

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

It is noteworthy that the current research deals with indigenous knowledge systems where practitioners were the primary reference. Therefore, literature review in this context follows to query the authenticity and/or validity of written sources but not indigenous knowledge accessed from informants. Apart from reviewing literature related to the research problem and questions raised by this study, this chapter also discusses the theoretical framework on which the study is based.

#### **2.2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The two main research questions that the study endeavours to answer are:

- (a) Which peculiar structural elements constitute form, content and performance of African music in general and Bukusu circumcision music in particular?
- (b) How has the Bukusu circumcision ritual changed and how has this affected the performance of the songs, and verbal themes in the songs, that are part of the ritual?

In answering the questions, a case study of the form and content of traditional Bukusu circumcision music was investigated within the modern context. The literature review focuses on the views of several scholars about form and content of African music. In several cases a deliberate effort is made to consult literature that identifies the main objectives of African traditional circumcision rituals in general. These objectives are reflected and captured in the circumcision music as will be detailed in the review.

The general study of Kenyan music has been carried out by a number of scholars. For instance, in the study of vocal music of Kenya, Kavyu (1977) focused on the following music parameters: melodic movement,

tonal range, commonest intervals, rhythmic motifs, phrasing and format. Apart from not considering a number of parameters inherent in the Kenyan vocal music such as vocal embellishment, polyphony, ululation and nasality, the analysis does not address important aspects required for the understanding of music of a given culture. For example, the composer, and the audience for which the music is composed have been ignored yet they are part and parcel of the music. Nannyonga (1995:9) concurs with this view by stating that “music does not exist in isolation from the people who produce it.” Similarly, Merriam (1964: 187) agrees with Nannyonga’s postulation when he states that “it has been stressed that ethnomusicology involves much more than the structural analysis of music sound. [This so because] music is a human phenomenon produced by people for the people existing and functioning in a social situation.” In this case, to understand music of a given people, the basic knowledge of the cultural factors behind the production of sound structure is important.

On freedom of expression through song, Merriam observes that “song itself gives the freedom to express thought, ideas, and comments which cannot be stated baldly in the normal language situation” (1964:193). He (Ibid) further argues that “[i]t appears, then that song texts, because of their special kind of license that singing gives, afford an extremely useful means of obtaining kinds of information which are not otherwise easily accessible.” These observations relate closely to how language is used in the context of Bukusu circumcision music. Some musicians use song texts with hidden meanings designed to convey special messages to the mature members of the audience and at the same time hide the meanings from the young members of the audience. According to the Bukusu norms and philosophy, the meanings are hidden because they can only be valuable and functional if the audience is mature enough to interpret the coded messages for their own benefit. That is, the recipients are supposed to apply the messages in their day-to-day life situations as adults. Moreover, since the messages entail the philosophy of the society in context, the only

way of making them a preserve of the adults, and by extension adding value to them is by coding them as such. Making such messages commonplace would contribute to the disintegration of cultural foundations and ties.

Senoga-Zake (2000:33) observes that in the Luyia marriage ceremonies, dancers exhibit the best of the art for the purpose of getting gifts. Although this may be true to some extent, even in the performance of Bukusu circumcision music, the dramatized dance postures, dance formations; gestures and facial expressions convey messages that go beyond mere dancing for the purpose of receiving gifts.

Changes in political organizations, religious practices, economic life, and desire for modernity have led to the changed mode of the circumcision ceremonies and styles which in turn, have led to adjustments in the organization of traditional circumcision musical practices to fit into the new culture. For example, Christianity has led to widespread use of Christian music that has interfered with the performance format and role of Bukusu traditional circumcision music. In some extreme cases, there has been total replacement of the traditional circumcision music with Christian hymns and gospel music. This has been due to negative attitudes towards African music by some early church missionaries, and perpetuated by the current Christians.

As Nketia observes:

All these developments were encouraged and strengthened by the activities of the church, which preached against African cultural practices while promoting western values and usage. It adopted a hostile attitude to African music, especially the drumming because this was associated with what seemed to Christian evangelists as “Pagan” practice. Moreover, this did not appear to be suitable for the form of Christian worship the Westerners were accustomed to (1974:14).

The negative attitude towards African music was not only in Ghana, as per the foregoing Nketia's argument, but also in Kenya. The converts were encouraged to adopt Western hymns in English, and translated them into Kiswahili and other local languages. They discouraged the performance of traditional music, which according to Christian evangelists was not suitable for use in church (Nang'oli 2000, Mindoti 1999, Kavyu 1977).

Coplan (1982) argues that four aspects namely: selection, rejection, transformation of music traits, and choice of composition principles are greatly determined by the urban social strata, cultural classification, and significance. Since urbanization is a major factor affecting the role and performance of traditional Bukusu circumcision music, three questions arise in connection with Coplan's argument:

- (a) Which of the Bukusu traditional circumcision music traits have been selected or rejected?
- (b) How has the transformation of the music traits been carried out?
- (c) And what has been the effect of changes, if any, on the Bukusu circumcision music in particular?

Since the researcher did not find any literature that would specifically answer these questions, a gap was constituted that necessitated the conducting of this study.

According to Akivaga and Odaga (1982), circumcision is a very important ceremony in communities that participate in it. It is considered as one way of graduating from childhood to adulthood. In communities that participate in circumcision, anybody who avoids it or who is circumcised in hospital is looked down upon and rejected by the society because of going against the cultural norms that direct and correct the behavior and the life of the community members.

Although Akivaga and Odaga do not refer to circumcision music, their views are in agreement with the objectives of this study that examines the form and content of Bukusu circumcision music. In this case, it is

argued that virtues responsible for maintaining/instilling the community's social controls and guidelines for the future life of the initiates are embedded in the content of the music.

About circumcision Nang'oli says:

In most African societies, one has to go through the ritual of initiation at a certain age, in order to achieve manhood or womanhood. Until then, one is still considered a child however old he or she may be. One is also considered unclean, and may not fully partake in the daily activities of life within the clan. May not for instance serve food or drinks to the initiated, or may not give advice on any matter or may not even get married because he or she is still *a child in the head* (2000:57).

Nang'oli's views stress the importance of circumcision in the respective communities that practice it. In the Bukusu circumcision rite, initiates are mentally prepared to face responsibilities and realities of adulthood via instructions, mostly embodied in the texts of circumcision music. Nang'oli's observation relates closely to this study in that in addition to examining form and content in Bukusu circumcision music, the study discusses sensibilities and meanings of song texts.

Makila (1986) argues that the Bukusu circumcision ceremony marks the end of childhood and gives the initiates the advice on adulthood, giving them new responsibilities together with an opportunity to benefit from the knowledge and wisdom within their culture. Because many of these teachings are passed on through the various songs performed, the current researcher agrees with Makila especially when he says that the ceremony gives an opportunity to the initiates to learn various lessons that will guide them in adulthood. This study is concerned with such lessons and especially in the way they are passed on proverbially in the circumcision songs.

According to Kenyatta (1966), the cutting of the foreskin is the beginning of a sequence of events in the long process of the circumcision rite of the Gikuyu community. Through music and dance

the youngsters are given necessary information and teachings concerning their community's customs and culture. Kenyatta's views have a very close similarity with the traditional Bukusu circumcision ritual in which apart from imparting customary knowledge to initiates through song and dance, there are several sessions when the initiates are formerly advised on how to behave as adults.

Senoga-Zake (2000) discusses the traditional circumcision of the Tiriki and the Bukusu, both being sub-communities of the Luyia community. He says the circumcision ceremony of the Tiriki is organised in two groups: The traditional one and the Christian one. The traditional one is organized in stages in which song, dance, and drama are included. Furthermore, he says that the songs are satirical but the words used encourage the initiates to be brave and overcome the pain during circumcision. In addition Senoga-Zake, (Ibid) observes that this ceremony is organized in accordance with some taboos. For example, women are not allowed to participate. Communities from other cultures are also not allowed to participate in the Tiriki circumcision ceremony. On the other hand, the Christian group has changed the traditional circumcision songs by retaining the melodies but changing the text to suit the Christian context and the western idiom. He observes:

Christianity has succeeded in splitting the Tiriki into two groups namely the minority who will go through the rites as they have been performed through the ages, and the Christians, the majority, who have dropped some of the old customs such as dancing in the nude in market places, wearing skins, and receiving lots of instructions. Nevertheless, initiated Christian youths stay in the bush huts like all the rest. These lads sing a lot of pleasure songs to a drum accompaniment. These songs are used as they march, exercising their bodies, and for competitions on initiation days (Senoga-Zake 2000:39).

When discussing the traditional Bukusu circumcision ceremony, Senoga-Zake (2000:40) says that this is an important ceremony that brings together the young and the old people. According to Zake, the performance starts with the dance called *kilumbe*. This dance

eventually reaches the climax called *khuminya*, which entails very lively mockery music while at the same time encouraging and praising the initiate. The initiates use the instruments called *chinyimba*.

The present study agrees with Senoga-Zake, especially when he notes that these days there are new trends cropping up in the organization of the Tiriki circumcision ceremony. This trend has also taken root in the Bukusu community in as far as circumcision music and ceremony are concerned. Among the Bukusu, three protagonists have emerged: the traditionalists, semi-traditionalists and modernists. While traditionalists advocate for the traditional organization and performance of Bukusu circumcision music, the semi-traditionalists mix the modern and traditional aspects. On the other hand, the modernists have altogether done away with the music.

About the cultural conflict between traditional and modern modes of circumcision, the East African Standard newspaper (10-1-2002) reported that Meru initiates from Kigumene village burnt down the houses of parents who circumcised their boys in hospitals and hence avoiding involvement in the performance of songs, dances and drama associated with the traditional ceremony. The report explains how the boys grouped themselves and sang the traditional circumcision songs as they castigated those who opted to be circumcised in hospital. They called them cowards and betrayers of their own culture who do not have a place in the Meru society.

Unlike the Meru, of late the Bukusu are adopting a liberal dimension in relation to the choice of being circumcised in hospital or traditionally. Incidences of criticism and harassment directed to those who opt for circumcision in hospital are extremely rare. On recent developments about the foregoing, the East African Standard newspaper reports the following about the recent trends in the practice of the Bukusu circumcision rite:

...But great success in the campaign against the agony of traditional circumcision has been achieved through Christian groups. A group comprising several churches has formed an association, which has started a project dealing with the circumcision of initiates at a very low cost of as much as a hundred shillings only....We expect to get about 500 initiates every August of the circumcision year (2002:3).

Mwamwenda (1995) examines circumcision as practiced among the Xhosa of the Eastern Cape in South Africa. He reports that for the last five years, the circumcision practiced by the Xhosa-speaking people in the Eastern Cape has become a matter of increasing concern because of its effects on many of the initiates. Hospitals in Queenstown, King Williamstown, Umtata, East London, Mdantsane, Alice, Butterworth, Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, and many more have reported a frequent and regular high admission rate of initiates needing treatment of Sepsis following circumcision. While some have been successfully treated and discharged, others have died. He further observes that the Xhosa believe that those who do not survive illness associated with circumcision had never been designed by the spirits to achieve manhood. Mwamwenda explains that it is not for us to argue for or against the validity of the foregoing belief, just as it would be futile to argue about the need and viability of the circumcision rite among a handful of African ethnic groups. He observes that it is apparent that many culturally determined beliefs and rites do not lend themselves to scientific and technological substantiation. Since this is not the basis of their existence, they thrive regardless.

About AIDS, he argues that there is currently a danger of contracting AIDS in view of the fact that the *assegai* (knife) used for circumcision is not sterilized and is used on several individuals. He reports that the same knife is used to operate on as many as six young people without sterilization. Mwamwenda further observes that the Xhosas do not allow female medical practitioners to offer medical services to the

initiates, as this would be in conflict with a cultural belief that the initiates should have no contacts with women. Moreover, he elaborates that among the Xhosas, being circumcised in hospital may lead to one being ostracized by peers. It is argued that hospital circumcision is not even close to the culture, experience and education entailed in the traditional circumcision rites.

He sums up by arguing that it is evident therefore, that the need for circumcision is not negotiable. What is subject to debate and negotiation is the manner in which it is administered. In as much as Mwamwenda illuminates issues very similar to the Bukusu traditional circumcision ritual, he does not focus on the structure and role of music in the ritual. The current study argues that music takes a centre stage in the organization and practice of African traditional circumcision rituals.

About form and structure, King (1999) observes that one of the most distinctive characteristics of African music is the use of 'call-and-response' song forms. In this type of singing the lead singer will call out with a sung message and the whole group will respond with an answer or the completion of the message. She states that the 'call-and-response' form is used in a myriad of ways with marvellous creativity. The brilliance of this form is the room for flexibility in the way it is organized. It can be adapted, augmented, shortened and expanded. It all depends on the needs and goals of the song at the time that it is sung. King goes on to expound on this form by classifying two categories of songs that arise from it. These are the **low text load songs** and the **high text load songs**. According to her, the **high text load song** is a song with many different words and phrases. On the other hand the **low text load song** is a song with few words or phrases. Only a few words change throughout the song. King further classifies and exemplifies seven types of the call-and-response form. These are:

(a) The 'mirror me' form (the simple 'call-and-response' form).

- (b) The 'long-look-in-a-mirror' form (a longer call with changing text response form).
- (c) The 'pick-up-and-run-with-it' form (the opening call is completed in the response).
- (d) The 'mirror-and-complete' form. In this song form, the lead singer calls out with a phrase, the response repeats the text and adds a completing thought. The pattern or shape of the song can be called 'A-B-Chorus'.
- (e) The 'respond-and-conclude' form. In this form both the call and response are short with a group chorus that makes a comment in chorus form. Again the pattern or shape of the song can be called 'A-B-Chorus', yet it is organized in a different way.
- (f) The 'Maasai-ostinato' form. (Call-and-response plus an underlying ostinato). This song form is very distinctive of the Maasai of East Africa. They combine two major composition techniques. That is, they use the standard 'call-and-response' singing style with a foundational or underlying ostinato pattern beneath it. The sung ostinato provides a type of basic rhythm to the song. Typically, the Maasai do not use drums to provide a regulative beat to their music.
- (g) The 'Senufo-story-telling' form (a complex combination of varying lengths of call-and-response). The overall pattern is of A-B-A form that uses call-and-response within its structure.

On his part, Agu (1999) categorizes the main forms of African music as:

- (a) Solos
- (b) Call and Response
- (c) Call and Refrain
- (d) Solo and Chorused Refrain
- (e) The mixed structural forms
- (f) Overlapping

About structures, Agu enumerates the following repetition techniques as the main structural features of African songs:

- (a) Repetition of the whole song and
- (b) Repetition of the section of the song

Apart from informing the current study about various issues related to form, structure, content and performance of African music, the consulted literature serves as a springboard for the analyses of culture-specific queries pertaining to the context of Bukusu circumcision music. On this basis, the current research discusses the socio-cultural, psycho-philosophical, functional, artistic-aesthetic, and historical perspectives of the music.

### **2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is guided by grammatical and speculative theories of music as expounded by Nissio Fiagbedzi (1989). He argues that the grammatical theory comprehends the rule or body of rules prescriptive or descriptive of musical organization and performance. He observes that it includes all systematizations of melodic and multipart techniques as well as techniques of formal structure and of composition and performance that would on application yield musical products in the idiomatic style from which the rules derive. According to Fiagbedzi:

In African music, the grammatical theory may involve rules of polyrhythmic and formal structures, rules of polyphony, polarity, melodic design, expectations governing the aesthetics and context of performance, and so forth. Thus rules of polyrhythmic structure may require that instruments of a drum ensemble play individual lines of rhythm aligned first to a complex of repetitive patterns played by bells and rattles and then severally to one another in a way that maintains rhythmic points of synchronization as a framework of reference (1979:3).

He states that the rules of structural design may prescribe sensitivity to the demands of the context of performance or to inherent limitations of particular instruments such as are used in hocket techniques of music making. He explains that as conceived, grammatical theory includes what Palisca (1963:112) identifies in western music as 'practical' and

'creative' theory aimed at training of musicians and composers generally, and in the context of African musicology, of performers as well, but subsumes both categories under one rubric. In this case, he recommends that the term 'grammatical' underscores more explicitly the common prescriptive function of the two.

Fiagbedzi (Ibid) postulates that the question may arise as to whether grammatical theory has to be written to be identifiable as such. He argues that undoubtedly, if it were written, it would be readily available and one can more easily identify it as a source and be able to consult it. On the other hand, he states that it is unlikely that there can be any tradition of music without rules and procedures by which the music is organized.

Moreover, he observes that in oral traditions where theory is often unwritten, it is probable that grammatical theory would as defined be explicit in the rules that the music practitioners recognize and make their music by. Further, Fiagbedzi elaborates that traditions of music and music making are usually transmitted from generation to generation by example and verbal explanation. According to him, unless it can be proved that this transmission takes place in some societies solely by example and by no other means, the argument must remain tenable that societies with oral traditions of music do verbalize about the rules of music making even if without much elaboration. He finally states that to the extent that such verbalization does focus on and is in explanation of music organization, grammatical theory must constitute an integral aspect of the musical tradition of a given society.

He points out that in contradistinction to the grammatical, speculative theory aims to discover the meaning, significance or value in music and musical activity. Thus its area of inquiry comprehends problems of musical value, modes of musical meaning (Nketia 1981), modalities evolved in societies for their communication, as well as aesthetic experience generally.

On the other hand, Fiagbedzi (Ibid) argues that speculative theory may be conceived of as ultimately comprising systems of thought for the understanding of music based on definable philosophical positions and argument in terms of which the individual systems can have validity. He observes that for example, in trying to rationalize what could constitute the most fundamental principle characterizing musical meaning, a system given to the elaboration of an eclectic view may have to base its argument on empirical evidence relating music to other arts and forms of behaviour by means of which meaning may normally be communicated. He agrees with Nketia (1975:11-13) who points out that:

In African societies, a person is said to understand a piece of music when he is able to relate or respond to it in certain culturally defined ways.... Meaning is, therefore, related to the musical experience itself (which) consists of both what is derived from the music itself and what is occasioned by it in the musical situation....This meaning may be communicated in several ways: through internal properties of music, expressive changes in them which may be mirrored in observable behavior; through creative expressions of verbal texts, the nexus between music and dance movement and between music and the context of use.

Fiagbedzi (Ibid) elaborates that evidently, the eclectic viewpoint advanced in the foregoing does admit to basic ethnographic description; facts may be gathered about music, musical activity, forms of artistic expression such as dance, poetic and other modes of verbal expression, observable behaviour and context of use in musical situations. He states that the list of possible ethnographic features could further include body arts, patterns of spatial movement or formations, sequence and rhythm of events as well as events of a public/private, ritual/non-ritual, professional in situ types with variations or repetitions of them.

He argues that likewise, the notion of meaning could call for the abstraction of those principles of the ethnologic kind that could account

for music and musical situations in relation to the culture of a given African society; show up explicitly what the individual culture could reveal about itself from its various artistic and socio-cultural expressions in given musical situations; and if the data so permits, indicate the morphological or typological classifications that could be established cross-culturally or by way of historical reconstruction.

He continues to explain that when compared with the notion of aesthetic attitude which forms the basis of western aesthetic speculation, the recommendation by Nketia (1975), that meaning can be found from 'several complimentary angles' embedded in a musical situation can be seen to have derived from the fundamental view of music as an integrated art. Fiagbedzi (Ibid) explains that this is in opposition to the western view that usually separates music from whatever extra musical context there may be. He elaborates that whereas both points of view would probably admit to the pertinence of an empirical foundation to the argument, conclusions based on the eclectic view cannot claim to be generalizations applicable across cultures in the sense scientific laws are, without shedding the implications of their cultural reference. More so, he observes that it would not be justifiable to regard western aesthetics as applicable. He justifies that this is because it would seem that among other factors, the behavioral demands of the concert hall and the widely disseminated cults of the aesthetic attitude have both contributed somewhat in making the cultural condition of the western art music peculiar to its social milieu and thus made its aesthetic theories inapplicable across cultures. He concludes by stating that it would seem that the philosophical position on which systems of speculative theory can be founded in ethnomusicological explanation cannot meet the test of universal applicability as is the case in scientific explanation.

In the context of this study, the grammatical theory focuses on investigating rules of Bukusu circumcision music. It underscores the structures, functions and contexts of performance styles. Furthermore,

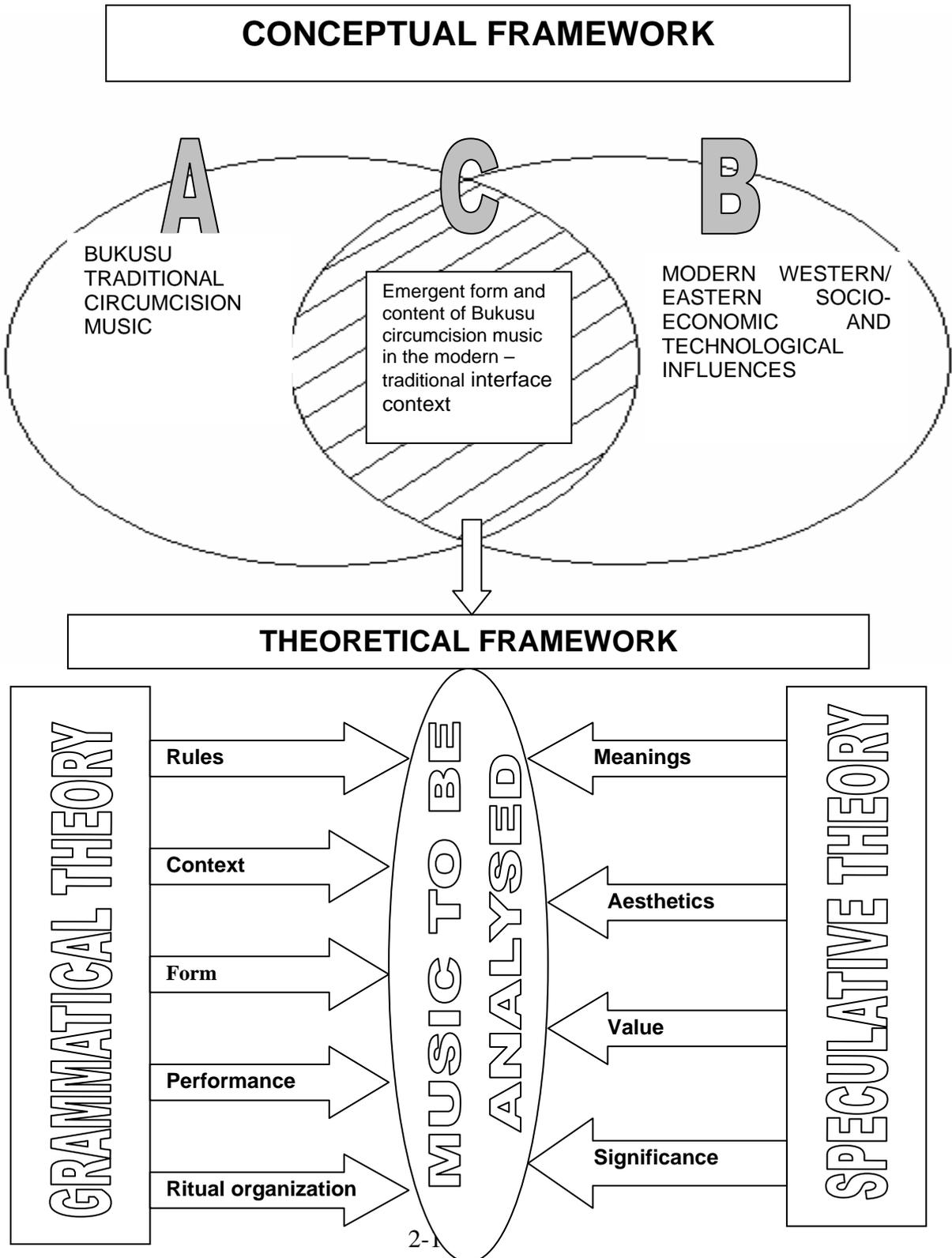
it is a useful tool in the determination of techniques of making and transmitting of Bukusu circumcision music from one generation to the other. The speculative theory on the other hand addresses the meaning, significance and value of Bukusu circumcision music and its performance. The current study corroborated the views of scholars such as Senoga-Zake (2000), Nketia (1974), King (1999) and Agu (1999) among others whose views about form, content and performance of African music were discussed in section 2.1. These views were consulted against the backdrop of Bukusu circumcision music with an aim of investigating its form, content and performance as per the context and objectives of this study. The theoretical framework guiding this study is comprehensively summarized in figure 2.1. As illustrated, it resulted from the conceptual framework of the entire study as briefly explained below.

At the conceptual level, it is observed that Bukusu traditional circumcision music is not static. There is a continuous negotiation/interaction between values embedded in its form and content; and values associated with the modern western/eastern social economic and technological developments. Within this interface, we encounter the music to be analyzed: the emergent Bukusu circumcision music in the modern-traditional interface context. When examined through the theoretical framework of the study, the grammatical theory focuses on the rules, context, form, performance styles and ritual organization. On the other hand, the speculative theory illuminates meanings, aesthetics, value, functions and significance of the music.

The model of conceptualization and analysis of Igbo music by Nzewi (1991) is used, albeit in a modified form, in this study to conceptualize, explain, analyze and articulate the Bukusu traditional circumcision music context. 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.

**FIGURE NO. 2.1: Researcher’s illustration and interpretation of the grammatical and speculative theories derived from Nissio Fiagbedzi’s “Philosophy of theory in ethnomusicological research.” In Djedje, J.G. and Carter, W.G. (eds). (1989). Volume I. pp. 45-57.**



## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, literature related to the study was reviewed in order to identify gaps to be filled by the current study. It was established that most of the literature centered on the context of circumcision in African communities as a ritual without making an in-depth analysis of music as an integral part of the rituals and the interpretations of meanings therein. Furthermore, most of the issues are dealt with on a general basis and are not specific to Bukusu circumcision music. The literature reviewed established that in addition to the already accomplished scholarly work concerning the analysis of form and structure, there is need for further investigation in regard to functions, contexts, rules, meanings, value and significances of African music, and more so, in the Bukusu circumcision music. Moreover, the grammatical and speculative theories as expounded by Nissio Fiagbedzi (1989) were discussed in detail and a justification was established as to why and how they are relevant as guidelines to this study.