

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THEMATIC, ENSEMBLE AND PRESENTATIONAL FORMS OF BUKUSU CIRCUMCISION MUSIC**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents and discusses form/structure and content of Bukusu circumcision music as guided by research questions and hypotheses of the study. In the study, content is discussed with reference to African indigenous knowledge about a human-musical product. Therefore, the chapter focuses on a creative-artistic content deriving from human, philosophical, artistic, socio-contextual, spiritual and health perspectives. The analyzed, transcribed, and discussed music serves as an example and/or representation of the African traditional perspective of musical practice and creativity as exemplified by the Bukusu circumcision music type. Discussions herein are in the context of African creative philosophy where the performance of a significant item of musical arts is only representative; that is, an elaboration of a significant formal-structural-textual-framework. The chapter also discusses the researcher's field research discussions and observations. It also attempts to answer one of the main research questions: which peculiar structural elements constitute form, content and performance of African music in general and Bukusu circumcision music in particular?

The model of analysis of Igbo music by Nzewi (1991) is used in this study to analyze and explain Bukusu circumcision music. For instance, some terms such as 'index for composing variations' that are Nzewi's original coinages to explain unique African creative thoughts and theoretical procedures are also used in the current research to articulate almost similar perspectives in the context of Bukusu circumcision music.

It is noteworthy that in transcribing the music, the researcher deliberately used key G major as the key of convenience for all examples. Moreover, he did not indicate the actual tempos of the transcribed music on the CD. The reason for this approach is that in African musical composition system/theory and practice (Nzewi, 1991), exact pitches and tempos are not applicable because of the spontaneous nature of the musical arts. For instance, in the performance of Bukusu circumcision music, the soloist may start singing at any time with or without pitching the music by using a pitch pipe. He may also shift from one pitch to another at his liberty and/or convenience. On the same basis, spontaneous ululations, yelling, groaning, vocalizations and other forms of vocal-aesthetic embellishments were not indicated and/or transcribed. However, for clarity, the reader can refer to the CD and DVD that accompany this thesis.

Bukusu circumcision music performance involves male and female participants as main contributors to the presentational form. In this study, it was noted that in most music items the chorus sections are performed in unison with female voices singing at an octave higher than the male voices. The music is mainly vocal with instrumental accompaniment provided by *chinyimba*, which are percussion instruments that enrich the music by giving it a regulated beat and hence strict rhythm. However, performances are embellished by whistle blowing and sporadic-spontaneous ululations (listen to CD track nos. 1-12). In some instances, improvised instruments such as *manyanga* (shakers), made by putting small stones in small tins and closing them therein; *chipombo* (aerophones), improvised by using pawpaw leaf stalks and sometimes plastic water pipes, are played to embellish the music (see DVD video clip no. B3). More often, songs that share the same meter are smoothly joined together by a skilful soloist.

In reference to “index for composing variations ” (Nzewi 1991:102), it is noted that by using this terminology, Nzewi implies that in African musical thought and theoretical procedures, each variation is a demonstration of creativity. He observes that:

...variations on a theme are limitless and do not usually come in a specifically predetermined order, especially since variations are, to a large extent determined by spontaneous contingent factors of traditional musical creativity which could be musical, emotive and/or contextual. What is essential is the integrity in the choice as well as timing of variations and other developmental devices (1991:102).

In relation to the foregoing, Gabriel Simiyu Lukhoba, a Bukusu circumcision music master, explains: “I do not reproduce fixed compositions all through, rather, I make variations within the initial musical frame of an already existing tune in accordance with what I observe and whatever I wish to communicate to the rest of the performers and the audience if any.”<sup>4</sup>

Nzewi further expounds the concept of “the index of composing variations” by observing that:

So if ‘x’ is taken as the index of composing variations, that is a variant gestalt or part thereof of a given fundamental theme used in the compositional development of such a fundamental,  $x^1, x^2, x^3, x^4, x^5...$  represent an infinite range of selections of variational indices on any given theme. Each component, as an exponent of x, is structurally quantifiable, and could be derived from a computation of rhythmic elements or patterns of a theme, as well as from tonal variations, of any given pitch or tone spectrum, or pitches and tone spectra of the theme. Furthermore, variational components, i.e., powers of x, could be derived from continuous differentiation of already derived powers, i.e., variational components of x. But the manipulation is not indiscriminate. There needs to be syntax and musical sense in the resulting expression. The resultant

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Gabriel Simiyu Lukhoba on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2003.

composition will also demonstrate meaningful sequence in timing and spacing to be adjudged satisfactory in both its musical and contextual fulfilment. It is in the ability for cognitive derivation and application of variational and other developmental devices that an artist's maturity and soundness are acknowledged (1991:102-103).

In examples used in the current study, if for example, the call phrase and the response phrase are marked 'p' and 'q' respectively; variations in the 'p' phrase are marked as:  $px^1$ ,  $px^2$ ,  $px^3$ ,  $px^4$ ,  $px^5$ , etc. On the other hand, the variations in the 'q' are marked as:  $qx^1$ ,  $qx^2$ ,  $qx^3$ ,  $qx^4$  etc. In respective examples, significant full thematic senses are developed/constructed by a configuration of question and answer phrases that can be represented in a "symbolic score" (Nzewi, 1991:106).

In this regard, Nzewi (Ibid) further postulates that:

(1) Powers (1, 2, 3 ... n) of x, although selected at the discretion of the individual musicians, must conform to the normative idioms of the Ibo music composition. (2) The powers of x represent the fissile or accretive dimensions of thematic development, while the constant sub-structural framework of the fundamental themes (g, h, j) constitute the factor of thematic-structural unity in the tradition of performance-composition.

Consequently, all examples of music items in the context of the current study are also represented in a symbolic score, albeit in a modified format as compared to that of Nzewi. For instance, in example no. 5.1, *Sioyaye*; the first thematic sense consists of phrases:  $p + q + r + qx^1 + s + qx^2$ . The second thematic sense consists of phrases:  $px^1 + q + t + qx^1 + qx^2$ ; while the third thematic sense is constituted by phrases:  $t + u + v + ux^1 + v + ux^2$ . Note that each of the three significant thematic senses is determined by distinctively recognizable characteristic fundamental sub-themes and variations there-of. Moreover, some examples such as: no. 5.1, *Sioyaye*; and no. 5.3, *Mundubi embya*; no. 5.6, *Mulongo*; no. 5.7, *Amba mutalya*; feature distinct sections that are

marked: **A, B, C, D**, etc. It should be noted further that in the actual performance, these sections are not fixed as such; rather, they may be interchanged at the liberty and discretion of the lead singer.

Bukusu circumcision music items are performed in a procedural sequence starting with those that are performed during the invitation of the initiate's relatives, followed by those that are performed on the eve of circumcision and then those that are performed on the circumcision day and thereafter (see the sequence as arranged on CD track nos. 1 to 12). It should be noted that music items performed on the circumcision day and thereafter (see example nos. 5.1, *Sioyaye*; 5.2, *Khwera omurwa*; and 5.3, *Mundubi embya*), are somehow fixed in terms of form, text and presentational style (also see appendix nos. 7.10; 7.11 and 7.12; and listen to CD track nos. 10, 11 and 12).

Example no. 5.1: SIOYAYE

*Sectoin A*

*SOLOIST*

*RESPONSE*

*CHINYIMBA*

*S*

*R*

*CHI.*

*S*

*R*

*CHI.*

E - we e - we e - we mu - si - nde - we

e - we mu - si - nde - we e - we mu - si - nde - we

Ho Ho Ho

e - we e - we e - we khwa - ra - kho

Ho

*p*

*r*

*s*

*q*

*qx1*

*qx2*

*px1*

*q*

7 *Sioyaye*

S *t* *sx1*  
 E si - bo - yo sye - ba kha - le mu -

R *qx1* *qx2*  
 Ho Ho

CHI.

**Section B**

9 *t* *v*

S si - ndo - 'te - re - ma - ka 'che 'bu - nyo - lo 'che 'bu - nyo - lo

R *u*  
 Ha o

CHI.

11 *v* *ux1* *ux2*

S 'che 'bu - nyo - lo

R *ux1* *ux2*  
 Ha o Ha o

CHI.

*Example no. 5.2: KHWERA OMURWA*

**SOLOIST**

1 *p*  
 Ya - ya khwe ro mu - rwa. khwe -

**RESPONSE**

*q*  
 Aa khwe -

**S**

3 *px1* *px2*  
 ro 'mu-rwa\_ ya-ya khwe - ro 'mu-rwa\_ khwe - ro 'mu-rwa\_ sa-nde khwe-

**R**

*q*  
 ro 'mu-rwa\_ Aa khwe - ro 'mu-rwa\_

**S**

6 *px3*  
 ro 'mu-rwa\_ khwe - ro 'mu-rwa\_ pa-pa khwe - ra khwe-

**R**

*q* *q*  
 Aa khwe - ro 'mu-rwa\_ Aa khwe-

**S**

9 *px4*  
 ro 'mu-rwa\_ chu-ma khwe - ro 'mu-rwa\_

**R**

*q*  
 ro 'mu-rwa\_ Aa khwe - ro 'mu-rwa\_



Example no. 5.3: MUNDUBI EMBYA

*Section A*

The musical score for Section A of Mundubi Embya is presented in three systems. Each system consists of two staves: a Soloist (S) staff and a Response (R) staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The Soloist part begins with a first-measure rest, followed by a melodic phrase starting on the second measure with a piano (p) dynamic. The Response part begins with a first-measure rest, followed by a rhythmic accompaniment starting on the second measure with a quiet (q) dynamic. The lyrics are: 'Oo le - lo' for the Soloist and 'le - lo 'ndia mu - ndu - bi 'mbya' for the Response. The first system is labeled 'SOLOIST' and 'RESPONSE'. The second system is labeled 'S' and 'R'. The third system is labeled 'S' and 'R'. The lyrics are repeated in each system.

**SOLOIST**  
1 Oo le - lo

**RESPONSE**  
1 le - lo 'ndia mu - ndu - bi 'mbya

**S**  
3 Oo le - lo

**R**  
3 le - lo 'ndia mu - ndu - bi 'mbya

**S**  
5 Oo le - lo

**R**  
5 le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu - bi 'mbya

**Section B** *Mundubi embaya*

*S* 7 *r*  
ma - yi wa-lo - ma - nga

*R* 7 *q*  
le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu-bi\_\_'mbya

*S* 9 *r*  
pa - pa wa-lo - ma - nga

*R* 9 *q*  
le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu-bi\_\_'mbya

*S* 11 *r*  
se - nge wa-lo - ma - nga

*R* 11 *q*  
le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu-bi\_\_'mbya

*S* 13 *r*  
ku - khu wa-lo - ma - nga

*R* 13 *q*  
le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu-bi\_\_'mbya

*Mundubi embaya*

15  
 S kho - cha wa - lo - ma - nga

15  
 R le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu - bi - mbya

*Section A*

17  
 S Oo - le - lo

17  
 R le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu - bi - mbya

19  
 S Oo - le - lo

19  
 R le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu - bi - mbya

21  
 S Oo - le - lo

21  
 R le - lo 'ndiamu - ndu - bi - mbya

Apart from addressing the origins and the importance of the Bukusu circumcision ritual to the initiate and the entire community, these music items have been passed on from generation to generation and their thematic sense and textual content have very minimal variations.

Consequently, their reiterative nature reinforces messages embedded therein. Moreover, these music items cannot be substituted, for instance, with the ones performed before circumcision. Songs performed prior to the circumcision day are various and varied. In relation to this aspect, Nketia (1974: 189) observes that in African music:

...themes of songs tend to center around events and matters of common interest and concern to members of the entire community or the social groups within it. They may deal with everyday life or with the traditions, beliefs, and customs of the society.

Some recognizable and already existing Bukusu circumcision music items also entail newly composed and extemporized texts that address various issues that reflect varied contemporary social experiences as shown in the examples below. For instance, the text of the song, *Babuya* (refer to example no. 5.4, CD track no. 2, and appendix no. 7.2), highlights the fact that witchcraft and food poisoning are not good practices in the community. The song denounces a certain Bukusu sub-tribe called Babuya (from a place called Kibuchori) who killed a teacher called Protus through food poisoning by using a chameleon's flesh. Babuya are also reputed as witches and therefore, as a social control measure, the other Bukusu sub-tribes are discouraged from marrying their daughters. On the other hand, the song; *Amba mutalya* (refer to example no. 5.5, CD track no. 4, and appendix no. 7.4), which can be directly translated as 'uphold the tradition,' of the Bukusu community encourages the Bukusu to perpetuate the old circumcision tradition handed to them by Mango and other ancestors. The song also addresses the fact that HIV/AIDS is a reality in the Bukusu community and people should be careful with their sexual behavior and/or associations with any person they come in contact with. A first encounter with some people often indicates that they are disciplined and principled but this often turns out to be not true. Here, reference is made to a proud girl who used to abuse men who could approach her

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for a relationship but later, it was discovered that she was suffering from HIV/AIDS.

**Example no. 5.4: BABUYA**

**Soloist**

1. Ee *babuya* is a bad clan let me reveal, *babuya*  
is a bad clan I refuse
2. Ee *babuya* is bad clan let me reveal, *babuya*  
is a bad clan I reveal
3. Ee *babuya*, who come from *Kibuchori*  
killed the young Protus
4. Ee, *babuya* is a bad clan I reveal; they cooked  
chameleons for people
5. Ee, the rags they tied together would only be split by  
'nacet' razorblade, sharp enough to dissect a crocodile!
6. Ee, rirrr! Truly make tremors that will shake the earth
7. Ee, we men have sworn never to marry girls from  
*babuya* clan
8. Ee we arrived home from the mountains only to find the  
child's heart rotten
9. Ee we have come from far and arrived at your home  
naked and tired
10. Sirrr! You shake the earth and cause tremors!
11. Ee sirrr! You shake the earth and cause tremors!
12. Ee *babuya* are bad people from *Kibuchori*; they  
killed teacher Protus

**Response**

- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!
- Ee *babuya*  
is a bad clan eh!

**Example no. 5.5: AMBA MUTALYA**

**Soloist**

1. We sing well this *Mutalya* as we jump up and down
2. It was in broad daylight that my sister in-law undressed herself
3. E, then on we have been jumping up and down
4. E, I went up to Chelebei hill to greet God
5. E, we sing and sing again this *mutalya*  
for all the Luyia people to be circumcised

**Response**

- Hold *mutalya*
- Hold *mutalya*
- Hold *mutalya*
- Hold *mutalya*
- Hold *mutalya*

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- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 6. We sing and sing again this <i>mutalya</i><br>for the painful circumcision ritual is coming                  | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 7. So we sing again   | Ah we thank you<br>oyee, hold <i>mutalya</i> |
| 8. This is <i>mutalya</i> of the Luyia people   | Ah we thank you<br>oyee, hold <i>mutalya</i> |
| 9. Circumcision of the Luyia people in Kenya<br>was founded by our father Mango                                 | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 10. It was Mango our father who brought circumcision in those days  | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 11. I called and called only to discover I had called even the blind  | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 12. I greeted a young girl, who insulted me; foolish, stupid;<br>so it is Mango who taught her those words      | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 13. E, foolish, stupid, but she was carrying AIDS in her stomach  | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 14. We took her temperature and at eleven<br>o'clock, the guy started swelling the neck                         | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 15. They said that it was the <i>ututu</i> that had been<br>used to perform witchcraft                          | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 16. And we sing again   | Ah we thank you<br>oyee, hold <i>Mutalya</i> |
| 17. You should know that this is <i>mutalya</i>   | Ah we thank you<br>oyee, hold <i>Mutalya</i> |
| 18. Eh this is <i>mutalya</i> of the Luyia people   | Ah we thank you<br>oyee, hold <i>mutalya</i> |
| 19. In those days, came a man by the name Mango   | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 20. It is our father Mango who brought this<br>practice of circumcision   | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 21. You ask well what this <i>mutalya</i> is, hold it,<br>pull it, for this <i>mutalya</i> belongs to ancestors | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 22. I called a young girl who started to insult me<br>so she was sent by her mother                             | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 23. She insulted me, 'foolish', 'stupid' but<br>AIDS was in her stomach   | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 24. We found out who her mother was and called her  | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 25. We found out and called her mother who bore her in great pain   | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |
| 26. We again called the father who carried her  | Hold <i>mutalya</i>                          |

Due to the cyclic nature of the significant structural framework of Bukusu circumcision music, only certain sections of the music where variations occur were transcribed in order to highlight their main

characteristic features and developmental procedures therein. However, full texts of each song in *Lubukusu* (the language spoken by the Bukusu people) and their English translations are provided in appendix no. 7.

“The melodic forms in traditional [African] music are largely configurations of the call and response principle” (Nzewi 1991:109) and the Bukusu circumcision music is not an exception of this fact. “Other structural forms like the through-composed form with short equi-spaced chorus responses,” (Nzewi 1991:111), for instance, as in example no. 5.6; *Mulongo* (also refer to CD track no. 5), or “solo statements with short chorus completion” (Ibid) as in example no. 5.7; *Amba mutalya* (also refer to CD track no. 4), “as well as variations of these” (Ibid) feature prominently in Bukusu circumcision music.

*Example no. 5.6: MULONGO*

*Section A*

The musical score for 'Section A' of 'Mulongo' is presented in three systems. The first system includes the SOLOIST, RESPONSE, and CHINYIMBA parts. The SOLOIST part begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 12/8 time signature. The lyrics 'Mu - lo - ngo' and 'Mu - lo -' are written below the notes. The RESPONSE part consists of two staves, with lyrics 'Ha - ho -' and 'Ha - ho -'. The CHINYIMBA part is on a single staff with a 12/8 time signature. The second system includes the S, R, and CHI parts. The S part has lyrics 'ngo', 'Mu - lo - ngo', and 'E khwa - ma wa kho -'. The R part has lyrics 'Ha - ho - Mu - lo - ngo' and 'Ha - ho -'. The CHI part is on a single staff. Musical notation includes dynamics like *p* and *q*, and articulation marks like *p1* and *r*. The score is written in a staff with a treble clef and a 12/8 time signature.



*Mulongo*

7

S  
 cha bo-na Mu - lo-ngo Wa-ko-li wa-nda-yase Mu-lo-ngo A-i-sa-

R  
 Ha-ho Mu lo-ngo Ha - ho

7

CHI.  
 Ha-ho Mu - lo-ngo Ha - ho

7

**Section B**

10

S  
 ka wa-nda-yase mu - u-me bu-u-ma mu-lo - ngo

R  
 Ha-ho E-ti-lo-'mwa-

10

CHI.  
 Ha-ho E-ti-lo-'mwa-

10

13 *Mulongo*

S *sx1*  
 khu - khwe-se li-pa-la Mu-lo - ngo

R  
 no 'mu-kha - na Mu - lo - ngo E - ti - lo - 'mwa -

13  
 no 'mu-kha - na Mu - lo - ngo E - ti - lo - 'mwa -

13  
 CHI.

*Section C*

16 *u*  
 E ba-ndu be nyu-ma mu-syu-le bi-bi-li khu-che mu-ta-u-

R  
 no 'mu - kha - na - Mu - lo - ngo

16  
 no 'mu - kha - na - Mu - lo - ngo

16  
 CHI.

*Mulongo*

19

S  
 ni Ba - ba ndu-be nyu-ma mu-syu-le bi-bi-li khu-che mu-ta-u-  
 uxl

R  
 19  
 kha no 'mwa-no 'kwa mu nda  
 v

19  
 kha no 'mwa-no 'kwa mu - nda

CHI.  
 19

*Section D*

22

S  
 ni mu - le-mbe Che\_\_\_\_ ni mu-le-mbe Che -  
 w wxl

R  
 22  
 kha-no 'mwa-no 'kwa mu nda Ha ho\_\_\_\_\_  
 v q

22  
 kha-no 'mwa-no 'kwa mu - nda Ha - ho\_\_\_\_\_

CHI.  
 22

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25 *Mulongo*

S  
 ni mu - le - mbe Che - ni mu - le - mbe Che -

R  
 Ha - ho Mu - lo - ngo Ha ho Mu - lo - ngo  
 HA - ho Mu - lo - ngo Ha - ho Mu - lo - ngo

CHI.

28

S  
 ni

R  
 Ha - ho — Mu - lo - ngo  
 Ha - ho — Mu - lo - ngo

CHI.

**Example no. 5.7: AMBA MUTALYA**

*Section A*

*SOLOIST*

*RESPONSE*

*CHINYIMBA*

E ba - li ne - khwi - mbi - li - sya bu - la - yi mu - ta -

*S*

lya ku - no khu - su - na mu - nga - ki ne - khwi - la - o E

*R*

a - mba mu - ta -

*CHI*

*S*

*px1*

ba - li - e - nje che - le - che - nje ku - mu - mu ku - fwa mu - la mwa ka - se -

*R*

lya

*CHI*

*Amba mutalya*

**Section B**

The musical score for Section B of 'Amba mutalya' is presented in three systems, each with three staves: Soprano (S), Alto (R), and Chorus (CHI). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines, and various musical notations such as 'r', 'q', 's + q', and 't' are placed above the notes to indicate specific articulations or phrasings.

**System 1 (Measures 7-8):**  
 S: nde 'ngu-bo ku - no mu-ta - lya kwe ba - lu - ya  
 R: a - mba mu-ta - lya Aa  
 CHI: (Chorus line with rhythmic notation)

**System 2 (Measures 9-10):**  
 S: ba -  
 R: we - ba - le o - ye A - mba mu - ta -  
 CHI: (Chorus line with rhythmic notation)

**System 3 (Measures 11-12):**  
 S: li ne - khwe - mbe - le - sya lu - ndi -  
 R: lya A we - ba - le o - ye  
 CHI: (Chorus line with rhythmic notation)

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*Section A* *Amba mutalya*

The musical score is written for three parts: Soprano (S), Alto (R), and Chorus (CHI). It is in the key of D major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The score consists of three systems of staves. The lyrics are in Xhosa and are repeated in several places, indicating a reiterative structure. Performance markings include *px2* (piano x2), *d* (dynamic), and *s + q* (staccato + quarter note).

**System 1 (Measures 13-15):**  
 S: E - mba-lu ye - cha ye Ba-lu-ya mu-nya -  
 R: a - mba mu - ta - lya  
 CHI: (Piano accompaniment)

**System 2 (Measures 15-17):**  
 S: nga - e - cho 'ndi Ma - ngo pa - pa wa - ki - re - ra ba -  
 R: a - mba mu - ta -  
 CHI: (Piano accompaniment)

**System 3 (Measures 17-19):**  
 S: li ne-khwe - mbe - le - sya lu - ndi  
 R: lya A we - ba - le o - ye  
 CHI: (Piano accompaniment)

**System 4 (Measures 19-21):**  
 S: (Silence)  
 R: a - mba mu - ta - lya  
 CHI: (Piano accompaniment)

As explained earlier, the reiterative nature of the songs serves the purpose of emphasizing the messages in the respective music items. However, in some cases, whenever there are changes in the text lines, the melodic structure/shape is bound to change in conformity with speech rhythms and/or speech tones. Soloists are regarded with a lot

of respect, dignity and honor. The soloist directly affects the quality of performance. A good soloist should be able to convey contextual sense and meaning of words. He should be able to compose textual and melodic phrases at the spur of the moment. During the Bukusu circumcision ceremony, soloists have the freedom/license of using appropriate language to scorn and abuse social deviants in the society. It is one of the effective tools of shaming the victims and deterring any other person from deviating from societal norms. Although in most cases the soloist is randomly selected, sometimes soloists usually agree on how they would take turns. More often, there is an overlap between the preceding song and subsequent one.

Most soloists are also composers of new songs. Apart from composing songs that encourage the initiate, they also compose songs on topical issues like HIV/AIDS, good neighborhood and political matters. The solo and response form gives the soloist room to extemporize and add totally new information depending on the audience, setting and the general context of performance. Occasionally the initiate's relatives reward performers by giving them foodstuffs and monetary gifts (see DVD video clip no. B2). In some cases, the soloist has the responsibility of guiding the chorus on what to answer and how to answer his question phrases.

In the Bukusu community, it is only men who undergo circumcision. Probably, as informants maintain, that is the reason why most prominent soloists/composers are male. In this case, it may be argued that the circumcision ritual affects the psychology and general personhood of the male person than it does to the female person. Consequently, the male members of the Bukusu society take centre stage in as far as key roles such as song leadership and composition are concerned. Nevertheless, as earlier mentioned, the response comprises of both male and female voices.



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In the Bukusu circumcision rite, body art, which is applied in various designs and color schemes, is both symbolic and decorative. The white color is usually dominant and it is obtained by mixing millet flour with water. In some cases, it is smeared all over the body and in other cases; it is applied only on the face, hands and legs of the initiate. The latter case mostly applies to circumcisers' sons basically for reasons of identification. The informants indicated that the application of the paint makes the initiate confident, steady and psychologically focused (see photo nos. 5.1 and 5.2 and DVD video clip no. B1).



**Photo no. 5.1; taken by the researcher: the initiate decorated for identification as the circumciser's son.**



**Photo no. 5.2; taken by the researcher: the initiate in costume on the way to invite his relatives to his circumcision ceremony.**

It makes him realize his position as the initiate and hence become conscious of his commitment and determination to face the ordeal. Moreover, the body painting makes it easy for initiate's relatives to identify him and encourage him by using satire/allusions. According to informants, the white colour in Bukusu worldview symbolizes the

success and prosperity that the community wishes the initiate to achieve in his adult life. In short, the community wishes the initiate a bright future.

The visual appreciation of performances is enhanced by the performers' costumes. The initiate in the Bukusu circumcision ceremony may use various costumes for aesthetic and symbolic purposes. Like body art, costumes are also meant to identify the initiate as the focal point of communication. This is evidenced by the fact that in the performances all the participants dance while facing the initiate all the time.

The initiate may wear a headgear (see photo nos. 5.1 and 5.2). Apart from being decorative, it is believed to be a source of inspiration to the initiate. Since it is rarely put on by anybody, putting it on during the circumcision season commits the initiate to a serious task ahead. In fact, as he dances, he is now and then reminded that such a headgear is not put on for fun but for a serious purpose.

Ornaments are part of the visual arts that are used by the initiate and other participants in the performance of Bukusu circumcision music. They contribute to the visual aesthetics of performance. The ones commonly used by most initiates are called *butundi*. These are beads used for decorating the initiate's chest and back. They are crisscrossed on the initiate's chest and back to form the shape of letter 'X' (see photo no. 5.3 and DVD video clip nos. B1 and B2).



**Photo no. 5.3; taken by the researcher: the initiate at his father's home. He is decorated with beads and paint in order to identify him as the centre of interest in the circumcision ceremony.**

Informants insist that apart from their decorative purposes, ornaments have the psychological role of making the initiate realize that he is uniquely dressed because of being the centre of attention and hence he gradually develops the courage necessary for the accomplishment of the task ahead of him. During this research, I observed that alongside the above-mentioned ornaments used by the initiate, most male participants carry very big clubs and sticks. These clubs and sticks (*bicholong'o* and *chisimbo*) are carried shoulder high as if the carriers, mostly men, want to hit the initiate whom they surround as they dance in a circular pattern. According to informants, this scenario leads to tension, which, in the long run, makes the initiate to psychologically realize that the circumcision rite is a serious affair. He therefore develops bravery and courage as the circumcision day draws near (see photo no. 5.4 and DVD video clip no. B 3).



**Photo no. 5.4; taken by the researcher: singers and dancers surrounding the initiate at night on the eve the circumcision day.**

Another kind of visual art of functional-aesthetic value that features prominently in the performance of the Bukusu circumcision music is the musical instruments that accompany the songs. Most initiates embellish the performance by blowing whistles and playing *chinyimba* simultaneously. Although any other performers may blow whistles, it is noteworthy that *chinyimba* are strictly restricted to initiates. The regular beat of *chinyimba* focuses the initiate's mind and concentration. Psychologically, being the subject of attention, the initiate is usually nervous and or tense. His emotional equilibrium is achieved through "striking" off anxiety, fear or tension by banging the iron (sharp sounding) instruments - *chinyimba*.

However, in the performance of Bukusu circumcision music, some music items such as; example nos. 5.2, *Khwera omurwa*; and 5.3, *Mundubi embya*; which are performed after circumcision, are not accompanied by *chinyimba*; the reason being that the Bukusu believe that it is a taboo for a circumcised person to play *chinyimba* (listen to CD track nos. 11 and 12). Furthermore, according to informants, the absence of *chinyimba* signifies the accomplishment of the transition process of the initiate from childhood to adulthood. The non-use of *chinyimba* - the main instruments in the respective music type, implicates the sudden change in the personhood/status of the initiate.

In Bukusu circumcision ceremony, all activities related to performance of vocal and instrumental music are referred to as *khuminya*. The dance styles that feature in the performance of the music vary from one event to the other. When going to invite the initiate's relatives, the participants dance as they run at a moderate pace (*khusanya*)-see photo no. 5.4 and DVD video clip nos. B2 and B3. When they arrive at the relative's home, they dance in a circular motion while moving either clockwise or anti-clockwise at a walking pace as they stamp their feet (*khuracha*). The speed of running, marching or stamping is always dictated/regulated by the rhythm and tempo of the song being performed (listen to CD track nos. 1 to 12 and see DVD video clip nos. 2 and 3). It is worth noting that transcriptions in example 5.8, *Kongona*; 5.9, *Luwaya*; 5.10, *Mayi wo mwana*; 5.11, *Sindu syanduma*; 5.12, *Chinyanga chawele*; and 5.13, *Lukembe*; (see pages 5-32 to 5-45) are examples of songs performed while the initiate and his escorts are running and dancing while going to invite his relatives. On the other hand, as indicated earlier on, examples on CD track nos. 10, 11 and 12 (also see example nos. 5.1; *Sioyaye*, 5.2; *Khwera omurwa* and 5.3; *Mundubi embya*) suggest marching. Example no. 5.1 is performed just before circumcision while 5.2, is performed immediately after circumcision and 5.3, thereafter in the commissioning ritual. It is arguable that their marching character is suggestive of the functional

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aspect of the music. In this case, it is quite supportive to the steady walking pace and the assertive mood of the performers.



**Photo no. 5.5; taken by the researcher: dancing to Bukusu circumcision music while on the way home after inviting the initiate's relatives.**

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Example no. 5.8: KONGONA

The musical score for 'KONGONA' is presented in three systems, each with three staves: SOLOIST (treble clef), RESPONSE (treble clef), and CHINYIMBA (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8.

**System 1:**  
 SOLOIST: Starts with a first-measure rest (1), followed by a melodic line with lyrics "E ko - ngo - na mu -". A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is placed above the final notes.  
 RESPONSE: A single rest for the entire duration.  
 CHINYIMBA: Starts with a first-measure rest (1), followed by a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

**System 2:**  
 SOLOIST: Starts with a three-measure rest (3), followed by a melodic line with lyrics "ngo mu-no 'li ko-ngo-na - E - we Wa-kha-te-li ne-ba khu-". A dynamic marking of *px1* (piano) is placed above the final notes.  
 RESPONSE: A single rest for the first two measures, followed by a melodic line with lyrics "E ko-ngo-na" and a dynamic marking of *q* (piano).  
 CHINYIMBA: Starts with a three-measure rest (3), followed by a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

**System 3:**  
 SOLOIST: Starts with a six-measure rest (6), followed by a melodic line with lyrics "we-le-kho 'li ko-ngo-na E pa-pa Mu-chu-ne ne ba-khu-". A dynamic marking of *px2* (piano) is placed above the final notes.  
 RESPONSE: A single rest for the first five measures, followed by a melodic line with lyrics "E ko-ngo-na" and a dynamic marking of *q* (piano).  
 CHINYIMBA: Starts with a six-measure rest (6), followed by a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.



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9 *Kongona*

S we-le-kho 'li ko-ngo - na\_\_\_\_\_ E I -sa Wa-ngi-la ne-ba-khu-  
 px3

R e ko-ngo - na\_\_\_\_\_  
 a3

CHI 9

12

S we-le-kho 'li-ko-ngo - na\_\_\_\_\_ E Pa-pa Wa-nyo-nyi ne-ba-khu-  
 px4

R E ko-ngo - na\_\_\_\_\_  
 q

CHI 12

15

S we-le-kho 'li ko-ngo - na\_\_\_\_\_ E ma-ra ya kwa-nza ne-ba-khu-  
 px5

R E ko-ngo - na\_\_\_\_\_  
 a1

CHI 15

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18 *Kongona*  
 S we-le-kho 'li ko-ngo-na\_\_\_\_\_ O - mwa-na mu-ya-ka ne-ba-khu-  
 px6  
 R E ko-ngo-na\_\_\_\_\_  
 q  
 CHI 18

21  
 S we-le-kho 'li ko-ngo-na\_\_\_\_\_ E ko-ngo\_\_\_\_\_ na mu -  
 px1  
 R E ko-ngo-na\_\_\_\_\_  
 qx1  
 CHI 21

24  
 S ngo mu-no 'li ko-ngo-na\_\_\_\_\_ Ee ko-ngo\_\_\_\_\_ na mu -  
 px7  
 R E ko-ngo-na\_\_\_\_\_  
 q  
 CHI 24

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Musical score for measures 27-29. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It features three parts: Soprano (S), Recorder (R), and Chibwe (CHI).  
- **Soprano (S):** Measures 27-29. Lyrics: ngo mu-no 'li ko-ngo-na\_\_\_\_ Fu - ndi 'we chi-ndi-ka Tu -  
- **Recorder (R):** Measures 27-29. Lyrics: E - ko - ngo - na\_\_\_\_  
- **Chibwe (CHI):** Measures 27-29. A rhythmic accompaniment consisting of eighth notes.  
- **Annotations:** A slur labeled "Kongona" spans measures 28 and 29. A dynamic marking "px8" is placed above the Soprano line in measure 29. A dynamic marking "q" is placed above the Recorder line in measure 29.

Musical score for measures 30-31. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It features three parts: Soprano (S), Recorder (R), and Chibwe (CHI).  
- **Soprano (S):** Measures 30-31. Lyrics: lwe tu 'li ko - ngo - na\_\_\_\_  
- **Recorder (R):** Measures 30-31. Lyrics: E ko - ngo - na\_\_\_\_  
- **Chibwe (CHI):** Measures 30-31. A rhythmic accompaniment consisting of eighth notes.  
- **Annotations:** A slur labeled "Kongona" spans measures 30 and 31. A dynamic marking "q" is placed above the Recorder line in measure 31.

*Example no. 5.9: LUWAYA*

The musical score for 'LUWAYA' is presented in four systems, each with three staves: SOLOIST (treble clef), RESPONSE (treble clef), and CHINYIMBA (bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 12/8.

**System 1:**  
 SOLOIST: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Starts with a fermata over the first two measures, then a melodic line. A dynamic marking 'p' is present. Lyrics: Ee — lu - wa - ya.  
 RESPONSE: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Starts with a fermata, then a melodic line. Lyrics: Aa —.  
 CHINYIMBA: Bass clef, 12/8 time. A steady bass line.

**System 2:**  
 SOLOIST: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Starts with a fermata, then a melodic line. Dynamic marking 'r'. Lyrics: Ya - yo 'li lu - wa - ya —.  
 RESPONSE: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Starts with a fermata, then a melodic line. Dynamic marking 's'. Lyrics: Ee — lu - wa - ya — Khe -.  
 CHINYIMBA: Bass clef, 12/8 time. A steady bass line. Lyrics: E lu - wa - ya — Aa —.

**System 3:**  
 SOLOIST: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Starts with a fermata, then a melodic line. Dynamic marking 'rx1'. Lyrics: mbo - le 'ndi lu - wa - ya —.  
 RESPONSE: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Starts with a fermata, then a melodic line. Dynamic marking 's'. Lyrics: E cho - ni Wa - nyo - nyi khe -.  
 CHINYIMBA: Bass clef, 12/8 time. A steady bass line. Lyrics: e - lu - wa - ya — Aa —.

**System 4:**  
 SOLOIST: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Starts with a fermata, then a melodic line. Dynamic marking 'rx1'. Lyrics: mbo - le 'ndi lu - wa - ya —.  
 RESPONSE: Treble clef, 12/8 time. Starts with a fermata, then a melodic line. Dynamic marking 's'. Lyrics: e lu - wa - ya —.  
 CHINYIMBA: Bass clef, 12/8 time. A steady bass line.

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Example no. 5.10: MAYI WO MWANA

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 12/8 time. It consists of six systems of staves, each with a vocal part and a CHINYIMBA accompaniment part.

- System 1:** SOLOIST (treble clef) and CHINYIMBA (bass clef). SOLOIST lyrics: "E Ma - yi wo mwa - na bi - ro 'lo -". Dynamic: *p*.
- System 2:** RESPONSE (treble clef) and CHINYIMBA (bass clef). RESPONSE part is silent.
- System 3:** S (treble clef) and CHINYIMBA (bass clef). S lyrics: "le E pa - pa wo mwa - na bi - ro 'lo - le". Dynamic: *p1*.
- System 4:** R (treble clef) and CHINYIMBA (bass clef). R lyrics: "Aa" and "Ee". Dynamic: *q*.
- System 5:** S (treble clef) and CHINYIMBA (bass clef). S lyrics: "E ma - yi wo mwa -". Dynamic: *px1*.
- System 6:** R (treble clef) and CHINYIMBA (bass clef). R lyrics: "ma - yi wo mwa - na bi - ro 'lo lo 'mwa - na". Dynamic: *r*.

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*Mayi wo mwana*

7

S na bi - ro 'lo - le O mwa - na wa su - ta chi - nya -

R Aa

CHI.

9

S ma

R Ee ma - yi wo mwa - na bi - ro 'lo - lo mwa - na

CHI.

*Example no. 5.11: SINDU SYANDUMA*

The musical score for 'SINDU SYANDUMA' is presented in three systems. Each system includes a Soloist (S), Response (R), and Chinyimba (CHI) part. The music is in 12/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

**System 1:**

- SOLOIST:** Melody starting with a *p* dynamic, lyrics: "Si-ndu sya-ndu-ma ma-yi si-fwa-na chu-ku-".
- RESPONSE:** Melody starting with a *q* dynamic, lyrics: "Aa\_\_\_\_\_".
- CHINYIMBA:** Rhythmic accompaniment.

**System 2:**

- S:** Melody with dynamics *pl* and *r1*, lyrics: "ni E si-ndu sya-ndu-ma pa-pa ka-ne si-khu-lu - me e".
- R:** Melody with dynamics *s* and *q*, lyrics: "e si-ndu sya-ndu-ma - - - Aa\_\_\_\_\_ e si-ndu sya-ndu-ma".
- CHI:** Rhythmic accompaniment.

**System 3:**

- S:** Melody with dynamics *pl* and *r1x1*, lyrics: "mba-lu ya - u-nya pa-pa ye-fwe ye ba-kha - le".
- R:** Melody with dynamics *q* and *s*, lyrics: "Aa\_\_\_\_\_ e si-ndu sya-ndu-ma".
- CHI:** Rhythmic accompaniment.

Example no. 5.12: CHINYANGA CHAWELE

The musical score is written in 12/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of three systems of staves. The first system includes a SOLOIST part (treble clef), a RESPONSE part (treble clef), and a CHINYIMBA part (bass clef). The SOLOIST part begins with a first-measure rest, followed by notes for 'E mu - bo - le - lo 'mwa - na' with a *p* dynamic marking. The RESPONSE part has a first-measure rest followed by 'Oo -'. The CHINYIMBA part consists of a series of eighth notes. The second system includes a Soprano (S), Alto (R), and Chinyimba (CHI) part. The S part has a first-measure rest followed by notes for 'E bo - le - lo 'mwa - na' with a *pl* dynamic marking. The R part has a first-measure rest followed by notes for 'Oo - bo - le - lo 'mwa - na chi -' with *q* and *r* dynamic markings. The CHI part continues with eighth notes. The third system includes a Soprano (S), Alto (R), and Chinyimba (CHI) part. The S part has a first-measure rest followed by notes for 'we - le - chi - nya nga - cha - we - le Oo' with a *px1* dynamic marking. The R part has a first-measure rest followed by notes for 'nya - nga cha - we - le Oo - Oo' with a *q* dynamic marking. The CHI part continues with eighth notes.



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7 *Chinyanga chawele*

S *p1x1*  
 ——— chi-nya - nga cha - we - le

R  
 bo - le - lo 'mwa - na chi-nya - nga *r*

CHI

9

S *px2* *px3*  
 E ——— ma - yi kha - la ——— yi E ———

R  
 cha - we - le *q* Oo ——— Oo ———

CHI

11

S  
 ma - yi kha - la - yi

R *r*  
 bo - le - lo 'mwa - na chi-nya - nga cha - we - le

CHI

Example no. 5.13: LUKEMBE

SOLOIST

E - mba - lu pa - pe 'we 'lu - ma bu - bi

RESPONSE

CHINYIMBA

S

E - mba - lu pa - pe 'we 'lu - me 'mwa - lo

R

E - lu - ke - mbe

E - lu - ke - mbe

CHI.

*Lukembe*

**System 1 (Measures 7-9):**

- Soprano (S):** Melody starting at measure 7, marked *px1*. Lyrics: E - mba - lu ba - ki - lo - ma 'lu - ma bu - bi
- Right Hand (R):** Accompaniment for the first two staves, marked *q*. Lyrics: E - lu - ke - mbe
- Church Instrument (CHI):** Bass line starting at measure 7.

**System 2 (Measures 10-12):**

- Soprano (S):** Melody starting at measure 10, marked *px2*. Lyrics: E - mba - lu ye - ba - lu - yia lu - me bu - bi
- Right Hand (R):** Accompaniment for the first two staves, marked *qx1*. Lyrics: E - lu - ke - mbe
- Church Instrument (CHI):** Bass line starting at measure 10.

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*Lukembe*

**System 1 (Measures 13-15):**

**S:** E — mu - chu - li lwo - li - le o - kha - bo - no 'mu - *r*

**R:** E - lu - ke - mbe *qx1*

**CHI:** (Rhythmic accompaniment)

**System 2 (Measures 16-18):**

**S:** khe - bi ne - wa - nja chi - mbi - lo E — mu - chu - li lwo - li - *r*

**R:** E - lu - ke - mbe *qx1*

**CHI:** (Rhythmic accompaniment)

*Lukembe*

19  
*S* le o-kha-bo-na kho - cho 'li ta - we. Ee -

19  
*R* E - lu - ke - mbe  
 e - lu - ke - mbe

19  
*CHI.*

22  
*S* mba - lu e - mba-lu e - mbi

22  
*R* E - lu - ke - mbe  
 E - lu - ke - mbe

22  
*CHI.*

In general, therefore, the performance of Bukusu circumcision music incorporates several aspects of artistic-aesthetic communication such as song, dance, and various visual and verbal arts that are integrated. Furthermore, paramusical features such as whistling, yelling and ululating are done randomly by participants to express their joy and enhance the aesthetic-artistic feel in the performance of the music.

## **5.2 THE CREATIVE AND COMPOSITIONAL**

### **THOUGHT/PHILOSOPHY OF BUKUSU CIRCUMCISION MUSIC**

Bukusu circumcision music is a ritualistic music type that is only performed in the context of traditional circumcision practice. Omondi (1983) observes that the occasions in which music is performed in traditional Kenyan society may be categorized as obligatory or optional. According to him, the former refers to situations whereby music performance is mandatory and indispensable, while the latter connotes situations where music performance depends on individual or collective choice. On the basis of his argument, Bukusu circumcision music could be termed as obligatory. Each music item is imbued with a specific message to be communicated to the initiate, his relatives or the audience. The music is both functional and implicitly contemplative and hence contributing towards features of aesthetic appreciation. The performance of the music spontaneously elicits various actions such as running, dancing, marching and a range of moods; such as happy ones and serious ones. For instance, due to their fast tempos, and the meanings embedded in the lyrics of the music, items performed while going to invite the initiate's relatives (listen to CD track nos. 1 to 9 and DVD video clip nos. B2 and B3) stimulate running, dancing and a happy/bright mood. On the other hand, music performed on the circumcision day when escorting the initiate from the river, *Sioyaye* (listen to CD track no.10), is in a moderate tempo that suggests marching. Whenever it is performed, it elicits a very serious and heightened mood that signifies the climax of the circumcision ritual.

As shown in the examples of Bukusu circumcision music items and when we consider the "African creative philosophy [of] performance-composition" (Nzewi 2003:28), the music is based on recognizable compositional frameworks for situational re-composition. Performance-composition, the art of musically marshalling, interpreting and aesthetically enriching the ongoing events as well as contingencies of a performance context (Nzewi, 1991, 1997 and 2003) as will be

discussed later, is part and parcel of Bukusu musical thought and practice.

One of the main roles of indigenous Bukusu circumcision music, as the case is for many other music types in other African societies, has been and is still communication. As Ekweme (1996:6) observes that “functionality is a known feature of music in Africa and in the functionality, communication becomes a primary objective.” As channels of communication, indigenous Bukusu circumcision music serves members of the Bukusu community by imparting messages that regulate the entire community’s social behaviour by emphasizing acceptable social practices.

During music performances, the musicians and their audience get involved in interpersonal communication. In Bukusu circumcision music performances there are no categories such as the passive audience and the active performers. Everyone seizes every available opportunity to contribute to the performance in terms of dancing, singing or verbally advising the initiate.

Akuno (2005:69) describes African music as “an [expression], a work of art and performance. It is a human behaviour involving people with their communities. It is an agent of socialization. Since it reflects and expresses culture, it embodies a people’s total existence: beliefs, philosophy (worldview), religion, norms, mores, language, expressions, relationships and aspirations.” Bukusu circumcision music performance is social in nature. As earlier indicated, every Bukusu community member regardless of age or gender participates in the performance of the music and observation of all contingent procedures of the ritual (see photo nos. 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9 and 5.4 and DVD video clips nos. B1, B2 and B3). Through this kind of participation, the young and the old are unified within the Bukusu cultural fabric.

Bukusu circumcision music encompasses many themes expressed textually and gesturally. While some themes always recur, others change in every circumcision year depending on the prevalent societal socio-cultural and socio-economic situations. For instance, music items: example nos. 5.1, *Sioyaye*; 5.2, *Khwera omurwa*; and 5.3, *Mundubi embya*; centre on fixed themes both melodically and textually (also see example nos. 5.14 and 5.15; appendix nos. 7.10, 7.11 and 7.12; and listen to CD track nos. 10, 11 and 12). The song; *Khwera omurwa* is performed immediately after circumcision and it stresses the fact that the Bukusus have a reason to celebrate for having killed one of their perennial enemies, Omurwa, a singular form of Barwa. Barwa are highland nilotes who live on the slopes of Mount Elgon and they, from time immemorial, clash with the Bukusu over livestock and land ownership matters. In this case, circumcision is compared to the hard task of fighting a strong enemy and the joy that one achieves after defeating such an adversary. On the other hand, in *Mundubi embya*, the refrain, *lelo ndia mundubi embya*, which when literally translated comes close to 'from today I will eat from my own plate,' recurs. In the Bukusu community, it is customary for the young boys who have not yet undergone circumcision to eat together from the same plate. However, once one gets circumcised, he is served with food in his own plate. Therefore, he is respected by his community members and becomes independent in his thoughts and deeds. This is the last song performed in the Bukusu circumcision ceremony. It is joyfully performed by the initiate in conjunction with his younger brothers and sisters during his pass out ceremony that is always held in the month of December during every circumcision year.

**Example no. 5.14: KHWERA OMURWA**

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. My brother we have killed <i>omurwa</i>	Aah we have killed <i>omurwa</i>
2. We have killed <i>omurwa</i> ; my brother we have killed <i>omurwa</i>	Aah we have killed <i>omurwa</i>
3. We have killed <i>omurwa</i> ; my father we have killed <i>omurwa</i>	Aah we have killed <i>omurwa</i>



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- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 4. We have killed <i>omurwa</i> ; my age group<br>we have killed <i>omurwa</i>              | Aah we have killed <i>omurwa</i> |
| 5. We have killed <i>omurwa</i> ; my <i>chuma</i> age group<br>we have killed <i>omurwa</i> | Aah we have killed <i>omurwa</i> |

**Example no. 5.15: MUNDUBI EMBYA**

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. Oh, today!	Today I am independent
2. Mother did not respect me	Today I am independent
3. Father did not respect me	Today I am independent
4. Auntie did not respect me	Today I am independent
5. Grandmother did not respect me	Today I am independent
6. Oh, today!	Today I am independent

Variations or deviations in the rendition of these music items are attributed to individual idiosyncratic flairs of different performers and their conception and interpretation of “contingencies of a specific performance” (Agu 1999:70) in terms of effect and affect.

As Mbabi-Katana (2001:93) observes: “indigenous music of a society is a phenomenon of life that gives historical depth to the musical art of the society.” For instance, the song, *Sioyaye* (refer to appendix no. 7.10), particularly addresses the historicity of the Bukusu circumcision ritual. In particular, it focuses on the mythical origins of the ritual; a theme that further inculcates and bonds the Bukusu community members’ respect, ownership, practice and perpetuation of the ritual. For that matter, it is always performed when the initiate is being escorted from the river on the circumcision day and it has no substitute whatsoever. As one of the informants, Vincent Wanyonyi Wechabe, observes: “the song is culturally fixed and has been passed on from generation to generation from time immemorial.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Nketia (1974:55), “a good Akan singer must be able to improvise texts, to fit tunes to new words extemporaneously, and to

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Vincent Wanyonyi Wechabe on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2004.

remember texts so that he can recall verses of songs or the leading lines.” In connection to the context of Bukusu circumcision music performance, Nketia’s observation about a good Akan singer closely relates with the qualities of a good Bukusu singer. According to Nketia:

The singer’s ability to improvise reflects the alertness or presence of mind. A singer must be sensitive to or show a general awareness of current situations. Since he has to perform in public, he must not be shy when performing, indeed, some of histrionic temperament is said to be desirable, for a singer is involved in dramatic communication (1974:56).

It is important to understand compositional process in African music in order to discern the ways in which creative musicians assemble their music (Agawu 2003). On creation of new compositions, Gabriel Simiyu Lukhoba, a Bukusu circumcision master musician, observes that “although I sometimes create new tunes, I also borrow a lot from existing ones”,<sup>2</sup> explained Simiyu. He further elaborated that he extemporaneously continues adding texts to existing tunes or his original ones depending on what he wants to communicate to the audience, the initiate and the community at large in the already referred to “performance-composition” context (Nzewi: 2003:28). In this case, he is “involved in a musical interpretation of the contingent occurrences in the context. What comes into [his] head, sensitized by his impressions or observations is what he [sings]” (Nzewi 2001:99). On the other hand, Dismas Sifuna Sinino, another master musician, argues that the main objective in his compositions is, ‘*khukambila babana*,’<sup>3</sup> (to advise the initiates). He observes that he carefully selects and varies the texts while maintaining the specific music items’ musical frame/melodic structures. For instance, he extemporaneously fits into his tunes (original or borrowed) the names of the initiate, and those of his parents, relatives and other performers. He also includes performers’ family lineages as he acknowledges their presence as

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Gabriel Simiyu Lukhoba on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Dismas Sifuna Sinino on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2003

exemplified in the texts of example nos. 5.16, *Kongona*; 5.17, *Luwaya*; and 5.18, *Mayi wo mwana* (also see appendix nos. 7.1, 7.3 and 7.6). In *Kongona*, the presence of several people such as: Wangila, Wakhateli, Wanyonyi, and Henry Keya is acknowledged. The literal sense of the recurrent refrain, *kongona*, ‘finish it,’ is: ‘scrub everything from the plate or from the cooking pot.’ In its inner meaning, all people present encouraged to participate fully in the performance of the circumcision music and the ritual as a whole.

On the other hand, the term, *Luwaya*, directly translates to ‘the wire.’ Here, it metaphorically refers to the penis. The song implies the fact that after circumcision, the initiate is mandated by the Bukusu community to marry and multiply so that the Bukusu people can increase in number and strengthen their identity and, by extension their solidarity. Moreover, the presence of people such as: Kusimba’s children, Tabalia and Wandabwa; Ezekiel Biketi, from Babayayo clan of Tulweti market; Wilson from Baengele-banyala clan; and Vincent is acknowledged. In *Mayi wo mwana*, the soloist who mentions that the initiate resembles a fox, *wanjusi*; and a wild bird, *ututu*; both of which are culturally conceived by the Bukusu as ugly, employs satire. However, in this context, these allusions are only meant to encourage and inspire the initiate so that he can face circumcision bravely.

**Example no. 5.16: KONGONA**

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. Ee, finish everything in this home you finish it	Finish it
2. You Wakhateli, if you are given you finish it	Finish it
3. You Wangila if you are given you finish it	Finish it
4. Even you Franco if you are given you finish it	Finish it
5. Dennis if you are given finish it	Finish it
6. If you are given for the first time you finish it	Finish it
7. Father Wanyonyi if you are given finish it	Finish it
8. Circumcision of our tradition, if you are given finish it	Finish it
9. The bicycle repairer in Tulweti market, you finish it	Finish it
10. Eh cut you circumciser you cut	Eh cut it
11. This a <i>muengele</i> Henry Keya you finish it	Finish it

**Example no. 5.17: LUWAYA**

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. E the wire	Ah
2. My beloved brother, the wire	The wire
3. E, the wire	Ah
4. My agemate, the wire	The wire
5. E the wire	Ah
6. Let me say, the wire	The wire
7. The wire	Ah
8. The wire gave birth to the initiate	The wire
9. The wire	Ah
10. You see, it gave birth to the initiate	The wire
11. Ezekiel Biketi	Ah
12. A man from the <i>babayayo</i> clan of Tulweti	The wire
13. Tabalia	Ah
14. A farmer called Wandabwa	The wire
15. Kusimba's children	Ah
16. Vincent, receive greetings	The wire
17. Kusimba's children	Ah
18. Wilson, receive greetings	The wire
19. A man of <i>baengele-banyala</i> clan	Ah
20. Vincent receive greetings	The wire

**Example no. 5.18: MAYI WO MWANA**

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. Eh mother to the child come and see	Aah
2. Eh mother to the child come and see	O mother to the child come and see the child
3. Eh father to the child come and see	Aah
4. The child has carried meat	O mother to the child come and see the child
5. The child resembles <i>ututu</i>	Aah
6. The child resembles <i>ututu</i>	O mother to the child come and see the child
7. The child has carried <i>luliki</i>	Aah
8. The child has carried meat	O mother to the child come and see the child
9. The child resembles fox	Aah
10. The child resembles a fox	O mother to the child come and see the child
11. Eh the child's mother come and see	Aah
12. Eh child's father come and see	O mother to the child come and see the child

On interaction in African music performances Agawu (2003:110), observes that “performers turned critics in the moment of performance/rehearsal can be extremely valuable sources of insight into musical aesthetics broadly conceived.” In Bukusu circumcision music, interaction/communication between performers is mostly done through song. The lead singer is quite significant in as far as the renditions of music items are concerned. For any performance to be effective, the chorus is bound to adhere to the cantor’s control, direction and leadership. This aspect is exemplified in various song items. For instance, in *Babuya* (see appendix 7.2), the song leader inspires and urges his fellow performers to dance vigorously by saying: *E sirrr! Ndi sinye, musinye liloba, musinye kang’ali*, meaning: E sirrr! You shake the earth and cause tremors. Here, he uses an onomatopoeic sound, *sirrr*, to allude to the sound of an earthquake. Likewise, in example; *Sindu syanduma* (see appendix 7.7), the song leader appeals to other performers to intensify the singing by calling out: *Papa endi kuta kumwenya* (Sing expressively); *Yaya endi khwesa kumwenya* (You sing very well); *Yaya endi khwesa bukhino* (Dance vigorously). The literal translation of the phrase, *sindu syanduma*, is: ‘something bit me.’ This refers to the bitterness of the Bukusu circumcision. The soloist’s recognition of the presence people such as: Wanyonyi, Bonventure and Wakhateli fosters communal bonding and collective responsibility.

**Example no. 5.19: SINDU SYANDUMA**

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. Eh something bit me	Aaa
2. Something resembling a black ant	Something bit me
3. Something bit me	Aaa
4. It will bite you	Something bit me
5. It is more painful at the end	Aaa
6. Circumcision is painful	Something bit me
7. It will bite you	Aaa
8. That which bit your father	Something bit me
9. That which bit your grandfather	Aaa
10. It will bite you	Something bit me

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11. That which bit your uncle	Aaa
12. It will bite you	Something bit me
13. Something bit me	Aaa
14. Something resembling a black ant	Something bit me
15. There is a smell of Circumcision	Aaa
16. Our circumcision of ages	Something bit me
17. Ee it came from Mango	Aaa
18. Something bit me	Something bit me
19. It came from Mango	Aaa
20. My brother I advise you	Something bit me
21. You Wakoli	Aaa
22. Sing with inspiration	Something bit me
23. You Wanyonyi	Aaa
24. Sing well	Something bit me
25. You Bonventure	Aaa
26. Dance vigorously	Something bit me
27. You from Khateli	Aaa
28. Circumcision is knocking	Something bit me
29. It is painful at the end	Aaa
30. It bites badly	Something bit me
31. This is circumcision	Aaa
32. It came from Mango	Something bit me

Occasionally, one of the performers may shout at the initiate by saying: *Khupa chinyimba ne kamani* (Play *chinyimba* with vigour), or ask him questions such as: *Onarengarenganga sina?* (Why are you trembling all the time?). On the other hand, during a short break, after performing a certain music item, one of the performers may request the song leader to start them off by saying: *Ramo kumwenya khuche* (start us off in song so that we may get going). Apparently, from the foregoing interactions, the song leader and the rest of the performers relate closely and mutually. On this aspect of performance in the context of African music, Nzewi states that:

The African practice of spontaneous and practical artistic performance of evaluation offers emphatic solidarity to a performing group. The assessor becomes included as a factor of, and participant in, creativity. Such practical evaluation may be emotionally

prompted, but it is an artistic component of a musical arts presentation. It is a proactive evaluation philosophy that makes the performance art the collective experience of performers and audience (2003:28).

He also argues that:

The African performance arts principle requires that, the master musician or dancer is not an expert who dominates a presentation with overt, psychotic ego-displays. Rather, the lead artist endeavors to democratize ensemble action, and credits as well as involves empathic, emotional performers. The master performer mediates the performer-audience rapport. As such, evoking human sensing as well as sentiments in a creative contextual process is imperative, whether the performance need is music-specific or music-intrinsic. Most nonmusical contexts inevitably demand musical-arts processing in the African rationalization of human interactions, in which music invariably mediates varied emotions, conducts attitudes, and structures actions (2001:102-103).

Soloists/composers of Bukusu circumcision music are not hired to perform at a fee. They derive pleasure in their involvement in the social activity and regard themselves as any other performers/participants working towards the achievement of a common goal, that is, the admitting/welcoming of the initiate into adulthood. On this aspect, Wasike Makhete Sakhasya, a Bukusu circumcision master musician states that “it is a talent I inherited from my grandparents. It is my pleasure to compose and perform circumcision music for it is one way of preserving our culture by imparting it to the youth through song and dance.”<sup>5</sup>

In his explanation of harmony in an Igbo musical ensemble, Nzewi (1991:127) observes:

This is not always harmony in the western classical music sense exemplified in church hymns in which one

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Wasike Makhete Sakhasya on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2003.

voice carries the melodic interest while the other voices harmonize it in a vertical dimension (chordally). In western classical concept when the melody-carrying voice is silent the music will sound decapitated and tuneless. The Igbo concept of harmonic relationships has as in its foundation a similar underlying principle of concordant vertical relationship as well as agreeable chordal progression. This only constitutes the deep structural level of Igbo harmonic sensibility. At the conscious level of creativity, however, the harmonic thought is not fragmented by the note. It is holistic. It takes an entire melodic statement as a harmonic unit. In other words, harmony is thought of in linear dimension.

It is worth noting that as exemplified in some examples of Bukusu circumcision music items, particularly example no. 5.6, *Mulongo*; that occasionally features harmony parallel thirds (also listen to CD track no.5), Nzewi's views about harmony in Igbo music very closely relate with harmonic aspects in Bukusu circumcision music. Despite the geographical and cultural distance that exists between the Igbo (in Nigeria – West Africa) and the Bukusu (in Kenya – East Africa), this phenomenon confirms what Nzewi (1997:31), in reference to the unity of traditional African music, maintains by observing that “[i]ncontrovertibly, there is an African field of musical sound.”

Another artistic-structural factor of melodic expression in African music that features in Bukusu music is the use of glissandos and indefinite pitches, marked with sign ‘x’ in example nos. 5.3, *Mundubi embya*; and 5.7, *Amba mutalya* (also listen to CD track nos. 4 and 12).

### **5.3 TEXT IN BUKUSU CIRCUMCISION MUSIC**

On African music as text, Agawu (2001:8-16) argues that text refers to complex messages based on specific cultural codes. The varieties of African music known to us today may be designated as text. He observes that text is something woven by performer-composers who conceive and produce the music-dance, by listener-viewers who consume it, and by critics who constitute it as text for the purposes of



analysis and interpretation. 'Text' as used here means cultural-environment-cosmic meanings encoded in music as well as communicated by the features, sound and context of music performance.

On this aspect, Nketia (1974:177) observes that "[t]he most far-reaching influence is exerted by the verbal texts to which songs are set. African traditions deliberately treat songs as though they were speech utterances." In all examples of the Bukusu circumcision music items, the lyrics strictly follow the natural speech rhythm and the tonal inflections (the rises and falls) of the spoken *Lubukusu*. Therefore, coupled with paramusical features and other performance contingencies, such as facial gestures and other body movements, the sung/performed text heightens the communicative efficiency of the spoken word.

As presented in the available Bukusu circumcision music examples, it is arguable that ellipsis of vowel sounds at the beginning and/or ending of some words occurs because of purely musical exigency. This means that the linguistic features can be compromised to fit into the musical frame/melodic structure. The same liberty occurs in speech tone in regard to pitch setting, yet the meaning of the compromised word or phrase of the language clearly stands out. Therefore, musical rule supersedes linguistic rule in a composition that sets text (extemporized or not) to music. For instance, in the performance of the song, *Kongona* (see example no. 5.8, appendix no. 7.1 and listen to CD track no. 1), certain vowels are ellipited. In the actual performance, the phrase: 'e kongona mungo muno oli kongona,' comes out as: 'e kongona mungo muno'li kongona.' Another example is in the performance of the song, *Mayi wo mwana* (see example no. 5.10, appendix no. 7.6 and listen to CD track no. 6), where the phrase: 'mayi wo mwana bira olole omwana,' comes out as: 'mayi wo mwana biro 'lol' omwana.

Likewise, in example no. 5.20 (see appendix no. 7.2 and listen to CD track no. 2), *Babuya*; the phrase that comes out as “*babuya ekholo embi khambole oli babuya ekholo embi ewe naloma*” in spoken form changes to “*babuye 'khole 'mbi khambolo 'li babuye 'khole 'mbi 'we naloma*” when sung. Despite the transformation in phonetics and word morphology, the meaning of the sung phrase is quite clear to the language owners, the Bukusu, who in the context of this study, are also the custodians/culture-bearers of the Bukusu culture in which the *Lubukusu* language is rooted.

*Example no. 5.20: BABUYA*

The musical score for 'BABUYA' is presented in three systems. Each system includes a SOLOIST part (treble clef, 12/8 time), a RESPONSE part (treble clef, 12/8 time), and a CHINYIMBA part (bass clef, 12/8 time). The SOLOIST part features a melodic line with lyrics and dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *q* (forte). The CHINYIMBA part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a steady pulse. The lyrics are: "E ba - bu - ye 'kho - le 'mbi khe - mbo - lo - 'li - ba - bu - ye 'kho - le 'mbi e - E ba - bu - ye 'kho - le 'mbi - E ba - bu - ye 'kho - le 'mbi 'khe - mbo le 'li - ba - bu - ye 'kho - le mbi we".

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*Babuya*

9

S *p1*

R *q*

CHI. *q*

13

S *px1*

R *q*

CHI. *q*

17

S *q*

R *q*

CHI. *q*

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter discusses Bukusu creative compositional thought and/or philosophy with reference to thematic form, ensemble form and presentational form in the context of the knowledge of form and content in African music. Discussions in this chapter have featured the voices of interviewees so as to elicit their views on the contextual composition and performance practices. The verbatim ethnographic observations and/or views enhance and detect indigenous philosophy, theoretical discourse, analytical procedure, aesthetic discourse and indices of evaluation. In spite of adapting the model of analysis of Igbo music by Nzewi (1991) in the analysis, explanation and discussion of Bukusu circumcision music, the entire study embraces the wider framework of Fiagbedzi's philosophy of theory in ethnomusicological research.