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'Can Creative Writing and Dramatherapy be used as tools to empower mothers to refuse Female Genital Cutting (FGC) for their daughters?' A study based in Talek, Narok and Maralal, Kenya.



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I use the term FGC (Female Genital Cutting) rather than FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) throughout this report, except where I am quoting sources who use the FGM term. The woman I worked with in Kenya, who had been cut, did not like the term FGM and chose to describe what had happened to them either as FGC or as circumcision. They felt that calling the practice FGM sensationalizes the procedure and creates a stigma. It also posits the survivor's parents as mutilators, when this is not necessarily how the women see their parents. FGC is a simpler and less loaded term, which simply describes what has happened.



Paula and Sarah with Kyla and Iris, on the tarred approach to Narok, with a moran (young man of warrior age grade) in traditional Masai dress, fixing the jeep with his buddy.

CONTENTS

DEFINITIONS OF TYPES OF FGC	pg 4
TRAVEL ITINERARY	pg 5
INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES	pg 5
TALEK	pg 10
ROTIAN	pg 17
KARICHOTA	pg 31
TAMIYOI	pg 33
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	pg 43
THANKS	pg 48
ADDENDUM: SUSAN KAELO'S STORY	pg 49

DEFINITIONS OF TYPES OF FGC

The World Health (WHO) classifies FGM into four types:

Type I

involves the excision of the prepuce with or without excision of part or all of the clitoris.

Type II

excision of the prepuce and clitoris together with partial or total excision of the labia minora.

Type III

excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching or narrowing of the vaginal opening, also known as infibulation. This is the most extreme form and constitutes 15 per cent of all cases. It involves the use of thorns, silk or catgut to stitch the two sides of the vulva. A bridge of scar tissue then forms over the vagina, which leaves only a small opening (from the size of a matchstick head) for the passage of urine and menstrual blood.

Type IV

includes pricking, piercing or incision of the clitoris and/or the labia; stretching of the clitoris and or the labia; cauterisation or burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissues, scraping of the vaginal orifice or cutting of the vagina and introduction of corrosive substances or herbs into the vagina.¹

¹ <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk/key-issues/fgm/definitions>

TRAVEL ITINERARY (July/August 2014)

Talek: a village on the outskirts of the Masai Mara National Reserve.

Rotian: a village near to Narok, Central Kenya.

Karichota: the training base for The Theatre Company, near Naro Moru, Central Kenya.

Tamiyoi: a village near to Maralal, Northern Kenya.

About The Masai and the Samburu

In Talek and Rotian, we were working with Masai, and in Tamiyoi with Samburu. The two tribes are distinct from one another, but closely related. They are both semi-nomadic pastoralists, share many of the same traditions and both speak the same language, Maa.

INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES.

Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today. —Robert McKee

Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact. —Robert McKee

To be a person is to have a story to tell. —Isak Dinesen

It always seems impossible until it's done. – Nelson Mandela

The research project Pamoja Tunakataa ('Together We Refuse' in kiSwahili) took place over a four week period in central and Northern Kenya. The project had four core objectives.

OBJECTIVES

- To gather stories from women who had successfully refused FGC for their daughters.
- To experiment with using creative writing and dramatherapy in fusion in working in the field of FGC.
- To workshop the gathered stories and share them with another community in Kenya, where FGC still happens at 100%.
- To assess whether this story-sharing technique was effective in reassuring mothers new to the concept of FGC refusal that they could refuse on behalf of their daughters.

Pamoja Tunakataa took me to Central and Northern Kenya, working with a broad spectrum of people with different stances on FGC, from seasoned activists leading pioneering work in the field to young girls to whom it was considered culturally normal to accept not only FGC, but rape, forced abortion and early marriage. The project was sometimes extremely daunting, not least because my project partner, Paula Kingwill and I both had very young babies, who couldn't be left at home and therefore tagged along with us to do the work. But I had a strong belief that story-sharing has a core role to play in the global movement away from FGC, and that Kenya was the ideal place to test our emerging methodology.

In some ways I have always been an uneasy academic. Creative Writing departments are traditionally housed within English Studies Schools in the UK, but they are very different disciplines. When I was studying English at university in the

1980s in South Africa, there was a heavy emphasis on structuralism, semiotics, and post-structuralism, mainly as explored by the French heavyweights, Derrida and Barthes. All of it, but particularly the Barthian idea that the intentions and biographical context of an author are of no relevance in interpreting a text, seemed entirely disassociated from the impact of reading and its exhilarating ability to lift me out of the bottom of Africa and into other environments and milieus. Later, when I joined the department at Brunel, my head of department had written a study of the oeuvre of Nadine Gordimer, the South African writer and political activist. I asked him how he had found his time in South Africa while he researched the book, and he laughed and said you didn't need to visit Africa to write a book about South African writing. That was an alien idea to me, and still is. I describe myself as a Creative Writing academic, rather than an English academic, but if I really had to define what I am, I would say I was a creative writing activist. And it is as a creative writing activist, that I approach working with reducing FGC, both in Kenya and the UK.

I became aware of FGC when I was twenty-two, in 1992, the first time I visited Kenya. A flirty man on a bus who kept insisting I was Swedish, told me he liked having sex with white women because they weren't cut. After settling that I wasn't either Swedish or going to have sex with him, I asked him what he meant about the cutting. When he clarified things I was horrified. Later when I was a student at St Andrews in 1998, there was a tradition of addressing a formal dinner in the dining hall in our college if you felt there was a topic that should be in the public arena. My talk was on FGC and how it should not be considered an acceptable practice in any culture. Everyone present, students and faculty, were unanimous in agreement that although FGC was obviously a human rights violation, it was also part of African culture and it would be inappropriate to intervene. In 2002 I was in Laikipia, Northern Kenya, staying with farmers to research a novel set in the area and I joined them to distribute *posho* (maize flour) to Samburu herdsman. The men and young girls came out of the huts but the older girls and women stayed very much on the fringes. The farmer's wife (a white Kenyan) told me she didn't have contact with girls after menstruation and cutting as they no longer attended school. I was struck then by the way she said menstruation and

cutting together, as if they were both just organic processes that a young Samburu girl should expect.

In 2011 I founded a story-sharing collective with the South Africa dramatherapist, Paula Kingwill, which we called Hadithi ya Afrika ('stories from Africa' in kiSwahili). Hadithi ya Afrika is based on the idea that stories are a powerful way in which to share testimony between communities that have experienced positive lifestyle changes, and communities that are still trapped in circumstances detrimental to their wellbeing. Our approach uses dramatherapy and creative writing to allow potential story-tellers, who have no background in what we would call compositional writing, to share a story in a way that can be transcribed and disseminated. Our approach is about exploring intensely personal decisions made in specified, particular locations with their own strong and binding codes, peopled by a cast of real-life characters who have had strong impact on the life-story of the story-teller. This detail and specificity is very important in the process. Without a complete understanding of these elements in their own life – characters, settings, social codes, expectations – how can a storyteller or a story-hearer really explore the idea of change?

Hadithi ya Afrika piloted with a project in Langa township in Cape Town, South Africa, documented on my website at <http://www.sarah-penny.net/hadithi-ya-afrika>. We asked the participants to comment on their experience of being educated in the aftermath of the policy of Bantu Education, failing at school and then coming back into education as adults. I chose that as the research topic because it represented the cycle I wanted to explore: a difficulty followed by a challenging but ultimately hopeful decision. I felt as a first experimental project the content was not too harrowing. After the pilot project I approached a number of organizations doing aid work in Kenya, explaining what we were doing and asking for the opportunity to be able to apply the work more meaningfully in the field. The most helpful of these was CAFOD² which put me in touch with a FGC rescue centre in Kenya.

² The Catholic Agency For Overseas Development

WHY KENYA?

FGM/C is practiced across the world by diaspora groups. Practicing communities bring traditions with them as they migrate and may be more likely to hold on to customs which they perceive as part of their cultural identity. Diaspora communities can play a positive or negative role in ending the practice. For example, in the UK, there are many very active and committed diaspora-led NGOs working both within the UK and overseas to end the practice. At the same time, anecdotal evidence suggests that efforts to end the practice in communities in Africa can be undermined by diaspora returning to have their girls cut. It is also thought that the practice of FGM/C within diaspora communities can take on a slightly different meaning which is more associated with maintaining cultural identity than with marriageability. Evidence of diaspora behaviour more generally indicates that communities living away from their countries of origin often hold on to practices long after they have become less important in those countries¹. It is said for example that foot-binding continued in San Francisco for decades after it ended in China.³

As the above explanation makes clear, tackling FGC in the UK diaspora is inherently more complicated. As an immigrant myself, from South Africa, I know what it is to always belong to two countries, and to form an identity woven between two cultures. I am only at the beginning now of working with FGC in the British context, but I felt that Kenya had the advantage of being familiar (I had visited the country several times before this trip, speak basic Swahili and had good contacts that I knew personally.) Also we could look at the dynamics of using our techniques for FGC refusal, in an environment where the core issue was FGC itself, rather than FGC complicated by fears over cultural identity and other insecurities associated with immigration. In this way Kenya was a good stepping stone.

³ **TOWARDS ENDING FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION / CUTTING IN AFRICA AND BEYOND** (DFD Africa Regional Department AIDS and Reproductive Health Team Report, Policy Division)

TALEK

The reason we went to Talek was because we were invited by the charity theatre company S.A.F.E KENYA to join their S.A.F.E Maa team on an FGC awareness campaigning tour in a number of villages on the outskirts of the Masai Mara National Reserve. FGC is widespread amongst the Masai. 90% of girls undergo Type II FGC, although there is some anecdotal evidence that this is being replaced with Type I since FGC became illegal as it is quicker to heal and therefore less easy to detect. All the usual risks of FGC plague the communities: death at the time of the cut; high-risk childbirth with increased infant and maternal mortality; increased risk of sepsis, fistulas and vaginal prolapse. Sex is painful, and many women experience both psychological and physical trauma throughout their subsequent lives. Yet women themselves remain committed to FGC as a social convention. In the patriarchal Masai culture, their role as mothers and wives are paramount. Despite women contributing substantially to the family income through activities such as farming or charcoal burning, men control the finances and women are entirely dependent. Once cut at the age of twelve or thirteen, girls often quickly marry, leave school and have children. Women do not have access to any resources without a husband and they can't marry without being cut. Since an uncut adult Masai woman would be ostracized from her culture, parents preserve FGC, in the belief that despite the risks (which mothers understand from first-hand experience) they are acting in the best interest of their daughters.

All of this makes promoting FGC refusal extremely challenging in the region, but the work S.A.F.E KENYA is doing is utterly remarkable and we were very privileged to be invited to join them. The NGO uses street theatre, film and community programmes to educate, inspire and deliver social change. In 2005 they started working with Masai leaders in the Loita Hills district. Loita is a remote and inaccessible rural area with no roads or communication infrastructure. Because of this isolation FGC remained a deeply entrenched cultural practice. S.A.F.E did not go to Loita initially to work with FGC – the work started with trying to address the HIV

problem. Because HIV was also taboo, they came up with the idea of devising a performance for the leaders to deliver using traditional songs, but adapting them to carry messages about HIV. The impact was immediate - the mixing of culturally familiar songs with clear health messages within the performances led to animated discussion afterwards, and attitudes and behaviour around HIV began to change. At this point Sarah Tenoi, the group's Masai Project Manager, approached S.A.F.E about extending the work to FGC. At the time there was not a single public advocate for the abandonment of FGC in the Loita Hills. S.A.F.E's intensive involvement in the area began in 2009 when they were honoured at a major Masai ceremony for their work on FGC and the chiefs announced at the ceremony that S.A.F.E Maa was soon to start delivering a message about FGC through performance and that it was time for the community to listen. This was a breakthrough because it was the first public acknowledgement that FGC could even be open to discussion. Five years on from that event, twenty percent of girls in Loita Hills are now graduating successfully to womanhood without being cut and without being removed to safe houses.

S.A.F.E achieves this through a three step process.

1. Performances promote FGC abandonment to the community.

Traditional Masai verses and poetry are updated to address FGC. Delivered in homesteads, markets and schools, these persuasive performances bring together the community and earn the audience's trust and attention. They initiate discussion amongst the community about the steps needed to be taken - practically, culturally and emotionally - for FGC abandonment to occur.

2. Workshops, education and training activities build upon the social momentum generated by the performance. S.A.F.E Maa facilitates discussion

amongst community members to analyse the norms, attitudes and behaviours associated with FGC. The lack of roads in this region means the team often travel by foot, enabling in-depth contact and providing the opportunity for a significant

amount of peer education and one-to-one discussions, creating a trusting environment in which FGC can be discussed.

3. Promote an Alternative Rite of Passage (ARP). Performances and education activities promote the replacement of FGC with a non-harmful but symbolically valuable ARP. The ARP was designed in partnership with members of the community with a vested interest in the maintenance of the practice, such as the Circumcisers, girls and parents. It ensures that abandonment is sustainable and not perceived to threaten Masai culture.⁴

The ARP that S.A.F.E promotes, and that was used in twenty percent of ceremonies this past year, is exactly the same ceremony as traditional FGC but without the cutting. Milk is used as a cleansing agent, but the ceremony and important rite of passage remains the same.

S.A.F.E Maa's most important stakeholders in this process are the Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) who are also the community's circumcisers. Their involvement was essential, and even the TBAs who support the ARP said it was to great a step for many in the community to make, and so they have also designed a bridge for the community to move from the full cut to the ARP. This is called Kisasa – meaning in Swahili 'for now'. It is not something that could ever be introduced in the UK in refusal programmes. In the kisasa rite, the clitoris is pricked – enough to draw blood, but not enough to cause any lasting damage. While this is obviously not ideal, the reality of kisasa is realized in the name of the practice – it is a community-designed bridge between the traditional practice of Type II FGC and the ideal practice of the rites of passage of a Masai girl attaining womanhood not involving the cutting of a girl's genitals in any way. Nick Reding, S.A.F.E's inspirational and visionary director says of kisasa; 'This is not something we could ever sanction, but as the TBAs insisted it would, it has proved very attractive to the community and

⁴ <http://www.S.A.F.Ekenya.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Nrv7fuCMwL0%3D&tabid=95>

almost seventy percent of girls received this lesser cut this past year. Our goal, which the Maa team and the TBAs say is possible, is to now move that seventy percent to the full ARP. We are confident that FGC will be stopped in Loita in the next four years.”

We spent three days in and around Talek and the nearby villages, observing S.A.F.E Maa at work. It was very valuable time. What struck me most watching the performances in the marketplace was how riveted the audience was – despite the surrounding market day hubbub a big crowd gathered and stayed for the whole performance. On the final morning with S.A.F.E Maa we met up with Sarah Tenoi and the other women from the group to chat informally. When I spoke to Nick on the phone from England before we came out to Kenya he agreed that we could talk to the women but it had to be on their terms and they could have as much or as little to do with us as they saw fit. There had been a previous very negative experience of European women asking for interviews with the Kenyan women, but conducting the interviews in an aggressive and unempathetic way which the women had found alienating and unpleasant. In the event, having the little babies with us (my nine month old, Iris, and Paula’s’ eight month old Kyla)⁵ softened everything – what was different about us, our whiteness, our foreignness – was so clearly of less importance than our motherhood in a culture where children are so prized. The S.A.F.E women are actors and activists and were very open about the things that they wanted to know about our lives. Did uncut woman really like sex? Did uncut woman really have sex like a man does with pleasure at the end? What are contractions like when there isn’t the scar place that doesn’t want to open? The discussion strongly underlined how much FGC steals from a woman and how irreparable the damage is.

⁵ A few weeks before we were due to start the project a South African film student, Caitlin McCleod, contacted me to ask if she could make a documentary about the work. I agreed that she could come along and I would contribute to her living costs if she would help us with childcare. The husbands arrived towards the end of the project, together with the older children, and assumed responsibility for the babies, freeing up Caitlin to make her documentary. The documentary is available online at <http://youtu.be/rWDXQ48fIt0>

At the end of our visit Paula ran an organisational development dramatherapy workshop with the S.A.F.E Maa team as a way to give back to them for sharing with us. They reflected on their journey in the work and considered the direction they wanted to take going forward.



S.A.F.E Maa performs to an audience in the market place.



Women watching S.A.F.E Maa perform



Sarah talking with S.A.F.E Maa activists, with Iris and Kyla.

From Talek we travelled on to Narok, which we used as a base for the work we did in Rotian. At the time of my WCMT interview, we were not intending to work in Rotian - CAFOD had initially put me in touch with an organization called the Tasaru Girls Rescue Centre, also near Narok. I worked with Tasaru for a couple of years as I slowly put the project together and brought in all the funding, and up until very shortly before the project everything was set to go ahead at Tasaru. Tasaru is a safe house for girls who have refused FGC and fled their homes; the girls then board at local schools and return to Tasaru when the schools are closed so they could only be available in school holidays. Having checked and double-checked with the centre about the exact dates they wanted and having absolute confirmation on this, I went ahead and booked all the air tickets only to be told by Tasaru in April that they had got the dates of the school holidays wrong by a fortnight. I could have paid the flight penalties and rebooked flights but I realized that if they were so disorganized about this, it was likely that other things would go wrong as well. As it turned out, when I actually got to Kenya and could observe first-hand the efforts against FGC I came to understand that Tasaru would not have been ideal at all precisely because of the issue of removing girls. Both Agnes Pareyio, the founder and director at Tasaru, and Josephine Kulea, whom we worked with later in Samburu County, work by removing girls swiftly whom they perceive to be in danger. Attempts at reconciling with the family are made after the removal and are sometimes successful. This strategy is obviously effective in the short term – a girl who would otherwise certainly be cut is not, but it also creates huge problems. I look at this issue in more depth under Conclusions and Recommendations.

However back in April I wasn't very happy as, rather heart-stoppingly, three months ahead of the project start date I was one crucial partner short. I wrote to all the other rescue centres I could find in Kenya, except for ones run by evangelical Americans (whom I wasn't keen to work with at all because I have had bad experiences in the past in various African countries running into American born-againists with gobsmacking levels of cultural insensitivity). But all the organizations I approached either refused or didn't reply. Then I found a news article on the

internet from about ten years ago about a young Masai girl called Sitatian Kaelo. Sitatian, having been circumcised herself was speaking out against the practice of FGC in Kenya. The article mentioned that, unusually for a Masai girl, she had returned to school after her circumcision, and won a scholarship from a programme called Masai Education Discovery to study medicine at Chicago State University. After some more googling, I realized she was now a qualified doctor in the USA but still involved in campaigning against FGC in Kenya. I couldn't find contact details for her so I approached her via LinkedIn. She got back to me and after getting to know each other a bit by email and phone, she offered me the opportunity to work with her own mother and a group of woman from her church in Kenya. These women had all been circumcised themselves as children and some including Sitatian's mother, Susan, had already circumcised their older girls. But now they had reached a point where they were refusing to allow their girls to be cut, and were the first generation in their village ever to do this. Sitatian underlined what an enormous decision this was for them and one that made them very vulnerable, because of the ostracization from the wider community. She asked me to be careful and respectful and always mindful of what they faced in their daily lives as we worked with them, bearing in mind how incredibly hard it is to turn your back on FGC as a Masai woman.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE FOR ROTIAN

DAY	CHURCH SERVICE FROM 10:30	SARAH TO	PAULA INTRODUCTORY SESSION
1	AM TO 1:00 PM	INTRODUCE	TO USING DRAMATHERAPY
SUN		PROJECT	
3		WITH BRIEF	
JAU		USEMI	
GUS			

T							
DAY 2 MO N 4 AUG UST	SARAH WRITIN G WORKS HOP ON CHARA CTER	PAULA WORKS HOP REFLEC TING ATMOS PHERE AND SOCIET AL RULES	SARAH WORKSHOP ON ATMOSPHE RE AND SOCIETAL RULES	SNACK BREAK	PAULA WORK SHOP ON CONFL ICT	FOLLOWED BY SARAH WORKSHOP ON CONFLICT	
DAY 3 TUE 5 AUG UST	SARAH WORKS HOP ON CHANGE	PAULA WORKS HOP ON CHANGE / THE SELF I WANT TO BE	WRITING TIME ON THE SELF I WANT TO BE	SNACK BREAK	FGC DISCU SSION	SNACK BREAK	STORY PREPARATION
DAY 4 WE D 6 AUG UST	SARAH AND JENNIFER TO MAKE STORIES THROUGH THE DAY						

DAY	PAULA PREPARATION TO	STORY	SNACK	EVALUATION AND
5	READ STORIES	SHARING	BREAK	CLOSURE
TH				
UR				
7				
AUG				
UST				

Day 1: Because all the women were united through their church, I felt it was important to share that with them initially so we joined them for the service. After church we gathered in one of the classrooms at the village school. I opened the first workshop with a brief speech I had prepared in Swahili explaining in detail what we were going to do, the outcomes we were hoping for (the stories) and the intention to share the stories later. I wanted them all to be very clear about what we would be doing and why from the outset. There were seven women in the group. All of them spoke both Maa and Swahili but five were completely illiterate. One of the women, Jeniffer Sururu, has overcome enormous hurdles to become a schoolteacher and is fluent in Swahili, Maa and English. Sitatian had asked her to be our translator and she proved to be very efficient and sensitive in this work.⁶ I do speak Swahili but not to the level required for this work so Jeniffer's role was invaluable. Also it meant that the woman could express themselves and explore the dynamics of the workshop in Maa, their first language, which on a therapeutic level was obviously preferable to playing and learning in Swahili, their second language.

The rest of the first afternoon was spent in a dramatherapy session – something to which none of the women had ever had any kind of exposure. It was an energetic and playful introductory session, using strategies to get everyone to know

⁶ Jeniffer is now doing an MA in special needs provision at Mt Kenya University. Special needs is a sorely underdeveloped area in Kenyan education, with children with learning difficulties often being left out of formal education all together. As it happened some areas of budget in the Wellcome Trust funding and the WCMT funding overlapped, and I had some money over to donate to Rotian. In consultation with Sitatian and Jeniffer, we have decided to send Jeniffer to South Africa for a month, to do vocational training work experience at Vista Nova, a very well run and successful SEN centre in Cape Town.

more about each other such as grouping according to birth position in the family, according to the number of children one had and so on. Paula and I had talked at length beforehand about how we were going to approach the work, with the ultimate goal of getting authentic and original stories. We decided that although we would come up with workshops designed to elicit information we would leave specific discussion of FGC to the end of the three day story-gathering process. Paula's concern was that we wait for FGC reference to come up organically, rather than prompting it continually. She had found in the past that when this was done in previous workshops, particularly with HIV content, the responses were often formulaic and repetitive and designed more to suit what the participants thought the workshop leaders wanted to hear, than a reflection of the participants real experience. I completely agreed with this but I was worried that if we didn't push for it at all, it might never come up which would make it impossible to gather the stories, which is why we engineered a specific prompting space for that on Day 3. I needn't have worried though – it came up strongly and continuously without any prompting at all so when we did come to that part of the programme on Day 3 we really just reflected on things already said. But that first afternoon on Day 1 we just played together, sometimes using just our bodies, and in other exercises using objects from Paula's box of toys⁷. The only more formal part of the afternoon was when Paula asked the woman to choose material and toys to map a story of their lives, and then to narrate the stories to each other. These stories on Day 1 were brief, matter of fact and quite devoid of detail. We repeated the exercise on Day 3 and it was a very different experience.

As we packed up our things on Day 1 though, it was clear that the woman were surprised and intrigued by the introduction to dramatherapy and that they had enjoyed the experience. It was a positive start.

Over the next two days we alternated between oral story-sharing and dramatherapy, leading the women through a series of workshops. I had not

⁷ The box of toys is an essential part of Paula's toolkit. Participants are consistently asked to choose toys from the box to represent and symbolize feelings and experience. The toys can be anything – an old key, a baby shoe, a photograph, a glittering bouncy ball. It is very interesting to see how the same objects throw up different associations for different people.

anticipated that five of the women would not be able to read or write, and had prepared writing kits for everyone in the same way that I had for our pilot project in Langa. So although I came with all my teaching materials prepared, I had to make some quick adaptations and work with those five women differently. They testified in Maa which Jeniffer translated into English and I transcribed, using a separate notebook for each woman with her name on it. This required a lot of concentration to make sure the right notes went into the right notebooks without muddle, and a very tired hand at the end of each day!

When I was putting together methodology ahead of the project, I had to start from scratch. With the Langa work, we had led the students through workshops fairly similar to what I do with my British students, but more concentrated and localized. We looked at character, setting, dialogue, monologue and interior monologue and studied short stories by African writers in African settings to illustrate the principles of these core elements of creative writing. But there we were working with high school students. In Rotian, we were working with women who had never attended school at all, and never had any exposure to a written story. Nevertheless, I knew all of them would have had lots of exposure to traditional oral stories.

I had prepared workshops on topics that I felt could draw out the story of how they had come to reject circumcision. But before that I needed to get them comfortable about the idea of making a personal story in the first place. So I got them to retell the oral stories from their childhoods – about bad monkeys who play tricks, and sneaky snakes who try to lure young girls into wells. The traditional stories tend to have anthropomorphic animal characters, and clear moral messages. After the women told the stories, we chatted about them, identifying the animals in the stories and what they were like (character), what everyone believed in the stories (rules) and the problems that cropped up in the stories (conflict). At the end I emphasized they would be making their own stories, and that, although this was in some ways a new process, it had a lot in common with the traditional stories with which they were very familiar, and had heard and told themselves numerous times.

For the remainder of Days 2 and 3, we talked and played about the characters in their lives who mattered most to them, both in the past and present; about the atmosphere of the community; about how rules work and what happens if you defy them; about their perceptions of conflict and change in the community; and about what they saw as important in being a women. I chose these focal topics because they seemed to me the most important things to be considered before thinking about change, and particularly FGC refusal.

I had prepared simple worksheets beforehand to guide the women through the process, sharing short vignettes from my own life and family as examples. Here are a couple of examples to show the process.

1) CHARACTER TALKING TIME⁸

I want you to think about how WOMAN and your other characters talk to each other. On the page where you have written about each new character I want you to write down EVERY DAY I SAY. And then I want you to write down something that WOMAN probably says every day to that character. Here is an example from my life.

EVERY DAY I SAY TO MY HUSBAND: Will you be home late or in time for supper?

EVERY DAY I SAY TO MY SON: Where is your jersey? Have you left it at school again?

EVERY DAY I SAY TO MY DAUGHTER: Don't forget to brush your teeth!

EVERY DAY I SAY TO MY BABY: Do I need to change your nappy? Have you made a poopoo?

2) WHAT ARE THE CUSTOMS AND RULES?⁹

⁸ To encourage the women to reflect on the core relationships and interchanges in their lives.

⁹ To encourage the women to reflect on the expectations in their daily lives.

Every society has customs and rules that people are expected to follow. I want you to write down three rules that are very important to the community your character lives in, and that your character is expected to follow. Write down what the rule is and what would happen if your character broke it.

Here is an example from my life.

SEND YOUR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL. Children in England have to go to school when they are four years old. Your children are given a school to go to, and if you don't send them social workers will come and see you to find out why they are not in school.

DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE. You are only allowed one drink if you want to drive a car. If you drink more than that and get caught, the police will take away your license and you can go to jail.

CHILDREN HAVE TO WEAR SOCKS IN THE PLAYGROUND. This is a very stupid rule, especially for someone who grew up in an African country, but it is an English rule and I am supposed to follow it. Lots of playgrounds in England are inside because it is often cold and rainy. Children are not allowed to play barefoot and have to wear socks because English people are very frightened of children catching warts on their feet from other children's feet.

Write down three rules from the community.

After each writing workshop that I did, Paula would visit the same topic using dramatherapy. The movement back and forth between the two disciplines works well because where the writing is reflective and more distanced, the dramatherapy is immediate and acute. Paula used a wide range of techniques: She always started sessions by warming the participants up into play and embodiment of feelings. This was helpful to enable them to release stress from the day and anxiety about what lay ahead, engage their creativity, as well connect with their emotions as felt in the body.

In the process of working with stories she used a lot of mapping techniques in which participants used scarves and objects to map stories, ideas and experiences. This technique enables them to step back from the experience and gain a new perspective as well as share the story with others in a new way. We also worked with body sculpting, which is playful and can help with deepening the physical connection to the story. When dealing with FGC specifically we worked with creating meaningful rituals that could substitute for the actual cutting.

In the beginning of Day 2 with the writing workshops, the woman made quite brief responses to the prompts but as we moved forward they became more and more voluble. This growth happened in parallel with the dramatherapy. Initially they were fairly stoic and impassive but as the days progressed tears came.

Consider Mary's story:

I was so afraid of that old man. {she was cut and married off at ten to a middle-aged man}. The second wife would call me to cook for him or give him milk, but I would just leave it in the corner and run away. I refused to have sex with him and he beat me for it. I was always trying to work out how to get home. One day he beat me and chased me outside and his dog bit me. He let his dog chase me like it would chase a hare.

or Jennifer's:

In February I had to go back to school. My wound was still very sore and my shoulders hurt from where the women had held me down during the cutting. It was painful to sit on the hard benches at school. In addition, my head was shaved which is one of the things we do to show a girl has been circumcised. My secondary school was a mix of tribes, and not all of the tribes cut girls. I felt that those pupils were laughing at me and saying bad things about me. I found it very difficult to still be so hurt from the circumcision, and coping with being a teenager and very worried about what people thought about me. Everyone knows circumcision hurts physically, but the emotional hurt is also very damaging. I had been top of my class, but I fell behind at school.

You don't go through these things as a child, bottle them up for twenty years and then get invited to talk about them without grief. But that is where dramatherapy is so vital. Each session starts and ends with sharing rituals – *Sarah feels* – and you make a gesture to show your mental state – *weary, sad, relieved* – and everyone copies, and takes their turn. It is calming and containing and it creates a strong bond of trust within the group.

But where there was crying, there was also laughter. It might seem odd but the laughter with this work is important. Another Winston Churchill fellow, Dan Boyden, commented on this.

'What I've heard from different people along the way is the Theatre of the Oppressed shouldn't be Theatre of the Depressed, if it is we switch off, we empathise but ultimately we lose interest, and with that goes any potential political or social impact.'¹⁰

Theatre of the Oppressed is a significant influence in dramatherapy practice and this holds true for what we did too. Stories, even about terrible things, will still hold the leavening of the indomitable human spirit, and this needs to be both allowed and celebrated in the workshop space.

At the end of Day 3 we revisited the story mapping exercise we had done on the first day. The stories this time were packed with detail – people, thoughts, dialogue, observations, comparisons. As the women narrated I scribbled down what they said. It took about fifteen minutes for each story and I had an aching hand by the end of the session, but also a very clear structure for each woman's story in readiness for the following day.

On the fourth day Jeniffer and I met with the women one by one to cowrite the stories with them, using the materials already gathered. I developed this cowriting process in the pilot project we did in Langa.

¹⁰ From Dan Boyden's blog Meet Geo Britto: A Post by International Fellow Dan Boyden 11/12/2013

CO-WRITING PROCESS FOR HADITHI YA AFRIKA

- The principal writer brings all of her notes and scribbles from all the workshops.
- The principal writer begins to dictate the story.
- The co-writer types up the story.
- If the co-writer reaches a point in the story which feels more thinly described or robbed of material that the co-writer was aware of either in the dramatherapy or the writing workshops, the co-writer asks permission to pause.
- The co-writer reminds the principal writer of the relevant material or experience.
- The co-writer asks the principal writer whether she would like to use the material the co-writer has suggested.
- If the principal writer agrees, the co-writer facilitates incorporating the material. If the principal writer disagrees, the co-writer moves on to the next part of the story.
- In the first case scenario, after incorporating the material the co-writer reads back the new material and asks the principal writer's permission to use it.
- The principal writer continues with the base story.
- At end of the process the co-writer reads the entire story back to the principal writer and ensures that the principal writer is satisfied with the story.

In Rotian the process needed some adaption with the women who weren't literate, but it remained essentially the same. The detail and painstaking forward movement of this process is incredibly important, because the stories have to be the absolute and authentic truth of the person who wrote them, and this can become diluted particularly in translation and transcription.

On the final day Paula worked with the women in the morning, asking them to choose how they wanted to present their stories and offering them different options to do that such as having the whole story read aloud as they stood beside the reader, or choosing key moments from the story to present in tableau. These were then shown to the children and staff from Rotian school in the church. Each of these ended with a message from the storyteller to her daughter. We finished our time in Rotian with a *nyama choma* – a feast of roasted goat meat – at the home of Susan, Sitatian’s mother. The meal had been prepared by the daughters, whose names we already knew from the stories as the women had all chosen to include material about their daughters: *My daughter Esther is nine years old. She is a friendly and loving girl who has a jovial nature and loves to have fun. She will never be circumcised.* Afterwards the women thanked us and decorated us with beads and brought the girls forward to meet us; a small band of shy giggling girls who had escaped cutting because of the bravery and tenacity of their mothers.

Sitatian wrote to me some weeks later, when I was back in England. ‘I am very glad that it all worked out for you. The women you met and worked with were very happy and they learned a lot by sharing with you and Paula. I wish we can do something like that again sometime in the future with a bigger group of women. It helped our women to open up and listen to each other’s testimonies and appreciate the daily internal conflicts and struggles that each one goes through behind their own closed doors.’



Writing time



Beatrice remembers her circumcision.



The new ritual: Celebrating with a girl when she receives her Kenya Certificate Of Secondary Education (KCSE)(see comments on new rituals in Conclusions and Recommendations).



Making an image of a Kenyan woman in 2014



Brave mothers: three girls who haven't been cut because of maternal refusal, with their mothers behind them.

KARICHOTA

We left Rotian and returned to Nairobi¹¹ where we spent a night before heading up to Karichota. It was at this point that our actors, Sylvia Namusasi and Beryle Chebet (who prefers to go by the name, Chebet), joined the project. I had sourced them through The Theatre Company (TTC), a local Kenyan company that has an extensive training programme for young actors. I was put in touch with the director of TTC, Keith Pearson, through another internet contact, also an academic, and having never met either of them it was obviously a bit of a gamble about whether the actors would suit our material. I did explain to Keith Pearson what we were doing and what we needed and he seemed to get it, but it is difficult to gauge these things remotely and both Paula and I were quite nervous hiring actors we didn't know, particularly with no way of vetting them before entrusting the work to them. As it turned out they were fantastic. They were both very young – early twenties -

¹¹ in order to collect husbands, older kids, actors, and baggage all to be ferried around Central and Northern Kenya in a series of dilapidated *matatus* (minibus taxis)

with all the infectious energy of being that age, but with a self-reliance and maturity that belied their years. They were completely professional and the artistic process of watching them shape theatre from the testimony was inspiring but they also proved to be invaluable in the Maralal workshops.

Karichota is the training base for The Theatre Company, on the pediment of Mt Kenya, and Keith Pearson very kindly lent us the premises for free for three nights, which gave us two days to work with the actors in converting the stories from English prose to Swahili drama. It is a beautiful place and it was lovely to be there, especially since it gave me a chance both to catch up with members of my abandoned family and to get to know the actors better with whom we were soon to be working so closely. We spent the time watching versions of the plays as Sylvia and Chebet devised them, which gave Paula a chance to make some practical suggestions regarding staging and dramatic delivery before we headed up to Maralal.

Apart from the actors making their plays, Paula requested one session for herself, me, Caitlin, Sylvia and Chebet to come together in a dramatherapy workshop to share with each other. When the hour came to do it, it was bucketing with rain but we gathered in the open air theatre behind the house and went ahead anyway. Paula asked us to choose a scarf to represent ourselves and then choose toys from the box to illustrate the journey we were on.¹² We worked on these maps and shared them with each other and it was a brilliant way of all of us getting comfortable with each other before the work moved ahead.

It was also at this sharing that we all chose objects to represent how we felt about the work. Among the objects chosen were some bright beads and a small plastic tree and a space shuttle. When we put them together in association we felt there was a suggestion of the future but also of plants and organic growth. We came

¹² Using toys and making maps in dramatherapy often reveals things about yourself that you didn't really cognitise as you made the map. In making my map I chose objects to represent England and Africa – money for England because it is where I work and the practical engine of my life, and a small plastic heart for Africa because it is what I love and where I belong. But when Paula looked at my map, she pointed out that I had put the money closest to the scarf and the heart on the far side of the money. She said: 'You've pulled England closest to you.' It's true, after fifteen years in the UK it has become home.

up with the name Mbegu Za Usoni¹³, to describe how the stories from Rotian were going to lead to the work in Tamiyoi and on to future work in England.

TAMIYOI

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE FOR MARALAL

WED S 13 AUG UST	PAULA INTRODUCTORY SESSION TO USING DRAMATHERAPY GIRLS	SARAH WRITING WORKSHOP ON CHARACTER GIRLS	SNA CK BRE AK	PAULA INTRODUC TORY SESSION TO USING DRAMATHE RAPY MOTHERS	SARAH WRITING WORKSH OP ON CHARAC TER MOTHER S
THU R 14 AUG UST	PAULA GIRLS	SARAH WORKSHOP ON ATMOSPHERE AND SOCIETAL RULES GIRLS	SNA CK BRE AK	PAULA MOTHERS	SARAH WORKSH OP ON ATMOSP HERE AND SOCIETA L RULES MOTHER S
FRI 15	PAULA GIRLS	SARAH WORKSHOP ON CONFLICT GIRLS	SNA CK	PAULA MOTHERS	SARAH WORKSH

¹³ Meaning 'seeds of the future' in Swahili.

AUG UST					BRE AK		OP ON CONFLIC T MOTHER S
SAT 16 AUG UST	SARAH WORKSHOP ON CHANGE GIRLS	PAULA IMAGES WORKSHOP GIRLS			SNA CK BRE AK	SARAH WORKSHOP ON CHANGE MOTHERS	PAULA IMAGES WORKSH OP
SUN 17 AUG UST	ACTORS/ NAROK STORIES AND REPOSSES GIRLS	PAULA PREPARING TO SHARE WORKSHOP GIRLS/ WHAT I WOULD LIKE MY MOTHER TO KNOW			SNA CK BRE AK	ACTOR S/ NAROK STORIE S AND RESPO NSES MOTHE RS	PAULA PREPARING TO SHARE WORKSHOP MOTHERS/ WHAT I WOULD LIKE MY DAUGHTER TO KNOW
MON 18 AUG UST	DRAMATH ERAPY INTRODUC TORY PLAY SESSION TO UNITE MOTHERS AND GIRLS	ACTO RS PLAY BACK GIRLS AND MOTH ERS STORI ES	MOTH ERS AND GIRLS RESPO ND TO STORI ES	DRAMATH ERAPY SESSION TO CONTAIN AND REASSURE AFTER RESPONSE S	SNA CK BRE AK	DRAMATHERAPY SESSION TO CLOSE THE WORKSHOPS AND CELEBRATE SHARING	

After Karichota, we headed north to Maralal. Through the Samburu Girls' Foundation I had been put in touch with a village, Tamiyoi, where no girl had ever been allowed to refuse FGC. I promised a small sum – 2000 Kenyan shillings (about £14) – to every mother that would bring herself and her daughters to the six-day workshop programme. I wanted it to be enough to make it worth their while to come and see what was going on, even if they were mistrustful of our intentions (and also to recognize that they were taking time out from their usual wage-earning labour, on their shambas or caring for cattle, in order to do this work).

If you look at the workshop structure for Rotian and the workshop structure for Tamiyoi, you will see that the first four days are almost exactly the same in content as the first three days in Rotian (we moved more slowly because of the larger group and because we were working with mothers and daughters separately). Methodologically, the idea was to lead the Tamiyoi women and girls through the same programme as the Rotian women had followed as they created their stories. We wanted them to reflect, play and make their own work around the same core ideas – character, atmosphere, societal rules, conflict and change – in their own community, before exposing them to the Rotian stories. We hoped by doing this they would have become used to the workshop atmosphere and their own immersion in story-making about their community would facilitate a much greater identification with the Rotian women, and also a bridge between their total acceptance of FGC as a necessity and the Rotian women's movement away from FGC.

You will see from the structure that we worked with girls in the morning and women in the afternoon. Paula and I decided to do this because we anticipated that there would be conflict between mothers and daughters over FGC and it would be better on every level for girls and mothers to explore their feelings separately, and then to come together to share once they were clear on what they wanted to say to each other. On the first morning as the woman and girls arrived I explained that they would be working separately for five days, and together on the last day. I underlined that there was nothing secretive about this process, and they were free to talk to each other about their experiences. We also discussed practical matters – what they would be paid and how that would work (each registered mother who

had attended with her girls every day would be paid on the last day of the workshops) so that all of that was out of the way before we started work.

The group was much bigger than Rotian with twenty-two mothers and around forty five girls. All of the girls were literate but hardly any of the mothers. The girls all spoke Swahili and Maa and some of the older girls spoke limited English as well. Most of the mothers spoke Swahili in addition to Maa but there was a group of women in their forties who only spoke Maa. Sylvia and Chebet translated into Swahili, and with the mothers, the women themselves translated from Swahili for the Maa-only speakers. The Samburu Girls' Foundation had also given us Becky Lekisolish, a really engaging and helpful junior staff member, who also helped with translation.

The girls' group ranged from nine years old through to some older girls of around sixteen who had managed to delay cutting by remaining in school but were due to be cut in January. Most of them had older sisters who had already been cut. When the mother's group convened on the first afternoon there was a very fresh-faced girl in traditional dress and beads with them, who looked about twelve or thirteen. I said to her that the girl's group was meeting in the morning but one of the women explained to me she was actually a mother who had come with her own mother, and that she had become a mother through beading. Beading is an appalling cultural practice that is very hard to get your head around from a non-Samburu point of view. Young men go through a period of being 'morán' – in past times warriors, but now it equates more to being a kind of outlaw – you leave the family home and spend a period of about eight years with other young men, or fending for yourself. During the morán time, men can demand sex from young non-menstruating girls. When they menstruate, the girls are cut and are then available for marriage. But of course some girls get pregnant before they know they are fertile. When this happens, there is supposed to be a forced abortion or if the child is born it's killed, because it is a 'dirty' child from an uncut women. In the case of the girl we worked with, her parents had decided to support in keeping her child. She was thirteen and Becky told me she would never marry because she was the mother of a dirty child.

I had initially hired Sylvia and Chebet so that the stories could be made into plays, delivered in Swahili by women actors. But they contributed so much more than that. In Rotian, I had used examples from my own life by way of illustration. But now I was able to substitute examples from our two actors' lives, and this worked brilliantly. To start with they were young and energetic, and the girls in particular loved them. But also, as young Kenyan women, who had lived in both rural and urban communities, their experience was directly relevant, and they were able to deliver lively, witty, impactful scenes based on Kenyan daily life. They were incredibly good at coming up with quick improvisations – I would often say to them the night after an exhausting day's work – look, I need this for tomorrow – such and such came up today, and I think we need a new scene which reflects this. Sylvia is Luhya and Chebet is Kalenjin – a tribe that is actually only two generations away from FGC so she was able to bring reflections into the creative space from that perspective as well.

There was a lot of laughter but the quality of the laughter changed over the three days. At first, especially with the younger girls it was a nervous reaction – endless giggling and hiding their faces. But when Sylvia and Chebet did their scenes, the girls and women often laughed uproariously because the scenes were genuinely very funny. Not all their improvisational scenes were comic though, some were very raw, but most mixed both humour and seriousness.

It soon became clear that, even if no-one in Tamiyoi had ever been able to refuse FGC, there was enormous conflict about it. We asked them to make tableaux of things they hated and things they loved in their society. A group of small girls (around nine years old) chose to present that they loved FGC. When Paula asked them why, they said simply 'It makes us Samburu.' But almost all of the older girls' groups modeled that they hated cutting. And later in the day when we moved to the mothers, group after group showed hatred of child rape, forced abortion, early marriage and FGC – those elements embedded in Samburu culture that would elsewhere be defined as crime. The small girls were the only ones to say they loved FGC. The other groups showed love for cattle herding, being a good farmer, beautiful Samburu objects like gourds, and respect for the elderly.

On the fifth day we showed the plays. First we showed two uninterrupted. With the third one we showed it once, and then we explained that we would start the play but the audience could stop it and redirect the action at any point. With both women and girls, as we came to the cutting they were jumping up from the benches, shouting at the actors not to let it happen. They had various suggestions, 'Run away!', 'Fetch the police!', 'Go to (a particular chief in the area who is now speaking out against FGC).' With our actors we played out each suggestion, exploring how practical it was and what the final outcome was likely to be if each path of action was followed. After that, we divided each group into smaller units. With the mothers, we separated them into groups of three or four mothers, and the daughter's group was then all the daughters who belonged to those mothers. We then prepared messages that mothers would like to communicate with daughters and vice versa. We offered them a variety of ways that they could share the messages – either through short plays or writing or Caitlin could film their testimony or they could make tableaux showing the past, the present or the ideal future they wanted. In the end they all went for either the plays or the tableaux, which they developed and rehearsed together before showing the group. When we watched the work at the end of each session, all the messages from both groups reflected very strongly three core areas.

1	MOTHERS	We want you to	stay in education until getting the KCSE.
	DAUGHTERS	We want to	
2	MOTHERS	We don't want you to	Be circumcised.
	DAUGHTERS	We don't want to	

3	MOTHERS	We don't want you to	marry early (and that was defined as having got the KCSE so at least eighteen but some girls and mothers said the ideal was to get secretarial or college skills first before marrying).
	DAUGHTERS	We don't want to	

Paula and I were quite surprised at the messages, and the conviction with which they were delivered. We had expected the girls to be forthright about refusal but not the mothers. It seemed almost unbelievable that in a community where FGC was so clearly hated, there was still a hundred percent practice of the ritual.

On the final day we brought mothers and daughters together to share the messages. The mood was celebratory as they watched each other's work and afterwards we all talked for a long time. The women said they had always felt that their feelings about FGC were personal and that it was not something that you could openly discuss, let alone announce that you didn't want your daughter to do it. The daughters said that they had never talked about it because it was just something that happened and there was no way out. The final consensus was that everyone privately had really struggled with cutting and now they saw that the other women and girls felt the same way. So we talked about this anomaly, about how everyone could feel the same way but not take action and why this was so. And this led straight to the subject of men.

The women said they knew they didn't want to cut and they understood now that all the other women felt the same way. But the problem remained that men make the rules and the men would need to be convinced. We spent the rest of the

morning talking about different ways of approaching men, so that the community could move forward from FGC together.

As we closed the programme, Paula invited everyone to come up with a chant, a song that could make them strong and reinforce the work they had done together and the decisions that had come out of it. They chose 'Heshima Kwa Wasichana Kutengeneza Wanawake Shujaa!' (meaning in Swahili, Respect For Girls To Make Great Ladies!), and we all stood outside in the Kenyan sunshine singing the new motto for not cutting girls.

Some of the older girls gave us letters they wrote during the picnic that followed the end of the workshops. Here's one.

I would like to say a word of 'THANK YOU' for the time and hard sacrifice for you to come all the way up here to tell us and to educate us about several things that we have never knew before, now I as Pamela I say thank a lot and I promise that we or I will put into practice all that I have gain. Thanks a lot and may God bless you all.



Daughters writing in creative writing workshops in Maralal



Mothers enact an imagined new ritual to celebrate womanhood without circumcision: Maralal



Sarah presents Sylvia and Chebet with Churchill crowns: Maralal

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I need to point out here, that I feel I have a strong understanding now of how arts can be used for social change (and particularly drama, dramatherapy and creative writing) with FGC in Kenya. With moving the work to the UK, there is still a great to learn and I am open to this learning process. I recognize that working with FGC refusal in communities as rooted and sure of themselves culturally as the Samburu and Masai, is in some ways going to be far less challenging than working in the African diaspora. We will be facing new challenges for which Kenya could not prepare us, and we will need to use what can be usefully bought to the UK from the Kenyan experience but also not try to import lessons from Kenya, where they are not applicable. The following observations are made in the light of that understanding.

1) Work with girls directly, rather than authority figures assumed to speak for girls.

There has been a prevailing idea in policy that communities with their origins in Africa retain an allegiance to chieftainship and/ or elders. This concept has historically been very abused in Africa with colonial authorities appointing chiefs from tribes where they had never hitherto existed, or giving existing but cooperative chiefs an authority far beyond their traditional legitimacy. This practice of assuming that all Africans recognize a traditional authority has somehow transferred itself to contemporary British immigrant communities. At best it is racist and patronizing; at worst it's dangerous. I recently had dinner (back in London) with Fahma Mohammed, an inspirational eighteen-year-old Bristolian who is a trustee of Integrate Bristol (a youth-led charity that campaigns against FGM) and was the face of the campaign to force the then education secretary, Michael Gove, to write to all teachers in England and Wales, warning them of the dangers of FGM. Mohammed recalled a meeting between youth representatives and government where the need to 'consult the elders' (within the Somali community)

was continually referred to until one of the girls present banged her fists on the table in frustration and shouted. 'Talking to the elders about advice on stopping FGM is like talking to a rapist for advice on stopping rape.' Mohammed herself says: 'I don't know what they mean when they talk about elders. I don't listen to elders, particularly conservative old men who have decided to call themselves by that name. I am a young British woman. I make my own decisions.'

2) Removing girls doesn't work

This is an enormous and contentious issue in Kenya. It is obvious that in one way removal is a solution: a girl who would certainly be cut is not, and there are organizations throughout Kenya which remove vulnerable girls to safe houses. But there is a huge price – although the organizations that remove do try to reconcile the girl with her family, reconciliation is not always successful. And at the time of the removal there is a huge and divisive tension between communities and the organization promoting refusal. It also sends a terrifying message to the younger sisters of the girl who has been removed: either you comply or you lose your family.

Organizations that remove girls will argue that there is no other way of ensuring that FGC doesn't happen. But the S.A.F.E model shows that there is a viable alternative to removal. In 2009 one hundred percent of girls in the Loita Hills area underwent Type II FGC. Today, five years later, ten percent undergo Type II. A further seventy percent undergo *kisasa* (and it is important to reiterate this is not Type I: the clitoris is nicked but not cut off). And twenty percent undergo the Alternative Rite of Passage and are not cut at all.

S.A.F.E Maa has achieved this remarkable act of cultural transition, without ever having removed or facilitated the removal of a single child from their home. S.A.F.E's position on this is as follows: 'Making FGC illegal can't stop it happening. Projects that enforce FGC abandonment without respecting cultural traditions fail. Laws have little effect on the custom amongst indigenous communities where members fear cultural exclusion more than prosecution. Projects designed to help

girls escape FGC do not offer a lasting solution to the practice as they destabilise the strong community bonds that could create sustainable change.’¹⁴

3) Replacing rituals with new rituals

This came up again and again in Kenya. S.A.F.E Maa’s Alternative Rite of Passage uses exactly the same symbolism (the milk, the gourds, the songs) as the old Type II FGC, except the cutting is eliminated. The Rotian women developed a replacement ritual on their own in a dramatherapy session, and both the Tamiyoi girls and women did exactly the same thing in their separate groups. All three groups reiterated very strongly that they wanted to leave cutting behind but they didn’t want to lose the ritual. For a woman to move from girlhood to womanhood without a ritual felt alien to them.

In the UK context I don’t know how or if this could work. The situation is so much more complicated because the adults have an attachment to a ritual that is not part of the younger generation’s lives. When I mentioned this to Fahma Mohammed (and her former teacher Lisa Zimmerman, the project manager for Integrate Bristol) they both felt that young women in England would not relate to or want a transitional ritual. But perhaps it would be worth retaining some idea of ritual for an older generation, that has always used ritual to recognize the movement from child to woman, and that has already experienced a seismic shift away from old rituals. This might be something worth developing in consultation with communities, as S.A.F.E Maa developed *kisasa* and their ARP (although I am emphatically NOT suggesting that *kisasa* ever be introduced in the UK). Even if girls found it cheesy, it could be something for parents to use as a bridge to move away from FGC. When I had finally jumped through all the hoops to become a British citizen, I was invited to participate in a citizenship ceremony. It was actually very moving – the group of us being recognized as British came from fifteen different countries, and it felt good to stand up and testify fealty to our new country. We had a party in the evening

¹⁴ From the website:

<http://www.S.A.F.Ekenya.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Nrv7fuCMwL0%3d&tabid=95>

afterwards and the whole day did process for me that I was now a British person with an African background, rather than an African person in Britain. So I feel there could be a space for this kind of public recognition of transition. In Kenya, the KCSE was the moment for this ritual to happen so perhaps in the UK it could also be aligned to educational achievement. But another idea is that participating in a programme like this could be a condition of permission to remain in the UK.

4) Working in the vernacular language/ making programmes community specific

In Britain programmes are generic i.e. one refusal campaign will be targeted at all FGC-practicing communities. When I spoke with Lisa Zimmerman and Fahma Mohammed, they felt there wasn't particular value in making programmes community specific rather than generic as girls identified with being British rather than Somali British or British Sudanese etc. I can see this with regard to girls, but I think when working with first generation immigrant parents there is potentially a very strong case for tailoring refusal work to particular communities and for creating opportunities for the adults involved to express themselves in their own first language and within their own community. Regarding the woman with whom we worked in Kenya, they could not express themselves in English, and were fairly restrained and formal in Swahili (the language of education in Kenya). But when they spoke in Maa, they became visibly more voluble and emotionally expressive. It also affects the personal experience of FGC – a Somali woman who has undergone Type III has a very different experience from a Kenyan woman who has undergone Type II, both in terms of language, geography and culture but with regard to the FGC itself. I think one of the core reasons the workshops in Tamiyoi were so successful was because the Masai woman in Rotian shared so much in terms of culture, language and attitudes with the Samburu women in Tamiyoi, and even though the Masai were not personally in Tamiyoi, this identification and similarity survived in the stories.

In a sensitive workshop situation, where a woman is making herself vulnerable, it could be far easier to open up in her own language and in an atmosphere where she feels she has a full understanding of the experiences and difficulties faced by the other workshop members.

5) Allowing spontaneous humour and playfulness in programmes

This is so important. FGC is a tragic crime against young girls with lifelong physical and emotional consequences. But making workshops stern and forbidding is only alienating. The opportunity for laughter and play has to be there, as much as the opportunity to express sadness and fear. Out of laughter comes hope.

6) Facilitating dialogue in families

The way that FGC is practiced in the UK is about secrecy. Cutters are sneaked in and out of communities. Girls are suddenly flown to African countries to be cut without any prior discussion or agreement on their part. Parents don't talk to girls about FGC beyond vague allusions to what will happen one day, and often girls don't feel they can open a discussion about FGC with their parents. Between the two generations is the experience of the immigration, which affects each generation very differently. It is crucial to establish dialogue between the generations in this situation. We saw in Kenya how well this worked between mothers and girls but we also saw at the end of Tamiyoi how essential it is to include fathers as well. There is a role for traditional campaign vehicles like posters and help lines but alongside this families need to be facilitated to talk about the whole experience of immigration, of becoming British, of moving away from FGC and how the family will cohere and remake itself as a British African family that no longer practices FGC.

7) Recognize but don't support the case for FGC/ give the cutters some good lines before transition

In any refusal programme there has to be empathy if the older generation is even going to begin to consider change. It is crucial for organizations to recognize how scary it is to be an immigrant, and to have children whose childhood is so radically unlike your own. I remember feeling very overwhelmed and unequal to the challenge when I immigrated to England from Africa in the beginning, and I was a native speaker of English, already had a Scottish degree and had a job waiting. Leaving your birth country permanently is a huge leap and it is an understandable desire to want to preserve familiar traditions for your children. If the language around FGC is completely confrontational and aggressive, the opportunity to persuade is lost. If you watch S.A.F.E Kenya's choral antiphony, the balance of this interplay becomes clear. The cutters and the anti-cutters form a v-shaped unit, singing against each other until one by one the anti-cutters persuade the cutters to cross the floor until everyone is an anti-cutter. But the cutters get to riposte and have some good choral moments before they are persuaded. This is important because it models transition with a realistic focus on the mindset before transition.

THANKS

Finally I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, for allowing me to undertake this work. I would also like to thank the Wellcome Trust for funding Paula Kingwill, who has been an extraordinarily good dramatherapist and invaluable project partner. Paula and I have now additionally been funded by Brunel University London and Thomson Reuters to implement a project in the United Kingdom in March 2015 to see how the work could be applied to FGC in the United Kingdom. We are both excited about this future opportunity and what potentially could come out of that. As we said so often in Kenya: *'Twendeni!*' Let us all get going!

ADDENDUM: SUSAN KAELO'S STORY

SUSAN KAELO

My name is Susan Kaelo. I was born in the 1960's in Mau. This is a story about my daughter, Sitatian and me. Sitatian is a wonderful girl. She loves her mother and she hates poverty. She loves education but she also loves her parents. Because of Sitatian, I have visited Indiana and Texas in America. I have been on an aeroplane when most Masai have not. America is different from Kenya. There is a lot of respect in that place. Even on the highway, the drivers are very respectful to each other which is completely unlike Kenya.

Let me tell you my story. My grandmother was circumcised and so was my mother and so was I. I also circumcised my older girls. But I did not circumcise my younger girls because my beliefs have changed.

When I was a young girl, we didn't have much. But we had animals and we considered those to be our riches. Our food was milk, and if the cows didn't give much milk, we would bleed them for food. I took care of the cattle and it was hard work. It all had to be done manually. The worst job was the ticks – we mixed up a kind of water that ticks didn't like and then we washed each animal with it. Can you imagine that with a whole herd of cattle and a flock of sheep? At the end of the day my arms would ache so much.

There were lot of rules for girls. We had to fetch the firewood. We had to fetch water. We had to look after the animals. We had to cook. And we were supposed to have many children. And woman always had to be under men. I didn't like that at all.

I was circumcised at 11 years old and married off at 13 years. We moved to Or Maram in Narok. The land is beautiful there and things like maize and wheat grow easily. I wasn't happy to get married. There was fear for me in that house – it was dark and the floor was slippery. There were dogs, cats and puppies everywhere, and later children. We didn't have beds – we slept on uncomfortable wooden benches. I didn't get on with my husband in the beginning although over the years we have grown to love each other. The only thing that bothers me is he doesn't let me sleep and always wants to wake me up too early. I tell him 'Leave me alone! I need to sleep.'

I didn't get pregnant for a long time after marriage. I was 18 already when my first baby came. We were poor. I only had two shukas so if I used one to wrap the baby, I had to be naked on one side of my body. I learnt how to plant crops. My first-born didn't go to school but with my second-born, James, and my third-born, Sitatian, I was able to send them to school. It was hard finding the money – I farmed and I burnt charcoal. I had to burn charcoal sometimes because the crops were too young to harvest so only the charcoal could bring in the money for school fees. I would chop down the trees with my axe and then use a panga to cut them into smaller pieces. I would arrange these small pieces so they could start burning and then cover the heap with soil. In three days to a week I could take the soil off – I used a rake to scoop the embers. When they had cooled I would take the bags from the bush to the road – in a big bag on my back with a rope tied around my forehead to secure it. Look at the mark the rope has made on my head from all the years of carrying charcoal like that. With that money I could buy clothes and food and maybe even a cooking pot. Because for a long time I only had one pot and I had to clean it each time I cooked something before I could cook something else.

I continued to have children. I have in total nine children. I feel bad that I had so many children when I was not able to feed them. It was a lot of burden on me. I feel a woman should be able to choose how many children she wants to have.

When Sitatian and James were in Class 6, James repeated a year while Sitatian progressed so she was ahead of him in school. In the 3rd term of Form Two, Sitatian was circumcised. She was 13 years old. I was happy and proud to circumcise my first-born daughter. But she didn't want to do it. She only agreed out of respect for our culture and me.

She was circumcised in December. She was supposed to go to Form Three but there was no money for that. So instead we began to plan marriage, and collect ornaments for the wedding. She didn't want that at all – she was a clever girl and had been in the second position at school. Letters kept coming from the school to ask where she was but her father threw them away and told me to keep collecting the marriage ornaments. It was here that God answered Sitatian's prayers – she got a bursary to carry on with Form Three. She had already missed two terms but she went straight into the third term with her bursary. What happened was that Sitatian asked me for 100 shillings. She wanted to go and ask if the school would pay her fees. She told me that if they agreed, she would leave a letter for me at the shop. After a while she didn't come back and the letter arrived. I can't read so I asked a boy to read it for me. She said that she was in school and she had a bursary and she was not coming back. I borrowed 100 shillings and went to the school to see her. The bursar there was very angry with me for keeping Sitatian out of school.

In Form Four Sitatian got a sponsor – Masai Education Discovery. She was sponsored to go to Switzerland for a tour before sitting her final exams. She finished her exams and she came home but during the time she was waiting for her results she went for a computer course run by Masai Education Discovery. This group announced that they wanted to sponsor three girls to study in America. They chose

the three girls with the highest pass mark in the whole Narok district and Sitatian was chosen. My clever daughter left for America to study medicine at the university of Chicago. She still lives in America with her husband and child but she often comes back to Kenya to work with girls resisting circumcision.

When I had circumcised Sitatian and her younger sister, I realized that it was only encouraging early marriage. I also saw how unhappy it made them and I really felt for them. I stopped believing in it completely and I have not allowed my younger girls to be cut. I also do not want this ever to happen to my grand-daughters.

Life is still difficult for us – we are still poor. We are always thinking how to get water. It is hard to get clean water – everything is a struggle. Right now the river water is unusable because it hasn't rained so we are struggling.

I am older now and I love to sit down with a cup of tea. My kettle is very special to me.

Many things in Kenya have changed. For example, people don't bleed cows for food any more. And think about phones! We just used to visit without notice but now you use a phone to connect with friends. When I was young I never knew about money – I only saw money for the first time after I was married. But there is great value to money – you can use it to get what you want.

There are things I would like to say to young girls nowadays. Don't agree to take care of animals instead of going to school. If you go to school, you will always be able to help yourself.

But the most important thing I have to say is about circumcision. There are wonderful things about our Masai culture. We take good care of our animals, making sure that they are fed and cared for. But we need to take care of our girls as

well. Circumcision is not caring. It is almost like killing, you are torturing the girl and making a wound for no purpose and no reward. Don't do it! It is completely useless. If people are suggesting you do it, go and find help so you can say no. Even if it is hard, you need to say no to circumcision.

When you are circumcised, birth is very difficult. Your scars can't stretch so they have to cut you to get the baby out. When a woman has not been cut she does not have scars, and she stretches easily.

Don't be tempted into thinking that the thing that will make you into a woman is circumcision. There are different things that make a girl become a woman. One is education. One is being married and having children. But the most important thing is having your own mind.