynamic. I was aware of the tension brought by discussing such topics, and that it crossed the gender line that exists within a society where men and women live in parallel realities. I suspect this is why Ismail avoided specific questions. However, this was the only interview Ismail participated in that had female respondents. Initially, I had tried to arrange for a second, female translator, but was unsuccessful in doing so.

Despite these challenges, I found Ismail to be a valuable part of my fieldwork. He shared personal stories from growing up in Maralal, which contributed to my understanding of the context, and made me aware of the barriers that exist within the community. His outgoing character resulted in many great conversations with different people. For instance, we travelled north to see a panoramic view of the Rift Valley and encountered five older men. They shared stories and opinions about FGC, the traditions, and the Samburu community. However, as we had intended to have a day off, I had not brought my materials. These men spoke continuously in Kiswahili, and to avoid interrupting the conversation, Ismail shared their stories with me afterward.

Even though there were many expected and some unexpected pitfalls of using an interpreter, I feel that Ismail did a great job to facilitate my research and introduce me to the community in the best way he possibly could.

### 2.5 Interview guides and execution

I had prepared six different interview guides, accustomed to the various groups I was hoping to interview (see appendix). The questions covered the informants’ background, FGC, gender dynamics, and community life. I chose these themes in accordance with the research questions the study attempts to answer, influenced by Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2008) and Anthony Giddens’ (1991) books on identity and Aud Talle’s books on FGC (Talle, 2003, 2010).

The guides were categorized based on age-sets, gender, authority, or NGO worker. For instance, the two guides appropriate for teenagers excluded sensitive, leading, and challenging questions (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 90), to make sure that they felt
comfortable. Hence, most of the questions I asked them were related to their knowledge of FGC and life in the community. On the other hand, the subjects discussed with the adults were of a more intimate nature, in that I asked about personal experiences of being male/female, and why FGC was important to them.

As I became more aware of what questions generated jargon or created similar answers and learned about the context, I adjusted the original interview guides. For instance, none of the teenagers lived at home, so I had to change the nature of specific questions to be more applicable and appropriate. In the case of the NGO- worker, I added five questions as I learned more about their work.

As mentioned in subsection 2.3.1, I interviewed people where I found them at that specific moment, and thus, drove all over Maralal. This offered the chance to enhance my understanding of life in both the town and in the more rural areas surrounding it. I also felt that by interviewing people in a location where they felt comfortable, might have made them feel more at ease during our conversation. Most of the time, we sat next to each other or in a small circle as if it was a conversation between friends.

2.6 Analytical approach

Social research consists of studying other people’s complicated reality (Ibid., p. 35). I conducted fieldwork in a convoluted context, which included objects, people, interactions, experiences, and opinions. The material I collected is fragments of how the reality is (Ibid., p. 35). My personal experiences and background have greatly influenced my understanding of the context, its people, FGC, and identity as these have predisposed my frame of reference and knowledge (Grønmo, 2004, p. 9; Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 38). Thus, as my construction of the reality influenced what I paid attention to and marked as important, a significant amount of the material available might have been lost (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 39).

I recorded my impressions of the participants, the information they provided, and my emotional stage immediately after every interview. The reason was that I collected a significant amount of information on a complicated topic. It had an enormous impact on me,
and by recording myself and my immediate reaction, I remembered small details and could clearly recount how I felt. In the evenings, I transcribed the interviews and recorded thoughts, emotions, and frustrations that surfaced from the day. These recordings have been helpful subsequently - notably when I analysed my findings, as they contain details and insights into what was being said, in addition to reflections and interpretations of the material I gathered.

I have used a combination of classification and thematic coding analysis, drawing on the headers already existing in the interview guides. I divided the material according to the background, gender, FGC, and community life, but as the analyses advanced, I created sub-categories to ensure that I kept all the relevant material (Ibid., p. 167). At one point, I also categorized the content according to gender and age to compare how these factors influenced my informants’ perspectives. I interpreted the data and used it as a gateway to understanding my informant’s experiences, values, and norms (Ibid., p. 168). As I used coding to analyse the material, I risked losing the context in which the person said something, and thus, jeopardizing the validity of the data (Bryman, 2008, p. 553). To prevent this, I have continuously referred to the original interviews to ensure that what my informants tried to communicate is reflected in my findings. I listened to the recordings to grasp the context in which things were said entirely, and the tone it was announced in, etc. As mentioned at the beginning of this sub-section, the researcher interprets the collected data, and there is, therefore, a chance that my conclusions reflect my values (Grønmo, 2004, p. 192). I have tried to eschew this by comparing my results with existing literature that shows deviations from the categories and themes I used.

2.7 Reflexivity & research ethics
2.7.1 Reflexivity

At the time of the fieldwork, in April 2017, I had spent over six years in Kenya. I had a good understanding of the general norms, expectations regarding behavior, communication skills, in addition to many of the socioeconomic challenges present in both urban and rural areas. Maralal is situated in a marginalized area, a six to eight-hour drive from Nairobi. I believe that my experience from living in Kenya for so long made me more aware of the vast differences that exist between urban and rural life. I also think that my awareness of the internal externalities that exists within Kenya strengthened my understanding of the grip
culture has on people in Samburu. In comparison, had I arrived in Samburu with minimal exposure to other places in Kenya, I would have evaluated the presence of culture differently.

Many people asked if I was a tourist as there is a national park located within proximity that results in the occasional visitor to Maralal. As a white, young, woman in rural Kenya, I was visibly an outsider. Ismail told me that people in the community are aware many outsiders do not approve of FGC. I, therefore, made efforts to show tolerance and be considerate about what people shared both before, during, and after the interviews. I felt that this helped to lighten the mood between the respondents and I, as I showed a general interest in the topic, but did not try to make them conform. As a result, we shared stories and laughed together, and it made me more able to understand FGC and the culture from their perspective. Many of my informants openly supported and argued for the continuance of the ritual.

I was on numerous occasions told that local customs did not apply to an ‘outsider’ such as myself. It was therefore acceptable for me to engage in conversations with the opposite sex, and they treated me with respect even though I am not cut. However, Samburu is a patriarchal society where men are the decision-makers, and women are discouraged from speaking and participating in conversations when men are present. I was aware that initiating interviews with men meant crossing several cultural boundaries, even though these limitations did not comply with me in the same way it would a Samburu woman. I was curious to see how our interaction would play out because of my age, gender, and race. During the interviews, I found the men to be very open and willing to share their experiences. But once the interview was over, I struggled to hold a normal conversation with them. It almost became ‘awkward,’ and I felt displaced. I also sensed that some women were a little suspicious of me and my intentions and therefore not necessarily as willing to share intimate stories as many of the men did. For instance, they would measure me and what I was carrying, trying to find out who I was. However, this was something I was prepared for and understood.

In some of the interviews, I was conscious of my gender and ethnicity as it felt uncomfortable asking questions about sensitive and intimate subjects. The unwarranted power dynamic that existed between the informant and I also felt troubling. Most were probably aware that I would offer them something in return for their participation as many had limited resources. Hence, it would be difficult to say no to participating in the study. I was also concerned about
how the informants perceived me, as many people have taken advantage of others’ poverty and situations. However, I feel that most of my informants felt comfortable participating, because some declined, while others joined in on the conversation of their own initiative.

While in the field and thereafter, I have battled with a feeling of guilt, and I have contemplated the ethical aspects of writing about a topic like FGC. A study reveals that many researchers struggle with these same emotions (Fahie, 2014). I felt that my presence did not add value to anyone besides myself, and consequently, it was uttermost important that my informants felt respected and treated with dignity. As a researcher, I aim to contribute knowledge, and I have strived to ensure that my interpretations and standpoints do not influence this analysis.

2.7.2 Research ethics

The Norwegian Centre for Research and Data (NSD) and the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya approved this research. Additionally, I reported my presence to the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education in Samburu County, as well as the local chief.

I was a guest in Samburu; present to study the local dynamics. It was necessary to treat my informants, their experiences, and understandings with dignity and respect. As the study gathered data on a controversial, complex and sensitive issue, it was essential that all of the respondents understood that what they shared would be treated anonymously. Before every interview, the participants were informed of the study’s purpose, their right to skip any question or discontinue the conversation at any time (Aase & Erik, 2007, p. 182). This was explained orally in Kiswahili, due to the high illiteracy rate in the county and limited fluency in English. I found this to be the most effective way to ensure that my informants understood the terms of the study. As some eligible informants chose not to participate in the survey, while others passed particular questions, I feel confident that many grasped the conditions of the research. I asked for permission to use a recorder in the interviews with people above 18 years while avoiding it altogether when I spoke with the minors. I did so to preserve their identity and took notes instead. The parents or guardians signed a consent form (see appendix) which explained the purpose of the study, the child’s role, confidentiality, and
voluntary participation. The content of the letter was disclosed to the parent or guardian, as well as the minor, in Kiswahili, English or a combination, depending on their fluency in English. In this thesis, I refer to my informants by fictive names. The list of informants detailing their age, gender, and occupation is available in the appendix. Knowing this information about the informant will give more context in which things were said, and it also reveals generational differences.

The study might have caused some participants distress, as we discussed sensitive topics like FGC and womanhood. The questions I asked the young informants were not of a personal nature; however, some wanted to share their stories with me. I found these very troubling and must, therefore, assume it was difficult for them to communicate. In these situations, I stepped out of my role as a researcher because I believed it was important to first and foremost relate to them as a woman. Second, their experiences were so heart-breaking and impactful that remaining in my role felt unnatural as some of these girls were only 14 years old. Like I have mentioned before, it was incredibly important that my informants felt they were treated with respect. I hope that since they took the initiative to disclose these experiences, they felt comfortable with me and the research.

2.7.3 The quality of the research

The overall quality of a study depends on whether the data collected is based on factual information and reflects the reality of the context in which the research takes place (Jacobsen, 2015, p. 246/247). Thus, the quality hinges on whether the readers believe the information presented in the study (Ibid., p. 246), and the researcher’s reflections of the survey and the given results (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1987). To ensure the quality of this research, I used reliability and validity as indicators.

The material collected, regarding what data is used, how the researcher gathers the information, and how it is processed, influence a study’s reliability (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 229). The concept of reliability is that if a second study uses the same methods and survey scheme, the two studies should produce identical results (Grønmo, 2004, p. 220). However, in qualitative research, it is challenging to measure reliability due to the lack of a structure while collecting the data. Further, it is close to impossible for a researcher to copy another’s
observations as these are depending on the context. Lastly, all the data is gathered by a social being with individual experiences and values. Thus, one person’s understanding and perception of information is not necessarily in compliance with another’s (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 229).

The validity of research is determined by the gathered material’s correspondence to the study’s intentions and the context in which it takes place (Grønmo, 2004, p. 221; Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 230). Using different methods within the same study reinforces its validity. I deliberately chose to combine qualitative interviews with observation, as this provided an opportunity to verify whether the information I received through long conversations reflected the reality correctly. However, it is necessary to mention that the data collected is not the reality, but different representations of it (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 69). It is also possible to confirm the study’s validity by evaluating the results with prior research; however, there is no data available on identity and FGC in Samburu. But, the analysis uses the findings from Nyambura’s (2015) research which evaluated the linkage between identification and the use of body adornments, and Mepukori (2016) which study FGC and alternative rites of passage. It is important to note that due to the different contextual situations these studies occurred in, might have affected the results (Grønmo, 2004, p. 238). I have also used different theoretical approaches to validate or challenge my findings. However, the size of this study places limitations on the generalities we can draw, as the study occurred in a specific place, at a given time, and with few informants.

To strengthen this study’s validity, I have shared the different methods I used, the challenges I faced while in the field and the aftermaths, reflections around my role, and how various factors might have influenced the result. This provides the opportunity for other researchers to see what has been done, in addition, to open up for the possibility to criticise the findings.
3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework used in this dissertation. The value FGC has in Samburu is an area of focus in this study, in addition to the link between cultural practices and authority, and the function FGC plays in inscribing women into the network of shared identities. The primary focus of the research comprises of how FGC influence female identity in Samburu. There is a vast amount of identity theories available. However, as this study ties a traditional practice like FGC to female identity and a sense of belonging, Anthony Giddens (1991) understanding of the late modern age and the self is the base of the theoretical framework.

I have divided this chapter into two subdivisions. In the first part, I explain the three components that Giddens characterize the modern age by, followed by his understanding of the reflexive self. Humans negotiate identity through interaction. Thus, the inclusion of Erving Goffman's impression management and role theory extend Giddens' concept of the reflexive project. To explain how groups create a shared identity, I use Richard Jenkins (2008) understanding of 'we' and 'the other.' This illustrates how a practice like FGC plays an essential part in securing a collective identity.

The second part of the chapter focuses on explaining concepts that are relevant to understand how people become who they are. First, Paul G. Hiebert’s (2008) concept of worldview is clarified, connecting the practice of FGC to people’s perception of the world around them. Following this is an illustration of how cultural boundaries influence people and their opportunities in life. Last is a brief explanation of social convention theory and its relevance to this research. The chapter also includes a variety of studies and articles on FGC, rites of passage and identity in different parts of the world to strengthen the overall theoretical framework used in this research.
3.1 The concept of late modern age and identity

3.1.1 The post-traditional society

Giddens (1991) characterizes the late modern age by the extensive use of reflexivity and tradition’s deteriorating grip on societies. In preceding eras, individual’s lifespans were pre-determined while their identity was inherited. Today, the individual is responsible for creating, maintaining, and sustaining her or his self through functional decision-making and reflexive processes (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 271).

According to Giddens (1991), the elevated dynamism that is present in the post-traditional order is influenced by the transformation of time and space, disembedding mechanisms, and reflexivity. They force social institutions away from pre-established practices and precepts (p. 18/21). The former presented the chance to coordinate interactions beyond time and space, which was a prerequisite to disembedding social processes from the peculiarities of locales’ abstract systems. These structures comprise of symbolic tokens and expert systems, such as money and professions, and contains a fundamental component of trust (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 273; Giddens, 1991, p. 30). Trust is therefore continuously negotiated, as people confide in abstract systems and relations they are not directly in contact with. For instance, M-PESA, the mobile money transfer service in Kenya is used even by traditional groups like the Samburu tribe. It is built on the foundation of people not only trusting the company and technology, but also that they believe that their money is passed on to someone else by just pressing a few buttons on a device.

In pre-modern societies, traditions conveyed a sense of trust and stability in the relations and interactions that took place within a community. Men’s authority, both in the public and private sphere, acted as a way to control and preserve sexuality, traditions and gender dynamics in the local context (Giddens, 1991, p. 194/195). These customs and structures were prescribed authority due to their nature of being transferred from previous generations; however, this reasoning is not deemed valid in contemporary times (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 276).

Reflexivity refers to the receptiveness of most aspects of social activity to continuous modification in light of fresh information (Giddens, 1991, p. 20). A combination of embedding mechanism, intensified globalization processes and reflexivity, result in a confrontation of traditions that are often followed by examination and criticism (Aakvaag,
Consequently, many practices are discarded, and the experiences and knowledge held by the elders have lost their importance. This has caused the discontinuation of identities that would previously have been inherited (Eriksen, 2008, p. 149/150). Instead, ‘the self’ is a result of the reflexive processes that connect the personal experiences to social changes (Giddens, 1991, p. 33). The disembedding mechanisms have therefore facilitated a greater mastery of social life, as reflexive methods were integrated into the construction of self-identity (Ibid., p. 149). Also, institutional reflexivity often cause reorganization of social establishments (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 274), as seen when the Kenyan government reassessed the Children’s Act of 2001 that led to the creation of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act, 2011. The new law forbade FGC in its entirety and strengthened the punishments for participating in the practice.

In the case of FGC, the practice has changed while the tradition has remained (Talle, 2010, p. 72). Modernity and developments have resulted in information and technology that might facilitate the continuance of practices labelled as harmful, as the procedure is ‘safer’ with advanced knowledge and equipment (Ibid., p. 71). However, it can also be interpreted as a positive progress, as more communities have transitioned to the other types of excisions (see section 1.2) and are cut in safer surroundings (Ibid., p. 72). As the trends exhibit that girls are cut at a younger age to prevent them from notifying the authorities or resisting participation, the continuance of FGC, even if it has changed form, is possibly seen as necessary to secure the honorable woman and the identity of the group. The sections below explore this further.

### 3.1.2 The reflexive self

The dynamic mechanism of modernity has caused an unclear and unpredictable social design, in which national belonging, social status or gender no longer determine the individual’s identity (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 270; Giddens, 1991, p. 16). Instead of being the result of traditions, obedience, and social expectations, identity is developed from the reflexive choices and active decision-making made by individuals (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 277; Eriksen, 2008, p. 118). It is, therefore, valid to claim that identity-creation is the result of structural forces imposed by the deregulated and destabilized society that has developed in high-modernity (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 270). However, these unstable and fluctuating tendencies that characterize modern society has resulted in a fragile narrative of self (Giddens, 1991, p. 186),
as it is continuously altered in the light of new information, experiences and knowledge. It ties the past, present, and future to moral ideas of who one aspires to be and presents a framework that adds value to one’s self-understanding (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 277; Giddens, 1991, p. 52/54).

As the abstract systems and the reflexive project has entered the body, ownership has become an increasing issue as the body is less submissive to the social regulations and restrictions (Giddens, 1991, p. 219). In traditional societies, sexuality and body were associated merely with reproductive functions, while it today is a means of promoting one’s identity (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 277/278). As the body reflects the individual's lifestyle choices, dress and self-adornment reveal fractions of one's identity even though societies standards and expectations influence such preferences (Giddens, 1991, p. 62/63/225). The institutions of reproduction, marriage, and FGC often affect women's identities in more traditional communities (Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2000). This is reasoned based on the notion that women cut their daughters because not doing so would reduce or eliminate their daughter’s chance to marry and have children. A great deal of these women find their identity in their roles as mothers and wives; thus the risk of not cutting is higher than the cut itself, as it would leave a woman unmarriageable (Shell-Duncan, Wander, Hernlund, & Moreau, 2011, p. 126; Talle, 2010).

### 3.1.3 The presentation of self

The sociological perspective claims that social processes decide, maintain and alter identities. Berger et al. (2000) state that the self is shaped through behavior, which in turn is a reaction of a given social setting and the expectations tied to any given role or identity (p. 107/108). Role identities are the internalized meanings obtained partially from the cultural context and partly from the individual’s interpretation of character (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 114). So, the meaning ascribed to a position is learned through observation of others react to the individual’s behavior in social interactions, people then create and recreate culture and relations through these processes (Burke, 1980, p. 114/115). In turn, such developments influence actions and behavior (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 100).

The concept of boundaries is used by Erving Goffman to define the sophisticated setting of social interaction and the context it belongs to (Martinussen, 2008, p. 88/89). People are part
of creating and recreating these boundaries through communication, which provides the framework for how people should behave when they play different roles (Ibid., p. 89). This is part of maintaining one’s identity (Ibid., p. 90). However, this presupposes a somewhat shared language and symbolic universe, as people will otherwise interpret these situations differently (Ibid., p. 88). Goffman uses the analogy of the theatre to explain how people play peculiar roles to control the way others perceive them (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 75). Frontstage is where the social performance takes place, while backstage is the intimate sphere where the audience has no access. This permits the individual to step out of character. The production is created backstage, and it houses the repertoire of different roles and possibilities of action. These manuscripts signify the cultural, symbolic and meaningful universes that people are part of, and the framework they act within. The roles people play, and the expectations that follow those parts are continuously amended during the interaction that happens on the front stage (Martinussen, 2008, p. 88). This allows the individual to reveal their desired persona by controlling the impression she or he gives off through the management of attitude, looks, body language, and facial expressions, etc. (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 75; Goffman, 1959, p. 32/34). Goffman goes on to say that through the dramatization of practices, such as rites of passage, people emphasize the importance of the interaction and focus on the tasks that need solving to have everyone working towards a common goal (Martinussen, 2008, p. 91). By acting according to the expectations that emanate from the role they are playing, the individual manages the impression given in such situations (Goffman, 1959, p. 116). However, there is always a possibility that the interaction will fail, and that sanctions and marginalization will follow as a result.

Uncut women who are a minority in their communities are often ostracized. The general view in such societies is that proper and responsible parents cut their daughters as the practice is perceived to be a necessary and vital part of life. In addition, it is part of the expectations girls have when ascribed the role of a ‘woman’ (Talle, 2010). A study conducted in West Africa reveals that due to the perceived notion that womanhood includes the cutting of the vulva, women who are not cut will often be systematically excluded (Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2000). The community prohibits them from participating in decision-making and communal activities and also considers them to be children who cannot behave according to social norms and expectations. The belief that FGC prevents promiscuity and disease provides the necessary reason to exclude uncut women, and therefore simultaneously maximizes the social capital of the women who are cut (Shell-Duncan et al., 2011).
Role theory stresses the potential conflict that can arise between a majority and a minority group when one part does not submit to the social expectations and norms. As exemplified above, the minority is at risk of facing sanctions that can prevent them from participating in social life unless they play the character of their appointed role. These kinds of penalties are tremendously useful to control how people behave and to ensure that they obey to cultural norms. Therefore, the vast majority of the people in a community manage the impressions they give off, to avoid sanctions. This means that people are always stepping in and out of different roles and adjust them according to who they interact with. This theory helps to clarify why people who are against a practice like FGC, still choose to partake in it as they are afraid of the consequences that will follow if they disobey social expectations. Understanding what penalties follow when someone contravenes the norms and traditions in Samburu, might reveal why so many continue to practice FGC despite being aware of the potentially harmful effects it has on the female body.

3.1.4 Shared identity

The individual’s identity builds on experiences, emotions, thoughts and social commitments (Eriksen, 2008, p. 64), while the customs, traditions and symbolic universe shared amongst groups, underline the community people identify with. According to Jenkins (2008), collective identities are “constituted by a dialectic interplay of processes of internal and external definition.” This means that a shared identity relies on the individual’s ability to feel a sense of belonging to a group, while outsiders acknowledge this internal identification process (Ibid.). As an individual is part of a group, they experience a form of self-enhancement, as being part of a collective confirms positive knowledge about the self. Moreover, the membership of a group causes the individual to compare their in-group as better than an alternative (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Identities are created out of contrasts as it divides people into the groupings of ‘we’ and ‘the other.’ External factors, such as belonging to a minority group or the sharing of a common enemy, tends to strengthen the ‘we.’ (Eriksen, 2008, p. 70/71). Hence, as minority groups are ceaselessly reminded of their identity when interacting with representatives of the majority, both the group’s strength and its member's identification with it, is reinforced. Thus, there is a
possibility that the Samburu community, which is a culturally homogenous society where ‘the other’ is easy to detect but still a minority in a national context, emphasize their cultural identity more than others. If this perspective is relevant, their identification with the group will play a greater role in their understanding of self (Ibid., p. 67/69). Moreover, as the globalization processes promote fragmentations in the society that leads to a greater number of non-territorial identities, this serves as a threat to the collective ‘we’ (Schiefloe, 2011, p. 26). More people identify with groups that reflect their gender or sexual orientation, thus putting the traditional geographic and ethnic identities at risk of being lost. In some circumstances, this will ignite a sense of threat towards the ‘we,’ which will increase and intensify the member’s identification with the group (Eriksen, 2008, p. 77). El Saadawi (1980) claims that some communities systematically reinforce and justify repression within, by claiming that specific practices are necessary to continue as the traditions protect and separate the in-group from ‘the other.’ In terms of FGC, it is a way of controlling and thus preserving women’s sexuality to fit with the monogamous system that secures known fatherhood; however, this is not necessarily how people who practice the custom experience it (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 38).

In Samburu, the modern processes that are slowly interfering with their traditional lifestyle are threatening their cultural and collective identity. An increase in willingness to sacrifice a great deal to protect the cultural traits that distinguish them as unique from others might result (Ibid., p. 77; Schiefloe, 2011, p. 26/235). Understanding this dynamic might prove useful to know why the Samburu’s are continuing to practice FGC and clinging on to their cultural traditions despite its illegal status.

The ‘we’ influences the individual’s behavior, actions and narrative of self (Ibid., p. 49). As mentioned above, practicing traditions and rituals reinforce the sense of a collective identity, and verify what behavior is acceptable in the context (Eriksen, 2008, p. 48; Martinussen, 2008, p. 80). Sharing a framework and worldview is thus essential to establish an internal sense of belonging to a group (Martinussen, 2008, p. 176), and the individual is held accountable to the obligations, commitments, and expectations that arise from the affiliation with the given category (Ibid., p. 78/79).

The individual verifies their group membership by acting according by the expectations held to her or his role (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 63). But when the person’s perceptions of the part
do not align with the community’s, the distinction between ‘we’ and ‘the other’ is reinforced. This preserves the existing boundaries and re-establishes a division in the social structure (Burke & Stets, 2000). As stated by Giddens (1991), self-identity is thoroughly tied to the appraisals of others (p. 38), and by being marginalized by the society, the individual risk to cripple the biographical narrative of oneself (Ibid., p. 65).

3.2. **How people become who they are**

3.2.1 **Worldview**

Hiebert (2008) perceives worldview as “the foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives” (p. 25/26). This means that worldview is the notion of how things are supposed to be, the way people group their thoughts, and the logic used to organize these groupings into a clear sense of reality (Ibid., p. 15). As a result, worldview directs individuals behavior as it offers valid reasons and explanations to the surrounding world (Geertz, 1973, p. 169). A significant number of these assumptions have never been examined but are taken for granted as something ‘given’ (Eriksen, 2008, p. 29). Many communities that practice FGC sees it as a necessary element to secure the girl-child’s inscription into the social life (Talle, 2010, p. 15). It is a ritual that is driven by its deep roots in people’s understanding of FGC as a definite requirement for marriage and what a woman should look like (Ibid., p. 16). The reaction and approval received from the community when partaking in a practice like FGC, reinforce the people’s perception of it being positive, necessary and right.

Concurrently, if an individual decides to defy such traditions, he or she will meet sanctions and possibly marginalization from the community. People tend to seek that which confirms instead of challenges worldviews and social norms and are forced to actively defend their traditions as people are no longer born into such conventions (Eriksen, 2008, p. 123). The decline of FGC amongst Somali women living in exile underlines this, as further explained below (Ibid., p. 125). Thus, one's worldview helps to reassure the individual that her or his perception and experience of life aligns with how the world really is.

3.2.2 **Cultural influences**
The social patterns that exist in a community are the result of people verifying, confirming and recreating norms and social roles that in turn develop into the framework of human behavior (Giddens, 1991, p. 104/105). Culture is the result of the power dynamics that exist in a society, and as people negotiate these relations, culture change. Amongst the women who live in exile but originate from areas where the practice of FGC is widespread, the number of cut girls has reduced. As these women face changed relations, new experiences and different social norms, their pattern of behavior alters (Talle, 2010, p. 86). This means that people are the preservers of social design, while simultaneously inflicting change. In the long run, this transforms the social structures in a community (Giddens, 1991, p. 105).

Culture is not homogenous in the sense that everyone belonging to a specific grouping shares similar opinions or the same amount of power. As much as people are cultural beings, they also have a sense of purpose, emotions, and dreams that influence their behavior and beliefs (Talle, 2010, p. 27). Thus, they are not necessarily submissive to cultural norms. However, it is the society that establishes the restrictions of what is possible for an individual to achieve throughout her or his lifetime (Schieflœ, 2011, p. 19), as humans adopt the values, knowledge, worldview, and language from the community they are part of. Further, people adjust their behavior according to the expectations linked to the role they are playing (Martinussen, 2008, p. 193). Therefore, the cultural circumstances one is born into have a significant impact on what kind of person the individual develops into (Eriksen, 2008, p. 49; Schieflœ, 2011, p. 129/134). So even though people choose how to act, interact and communicate with the world around them, it is essential to acknowledge that they did not choose the contextual surroundings that have played a tremendous role in shaping who they are (Eriksen, 2008, p. 78).

The position an individual has in the community influence manners, as class and wealth generate restrictions and thus guide people into patterns of behavior. Society socializes people into the groups and roles that are of relevance to their lives. Thus, the individual internalizes the appropriate norms and values, which is experienced as given (Martinussen, 2008, p. 190). The limitations these boundaries have on the person's life depends on how well-defined the norms are in the context, and the person’s level of integration in the community. For instance, studies show that the number of cut girls is higher in rural areas compared to urban ones and that the parents level of education has some influence on the
prevalence of the practice (Ibid., p. 37). Also, in areas where FGC is rampant, traditional circumcisers tends to have a high social status (Talle, 2010, p. 53).

A study of the Mande group in West Africa reveals the connection between FGC and the idea of women's authority (Ahmadu, 2005). It is women who organize, execute and in many cases, defend the practice (Ibid., p. 56). Therefore, women want to continue practicing FGC as it maintains both their structural position and the power of the female elders. It is, therefore, safe to say that culture is internalized and embodied in people’s thoughts, values, and behavior, while most individuals are unaware that they reproduce these through their habits, actions, and communications (Talle, 2010, p. 61). But, the power of habit can be dangerous. It restrains people from questioning how the culture and community exercise control, as social order and continuity legitimize it. People do not reflect over their behavior or preferences and instead continues to reproduce them in similar forms, and therefore, nobody questions whether traditions or customs are acts of violence or even of relevance in today’s society (Ibid., p. 18). Instead, many practices are defined necessary to reach an overall goal, such as a moral and beautiful woman. Thus, the power of culture is found in how it internalizes understandings of morals, aesthetics and what people view as a ‘good life,’ while it, in reality, might not necessarily serve them. FGC is the perfect example of this, as it permits the elder generation to exhibit their authority and pass on traditions, but it is simultaneously causing potentially damaging changes to the female body (Ibid., p. 61). They use the body to engrave symbols that display who the person is, and in that way communicating both their personal and collective identity to the world. Symbolic boundaries are often used to enforce, maintain, normalize or rationalize social boundaries as exemplified by the use of cultural markers like FGC (Lamont & Virag, 2002, p. 186).

### 3.2.3 Social conventions

A convention is a social custom that is and has been, widely practiced in a community for an extensive period. The prevalence of the practice is the cause for its continuance, as its force drives it. Hence, no one asks questions of the practice’ origins or the reason for why it is still prevailing. According to the political scientist Gerry Mackie, participating in harmful customs is not equivalent to being unaware of the negative aspects of the practice. But to avert sanctions or marginalization, people choose to partake in the tradition (Ibid., p. 17/18).
The social convention theory, developed by Mackie, suggests that people practice FGC as a way of securing a better marriage in societies struck by significant resource inequality. As the vulva is ‘closed,’ and so a sign of fidelity, poor women have a chance of marrying into more resourceful families. This way, the practice has spread to become a prerequisite for marriage for all women.

A group of researchers tested the social convention theory in Senegambia. This study presented findings that disclosed FGC as being driven by a peer convention, and only being indirectly tied to marriageability (Shell-Duncan et al., 2011). This means that when a girl is cut she signals to the rest of the community that she respects the elder’s authority and is worthy to be part of their social network. Consequently, people associate the practice with a higher social status that might leave uncut women stigmatized as an anomaly. According to cultural norms and beliefs, uncut women behave like children and are promiscuous (Talle, 2010). This results in denunciation of uncut women and makes them unmarriageable. So, unless the girl or woman submits to the cultural conventions, she is risking her relations with the community, her family, and her future (Berger et al., 2000, p. 85; Talle, 2010, p. 16). A study conducted in Yoruba disclosed that only a mere 1% of the women participating felt confident that they would marry an uncircumcised man (Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2000, p. 81). These attitudes reveal the stigma attached to men who are not circumcised. The likelihood of these perceptions being somewhat equal in the opposite situation is high, despite the awareness campaigns informing about the harmful effects of FGC (Ibid., p. 81). This shows that as long as a cultural practice serves a useful function, it is likely that it will persist (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003, p. 421).

During the rites of passage, the individuals are ascribed social roles that are tied to particular expectations and responsibilities (Ibid., p. 418). A study on how identity formations embed in rites of passage revealed that the overall notion of the practice brought a sense of ease, despite parts of the ritual causing pain or discomfort (Ibid.). This is due to the inscriptions into the social network. Further, the new role ascribed to the person throughout the custom amplifies one’s sense of importance and purpose, as the part carries prescribed values and behavioral expectations. However, the findings that are most relevant for this study show that the rites of passage strengthen the preexisting connection the individual has to the community, as she or he receives a significant amount of support and validation from the public. Therefore, the support the girl-child gets during and in the aftermaths of FGC affirms the
value her newly ascribed identity has in the community (Ibid., p. 404). In addition to enhancing her sense of belonging as she has become part of the ‘we’ group of cut women (Talle, 2010, p. 52). Humans share the fundamental need of being accepted, regardless of what group or the steps one has to make to become part of it (Berger et al., 2000, p. 80).

3.3 A summary of the theoretical framework

This chapter is divided into two parts, and the first section illustrates theories and concepts of identity, built on Giddens (1991) understanding of the reflexive self and the late modern age. The mechanisms that characterize high modernity have changed identity into a reflexive project, where the individual is responsible for creating her or his own identity. I build upon this analysis by including Goffman’s (1959) concept of impression management and role theory, as individuals negotiate their characters through interaction. As the social context ascribe roles to the individual, social context influence identity, as seen in FGC practicing communities. The setting often intensifies the collective identity through the precise boundaries between ‘we’ and ‘the other.’ The second part of this chapter focuses on explaining how perceptions of the world, culture and social conventions influence human behavior. Understanding such concepts help to tell how a practice like FGC is still widely practiced, and how communities use it to strengthen their collective identities and thus to reinforce existing boundaries.
4 Presentation of Data

In this chapter, I will present the material I gathered during the fieldwork in Samburu. All of the citations by my informants are direct; hence, I have not changed the language or fixed the grammar in these quotations. I start by providing details about the informants’ background, occupation, and environment, to give a better understanding of who they are. I then go on to explain the findings concerning the Samburu culture, such as rituals, religion, and politics. The third sub-chapter focuses on FGC, what it encompasses and how it is perceived in Samburu. This part also views the practice in relation to poverty and sexuality, in addition to the consequences of opposing it. The fourth part covers the gender dynamics in Samburu, while the last section reviews the findings concerning education and modern life.

I want to clarify two concepts that are mentioned several times throughout this section of the thesis. First, rescue center refers to the home where girls who have escaped or are survivors of, child-marriage, FGC, or beading, lives. The center provides the girls with shelter, food, and education. It concentrates on re-integrating the girls back with their family and the community. Most of these girls will live at the rescue center until they have graduated from secondary school. The second concept that I want to mention briefly is beading. The practice signifies an ‘engagement’ for sexual purposes, where the young girl receives specific beads from the moran (male 15-35 years old). Part 1.2 provides additional details on the ritual.

4.1 Description of the informants

The purpose of the study is to understand how FGC influences women’s identity and their relationship to the community. Amongst my informants, there were three members of the Luhya, Kikuyu, and Maasai tribes respectively. All of the informants lived in Samburu, except the Luhya woman who dwells in Nairobi. The respondents resided in, or on the outskirts of, Maralal. The town, with a population of 20,841 (GeoNames, 2018), is surrounded by mountains and forests and is approximately 350 km north of Nairobi. The poorly developed infrastructure has resulted in marginalization. Maralal consists of a few streets crowded with people and animals like goats, cows, and camels. There is also a small market where women sell traditional herbs and medicines. Majority of the Samburu men and
women dresses in traditional garments and beads, living up to their nickname ‘the butterfly people,’ given because of their brightly colored attire.

The educational level varied amongst the adult informants. Esther, who lived in a modern house with electricity and TV near the center of Maralal, had a university degree and worked in the local government. Elizabeth, a retired nurse, grew up in Maasailand and was married to a respected Samburu. We had a two-hour long conversation at a local café, where she explained how her parents left behind all traditions, except FGC. Today, she spends her time teaching people about their rights and FGC abandonment. I also interviewed a senior man, John, who had no formal education, but worked as a blacksmith as his father and grandfather had before him. He lived on the outskirts of Maralal, and his children went to school up to class four. Today, his sons were in the ‘bush’ taking care of the livestock. While sitting next to the fire where he made circumcision knives, cowbells, and spears, he explained the importance of continuing cultural practices. A few meters away was his manyatta (hut), and a little further, his mother’s. As we were talking, his wife and mother joined, both fully dressed in traditional clothing and body adornment. However, neither of them said a word.

The 14 youths who were part of this study went to school; however, the class level varied. The school usually run from Monday to Saturday, not finishing until late afternoon. They, therefore, have a minimal amount of spare time; however, many spent their day off attending the Catholic church service. The youths in this study either lived at a rescue center or at a children’s home, which was run by adults who serve as their parent-figure. As such, they might have influenced the youth’s perception of FGC. I adjusted the interview guides to suit their situation, as most of them had a minimum to no contact with their parents and extended family. The girls who lived at the rescue centers had either escaped, or survived, child-marriage, beading, and/or FGC. Most of the girls from the rescue center that are part of this study had no relationship with their family at the time.

I had two group-conversations with members of respective self-help groups (see section 2.3.2). The first comprised of three women who wore traditional clothing and were engaged in beadwork, seated in a circle inside a compound. One of them had married at the age of fourteen and joined the empowerment group as her husband’s income could not sustain the family. She uses the profits to pay for her children’s education. Around 80 women had come together to form this self-help group, to support each other and set up projects that would
earn them an income. The second group-conversation consisted of four men who occasionally worked as tour-guides and ran a souvenir shop as part of an empowerment program. They were dressed in regular pants with a t-shirt, sitting outside the shop with 10-12 other men, observing people passing by while some of them were chewing khat. I saw them sitting like this every day when I drove past.

4.2 How do people understand their reality?

4.2.1 Culture, traditions and rituals

Samburu people are semi-nomadic pastoralist, and their animals play a significant role in the culture as they are a necessary component of most rituals. For instance, after circumcision, both girls and boys drink a mixture of cows’ blood and milk, which is believed to make them regain their strength after the procedure. By tradition, wealth was measured by the size of one’s herd, which to some extent is still relevant today. The more livestock a man has, the more wives he can afford. They often pay the bridal price in cows.

There are ceremonies for everything in Samburu, and everyone is expected to participate in such practices, regardless of educational level or social status. Esther explained that if a person who dies misses one of the rituals, they fulfill it before the burial. In other instances, ceremonies merge. Before Esther’s son was circumcised, she and her husband had to sleep outside in a hut for three days because they had not done this when they first got married. People in Samburu believe it is essential to fulfilling the rituals to please their ancestors, and not conforming to this will result in severe luck following their family. Culture and traditions are understood to be what separates them from other ethnic groups and dictates how they lead their lives. Like Esther said «My culture is my identity, it is who I am. If the culture is not there, I am nothing». She connects culture to the arrangements of clans and the referral system. In Samburu, people introduce themselves by clan-membership and then go on to explain their family. So, all the men who belong to her mother’s clan are thought of as her uncles, while the men who are the same age-set as her father are all considered to be her parent. As a result, the clan is essential to shape identities and bring people together.

A few of the older informants had inherited their occupation from their parents. John, who works as a blacksmith, was eight years old when he started to learn how to make spears and
knives from his father. Simultaneously, his sisters learned how to circumcise girls from their mother. However, as more people have better access to information and education parts of the wisdom transferred from older generations are no longer viable. But, it is difficult for many elders to accept this new knowledge as they perceive young people to be children. The younger generation is therefore in a position where they have to evaluate for themselves what is correct. Adam said that in his family they did not eat eggs because according to his parent’s beliefs this was wrong. However, he learned in school that eggs contain healthy vitamins. Therefore, he now eats eggs a few times every month.

In Samburu, they practice FGC, child-marriage, and beading. A traditional circumciser uses the same knife to cut a large number of girls. Infibulation means that the girls’ vaginal hole reduces as the circumciser cut off and reposition their labia minora and/or labia majora. Sometimes the clitoris is also removed. The circumciser keeps the covering seal together by using thorns (28 Too Many, 2016). The image in section 1.2 illustrates the distinctions between the three types of FGC practiced around the world. Afterward, the girl’s legs are tied together to ensure her stitches doesn’t open. If the ritual is carried out as part of the wedding ceremony, the girl will spend the following day walking to her husband’s homestead. This can be tens of kilometers away. Elizabeth stated; «You can imagine going to another woman (mother-in-law) when you are sick and in pain, and there is no doctor or medicine. Maybe your husband will start using you sexually». John explains the circumcision ceremony as followed:

There is a ceremony where they kill a cow or goat, and they make a big boma (an enclosed homestead) for 300 people where they stay together. And the morans sing songs. This is for the boys. For the girls, they don’t have a big ceremony because the circumcision is done secretly. The girl will be circumcised in the night, and the next day she will go with her husband to his homestead. (John)

When asked what happens to the girl or boy who does not want to be circumcised, he said:

Mbaya sana (very bad). In Samburu when you (boy) are circumcised, you cannot close your eyes, not even blink. If you blink you bring shame. (...) 15 years ago, there was a boy who was circumcised here. (...) He cried until his eyes went red. The mother of the boy put ashes on the face to make it mbaya (bad), and she would not bring the boy into her house. She could not understand who made her pregnant with such a bad boy. (John)
Elizabeth explained that practices, like FGC, are not culture but part of an ingrained belief system of how the world is. To exemplify her point, she referred to how the practice of ear stretching had stopped as it caused issues with the schools. Nobody resisted this change. Someone else mentioned that the challenge of ending FGC is that they are born into a reality where it is deemed necessary.

There are those who see it as an un-cut woman is not a full woman, and she is not clean, and she can therefore not associate with all the others who are cut. You cannot partake in the society as you normally would. Therefore, many girls do it (FGC) to be accepted and to fit in. (Susan)

This reflects the notion of many informants, especially the girls who lived at the rescue center. One of them, a girl called Terry, said that defying the practice meant that «your parents will hate you and say you are not their daughter».

Beading is the practice that ‘prepares’ the girl for marriage, as it is a sexual relationship between a Moran and a young girl from his clan. Her family approves the beading, and he buys expensive beads to the girl, that follows by her mother building a small hut where the relationship will play out. While some informants claimed that the parents of the girl receive livestock from the Moran, others denied this. In the cases where the girl becomes pregnant, she has to abort the baby as it is believed to be a «bad omen». The abortion results from a woman beating the girl’s stomach. Often, the girl is labeled ‘loose’ and faces challenges of getting married later on or are chased away from the family home. It is common that these girls end up as someone’s 3rd, 4th, or 5th wife. An informant said this practice originated from the elders trying to prevent the development of a relationship between their wives and the morans, as the custom secures that the morans sexual needs are met.

The majority of people in Samburu follow the traditional religion, which believes that Nkai (God) is in the mountains and protects their society from any misfortunes (Kenya Information Guide, 2015a). All of their rituals and sacrifices are tributes to Nkai. They believe that he is their protector, but also the one who inflicts punishment on those who are cursed by the elders. To free themselves from this curse, they need to make a sacrifice. Even though many of the informants regularly pray to Nkai, they do not believe he is present in their everyday life. Instead, they seek help and guidance from the laibonok (diviners) who predict the rain and help with fertility issues (Exploring Africa, 2018). In the urban areas, many have
converted to Christianity. Part of the Catholic church’s popularity in Samburu is that they have incorporated religion into the culture. For instance, in the traditional wedding ceremony, the bride and groom exchange rings blessed by the church. However, the church does not criticize the practice of FGC, even though many people are aware that the church condemns the ritual. In Elizabeth’s opinion, had the church informed people that the Bible doesn’t encourage FGC as well as the harmful effects it has on the female body, it might have decreased the practice’s prevalence. However, the women who were part of the group-conversation said that people would still oppose the Bible and the church because of tradition’s stronghold in the community. Disagreeing with both, John was of the opinion that most people are suspicious of the church as it is leading them away from their traditional beliefs. He continued to say that the ancestors performed these rituals, and thus, had blessed these cultural customs. This is perceived to be a valid reason to keep practicing such traditions.

4.2.2 Politics and the local authority

The government in Kenya banned FGC without allocating funds to create awareness before, during, or after the law passed. Neither did people working on the grassroots receive any funding from government bodies. Elizabeth claimed that there was a lack of political will to end the practice, as neither the national or local government took the necessary steps to fight the ritual. While many informants from humble backgrounds believed that local politicians secretly cut their daughters, more prominent respondents reasoned that the politician's lack of denouncement is for fear of losing votes if they did so. The four men told me that the woman who was running for MP in the 2017 election was not circumcised, and people could not vote for her because she was a child unsuited to be their leader.

All of my informants agreed that FGC is carried out in the evening or at night, which makes it challenging to uncover. I spoke with the Janet, the female assistant chief at her office, surrounded by several men who were assisting her. Following is her description of what she did when first entering the position in 2013:

We facilitated the whole of this central teaching disadvantages of FGC, but they could not accept. One of the reasons to why I went around teaching them, was that when I
come around arresting them. I know they already have the concept. So, I went around 2013 teaching and emphasizing the disadvantages. Some accepted, and some don’t. In the Samburu, it’s the men who are the lawmakers, (…) so I went on and arrested two men who had sold a 9-year-old girl for early marriage. (Janet)

She said that most people in Maralal do not circumcise girls anymore, because they are aware of the harmful consequences of the practice, and they fear the law. However, a woman working with an anti-FGC organization argued this claim, saying that in Samburu close to 98% of girls are circumcised. A majority of my informants believe that FGC is widely practiced in the community. Further, two people working on FGC issues said that the authorities are not doing enough to stop the practice and that if they had been more active FGC would have already been eliminated. Thomas said that when they ask for assistance from the police when rescuing girls, they will often ask for a bribe and in general show little interest in the mission, except for one police officer.

4.3 Female genital cutting in Samburu

There seems to be a shared notion amongst people in Samburu that the instigation of FGC resulted from the men being gone for extended periods, ranging from a few months to a year at a time, fighting other tribes. Upon their return to their village, they would find their wives pregnant with another man. To prevent this from happening and to secure their wives fidelity, they started to practice circumcision. Even if this is the standard understanding of the practice’ origins, it is still widely believed to be a cultural necessity today, despite fewer men being away for lengthy periods. FGC is legitimized and validated as it has been practiced for generations and is understood to be blessed by the elders: «It has become nature» (Jack). It is a way of preserving the culture, as it is part of defining what a Samburu woman is. As FGC marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, an uncut woman is still a child and therefore not marriageable. Eva, who supports the ritual, said:

It makes you grow up, your behavior change. Even when you are young, and you are circumcised, it opens your brain and you become grown up, and you don’t play. Even if you are young, like 13 years, you will start changing behavior. (Eva)

I asked Esther to analyze what this woman might have meant by her statement above, which she replied:
I think the cut is traumatizing, and you will never be the same again. When you are
that young, you don’t understand the point of it or why it was done to you. Maybe that
is what they mean by it switching something in your brain. Then you are told that you
are a woman, even though you are still a child. So, then you can do whatever a
woman can do, such as having sex. So, it is not a positive switch; it is a negative one.
It is not an experience I would like for anybody that I know. (Esther)

The cut qualifies a woman to marry and bear children, as it prepares her for difficulties to
come. These institutions are the fundamentals of women’s roles in Samburu and are
inherited from previous generations. When asked about women’s roles in the society, Esther
responded:

It is almost the same how it used to be, illiteracy is 80%, so these people live a
traditional life. The girls therefore still marry early, they start their family, and then
they are expected to do the roles women did long ago, bearing children, fetch
firewood, etc. But today, the women are also expected to go look for food, so they do
petty trade. This has happened because (..) livestock levels have decreased; poverty
levels are high, and most of the men are now into alcohol. So now it is up to the
mother to get food for the children. (Esther)

After circumcision, the girl experiences a change in how the society treats her. The reason for
this change is their notion of her being a woman. As an effect, younger girls are excited about
the ritual:

It is there when you are born; you see girls being cut left, right and center. When you
are five you see a 10-year-old being cut, and you see how she is treated in the
community, and you want that. Then, when she is 12 and married off you see how
different her life is and how she is looked at in the community, and you want that too.
It, therefore, becomes something they (girls) look forward to. (Thomas)

When I asked the women in the group conversation what they would do if their daughter
refused to undergo FGC, one immediately replied: «Tell them to go» (Denise). The girls who
do not take part in the tradition, are isolated and stigmatized. All of my informants agreed on
this, regardless of age, background, and gender. Section 4.3.1 explains this.

The informants mentioned several reasons of why people practice FGC, ranging from
illiteracy to clan customs and health benefits. A man who earlier expressed disdain towards
the practice uttered the following: «It was really important for me (that his wife was
circumcised) because then she would not be around, and my family would be in good health»
(Leon). He referred to her not bringing any sexually transmitted disease (STD) or HIV/Aids into the relationship. He later elaborated: «When a woman is circumcised she will live good. When you are not circumcised, you become a whore. I can spend a night with you. It’s a low standard». People believe that circumcising women prevents them from being promiscuous, as they are ‘closed.’ Eva, who supports the practice, explained this:

If you don’t get circumcised, and your husband goes away for some days into the bush to look after the cattle, you feel horny, and you might bring someone else, and you don’t know if that person suffers from HIV or not. (Eva)

On the other hand, many disagreed with this understanding because they believed that cut women sleep with many men trying to ‘feed their hunger for satisfaction.’ Elizabeth shared her opinion on this:

What connection does the cutting of reproductive organs of a woman have to do with her physical or mental state? You grow by age, not cutting. They remove the organs to take away the sexual urges, but the urges are in your mind. It is lack of knowledge. (Elizabeth)

4.3.1 The segregated women

The women and girls who do not undergo FGC face a lot of challenges. They are seen as ‘unclean’ or ‘loose,’ while also being referred to as children who are unable to make decisions. Based on these beliefs about uncut women, they face stigmatization and isolation as they are excluded from participating in social activities and bullied by those who have undergone the procedure. Some said that this could cause the uncut girl to want to be circumcised. FGC, therefore, plays a vital role in securing women’s acceptance in the community, as emphasized by many female participants:

It’s because of the socialization; they don’t want to be isolated. You have not fulfilled the culture, so you can’t participate in cultural festivities and so on. (..) You (the cut woman) will be respected, you are somebody, and you are belonging to that community because you are not isolated. (Elizabeth)

A girl living at the rescue center explained the consequences of refusing to be circumcised:
They can kill you with a gun, hit you, they say that you will meet bad animals and they curse you. They say you will not perform well in school or get married. Sometimes they follow you, and when they get you, they will beat you. You will become an outcast in the family. (Emily)

Most of the young girls shared similar examples of what could happen to those who refuse to be cut and added that parents also tend to chase them away as they bring shame on the family. Jennifer asked to share her story with me:

I was five years old when my father married me off to a 64-year-old, tall man. I am in form 1, and it is 2007. I come home one evening, and I hear my father say that I will be circumcised tomorrow. I go out of the house. My mother doesn’t want me to be circumcised, because she doesn’t want girls to be circumcised, only boys. I ran away, and I slept in the forest for two days. Then I ask a mama where this center is, and I come here. My sister who is younger than me is married and she already has two children. When I get older, I want to rescue girls, because my clan does foolish things. They marry young girls to old men; the girls don’t get to go to school, and they only look after animals. (Jennifer)

Many girls said that they had friends who were married and had dropped out of school. They also stated that together with others, they had decided never to circumcise their daughters. FGC is a prerequisite to marriage and reproduction. These institutions are what womanhood is in Samburu. According to Thomas, the men in Samburu have ingrained it into women’s beliefs that this is all they are good for.

4.3.2 Poverty: A driving force?

Traditionally, livestock was the currency used in Samburu and, therefore, animals signalize wealth and power (see section 4.2.1 for more information on livestock’ value). As money became the primary currency, and there has only been minimal economic development in Samburu, few people have the necessary resources to improve their financial situation. Because few people have well-paid jobs, and many smaller herds of livestock compared to earlier, FGC and poverty might be interlinked in Samburu. Thomas explained this:

It is related to poverty in terms of FGM, child-marriage, and beading. No parent wants to sell off his or her children. Yes, you have the culture, but the poverty drives that culture. You see that a family have many kids, if they sell that girl off they don’t have school fees expenses etc. and it is one less stomach to feed. (Thomas)
Men pay a bride price to compensate for their wife’s fertility and labor. He is not buying her, even though many tend to express it in this way. Thomas goes on to elaborate on the link between poverty and beading (see section 1.2):

Beading, it revolves around poverty. The beads are expensive, and the morans don’t have cows yet. They might steal them in order to buy the beads. The parents usually don’t get anything. There is another form for beading where the father gets the beads and gives it to them so that they can go and look after the animals. Then they are not available for the morans, but they are considered candidates for marriage: they qualify. (Thomas)

It is also necessary to recognize that FGC sustains someone’s livelihoods. During the interview with John, my translator Ismail said:

When he (John) is making knives for circumcision that is his way of making an income. The government came in and told them to stop without giving them an alternative, all they did was tell them to stop. So, what will then happen with the engineers who make these knives? How will they survive? This is their job. (Ismail)

The knife used to circumcise girls’ costs three goats. And even though John makes other tools like cowbells and spears, he emphasized that making these knives is essential for his income. He needs the money so that he can feed his children.

4.4  Gender dynamics

There seemed to be a general understanding that men are the decision-makers and head of the households. Both women and men shared this notion. Elizabeth stated the following:

They (women) are marginalized and oppressed (..) It’s the men who dictate. Women are not free; they don’t make their own decision. Interior you will find men carrying his wife’s id card. Now, this is what we are fighting. Women are like property. The men distribute or do whatever he wants. You have no choice when it comes to sex. You are not allowed to say no. Men decide whether you can go to the hospital. You have nothing. Men oppress us and discriminate us. (Elizabeth)

On the other hand, some informants believed that the relationship between husband and wife is complimentary as they have different roles in the household and the community. Denise
pointed to the fact that men and women are different and complement each other. She then uttered: «Women are made from the man’s ribs, so how can we have the same rights?»

During my conversation with John, he stated unequivocally that his wife was not allowed to touch the knives and spears he was making or sit next to him. She had to sit on the other side and pump the fire. When asked about what role women had in the community, Adam said:

But women have a lot of work. They make the house; they take care of the children, cooking, fetching water is the women. Men really, I can say, are sometimes lazy and just orders the wife “where is the food” “bring tea for guest.” And also, women have less voice. (Adam)

To point at the unequal treatment women in Samburu have, as well as to clarify how women’s roles have changed, Thomas said:

(One of our girls) When she was nine years old, we rescued her and found her selling milk so that she could feed her husband of 40 something years old. She is the one who raises the cows, milks them and sells the milk. She gets the money and feeds the man. That’s the difference between men and women in Samburu. (Thomas)

Examining the number of girls to the number of boys enrolled in school, demonstrates the unequal gender divide. Emily pointed to her classroom where there were approximately 50 boys and between 20 to 30 girls. However, she was told by someone who worked at the rescue center, that maybe 10 to 20 years ago, there was 50 boys but only two girls in the classroom. This demonstrates that change is slowly materializing. Many of the young, female respondents highlighted how education made them realize that they have the same potential as the male students.

4.5 Modernity and knowledge

While the older generations are proud and emphasize their cultural heritage, the younger ones are aware that they have inherited a lifestyle from their forefathers that is not reflecting how they understand the world. With access to technology, youths are aware of the alternative lifestyles that exist in other parts of Kenya. According to Jack:

They (youth) see differences between counties in Kenya and they compare them. Then they will see that other places they don’t do circumcision of girls and that other
people don’t like it. Elders are open to technology if you explain to them. But maybe they don’t understand why you talk to people from different places, and to people, you don’t know, because it can be bad, like Illuminati (a conspiracy theory about a secret organization that controls the whole world). But when you talk to people from different places you learn from them, share ideas and create relations. (Jack)

The men that were part of the self-help group, and wore regular clothes, firmly believed that the Samburu community is moving away from the traditional lifestyle. Ross said:

They (morans) are very free because education is for them now. So, when they come for holiday most of them don’t even attend cultural ceremonies, you won’t even see them there or wearing their traditional clothing. If you compare to the disco or church, you will find more of them there. So, you see now that cultural ceremonies they are also changing. (Ross)

On the other hand, both John and Denise firmly believed that their society had barely changed and that most people, including the youths, wanted to continue their traditional lifestyle. An informant asserted that the people who return to Samburu after traveling abroad might bring back modern technological devices like phones. However, once they are back, they will wear traditional clothing and ornaments and speak the local language. Many of the youths disclaimed this by saying that they live in a «digital world», and hence, many of the traditions and customs are not eligible in today’s society.

Most of those girls who participated in this study said that they ran away or escaped circumcision, beading, and child-marriage because they wanted to finish their education and become something in life. The youths shared with me what they knew about the health consequences of practicing FGC, such as complications during birth, blood loss, and the spreading of disease. When asked if the information on FGC provided in school is sufficient, Thomas firmly said:

No, it is not at all enough, zero. Therefore, we have a school program and tell them. The schools have to be politically correct, so many teachers are hesitant in participating. We involved all principles, and they invited us because they can’t talk about it themselves, it’s the same with sex education and condoms. The head teachers told us that the pregnancy rates in Samburu are huge. (Thomas)

The knowledge the youths had of FGC varied significantly. The girl’s living in the rescue center had more detailed information, while one of the boys only knew what his friends had told him. He told me that he wanted to marry a circumcised woman because his friend said to
him that if an uncut woman firstborn is a boy, all of the woman’s siblings will die. As he did not want to cause his future wife the pain of losing her family members, he would want his future wife to be circumcised.

Denise and Eva said that when people come from the outside, whether as individuals, NGO’s or government bodies, and criticize FGC, they think negatively about them. They interpret this as people not respecting the Samburu culture, heritage, and their traditions.
5 Analysis

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings presented in section 4, which are based on my informants’ experiences and knowledge. I discuss these in light of the theories and studies presented in part 3. This chapter aims to offer credible answers to the research questions posed in this thesis. These questions are as follows:

i. How do female genital cutting influence women’s identity and sense of belonging to the Samburu community?

ii. What meaning is attributed female genital cutting as a ritual, in the Samburu context?

iii. What are women’s roles in the society?

The first section of this chapter will discuss FGC’s meaning and value in Samburu, and how it influences society. The second part presents women’s role in the community and how FGC affects identity. All of these topics are interrelated, and consequently, some aspects are repeated in different sections. I present the conclusion of my findings in chapter 6.

5.1 Female genital cutting in Samburu

A reoccurring topic in the interviews was that of culture. Some respondents referred to culture as being a defining part of who they are, others claimed it is disappearing and people are pulling away from the cultural practices and lifestyle. Talle (2010) emphasize the control culture has over the individual, as it restrains people from questioning practices, behavior, and other aspects of their social life. As it is believed to be inherited, culture has the legitimacy to create a form of social order that in Samburu greatly defines womanhood (s.18). Practices like FGC are essential because they tie the past to the present and like John said; «this is how we have always done it». On the other side of the spectrum, FGC is referred to as a belief, and not culture. These disparities that exist within society illustrate the changes that are occurring overall, as elaborated in part 5.1.1. The symbolism attached to rituals and how poverty sustains the practice is discussed in section 5.1.2 and 5.1.3
respectively. The last unit explains how education is changing the perceptions people have about FGC (5.1.4).

5.1.1 Samburu: A modern - or traditional society?

There is a significant distinction between what characterize a traditional society to that of high-modernity\(^2\) (Giddens, 1991). While the former emphasizes continuation, stability, and heritage, the latter has produced a community with unprecedented dynamism resulting from reflexivity, a transformation of time and space, and disembedding mechanism removing the peculiarities from the locale abstract system (Ibid., p. 18).

Several features of the Samburu society indicate that it is a traditional community. The general notion amongst many is that the world «(...) is as it is because it is as it should be» (Giddens, 1991, p. 48). Most of the traditions and customs, especially associated with transitions, are practiced today as they provide continuity and stability from one generation to the next by prescribing the individual a role and place in the society. Its legitimacy derives from being inherited from their forefathers, and therefore, blessed by them. Hence, people perceive the ritual as ‘necessary’ and ‘right.’ Hiebert (2008) says that this form of preservation of culture influence people’s notion of how the world is supposed to be (p. 15). FGC is essential in the community because it is a prerequisite to marry and have children, as it prepares the woman for the future hardships she might endure. The children who are born from uncut women are, as a result, seen as a «bad omen» and excluded from the community. A study conducted by Talle amongst the Maasai tribe, whose culture greatly resembles the Samburu's, support these findings (2003, p. 51).

Another characteristic of a traditional society is men’s authority over the female body and sexuality (Giddens, 1991). Men are the decision-makers in both the household and the community in Samburu. Several informants shared that their mother was against FGC; however, it was their father’s opinion that mattered. These different authority levels apply to sexual intercourse, finances, and general decision-making that influences women’s lives (see

---

\(^2\) The concepts ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ are stylized, abstract epitomes of different aspects of the world. According to Weber, these dichotomies are over-simplifications that do not reflect the reality it aims to describe. Instead, the concepts are used as analytical distinctions to clarify contrasts (Eriksen, 2010)
Gruenbaum, 2001; Leonard, 2001; Samburu Women Trust, 2016). However, while that was the general consensus amongst my informants, the women in the empowerment group argued that they made the decisions in the bedroom. The ingrained acceptance that women have secret lovers can explain this; a relationship based on attraction instead of parent’s arrangement, resulting from the age difference between husband and wife. From my informants perspective, having a lover can be their way of opposing the husband’s and the patriarchal system’s authority (Talle, 2007, p. 363; Wanyoike, 2011, p. 185/186).

Despite having several distinctions that are features of a traditional society, the dynamism that depicts high-modernity dramatically influences Samburu. For instance, the disembedding of locale abstract system has shifted the culture to use money as currency, instead of livestock. As the Samburu are pastoralist, the animals have always played an essential role in their society, and it used to be a sign of wealth and power. The livestock plays a crucial part in rituals like FGC, as the circumcised child drinks milk mixed with cow’s blood to regain strength, and as animals are slaughtered to mark the transition, features shared by the Maasai tribe (Talle, 2003, p. 55). However, as money facilitates trade with other tribes, it is more convenient, resulting in livestock losing some of its status and importance. People no longer have the same number of animals as they once did, and with limited access to financial resources, many live in poverty (section 5.1.3 detail this). On the other hand, John priced a circumcision knife to be three goats, a price I see inadmissible as one goat cost between $40 - $60. But, this reveals that people within the tribe or clan might use traditional currency and trading-methods as long as both parties share the same understanding of the value and costs of products (Eriksen, 2010, p. 180).

The reflexivity that Giddens characterizes as distinctive of a modern society provides an explanation as to why a high number of tribal groups have discontinued the practice of FGC in Kenya. In light of Christianity and missionaries’ rejection of the custom, education, and improved access to information (Talle, 2010, p. 38), people started to question beliefs, practices, and behavior, and systematically discontinue that which is unsuited in a contemporary community (Giddens, 1991, p. 20). In Samburu, ear stretching had ceased to continue, as it caused difficulties when children got into fights at school. In this case, the traditional custom is disregarded as it clashed with modern institutions. There is also the possibility that the practice did not have the same symbolism as FGC, as outsiders have not
‘forced’ the eradication, underpinning the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (further elaborated in 5.1.2).

A vast majority of the youths in the study believe FGC has harmful effects on women and reject the practice as pertaining to a traditional lifestyle that they cannot identify with because «we live in digital now». This can be interpreted in accordance with Giddens understanding of reflexivity, as the information that is made available to them, both through education and technology, has changed their outlook on how the world is, or should be. As they are informed about the harmful effects of FGC and the female reproductive system, the argument that ‘this is how it has always been’ has lost its soundness (Eriksen, 2008, p. 29; Hiebert, 2008). Consequently, as FGC is closely tied to womanhood in Samburu, these youths view of women have changed. According to Hiebert’s understanding of worldview, the rejection of FGC by these youths in Samburu means that their notion of what a woman is, or should be defined as, has also changed. A study from Marsabit county in Kenya which reveals that «as societies experience dramatic social change in the process of development, traditional values erode, and adherence to the practice of ‘circumcision’ declines» (Shell-Duncan et al., 2000, p. 119) supports this. Hence, the inducement to continue FGC conflicts with how the individual perceives the world, and therefore, make no sense. However, as Esther stated; «at the end of the day it is about the elders and parents, and what they want to do». Talle (2010) claims that parent’s educational level has some influence on their decision to cut their daughters. Seen in the light of Esther’s claim that 80% of the population in Samburu is illiterate, this helps to explain the prevalence of FGC in the area. Simultaneously, studies support my findings that parents see the added value of education and encourage school enrolment, despite having minimal or no formal education themselves (see Samburu Women Trust, 2016, p. 19). This is best demonstrated by the women who expanded their social roles and developed ways to make money to pay for their children’s school fees (section 5.2.1 depicts the expansion of social functions).

The Samburu community has characteristics of both a traditional and high-modern society, which means that it is enduring a lot of changes. By considering the dynamism that features the modern society, it is likely that Samburu will continue to move in that direction. Better access to technology inform people about alternative lifestyles, which in turn result in more reflexivity. From Gidden’s theoretical perspective, the questioning of practices, behavior, and traditions will eventually result in the eradication of FGC in Samburu (Giddens, 1991).
5.1.2 Rituals

Rituals convey various denotations and messages regarding gender and sexuality and transmit knowledge, expectations, and attitudes from one generation onto the next (Abusharaf, 2001, p. 152; Barth, 1975, 1987). FGC’s vigor, results from it being inherited, widespread, and having immense social value. Circumcision marks the transition into adulthood and has close ties to the institutions of marriage and reproduction in Samburu. It is considered a preparation for the difficulties that lie ahead and is thus a defining characteristic of both womanhood and manhood. Resulting from this, the ritual influences how people perceive women and consequently understand their reality, as it organizes it into groupings that offer a valid explanation to the world around them as emphasized by Hiebert (Geertz, 1973, p. 169; 2008, p. 15).

The Samburu people are a minority in Kenya, and cultural practices like rituals facilitate and reinforce groupings such as ‘we’ and ‘the other’ (Eriksen, 2008, p. 70/71). In meetings with people of different ethnic backgrounds or lifestyles, the cultural identity one inhabits being from Samburu will be signified, and act as a constant reminder that the individual is different (Ibid., p. 67/69). According to Hylland Eriksen, a threat to the cultural identity, such as influences of modern life elaborated in part 5.1.1, will often result in a stronger collective identity (2008). Esther illustrated this when she uttered, «my culture is my identity, it is who I am». From this perspective, FGC is a cultural attribute that is necessary to protect as it distinguishes them uniquely from ‘the other’ (Ibid., p. 77; Schiefloe, 2011, p. 26/235). As such, the boundaries created by separating the ‘we’-group to that of ‘the other’ is an aspect that explains FGC’s importance in many societies and offers an insight as to why the prevalence remains high in Samburu.

5.1.3 Poverty

While some of my informants lead a traditional lifestyle, which included living in manyattas (huts) and having the same occupation as one’s parent, others lived in big houses with TVs and electricity. An individual’s financial situation creates opportunities and limitations on
what she or he can do, and therefore influences their outlook on life and leads them into specific patterns of behavior (Gruenbaum, 2001, p. 50; Hiebert, 2008). For example, a girl who grows up in a poor household will most likely not go to school. Instead, she takes care of the livestock and helps her mother around the house. When the time is right, she will be cut, married off to an older man, and most likely start reproducing. Her world is narrowed down to her immediate circumstances, and thus, she will according to Giddens (1991) obey traditions and beliefs valued in her cultural worldview. On the other hand, a girl from a more resourceful family is expected to graduate from secondary school, if not university. She has access to books, TV, and the internet, all which broadens her frame of reference. As such, being part of the more modern world, the reflexive processes that Giddens’ characterize this society by, would result in her questioning traditions and rituals. The ones that do not comply with her idea of the world would have to be discarded to resort logic in her worldview, as Hiebert would say (2008). This example shows how society socializes people into both the groups and roles that are relevant to their lives. For many girls from less resourceful households, the likelihood of them prevailing despite poverty is rather limited as they do not have access to knowledge and information, and so on. Hence, they will, in most cases, follow the traditional path and marry young. With a poverty rate of 77% (Commission on Revenue Allocation, 2011) and minimal economic developments in the area, the people living in Samburu have few financial opportunities. I argue that this encourages the acceptance of practices such as early-marriages. This union results in her family having one less child to feed and educate, plus a bride-price that will help to sustain them (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Population Studies and Research Institute, & United Nations Children’s Fund, 2016, p. 153). For parents with minimal resources, marrying off a daughter might be seen as their only option.

Poverty’s influence on practices like FGC can also be measured by evaluating how the ritual facilitates membership into social networks. A study from Senegambia proposes that an extensive social network protects the individual from external hardships, as social relations build on the foundation of sharing (Shell-Duncan et al., 2011). This provides access to resources that would otherwise be unavailable. A system of reciprocity develops (Ahmadu, 2005), where the members have mutual obligations (how FGC facilitates membership to such networks is elaborated on in section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2).
5.1.4 Education: A changemaker?

An exhaustive majority of my informants who were in school, or had graduated from higher education, opposed FGC. However, even if parents with a higher educational level tend to practice FGC less (Talle, 2010), it is not necessarily the case. Albeit my informants disagree whether local politicians cut their daughters or not, it is difficult to rule out the possibility that some have succumbed to the external pressure that arises from not taking part in the practice.

A report by Samburu Women Trust (2016) states that a growing number of parents recognize the benefits of educating their children (p. 20). A woman’s answer when asked if she was transferring their lifestyle onto the children illustrates this; «all of my children are in school; therefore, I work hard to pay school fees». But, the same reports show a high drop-out rate amongst beaded and married girls, as the responsibilities that accompany such roles (i.e., taking care of the household and have children) does not allow for the continuation of education. Many of the youths said that most girls who underwent the procedure did not report to school afterward due to marriage, which is confirmed by a study revealing that 96% of the girls enrolled in school were forcefully married between the ages of nine to fourteen (p. 68; Njogu, 2015). So, on the one hand, people’s perception of what is essential has resulted in changes in women’s roles, as they now have jobs to pay for school fees. However, on the other hand, their fundamental beliefs of womanhood are not transformed, hence the continuation of women’s primary roles is crucial. This illustrates Hiebert’s notion of how worldview directs people’s behavior, as they see education to be important and valuable, however only if it fits into the idea of how the world is supposed to be (Geertz 1973 p. 169).

Several of the girls who had escaped or survived beading, FGC, and/or child-marriage, expressed that education was what motivated them to not partake in these practices. Like one said; «I like to read so that in future I can become an important person in the society». There seemed to be a general notion amongst my younger informants that the practice is something of the past, as they expressed their access to the outside world. So, even if these girls socialize into specific roles that come with a particular behavior, their dreams of the future have influenced their actions according to Talle (2010, p. 27). The knowledge they have learned in school about FGC and its harmful effects contradicts the attributed value and symbolism it has in the community. As a result of what Giddens calls the reflexive processes, these adolescents have evaluated the practice to have no meaningful purpose; hence it makes
no sense to practice it. However, their position is still in the minority in the community, and they are met with sanctions if they do not conform (elaborated in section 5.2.1).

5.1.5 Womanhood

In many of the societies where the FGC is prevalent, it is perceived to be a necessity to marry and reproduce (also see Leonard, 2001, p. 175; Shell-Duncan et al., 2000, p. 117; Talle, 2010, p. 16). In Samburu, there is a general notion that a woman who has not undergone FGC is a child. Through the initiation into adulthood, and primarily the cut itself, prepares her for the hardships that they associate with marriage and reproduction. This is linked to a «switch» in the brain, as one informant describes it, that causes the girl to immediately grow up during the ritual (Talle, 2003, p. 40). Esther explained this ‘switch’ to be the trauma suffered during the initiation. Other tribes, such as the Kikuyus, share similar descriptions. Within this group, some still cut the girls even though it is no longer part of the rites of passage; however, the pain contracted from the cut is seen as a necessary experience to become an adult (Ibid., p. 40). So, according to Hiebert (2008), the Samburu people have amalgamated their understanding of what a woman is to that of FGC, resulting in an understanding that the ritual is a defining part of womanhood as it prepares her for the fundamental roles she has in the society. According to the concept of worldview, nobody in Samburu will marry an uncut woman because to them she is still an unprepared child. The meanings, expectations, and responsibilities one ties to what a woman is or should be, emerge from cultural belonging and the individual’s worldview. As the cut is indispensable within the culture, it will be necessary to change the whole community’s perception of what a woman is, and what womanhood comprises.

The Samburu people use body adornment as a way of communicating and portraying their fulfillment of social roles and expectations. The different ornaments signal their status in the community, regarding marriage, children, FGC, and so on as thoroughly portrayed in Khasandi et al. (2014). For instance, when a man’s daughter is cut, without having been pregnant, he will receive respect and become a recognized elder (Ibid., p. 3). When a girl wears the beads that signal her circumcision, she attracts attention, admiration, and respect from others, as they recognize her as mature, respectful, and obedient. These are qualities desired in a wife (Samburu Women Trust, 2016, p. 32). After the initiation, a girl in Samburu
will notice how different, and more respectful people in the community treat her as confirmed by other studies such as Samburu Women Trust (2016, p. 18/32); (Shell-Duncan et al., 2000, p. 117). As a result, younger girls want to undergo the procedure because they wish for that same treatment, and the initiation becomes something they look forward to. This seems to be common in other communities that practice FGC, as described in Abusharaf (2001, p. 153) and in the biography *desert flower* by Waris Dirie (1998). The question is, therefore, if these girls have taken ownership over their bodies to control how the society perceives them. Or if it signals that they conform to how people used to view the body; purely related to its reproductive functions (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 277/278). My findings and the studies mentioned reveal that people tend to conform to social norms to be accepted. So, by looking at this from Gidden’s perspective of the self, these rituals communicate the girl’s lifestyle choices due to the symbolism signaled by the beads she wears. Hence, her newly acquired social identity. But this contradicts Gidden’s (1991) understanding because instead of defying the social restrictions and norms, she is conforming to them (Giddens, 1991, p. 219).

In Samburu, it is relatively common that girls engage in sexual activities before the circumcision, as the practice of beading (the sexual relationship between a girl-child and moran, see section 1.2) is widespread, accepted, and signalize that the girl qualifies for marriage according to Samburu Women Trust (2016) and my findings. This contradicts other communities who practice infibulation, where the girl’s virginity has close ties to morality and shame (e.g., Somalia and Sudan) (Abusharaf, 2001; Dareer, 1982; Hayes, 1975; Talle, 2010). Circumcision and marriage are believed to be two institutions that are essential in reproduction. So, if a girl gets pregnant without being inscribed into these institutions, she will have to abort the child as it is believed to be a bad omen (also see Samburu Women Trust, 2016; Wanyoike, 2011, p. 198). The link between reproduction, marriage, and FGC is stringent and defying either result in stigmatization of the girl-child.

5.2 **The female identity in Samburu**

The previous section has explained the value FGC have in Samburu and what influence their notion of womanhood and the expectations that follow. It illustrates how the cultural circumstances a person is born into, affect her or him (Eriksen, 2008, p. 49; Schiefloe, 2011, p. 129/134). The following part aims to elucidate women’s role in the society and to
categorize the relation between FGC and identity. This part of the chapter will first explain the function women have in Samburu and how this influence women’s behavior and understanding of self. The last section discusses how inscription into a network influence the prevalence of a ritual.

5.2.1 Women’s roles and identity

According to Burke and Stets (2009), role identities are the internalized meanings obtained partially from the cultural context and partly from the individual’s interpretation of the character (p. 114). In Samburu, women are subordinate to men and only have a minimal say in matters that are relevant to their lives. Their primary roles are tied to the institutions of marriage and reproduction, which contains a set of expectations on how to behave that is amended through human interaction (Martinussen, 2008, p. 88). Hence, the expectations tied to the different roles adapt to social changes. When a girl is initiated and therefore ascribed a new social role, she will adjust her behavior to suit the expectations assigned cut girls. By fulfilling these expectations, she is, as stated by Giddens (1991), acting in accordance with her understanding of who she should be (Aakvaag, 2008, p. 277; p. 52/54). Following the changes in how the community treats her, as described in section 5.1.5, verifies her newly ascribed identity and behavior. In turn, this affects her self-image, as it relies on confirmation from other people (also depicted in Abusharaf, 2006, p. 153; Dirie, 1998; Markstrom & Iborra, 2003, p. 403; Samburu Women Trust, 2016). As mentioned in section 5.1.5, it is difficult to assess whether this is a way for her to control others’ perception of her, and therefore a deliberate choice, or if her behavior is a result of minimal to no reflexivity. The girls who are standing up against the practice, however, are more aligned to how Giddens (1991) sees identity in a modern society. Their deliberate decision to eschew FGC, often as a result of knowledge combined with a desire to continue their education, result in them acting in accordance to how they see themselves and their surroundings. This will influence social norms, expectations, and culture, as this change and reproduces through human interaction, and therefore is part of redefining womanhood and expectations tied to it.

Goffman uses the analogy of the theatre to describe how people control others perception of them, and this parallel applies to those who practice FGC but do not believe it is right. For instance, Edwin said that «circumcision for women is bad», but yet it was important to him
that his wife was circumcised because «I don’t want her brothers and sisters to die». A friend told him that if a woman’s firstborn is a boy and she is uncut, all her siblings will die. To ensure she did not have to go through the pain of losing them, he would want her to be cut. Talle (2010) also mentions similarities from a study in the Maasai group, where she describes a scenario where the mother did not like FGC but deemed it essential for social life. Hence, people who are against the practice still tend to submit to it. In public or frontstage as Goffman refers to it, they play the part ascribed to them by the society. This influence their behavior, dress, and communication. By acting according to the expectations that emanate from the role she or he is playing, the individual manages the impression given in such situations (Goffman, 1959, p. 116). For instance, the young girls who admire the older, cut women, can obtain this desired state by going through the ritual herself. She will then receive the treatment she has anticipated, which again reaffirms her new identity. Another interesting example is of the cut girls who still interact with girls who are not. One informant said that her (cut) friends had agreed not to let their daughters go through FGC. Throughout this form of interaction, the internalized preconceived idea of what womanhood is, changes. Not only because it goes against social norms to socialize with an uncut girl, but also because it changes their personal understanding of what womanhood means. So, even if they are not aware of it, they are changing the roles and expectations tied to what defines a woman, hence their worldview. But, many of these girls will most likely return home and again act according to the expectations of a cut woman. This demonstrates how people continuously step in and out of roles depending on who they socialize with.

Those girls who refuse to accept the part attributed and wanted an education instead of marriage are fully aware that by doing so, they impute themselves as an ‘outcast.’ This is because the whole society is cognizant that disobeying social norms will result in sanctions. The reactions that follow from such actions will according to Burke reveal society’s stand on such behavior (1980, p. 114/115). Girls who reject the initiation ritual are stigmatized, and as individuals rely on other people’s confirmation to have a good self-image, Gidden says her understanding of self is weakened (1991, p. 38/65). A study from Samburu reveals how this occurs:

Stigma takes the form of public shaming, derision, and belittling. An uncircumcised woman is considered childlike and immature and hence, her ability to perform ‘feminine’ duties such as cooking, and cleaning is constantly questioned.
Furthermore, her child-status means that she cannot speak before circumcised women, enter spaces where men occupy, be married by Samburu men, nor bear children. This constant maltreatment often drives women to internalize the shame directed toward them and begin seeing themselves as lesser-than. (Mepukori, 2016, p. 35)

This reinforces my findings and illustrates the consequences faced by the girls who do not obey social norms. Evaluating it in light of Hiebert’s understanding of worldview, people in Samburu legitimize treating uncut girls in this manner because they are seen as less and as children. This reasoning makes maltreatment acceptable (Geertz 1973, 169). In some cases, this results in the girl succumbing to be socially accepted. This demonstrates how it is easier to obey to social norms and expectations, even though the practice conflicts with how one understands the world than it is to manage the sanctions that follow such deviations. These girls challenge the existing worldview and the social norms that exist, which according to Hylland Eriksen will in many cases result in people actively trying to defend these traditions (2008, p. 123).

Women’s traditional roles have expanded, as they are expected to make money in addition to their established responsibility of maintaining the house and caring for the children. On the one hand, this is a positive development as it can give women greater freedom since they no longer depend on their husband to pay expenses. But on the other hand, this results in a more significant workload for these women, as it gives them more responsibility. For instance, the NGO Thomas works for, came across a nine-year-old girl while she was selling milk to feed her 40 – year-old husband. The little girl was the one who raised the cows, milked them, and sold the produce. Her earnings supported her spouse. Poverty and men’s drinking habits influence this expansion of the roles, as these women have no option but to work to provide for their children.

The notion of womanhood in Samburu is verified and redefined in the classrooms, as some girls drop out to get married, while others resist the social pressure to undergo FGC. My findings indicate that education has resulted in many girls becoming aware of their potential and abilities. This influence their understanding of the context they live in, and the unfair power dynamic that confines their autonomy. The Constitution of 2010 allocated one-third of all elected government seats to women, hence more Samburu women have access to influential positions. Traditionally, women have no voice in Samburu, and so this
development has the potential to change the general perception of what womanhood means in the society.

A study by Ahmada (2005) of the Mande group in West Africa reveals the connection between FGC and the idea of women's authority. It is women who organize, execute and in many cases, defend the practice (Ibid., p. 56). Therefore, women want to continue practicing FGC as it maintains both their structural position and the power of the female elders. However, my findings did not necessarily indicate this. Instead, my informants highlighted that the practice was significant because it brought forward the culture and deemed it necessary due to its close ties to womanhood. Additionally, instead of conferring power to female elders, it is an effective way to secure girls’ social participation, as elaborated in the coming section (5.2.2).

5.2.2 The shared experience

FGC is a requirement to marry and have children in Samburu, and not succumbing to this norm will result in sanctions (as described throughout section 5.1 and 5.2.1). The pain the girl-child endures during the ritual is grooming her for the adversity brought by reproduction and marriage. A study by Markstrom and Iborra (2003, p. 403) on initiation rituals amongst an Indian-American group illustrates how a practice can unfold as painful, yet still be regarded as positive and valuable. The ceremony emphasizes cultural values and inscribes the girl into the communal, hence strengthening and confirming her collective membership (Ibid., p. 403). The practice also facilitates the enforcement of pre-existing bonds between the individual and the society, as they support her. This encouragement validates and affirms the identity she was ascribed during the ritual (Ibid., p. 403/404). In Samburu, the change in treatment post-circumcision (as detailed explained in section 5.1.5) illustrates this and the admiration she receives from the community. The initiation rituals are the most effective way for women to gather as a group, as girls inscribe into the network consisting of women who share her experience. Studies by Moore (1986, p. 172) and Talle (2010) support these findings. On the other hand, however, the women who challenge the practice by opposing it, reinforce an internal distinction between ‘we’ and ‘the other.’ This establishes a division in the social structure, and as they pose a ‘threat’ to the traditions, they are sanctioned (Burke & Stets, 2000).
Gerrie Mackie presented the social convention theory in 1996, which suggests that people practice FGC to secure a better marriage in societies struck by significant resource inequality (section 5.1 explains the relevance throughout). Mackie drew parallels between FGC and the practice of foot-binding in China and consequently claimed that the cutting of the vulva could be eradicated within a generation (Talle, 2010, p. 19). In China, they held extensive awareness campaigns, founded an umbrella organization for everyone working on foot-binding, and encouraged people to stand up and vocally discredit the practice (Ibid., p. 19). In Kenya, the ‘National Anti-FGM Network’ was launched in 2016, while awareness campaigns have been running for years without having a significant effect in Samburu. A peculiar feature of a tradition like FGC is that even if everyone in the group thinks it will be valuable to desert the custom, a single individual proceeding alone will not be able to change it (Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2000, p. 255). In Samburu, only a handful of locals are vocally fighting the custom, and as seen throughout chapter 4, local politicians, authorities, and the church are not using their power to sway people. In relation to Mackie’s claim, my findings confirm this to a certain extent as FGC is a ritual necessary to endure to marry. However, being cut does not mean that the girl will find a more resourceful husband. Instead, FGC permits the girl to stay with her family and the community. When a girl in Samburu repudiates the cut, she faces sanctions that make her an outcast in the society, which means rejection. This dismissal has a direct, negative impact on her self-understanding, as people depend on approval and confirmation from others to sustain their self-identity. A group of researchers tested the social convention theory in Senegambia, and the results stated that FGC carries the function of ascribing girls into a network consisting of other circumcised women, and to the cultural community she belongs to (Shell-Duncan et al., 2011). Some of the female youths who were part of this study had made a pact with their girlfriends never to cut their daughters. These girls had been omitted from the community as they had either been rescued from or rejecting FGC, beading, or marriage. They have, therefore, created a network of themselves, where their opinions and emotions about these practices are accepted and approved by others, and hence verifying one’s role and identity.
6 Conclusion

6.1 Reflexivity

In this thesis, I present how some people in Samburu experience and understand female genital cutting and womanhood, and how this influence women’s identity and sense of belonging to the community. I clarify the findings through the use of theories that, on the one hand, explain how reflexivity causes people to question different aspects of their reality, but on the other, expound what influences one’s identity and how roles and a shared notion of reality affects the self. By merging these concepts with my findings and other studies, I have drawn parallels between FGC, womanhood, identity, and sense of belonging.

The findings accumulated in this study and the conclusions I present in this chapter are a reflection of 29 informants’ perceptions of reality. It is also important to underline, as explained in part 2.6, that this material has been interpreted through my frame of reference as it is unattainable to disentangle oneself from the social world. Consequently, the following conclusions must be appraised with regard to my background and experiences.

6.2 Conclusion

I have organized the following part corresponding to the initial questions asked in this research. This set-up permits the reader to see the correlation between the different questions and the conclusions drawn in direct relation to them.

6.2.1 What meaning is attributed female genital cutting as a ritual, in the Samburu context?

FGC in Samburu connects to people’s perception of women, which in turn influence their understanding of the reality. The practice is a prerequisite to marry and reproduce in the community, as the ritual prepares the woman for the difficulties she will endure in the future. If she is uncut, the society labels her as a child; hence the practice is a necessity to become a
woman. As the ritual categorizes womanhood, it plays a significant role in their understanding of how the world is or should be.

The study demonstrates how the Samburu community is changing by indicating how different characteristics of both a traditional – and modern society is influencing social life. Most notably are the reflexive processes that have resulted in people questioning different practices and types of behavior. Improved access to education and information, which often contradicts or diverge traditional wisdom, facilitates this continuous evaluation process. By way of illustration, children in school learn about the harmful effects FGC has on the female body, while they have been raised to believe that FGC is a necessity for girls to become women. This preconception was part of the information transferred from one generation to the next and has become so ingrained in the society that it today is perceived to be a ‘given’ and required. However, in light of new knowledge that conflicts with these ideas, practices and behaviors are assessed to measure how they fit into the individuals’ understanding of reality. My findings disclose that a majority of the youths struggled to understand why practices like FGC are compulsory by social norms. According to Giddens (1991) idea of reflexivity, the changes observed in these youths will spread as more people access information, and eventually result in the eradication of the practice.

6.2.2 What are women’s roles in the society?

By tradition, women’s roles have close ties to the institutions of marriage and reproduction as mentioned above, but in the present time poverty has made many women engage in paid labor. Consequently, women's roles have changed to facilitate the households' financial situation. As FGC is considered to be a prerequisite to marry and have children, the ritual interlinks to two of the fundamental roles Samburu women have. This was illustrated by a young girl whose response was the following when asked how parents react if their daughter says she does not want to be circumcised; « (..) They say you will not perform well in school or get married». The use of ‘not being married’ as an insult demonstrate the importance of this institution in the society. In contrast to earlier times, more girls have access to education today. There seemed to be an increasing awareness amongst the girls in school that they have the same abilities as their male counterparts. Consequently, there is a growing understanding of how unfair it is that women have no voice in the society.
It is through interaction with others that expectations tied to social positions, and the roles themselves, are re-established and verified. This also includes the sanctions that link to the different types of behavior. The influences of the dynamism that characterize the modern society have caused changes in Samburu. Today, it is acceptable and even expected that women take up paid jobs, a higher number of girls enroll in school than earlier times, and more women have influential positions in the society. It is not unreasonable to predict that this will influence, and might even redefine, the general notion of womanhood in Samburu and the values attributed FGC. Simultaneously, by looking at the girls who have escaped FGC or other harmful practices, it seems as if they are influenced by these elements already. These girls made a conscious decision, and instead of conforming to social expectations, acted according to how they perceived their surroundings and themselves.

6.2.3 How do female genital cutting influence women’s identity and sense of belonging to the Samburu community?

The meaning attributed FGC in Samburu is interlinked with the initiation ritual transitioning the girl from childhood to adulthood. As a result, the women who have not undergone FGC are perceived to be children still. The pain a girl endures during the ritual is believed to prepare her for the future hardships she will suffer through marriage and childbearing. The traumatic event, also verbalized as ‘the switch,’ is professed as necessary to become an adult. This applies to other ethnic groups as well, like the Kikuyu tribe (Talle, 2003, p. 40). The cut is believed to make her grow up instantly, and one informant said that their behavior transforms because of the trauma it caused them. However, this change in conduct is understood as a positive development from the society’s perspective, as the girl becomes obedient and mature; qualities valued in a wife. The society acknowledges her transformation by treating her in a more respectful and admirable manner, differ noticeably from previous treatment. This results in many young girls desiring to be cut, hence FGC is something they look forward too. One of the main arguments in this thesis is that the changed treatment the girl experiences after FGC plays an important part in the prevalence of the ritual. The reason is that the community’s changed attitude towards the girl confirms and verifies her newly ascribed social role and identity. This confirmation signals that the girl act according to social expectations and norms. The validation she receives from others produces a positive
understanding of self. The second argument I make in this thesis is that FGC is important because it inscribes the women into a social network consisting of other women who share their experience. This is carefully linked to the sanctions that follow when a girl challenge the social norm. In Samburu, these girls will be isolated and often chased away from the community. The risk of opposing the practice is, therefore, to lose everything she has ever known. This explains why some continue to participate in the practice, despite believing it’s harmful. My findings reveal that some of the girls who suffer exclusion from the community created their own groupings where they receive confirmation from others. These girls had agreed never to cut their daughters or pass on such practices (i.e., beading). The shared notion provides acceptance and validation and reaffirms that one's stance is appropriate and right. In turn, this positively influences and nourish their identity.

6.3 Further research

This thesis is built on the material collected from 29 different informants and is under no circumstances a representation of the Samburu community. Instead, it offers information and insights on perceptions of FGC and womanhood within the society. Future studies on the connection between identity, sense of belonging, and the prevalence of FGC can utilize the findings and conclusions drawn in this paper. Researching this correlation will benefit organizations that work towards eliminating the practice, as understanding the value FGC has for personal identification can provide them with the necessary material they need to create appropriate strategies.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Google maps. (2018). Samburu County Kenya. Google maps. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/maps/place/Samburu+County,+Kenya/@0.5445998,35.5053212,6.7z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x17906d4157e2c6b9:0xf59b7a0063013edb!8m2!3d1.2571383!4d37.176783


## Appendices

### List of Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tour-guide/Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Housewife/Beadwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabet</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Housewife/Beadwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabell</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Casual Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Assistant Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Housewife/Beadwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tour-guide/Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>County Director of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Tour-guide/Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>PR &amp; Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>NGO Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Assistant Clerk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent/Guardian Informed Consent Agreement
Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to allow your child to participate in the study.

**Purpose of the research study:** The purpose of the study is to identify factors that play a role in maintaining female circumcision as a traditional ritual within the Samburu community.

**What your child will do in the study:** Your child will answer a line of questions related to female circumcision, school and the life within the community. The child will be free to skip any question he or she feels uncomfortable with or stop the interview at any time without giving a reason as to why. The child can withdraw information provided during the interview at any time. There will be no use of audio recording or video recording to ensure the child’s anonymity, but notes will be written during and after the interview.

**The time required:** The study will require a maximum of 1 hour of your child’s time.

**Risks:** There are no anticipated risks in this study.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you or your child for participating in this research study. The study may help us understand how female circumcision influences a woman’s identity and relation to her community.

**Confidentiality:** All the data collected from the interview will be kept private and handled confidentially. The data will be reported in a way that will not identify your child, which means that it will not be possible to trace the information back to your child.

**Voluntary participation:** Your child’s participation in the study is entirely optional.

**Agreement:** I have read and understood the information above, and I agree to allow my child to participate in the research study described above.

Signature: _________________________________________ Date: ____________
Semi-structured interview guide: Local Authorities

1. Name:
2. Position:
3. Tribe:
4. What is the standpoint to the local authorities?
5. Do the government gives you guidelines on how to deal with female circumcision?
6. What do you do to prevent the ritual from taking place?
7. What are the attitudes towards female circumcision amongst the employee at the local authorities?
8. What do you think are the main reasons as to why the ritual is still practiced?
9. Do you feel like the perception of the ritual has changed in the past years?
10. What role does men play in the fact that the ritual is still practiced?
11. Is the community aware of the potential consequences of practicing female circumcision?
12. What do you think needs to be done to prevent the ritual from occurring?
13. What do you think is the biggest challenges around the ritual?
14. How would you normally become aware that the ritual has been performed?
15. How many has been charged with this in the last five years?
16. Have you seen any progress?
Semi-structured interview guide: NGO

1. What does your organization do?
2. What is the reception you receive in the communities where your organization is active?
   a. Do you find that many parents, grandparents, or community leaders oppose your work, or is it easy to work within the community?
   b. In what group do you meet most resistance?
3. Why do you think female circumcision is an important issue?
   a. How do you think it related to women’s rights?
4. What do you think is the reason why the ritual is maintained in the (Samburu) community?
   a. How is it for the people who oppose the ritual and don’t participate?
   b. Which groups tend to pull away from the ritual?
5. What does female circumcision mean for the (Samburu) culture?
6. How do you feel the people in the community understand the ritual?
7. How is it related to how women understand themselves?
8. How does the male population maintain the ritual?
   a. What power do the male population have in the community?
   b. What kind of influence do they play in maintaining/stepping away from the tradition?
9. How is it related to sexuality?
10. How do you work with the children in the different communities?
11. What are the mentality towards female circumcision amongst teenage girls and boys?
    a. Do you feel as if it is important for girls that they are circumcised?
    b. What does teenage boys say about it?
12. Do you feel that there is a big difference in how people view female circumcision based on gender differences, age etc.?
13. Have you seen any changes in the mentality in recent years?
    a. If so, what do you think has triggered these changes?
14. How has education impacted the ritual?
15. What impact has technology had on these communities?
    a. What effect has technology had on FGM within the Samburu community?
b. Has the technology affected the communities’ mentality? Does it differ between older and younger generations?

16. What is your organization's biggest challenge?

17. What do you think is the way forward?
Semi-structured interview guide: Women above 18 years of age

Background

1. Age:
2. Occupation:
3. Tribe:
4. How did you spend your days growing up?
5. What expectations did your parents have for you?
6. What knowledge was transferred from elder generations to you?

Gender

7. What role do women play in the community?
8. What role do men play in the community?
9. What is the difference between men and women in the community?
10. Who makes decisions in the home?
11. What is expected from you as a wife?
12. Who do you think has the most power in the community?
13. Do you feel that men, such as the chief, your father, husband or son, sometimes make decisions on your behalf that you have no say in?
14. If yes, how does that make you feel?
15. Do you think that men are superior to women?
   a. How? Or why not?

Female circumcision

16. Why do you think people in the community think it is important that girls are circumcised?
17. Have you or anyone in your family been circumcised?
18. What is the reason it is performed in the Samburu community?
19. Why is the ritual important for a woman?
20. If you had chosen not to do it, or run away from it, what would people in the community say and think about you?

21. What did your parents tell you about the ritual when you were a child?

22. Was it ever talked about in within the women, or at school/church?

23. What are your thoughts on female circumcision?

24. Have organizations (NGO or governmental) raised the issue within the community?
   a. If so, what did they say and how do you feel about what they were saying?

25. What do you think about outsiders condemning the ritual?
   a. How do you feel about the government making the ritual illegal?

26. What importance has it had for your life?

27. How is it for the people who oppose the ritual? Is it acceptable to not go through with it, and has it always been like that?

28. What do you think affects the parents’ decision to circumcise the girl?

29. Do you think it is/was important for your husband that you were circumcised?

30. What do you think men think about women who are not circumcised?

31. What do you think of girls/women who oppose the ritual?

32. Would you want your future children to be circumcised?
   a. If yes, why is it important for you?
   b. If no, why not?

33. Is sexuality a topic you will discuss with your kids/discussed with your parents?
   a. What did you discuss/why not?

34. How is female circumcision related to sexuality?

Life in the community

35. How do you spend your days now?

36. What is important to you in your life?

37. What values are important to you? Do you and your husband/family share the same values?

38. What is special with the Samburu tribe?

39. What traditional rituals are performed within this community?

40. What does it mean to you to live in a traditional society – the occupation, ritual, clothing etc.?

41. Why do you feel traditional rituals are important for you?
42. What ritual do you include in this understanding?
43. What do you tell your children about the traditional rituals that occur within the community?
44. Do you feel that values and attitudes from outside are influencing the community?
   a. How, or why not?
45. How has technology and modernization (phones, internet, access to education for all children) changed the community and life here?
46. Has it resulted in some traditions being left behind?
   i. If yes, which ones and what role did it play before?
47. How do you feel about technology, and that the government wants all the children to go to school, learns English and other skills that traditionally has not been used within the Samburu tribe?
48. What role do you think you have in sustaining the tradition? Why is that important to you?
49. What role does religion play in the community?
50. What role does religion play in your life?
51. Can you tell me about the traditional beliefs?
   a. Are they still present in the community today?
Semi-structured interview guide: Men above 18 years of age

Background

1. Age:
2. Occupation:
3. Tribe:
4. How did you spend your days growing up?
5. What expectations did your parents have for you?
6. What knowledge was transferred from elder generations to you?

Gender

7. What role do women play in the community?
8. What role do men play in the community?
9. What is the difference between men and women in the community?
10. Who makes decisions in the home?
11. What is expected from you as a husband?
12. Who do you think has the most power in the community?
13. Do you feel that you as a man, being a father, husband or son, sometimes allow you to make decisions on behalf of your mother, sister, wife or daughter?
14. Do you think that men are superior to women?

Female circumcision

15. Have you or anyone in your family been circumcised?
16. Why do you think people in the community think it is important that girls are circumcised?
17. What is the reason it is performed in the Samburu community?
18. Why is the ritual important for a woman?
19. If your sister or daughter had chosen not to do it, or run away from it, what would people in the community say and think about her?
20. What did your parents tell you about the ritual when you were a child?
21. Was it ever talked about in within the women or men, or at school or church?
22. What are your thoughts about female circumcision?
23. Have organizations (NGO or governmental) raised the issue within the community?
   a. If so, what did they say and how do you feel about what they were saying?
24. What do you think about outsiders condemning the ritual?
   a. How do you feel about the government making the ritual illegal?
25. What importance has it had for your life?
26. Was/is it important that your wife/future wife is circumcised?
27. Was that crucial in order for you to marry her?
28. Was/is it important that she was/is a virgin before you married her?
29. Has this view changed from earlier? What affected the change?
30. Is sexuality a topic you will discuss with your kids/discussed with your parents?
   a. What did you discuss/ why not?
31. How is female circumcision related to sexuality?
32. How is it for the people who oppose the ritual? Is it acceptable to not go through with it, and has it always been like that?
33. What do you think affects the decision people make in terms of circumcising their daughters?
34. Do you think it is important for men that their wives are circumcised?
35. What do you think men think about women who are not circumcised?
36. What do you think of girls/women who oppose the ritual?
37. Would you want your future children to go through with it?
   a. If yes, why is it important for you? If no, why not?

Life in the community

38. How do you spend your days now?
39. What is important to you in your life?
40. What values are important to you? Do you and your wife/family share the same values?
41. What is special with the Samburu tribe?
42. What traditional ritual is performed within this community?
43. What does it mean to you to live in a traditional society, in terms of occupation, ritual, clothing etc.?
44. Why do you feel traditional rituals are important for you?
a. What ritual do you include in this understanding?

45. What do you tell your children about the traditional rituals that are practiced within the community?

46. Do you feel that values and attitudes from outside are influencing the community?
   a. How, or why not?

47. How has technology and modernization (phones, internet, access to education for all children) changed the community and life here?

48. Has it resulted in some traditions being left behind?

49. How do you feel about technology, and that the government wants all the children to go to school, learns English and other skills that traditionally has not been used within the Samburu tribe?

50. What role do you think you have in sustaining the tradition? Why is that important to you?

51. What role does religion play in the community?

52. What role does religion play in your life?

53. Can you tell me about the traditional beliefs?

54. Are they still present in the community today?
Semi-structured interview guide: Girls below 18 years of age

1. Age:
2. School year:
3. What school do you go to?
4. What is your favorite subject in school?
5. What do you like to do outside of school?
6. What are your chores at home?
7. What do your parents want for your future?
8. Do they sometimes talk about girls being circumcised in school?
   a. What do they say?
9. Are there sometimes people from outside the community who comes and talks about it? How do you feel about that?
10. Do you ever talk about female circumcision in the house?
    a. What do your parents or grandparents say about it?
11. Do you talk about it with your friends?
    a. What do you discuss?
12. Why do you think many girls are circumcised in this community? Why is it important?
13. Has anyone explained to you why it is performed? What did they say?
14. Do you think it is important that a woman is circumcised? Why is it important?
    What do you think happens to women who are not circumcised?
15. What do you think is the reason a woman does not want to have it done?
    a. Is that good or bad?
16. What other traditional ritual are performed in the community?
    a. Do you feel they are important?
17. Do people in the community use technology, such as phones, radio or TV?
    a. What do you think about it?
18. What do you dream of doing in the future?
**Semi-structured interview guide: Boys below 18 years of age**

1. Age:
2. School year:
3. Name of school:
4. What is your favorite subject in school:
5. What do you like to do outside of school?
6. What are your chores at home?
   a. What are your sisters chores at home?
7. What do your parents want for you in the future?
8. Do they sometimes talk about girls being circumcised in school?
9. Are there sometimes people from outside the community who comes and talk about female circumcision?
10. Do you talk about female circumcision in the house?
11. Do you talk about female circumcision with your friends?
12. Why do you think that many girls are circumcised in this community and why is it important?
13. Has anyone explained to you why they circumcise girls?
14. Do you think it is important that a woman is circumcised, and what do you think happens to a woman who is not circumcised?
15. What do you think is the reason a woman does not want to be circumcised?
   a. Is that good or bad?
16. Do you think that TV/radio/phones influence the community, and is that good or bad?
17. What do you dream of doing in the future?
18. What is the boys’ role in the community?
19. After a girl is circumcised, what happens to her next, and how does this affect her life?
20. Is this different from boys?
21. What is the difference between men and women?