

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research aimed at identifying, examining and analyzing the form and content of African music as exemplified by Bukusu circumcision music. The two main research questions were:

- (a) Which elements distinguish form and content in Bukusu circumcision music?
- (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?

The study was undertaken in Bungoma district - one of the districts making up the Western province of Kenya. The main research methods used were participant and non-participant observation, interviews, focus group discussions and content analysis. Apart from participating and examining the unfolding of events, pictures of the whole rite were taken by using still picture cameras and video cameras. The music was also collected by using audio tape recorders.

This chapter focuses on the summary of research findings, conclusions, recommendations of the study as well as recommendations for further research.

#### **6.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This study found out that Bukusu circumcision music is deeply rooted in myths, taboos and beliefs that form the basic philosophical foundations of the Bukusu cultural fabric and hence its context-specific/context-utilitarian nature. Textual repetitions serve the purpose of emphasizing the messages embedded in the songs. Bukusu circumcision rite is not just a mere cutting of the foreskin of the initiate's penis; there are various virtues embodied in the form, content and performance of the music that accompanies it. Most virtues emphasize

the importance of: endurance, hard work, determination, respect, collective responsibility, communal ties, etiquette, discipline etc.

Performance of Bukusu circumcision music simultaneously entails playing of instruments, vocalization, dance and drama. The music is also characterized by parallel harmonies in thirds, which adhere to textual-tonal inflexions and hence enhance textual sense and meaning. Ellipsis of vowel sounds is a prominent feature in the performance of Bukusu circumcision music. Whenever two words follow each other, the first one ending with a vowel sound and the next one starting with another vowel sound, one of these sounds is dropped. This feature cuts down textual syllables to a number that fits comfortably in the basic melodic framework of the music. The ellipsis of the vowel sounds occurs because of purely musical exigency and hence 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 words or phrases of the language clearly stands out. In this case, musical rule supersedes linguistic rule in a composition that sets text (extemporized or not) to music.

The solo-and-response form is the basic structural feature in Bukusu circumcision music. However, in actual performance it was observed that there is no strictly fixed framework of music and/or text as is the case in Western music. Thematic development is based on spontaneity, extemporization and creativity. Variations in texts lead to variations in significant themes/melodies as dictated by speech rhythms and speech tones. Often, brief overlaps are created between the answering and questioning phrases and in most cases the questioning phrases are longer than the answering phrases. Moreover, by extemporizing and improvising, soloists in Bukusu circumcision music create melodic/thematic variations, which constitute developmental procedures in the tradition of performance-composition.

The use of satire/allusions in Bukusu circumcision music is meant to inspire the initiate and coerce him to undergo the rite. It is one way of encouraging the initiate and informing him that circumcision is a major rite of passage in the life of every male person in the Bukusu community. The rite indicates the initiate's future challenges, realities and responsibilities in his adult life. The aesthetic-artistic factor in the performance of Bukusu circumcision music is enhanced by paramusical features such as coinages of words, vocalizations, whistling, yelling and ululating done emotively alongside song and dance by participants for the purpose of expressing joy/excitement and embellishing the performance. Visual and verbal arts are integral parts of form and content of Bukusu circumcision music and they contribute immensely to the aesthetic-artistic value of the music.

Lastly, it was noted that emergent political, economic and social changes are gradually influencing the trend of the traditional role of Bukusu circumcision music performance. Changes in the organization and performance of the Bukusu circumcision ritual and its accompanying music are due to religious, technological and socio-economic developments.

### **6.3 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

Among other aims of this study, those that focused on music education endeavoured to:

- (a) Articulate the philosophy and function of African music as exemplified by the Bukusu.
- (b) Contribute music education study materials for schools, colleges and universities in Kenya and perhaps elsewhere. Currently such materials are inadequate.
- (c) Create a reference source for scholars such as anthropologists, ethnomusicologists and educationists in understanding culture as a dynamic phenomenon.
- (c) To stimulate further research in ethnomusicology and related fields such as anthropology, history and sociology.

On the basis of the above aims and discussions in the context of this study, it is arguable that traditional African musical practices should not be dismissed on face value as practices overtaken by circumstances and hence irrelevant to the present community developmental needs. They contain a lot of wisdom in as far as virtues related to ideal humanistic creativity, sensibilities and meanings are concerned. They therefore, embody the African philosophy of life, achievement and identity. A lot of ideas may be borrowed from virtues/lessons and philosophies embedded in the cultural practices. They can also be modified, and applied in the modern context for realization of meaningful and sustainable human socio-economic development. For instance, creative performance-composition techniques evident in various traditional African musical arts and practices as exemplified in Bukusu circumcision music may be successfully used in teaching various concepts in music education. Concepts such as melody, rhythm, tempo, pitch, harmony, form, pulse, composition and performance can be relevant and clearly understood and practiced in African schools, colleges and universities when approached and exemplified from the African perspective than the prevalent Americo-eurocentric models/approaches.

The main findings of the current study that relate closely to its music education aims are that:

- (a) Bukusu circumcision music is deeply rooted in myths, taboos and beliefs that form basic philosophical foundations of the Bukusu cultural fabric and hence its context-utilitarian nature. Therefore, in order to appreciate the relevance of African music, teachers and students need to be cognizant of its cultural underpinnings.
  
- (b) The form and content of Bukusu circumcision music is embedded in/characterized by its musical creativity and practice achieved through “performance-composition” which according to Nzewi

(1991; 1997 and 2003), is the art of musically marshalling, interpreting and aesthetically enriching the ongoing events as well as contingencies of a performance context. In this regard, individual and group creativity should be provided for in a music curriculum focused on talent nurturing.

(c) The solo-and-response form is the basic structural feature of Bukusu circumcision music. However, in actual performance it was observed that there is no strictly fixed framework of music and/or text as is the case in western music. Thematic developmental aspect of the music is based on spontaneity, extemporization and creativity. Consequently, it is crucial for the students to understand forms, structures and performance styles of African music. This dimension links the music to meaningful expression within a particular cultural setting.

(d) The performance of Bukusu circumcision music simultaneously entails elements of music, dance and drama that complement each other in the process of communicating certain contextual messages. Therefore, in the context of this study, music, dance and drama/theater should be integrated under one umbrella of arts and culture/musical arts. This is because, in the context of African musical performance, theory and practice, and as expressed in the research on Bukusu circumcision music, the three units heavily complement and depend on each other.

In regard to the foregoing, this study ascertains that African traditional music, as Nzewi (1997:11) puts it, “contains all materials that are needed in philosophy, theoretical content and principles of practices for culturally meaningful and independent modern music education of any disciplinary specialization at any level in Africa and perhaps elsewhere.” Therefore, this study adds value to scholarship in African music and becomes a “worthwhile contribution to the debate about and enhanced understanding of Africa’s extraordinarily rich musical

heritage” (Agawu 2001:193). This dimension is one way of forging “an African understanding of African music” (Ibid 2001:190) by researching into African materials and hence boosting our concerns about the state of music education in Africa. This endeavour is based on the fact that since Africa, Europe and America embrace completely different cultural divides; Americo-eurocentric approaches/models can be a handicap in discussing African indigenous creative procedure and music theory.

#### **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY**

As expressed in this study, Bukusu male circumcision, being a cultural practice, is difficult to be done away with. However, most of its traditional cultural functions and settings are rapidly adopting a new dimension in the present context of modernity. Its essence is losing meaning due to politico-socio-economic changes in terms of western educational and religious values coupled with modern industrial and medical products. Consequently, the Bukusu traditional circumcision rite is gradually losing its religious and humanistic attributes and hence becoming a secular practice. This means that currently, its traditional/cultural/religious attachments beyond the physical circumcision mark of identity are gradually dwindling.

This study has indicated that the emergent religio-socio-economic values related to the foregoing recommendation have somehow rendered messages/lessons in Bukusu circumcision music irrelevant to initiates, particularly due to their tender age at the time of their initiation. However, while parents consider alternative means of guidance and counseling, it is imperative that they draw insights from Bukusu circumcision music – a rich pool of knowledge focusing on morality and humanity – as established in this study. This should be a rational basis for preparing their children to fit in the modern society and contribute to it productively.

Current human decisions, actions and developments are based on the past records and experiences which in turn dictate future humanistic

aspirations, developments, successes, failures and solutions. Therefore, the Department of Culture in Kenya and by extension, in other African countries should encourage preservation of traditionally/culturally loaded communicative/informative practices by documenting them in a scholarly manner, as exemplified in the present study, for future reference, posterity and sustainable humanistic developments. As Akuno (2005:74) puts it, “today’s state and activities provide the grounding and roots for tomorrow’s achievements, the strides of which are determined by the level of understanding of ‘today’ that we can reach.”

### **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

A study should be done on the form and content of other traditional Bukusu musical arts and practices such as: wedding music, funeral music and harvest music with a view to examine in detail, their theory and practice in the context of indigenous and/or contemporary African humanistic, creative, artistic and theoretical thoughts and practices. Moreover, and related to the former, aesthetics in Bukusu verbal arts such as: proverbs, epic, lyrics, dictums and other poetic formations should be examined in relation to how they are musically theorized, practiced and expressed.

Since this study was limited to the Bukusu community, and hence may not have adequately reflected features in other African communities that practice male circumcision, a comparative study based on form and content of circumcision music of other African communities should be carried out. In this connection, it is also noteworthy that research on aesthetics of other African cultural and artistic practices inclined to human development spheres such as: guidance, counseling, entertainment, leisure, and spiritual, social, philosophical, historical and psychological matters could be carried out.

Lastly, laboratory tests should be undertaken to ascertain the possibility of using the Bukusu traditional herbs (*enguu*), used in

healing the circumcision wound, for the treatment of other wounds. This dimension would be an example of how African indigenous knowledge may contribute to the development of human medicine in modern times.