AN ANALYSIS OF THE AESTHETIC OF ABAGUSII MALE INITIATION RITUAL DRAMA: OKWAROKA

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A Thesis submitted to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts of Kenyatta University.

October, 2011.
DECLARATION

This dissertation is my original work and has not been presented for any award in any other University.

Signature ....... Date 31st Oct 2011

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DEDICATION

To my family: May this work be a living proof to them that hard work, patience, unselfishness and prayer always pay abundantly.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This undertaking was a challenging process, full of exciting adventures. However, it would not have been possible without the inspiration, guidance and encouragement of many people to whom my gratitude is due. I am grateful to my supervisors; Prof. Rev. Wangari Mwai and Dr. Wallace Mbugua, whose encouragement, guidance and support from the initial stage to the end enabled me to develop a better understanding of this work and enhance its quality.

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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Okwaroka, iburu, bware, mache motwe: entire ritual performance process by which Abagusii children become young adults through a series of ceremonies. Each ceremony is an occasion that includes formally defined and scheduled ritual events and periods of informal discussion and interaction. Ritual events include artistic actions that combine communication resources from a variety of channels both verbal and non-verbal.

Aesthetics - entails the artistic means through which perception and appreciation of a work of art is achieved.

Ritual Drama - refers to that mode of performance in which the action is central to the religious and aesthetic wholeness of the community that practices it. That is, the aesthetic and religious elements are organic and essential to the ritual’s communication and larger meaning.
ABSTRACT

The Abagusii of Kenya initiate boys into adulthood through *okwaroka*, a ritual performed annually. This study focuses on the aesthetic aspects of the ritual in terms of its dramatic make-up. The focus involves an analysis of the performance of the ritual right from its preparation stage, through the seclusion period to the graduation rite, in order to unveil the aesthetic nature of *okwaroka*. The objectives are: one, to identify and analyse the aesthetic aspects of *okwaroka*; two, to examine the contribution of performance of the ritual in the realisation of its aesthetics; three, to critically evaluate *okwaroka* as a tool for communication of social values. The analysis of the data has been guided by the Afro centric perspective on aesthetics as advanced by Kariamu Welsh-Asante in the Nzuri model. Data has been obtained through participant observation and key informant interviews, and has been analysed according to the provisions of the conceptual model, which postulates certain aspects in African art. These aspects are: spirit, rhythm, creativity, mode, function, ethos, motif, meaning, method/technique and form. The study opens up the performance of *okwaroka* in terms of time and context, revealing the aesthetic nature of the ritual. Further, it emerges that the performance has a functional value to the performers and that literary messages are embedded in the expressive modes of the ritual. These expressive modes in *okwaroka*, it was realised, communicate the ideals of the Abagusii community.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

In recent years, there has been a re-awakening of interest in African theatre. A quantity of literature has appeared revisiting and exploring the nature of Abagusii ritual drama, whose subject and aims are religious. These ritual drama may in turn be categorised so that there are ancestral or myth plays, masquerades and, age group plays. Zander postulates that they are also secular dramas, which include civic dramas, dance or song dramas (14). This study was undertaken in an attempt to offer an insight into Abagusii ritual drama by exploring its aesthetic aspects.

Africa is home to several traditions of theatre conceived as an ensemble of culturally marked and consciously staged practices, in space and time, before an audience (Molette and Molette 56). Many of these traditions are of ancient origin, while others emerged with European colonisation of the continent starting in the early nineteenth century and the subsequent imposition of Western education, religion, and culture.

There are four distinct categories of African theatre traditions: festival theatre, popular theatre, development theatre, and art theatre (Tejumola and Ato 355). For the purpose of this study and as Graham-White points out, we have focused on ritual drama which is also referred to as “pre-drama” or “traditional ritual” or “ritual drama” (4) because of its expansive multimedia format; its firm integration of the dramatic amidst the other arts, and the presence of both religious and secular re-enactments.
The study zeroed in on the ritual drama of the Abagusii community. While there are multiple manifestations of this, we have focused on *okwaroka*: the male initiation ritual drama.

The Abagusii are one of the Bantu speakers who occupy the most southwest portion of the western section of the Kenya highlands. The Abagusii trace their genealogy to the great ancestor of their community, Mogusii. Mogusii was one of the three sons of Osogo, son of Mkisa, son of Kalimeni, son of Ham, the first man believed by Abagusii to have first inhabited the 'big river valley in Misri' (Ochieng' 1974). After a series of migrations from Misri, Abagusii subsequently settled on the Kisii highlands and developed their social institutions.

Among the Abagusii, circumcision is an important ritual in the initiation of both boys and girls into adulthood. All male and female children are eligible for circumcision, at the age bracket of eleven and sixteen, through *okwaroka* and *ogokebwa* respectively. Apart from being an initiation ritual, *okwaroka* is a medium for the inculcation of special education, especially regarding sex, among the neophytes. It is also a preparatory stage to marriage and thus of great importance to every Abagusii expected to marry. It is also a period for cultivation of communal values in the neophytes, such as culturally cherished values as bravery and patriotism. It is within this context that this research set out to gain a deeper insight of the aesthetic and communication process as presented through *okwaroka*. 
The definition of aesthetics depends upon a cultural frame of reference. With regard to this study, aesthetics entails the artistic means through which perception and appreciation of a work of art is achieved. Thus, a dialogue on the aesthetic merit of a particular object or, of a certain group’s creative acts are served well only when those cultural considerations are taken into account. Although there are certain universals which may be generally agreed upon, they are not useful if cultural variances are ignored. One’s culture shapes the notions one has of beauty, form, mode of the creative act, and the social aesthetic values and philosophy upon which a response to the artistic object is based. The cultural perceptions thus form the basis for the choices of how a creative idea is represented, where it is represented, and to whom it is represented (Nketia 5). Aesthetics, thus, facilitates expression of the Abagusii worldview through okwaroka as an artistic enterprise.

Nketia further argues that the content and the nature of the art serve as a communication system for the individual and the group, reinforcing and elaborating upon cultural values. Thus, aesthetic judgment should rely on knowledge and acceptance of the cultural reference system from which the art emanates.

(Bell 111) argues that two issues are involved and often collapsed in any consideration of ritual and language: first, the ritual use of language and second, the comparison of ritual as a language with verbal or textual languages in the sense that its activities parallel the communication functions of the latter. She further postulates that in ritual, words themselves are deeds that accomplish things. This position was pioneered by Frazer and Malinowski who understand most rituals as magic because they assume an identity between the word and the thing. (Tambiah 1968) shares with
many other ritual theorists a concern to show how ritual communication is not just an alternative way of expressing something but the expression of things that cannot be expressed in any other way. Ritual communication is one of the core concerns of this study.

Nketia regards aesthetics as part of reference system comprised of social, artistic and philosophical values which may be studied empirically. The arts are governed by their social values, that is, they may be considered good because they satisfy artistic and social values. Social values may also inspire and guide the content of artistic expression, and determine the source, media of interpretation as well as the object itself (7).

Further, social organisation determines the ordering of artistic efforts, that is, who creates what in what context, is based on the structure of the society. The philosophical values of the culture are manifested in the artistic forms which operate within a specified symbolic system. For example, if the leopard skin signifies the chief, representation of the chief will be reflected through the use of this and/or other symbols. The independence of the aesthetic system from its mode of expression allows it to operate freely in a variety of spheres. Yet, its values are effective because they evolve from the practice of and response to creativity. Thus the leaders’ opinion of thought and the approbation of those in authority constitute only a component of aesthetic guidance. Whereas in the West there is reference to authorities in a particular field in the judgment of aesthetic merit, African traditions are learned through socialisation and participation.
Nketia concludes by saying:

...since theory is separate from practice, specific musical events or aspects of such, one could deduce African aesthetic values from performance practice and the verbal statements that are made about specific musical events or aspects of such events (7).

An African aesthetics does not differ in important ways from others; instead, it goes further to incorporate broader conceptualisations based on a group’s sense of beauty of form, style and content (14).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ritual drama’s aesthetic attention is expressed in the Abagusii puberty rite of okwaroka. The art associated with the ritual includes various dramatic elements. (Otternberg 32) observes that, “the question is no longer whether there are theatrical aspects to ritual... but what these aspects are, why they take their particular configurations, and what purpose they serve. This study has sought to critically analyse okwaroka’s theatrical aspects, their particular configurations and the purposes they serve.” The study is interested in the performance of the ritual and the devices that the performers use that contribute to its aesthetic appeal. The ritual is, in this case, a formal medium of communication, entertainment and instruction.
1.3 Objectives
This study aimed at undertaking an aesthetic analysis of the performance of *okwaroka*.

This study thus sought to:-

1. Identify and analyse the various aesthetic aspects of *okwaroka*.
2. Examine the contribution of performance in the realisation of the aesthetics of *okwaroka*.
3. Critically evaluate *okwaroka* as a tool for communicating social values.

1.4 Research Questions
1. What aesthetic aspects are there in *okwaroka*?
2. What is the contribution of performance to the realisation of *okwaroka*'s aesthetics?
3. How does *okwaroka* communicate Abagusii’s social values?

1.5 Justification and Significance
There are certain salient factors that justify the undertaking of this study. Rituals are important social and cultural occasions among those communities that practice them. According to Turner (130), rituals, among those societies which practice them, also operate as drama through which vital issues concerning society in virtually all aspects are addressed. It is in light of that the study seeks to investigate how *okwaroka* addresses Abagusii’s social concerns.

The study seeks to explore the aesthetic aspects and communicative nature of ritual drama. It is hoped that the study would enrich our knowledge concerning Abagusii traditional aesthetics. Besides this, it is expected that this investigation would contribute to the expansion of our literary knowledge in the area of ritual drama as well.
as being helpful to scholars in the field of ritual drama. The intention is to enhance the available literature in the field of ritual drama and to provoke thought and inquiry, as well as to stimulate curiosity and attention regarding aesthetic content of the ritual drama.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

This study is limited to the critical analysis of the aesthetic aspects of okwaroka. It looks at ritual performance of okwaroka among the Abagusii. This mapping is made because we were familiar with the Abagusii language and culture. The study has undertaken an actual analysis of a ritual performance which is considered a complete ritual cycle. The purpose of this study is not a general survey of okwaroka but an in-depth literary analysis of its process, manifestations and impact, observing a ritual in order to account for its aesthetics.

1.7 Literature Review Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

1.7.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is to understand what other scholars have said about our topic; how they have dealt with this topic and, what has been their motive. Of particular interest to us is literature that explores African ritual drama and aesthetics. This section of African writers and non-African writers attempts to study rituals in order to help us identify a lacuna and crystallise it. This also offers insights that map the trajectory through which the study finds its place among previous pertinent studies.
1.7.2 African Traditional Ritual Drama

In his study of the Abatachoni theatre and its aesthetics, Karani (5) avers that drama refers to a specific concept of an art where man utilizes his capability of dramatization in acts of role playing. Drama is therefore, the intellectual ability to conceptualise social phenomenon through role playing (action) in concrete performance. It is the ability to examine intellectually this very process itself. The import is that drama is a mode of art based on man’s inherent ability to represent modes of reality and experience theatrically. These definitions are significant, first as attempts to comprehend a specific realisation of the concept of drama, and secondly, in so far as they recognise the performance as a rule-governed (‘conventions’) phenomenon capable of transformation. Transformation as Karani puts it implies that dramatic forms change, borrow or even discard some aspects of their form (6). Hence this study has sought to carry out a field study with the intent of describing ritual events in detail in order to ascertain what principles guide the form, content, and mode of artistic out put.

This study considers a ritual to be actions which are prescribed and repeated and which convey elements of religious symbolism (Bourdillon 30). Drama is used to refer to an art form that employs histrionic aesthetics in its modes of signification (Taviringana 5). In pre-colonial and post-colonial drama and theatre in Africa, context is the specific social and cultural setting within which a ritual enactment is carried out. Performance is used to refer to elements of drama that are discernable during the actualisation of a ritual, especially when a ‘simultaneity of sensory impressions are involved’ (Styan 3-4).
Graham-White (4) differentiates between three types of drama in the sub-Saharan Africa: traditional drama, drama of the colonial period, and literary drama. Traditional drama is that which was performed prior to the colonial period and, in some cases, is still performed today. It is expressed in the vernacular, is not written down, is typically based on the social organisation of the village, and is performed by members of a special society or age-set. Graham-White further describes traditional performances of drama as those performed in the open air where actors are not separated from the audience, no particular attention to lighting, or a raised stage. There is no strict separation of actors and spectators; actors may move freely among the audience, and spectators may get up to dance with performers. The study seeks to examine the presence of the above mentioned elements of drama in okwaroka.

Every day life in a traditional African community is punctuated with performance almost at every stage right from prayers, greetings and work. (Scribner 7) concurs with Graham-White on the presence of performance in Africa before the arrival of Europeans. He refers to this performance as traditional theatre and further postulates that some traditional African theatre is performed for entertainment, such as the storytelling while other traditional theatre has important religious and social meaning. Scribner's sentiments underscore the functional element of drama, one being entertainment. The study, however, seeks to investigate how okwaroka fulfills the desires of Abagusii community.

Male circumcision is a practice that has existed in many African communities. Zoske (218) also notes that ritual circumcision (as differentiated from modern medical circumcision) has existed throughout history. Among the many 19th and 20th century
authors who have studied its historical, religious, and cultural aspects, there is a consensus that its roots run back thousands of years ago, even predating Judaism with depiction of circumcision found in Stone-Age cave drawings. Fertility rituals, control of sexual drives, and tribal identification - for men and women - are considered the primary purposes for circumcision's many variations.

Traditional theatre in all African cultures shares certain features. (Scribner 9) contends that traditional theatre is characterised by lack of a script or a "correct" version that performers must follow. Characters are not portrayed as individuals but as general types such as the dishonest merchant, the prostitute, or the foreigner. Performances often criticise or make fun of political and social targets such as corrupt chiefs or greedy prophets of foreign religions. Song, music, and dance are highly important elements of performance. This view underscores this study's focus on song and dance incorporated in okwaroka performance.

African traditional theatre is a group activity often without boundaries between creators, performers and audience. (Scribner 13) advances, unlike modern plays, traditional ritual drama and narrative plays are not written by individual playwrights. They have been molded from the culture and customs of an entire community and are passed on by memory from generation to generation. Rather than take place on stage at a planned time and date, performances are part of the social and cultural activities associated with daily life and with major events such as birth, initiation rites, hunting, marriage, spirit possession, and death. This study has analysed okwaroka as one of such African traditional theatre.
Ritual behaviour, as classically applied to humans, has four characteristics. First, ritual is a stylised or stereotyped, repetitive, pattern of behaviour. Second, it is associated with religious beliefs and practices and in some sense deemed to be sacred. Third, it contains a temporal element in that rituals are held at set times and have a liturgical order. Lastly, ritual has a spatial element because it often takes place in a specified location with actors also being spatially coordinated. Sometimes, however, the second and third characteristics are rather loosely interpreted so that secular events like graduations, installation of officers, visits of foreign dignitaries, and pilgrimages to Disneyland can be described in ritual terms (Kertzer 235). In this expanded interpretation, what is deemed to be sacred spreads beyond religion to what is valued in secular life.

1.7.3 Aesthetic Functions of Ritual Drama

The performance of okwaroka like that of other rituals is functional. In his study, (Lugira 72) lists five functions of ritual: ritual as a form of knowledge, ritual as being didactic, ritual as a way of influence or control, ritual as a way of glorifying and lastly ritual as a form of entertainment. This study seeks to examine the functions of okwaroka among the Abagusii.

In a study of Ndembu religious practices (Turner 19), describes them as social and ritual drama, symbolically rich in expressing cultural meanings and indications of how a society structures the lives of its people. To Turner, rituals are always associated with rites of passage that mark a transition from one status to another. His argument provides us with the impetus to study okwaroka as a form of ritual drama.
The approach, timing, and places for the rites of initiation vary from people to people (Lugira 67). Young people may be initiated through either physical initiation or instructional retreats. Physical initiation usually means circumcision, or the removal of the foreskin of the penis for boys, and an operation to remove the clitoris for girls. *Okwaroka* rites of passage as performed by the Abagusii community fall under this category.

The performance of initiation rites provides a channel for the passage of societal beliefs and taboos. (Lugira 69) postulates that apart from their drama and impact, initiation rites convey many religious meanings. Lugira’s point of view serves to provide the premises of our study since the study has sought to investigate the aesthetic aspects of *okwaroka* and its impact on the participants and the Abagusii community at large. He further postulates that elders take young people to retreats away from home where they learn the art of communal living. They are introduced to the basic facts of life, privileges, rights, duties and responsibilities of the community. The initiation rites give them instruction in matters of sexual life, marriage, procreation, and family responsibilities. Through initiation they are groomed into adults who may shed blood for the sake of their people. They are also encouraged to accept the responsibility of procreation in order to multiply the community through marriage. The aspect of secluding the neophytes was noted in the performance of *okwaroka*.

During field study, it was noted that song and dance inform the performance of *okwaroka*. (Lugira 75) concurs with this observation by saying that music and dance are part and parcel of traditional African performances. He says that music is an audible expression of African prayer. There are many religious songs in praise of one’s God and
There are many songs which are an expression of joy for spiritual blessings. There are songs asking favours from above. And there are songs exuberantly sung in thanksgiving. The presence of song was evident in the performance of okwaroka thus forming one of the areas under focus.

Whereas song is religious expression in voice, dancing concentrates on expressing religious emotions, elegance, and dynamism through bodily movement. (Lugira 78) observes that African religious ritual could be lifeless without the accompaniment of song and dance. These are powerful means of African religious expression. This was evident during the performance of okwaroka. The women dancers added life to the performance of okwaroka by punctuating it with song and dance. This study seeks to look at song not just as an additive to okwaroka but how its performance enhances the artistry of the ritual.

Besides song and dance, the context of performance of okwaroka provides for sacred space and time. (Lugira 87) argues that the places where the rites and rituals of African religion are carried out are sacred space. Some of these places are constructed specifically for religious purposes but others are the natural environment where people come together for ritual purposes. There are also places that would normally be regarded as non-sacred but may on certain occasions serve as ritual spaces. These are often homes in which senior family members may officiate as ritual elders. During the performance of okwaroka, the occasion was regarded by the participants as being sacred while its various settings provide the sacred space.
Through sacrifice, divination or the intensity of the dance, the consciousness of a devotee can be so transformed that the boundary between the ordinary and the extraordinary worlds becomes blurred. For example, with the rhythm of drums, persons can literally dance in order to tap divine power. That is, persons can ‘dance out their desires’ until they are ‘mounted by a god’ and ‘come into possession’ of a special identity, power, or consciousness. Dance among Africans is sometimes a ritual technique used to discern the will or intention of a god, a technique employed to ensure that order is maintained or a fundamental conflict is resolved (Williams 434). Williams informs this study with his postulation that dance is part of ritual performance. The study has explored the technique of dance and its contribution in the aesthetic realisation of okwaroka.

In the assessment of okwaroka, the study sought to look at ritual agents. (Trumbull 50) postulates that in their quest for resolution or relief, human beings become ritual agents by participating in a field of meaning by means of right action, exteriority and the embodiment of a special mystery. In this connection, symbolic or ritual actions more than, say, a textual expression or a verbal orientation, define and gesticulate the vital dimension of reality. Trumbull, in his dissertation on theatre further observes that ritual actions really embody and account for the problematic which is lived, practiced and experienced. Ritual portrays "a symbolic resolve of the conflicts which external environment, historical experience, and selective distribution of personality types have caused to be characteristic in ... society" (52). This study sought to investigate the presence and role of participants in realising okwaroka as ritual drama.
Ritual is delineated almost always with respect to its instrumental character. Kluckhohn’s psychological summary is a good example: “Ritual is an obsessive repetitive activity - often a symbolic dramatisation of the fundamental 'needs' of the society, whether 'economic', 'biological', 'social', or 'sexual'.” Ritual, as "a symbolic dramatisation of fundamental needs," conveys the sense of a procedure or plan whereby certain benefits are derived from a ritual or symbolic undertaking qtd in *Exorcising blackness: historical and literary lynching and burning rituals* by Trudier Harris (19). *Okwaroka* as a performed entity has a culturally prescribed and predetermined structure that in its performance enhances the ideals of the Abagusii community.

Kluckhohn further argues that ritual is usually associated with moral conflict and social problems. The salvation or resolution, which comprises the goal of ritual practice, relates to human conflict and social problems. Through religion, ritual, drama and the power of divinity are correlated.

The study considers *okwaroka* as a dramatic human act aimed at aiding the Abagusii community attains a desired status. Turner argues that if human action, in the form of a planned and repetitive locomotion of the body, is a means by which some nagging problems are resolved, then the best commentary on, or the successful interpretation of ritual is a form of action and re-presentation that is parallel to the ritual enactment itself. (Williams 434) advances that motion, drama, enactment as employed by devotees of black religion are vehicles for making contact with God and of attaining personal-social goals identified with the reality and will of the deity. Similarly, the study has examined how the performance of *okwaroka* provided the participants an opportunity to commune in divinity through its creative space.
In religious matters, Africans exist and search for meaning as well as the resolution of conflict. They undertake such searches as they are ritualistically and actually involved with changing and moving concerns of life.

Mbiti observes that:

Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the field where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony ... to the house of parliament... Everybody is a religious carrier. So then, belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated; they belong to a single whole (131).

The power of the universe is ultimately from God even when there are instances of power being derived from, and conveyed through lesser spiritual beings and natural objects. Hence, within this world of sacred objects and forces there is continuity expressed with respect to the varied and differentiated aspects of life. Williams contends that this continuity is found in ritual practices and includes community and communal responsibility along with a sense of the nearness of ancestors as well as a strong tie to the activity of various gods (435). This study assesses how okwaroka enhances the ideals of Abagusii community.

In initiation rites, for example, the performance of okwaroka facilitates cultural transition from one state or status to another. Hence, as Mbiti comments:

Initiation rites have many symbolic meanings, in addition to the physical drama and impact .... [as ritually centered in] the experience of the
process of dying, living in the spirit world and being reborn (resurrected). [They] have a great educational purpose .... the beginnings of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated (67).

The performance of *okwaroka* is intended to create men out of boys. The neophytes are taken through intense instruction such that by the end of seclusion they are ‘mature’ people ready to gel into the adult community.

The performance of *okwaroka* could not be divorced from its religious aspect. Every detail had to be observed to avoid repercussions. Williams (437) notes that ritual practices in Africa are central to religion and in this respect, ritual is structured around such primary aspects of existence as fertility, healing, and oath-taking, purification, accession to office, funerals, initiation, sacrifice, and new year celebrations; each of which is construed to relate to the on-goings of communal life. But each primary aspect of existence is believed to be oriented to a power that can be disclosed by the vehicle of ritual.

Certain common elements or features are observable in African religion with respect to ritual. These features are a sense of community, a sense of the activity of intermediary gods, relatedness to ancestors, and a belief in the non-involvement of the high God. Thus, salvation for the traditional African is a present reality. ‘Salvation’, or the resolution of social conflict, is not grounded in a future event. ‘Salvation’ by means of the drama and power of ritual practices, is an event which occurs in the here and now. In essence, the ‘salvation event’ as mediated by means of African ritual, recreates and re-establishes human experience in the present time. Religion, therefore, is a
significant part of the African's moral life and the use of divination as well as the appeal to deities is an integral part of belief and reinforcement of order in social life.

Rituals are performed to guarantee order and stability in community. (Rubin 14) argues that rituals are intended as a discourse with supernatural forces in order to channel them, control and appease them and, to ensure the survival and equilibrium of the community. He further postulates that each of these thousands of rituals constitutes the germ of a theatrical performance in its use of mask, dance and incantation. Rubin enhances this study by attributing theatrical performance to ritual and we have further explored this by looking at the aesthetic and communication perspectives. (Mbiti 75) concurs with Rubin by contending that a ritual is a means of communicating something of religious significance through word, symbol and action. His emphasis is on the communicative nature of rituals. Even though he does not define rituals from an artistic perspective, Mbiti makes a useful observation which provides us with one of the aspects of ritual drama, their communicative nature, an aspect this study explores.

This study, therefore, considers ritual to be the complex means by which the three spheres of life are integrated to achieve the active sanctification of life. This is true in that it encourages and often demands the involvement of the participants in pre-assigned roles. Ritual is a powerful social vehicle which publicly confirms and reinforces appropriate moral, philosophical, and social values. Ritual is also transcendental in that it transforms the earthly to the spiritual and thus reaffirms the relationship of man to the gods. The ritual is a preparation to attain a certain state. An initial period zero is created which could be likened to the beginning. An important problem is posed and the entire community is expected to solve it. The ritual is like a
process which leads an individual from one point of conscience to a higher one. In it, all the participants, in a creative manner, contribute in resolving the problem that is posed. In a ritual setting, the scene and the poetic atmosphere are intimately linked. Both evoke the human and the supernatural worlds.

Through performance the inherent dramatic elements of rituals are realised. Kwakwa (9) helps us situate ritual performance within the realm of drama by identifying elements of ritual which contribute to the dramatic effect. She identifies them as: paraphernalia,(in this instance, ceremonial make up to characterise the gods) setting, a pre-designated place which accommodates the act of possession; pre-assigned roles, those of the gods to be invoked; order, that is, an agreed upon order of appearance of musicians, dancers, and priests as well as the gods. Other aspects of ritual may include music, dance and sacred drums. These are the elements that the researcher investigated in the performance of *okwaroka* and how they contribute to its artistic realisation.

Song and dance punctuate the whole spectrum of African traditional life. Kwakwa (13) postulates that the importance of music in ritual is clear but that is not a basis for an argument that it fulfils aesthetic requirements. The aspects of the musical performance which embody aesthetic values are the use of rhythms which are complex and interesting; the structural relationship of melody and words; and the conception of music, dance, and drama as a unity. Unity also exists among artists and between artists and audience; based upon their mutual agreement on the conceptualisation of the art and technique presented.
1.7.4 Media Realisations in *Okwaroka*

Symbolisation illustrates a community’s values in a variety of ways. (Kwakwa 15) argues that in a ritual setting, symbolisation provides visible, audible and tangible evidence of the beliefs and values which cannot be readily perceived. That totality of perspective based on the social and cultural values of the group is the essence of the African aesthetic. The integrity of the art in African ritual is protected because of the education which prepares all members as arbiters. Its proportion is guided by the careful attention to scale and degree of intensity in music, dance, structure, and time/space. The researcher has examined how the splendor of the whole performance derives from these and other parts of the drama coming together to attain the central purpose of *okwaroka*.

Drama is the daily life experienced actions. Graham-White (17) says that ritual drama is that mode of performance in which the action is central to the religious and aesthetic wholeness of the community that practices it. That is, the aesthetic and religious elements are organic and essential to the ritual’s communication and larger meaning. He further says that ritual drama has an appreciable strict adherence to procedures and process in terms of their sequence and mode of execution. The element of strictness is seen as an essential aspect of the projected force of *okwaroka*.

Victor Turner (1956) in his study of ritual devoted only one of the twelve chapters of his work, indicatively entitled “The Politically Integrative Function of Ritual,” to the study of ritual. At this stage of his career, Turner saw rituals as mere compensations, or redressive mechanisms for the tensions produced in the secular order. Turner did not intend to study the Ndembu ritual complex as such. As he states in a footnote: “I do not intend here to make a cultural analysis of Ndembu ritual but simply
to isolate from the ritual complex those sociological features which are relevant in this book" (Turner 276). This point at lack of a perspective in the study of ritual including an aesthetic one.

Rituals performed by cult-associations cross-cutting the boundaries of lineages and villages creating wider networks of association were treated by Turner as merely the "social glue" that hold Ndembu society together (Turner 291). The institute he worked for had a low regard for rituals necessitated this negation of the rituals. It is on this point that this study has been carried out from a literary perspective. However, this study is geared at providing a critical literary analysis of *okwaroka* in an attempt to describe its aesthetic.

In her contribution to the study of ritual drama, La Fontaine looks at the communicative process of rituals. Her view begins with a consideration of its nonverbal aspects including the objects worn, carried by, and constructed around the initiates (La Fontaine 208). La Fontaine’s perspective is that there is communication during performance. She hints at various modes of communication but her focus is on the nonverbal aspects. This study not only addresses the nonverbal aspects of communication but also the verbal aspects.

It is evident that there is drama among African communities. (Ottenberg 36) in an analysis of a Limba wedding in northern Sierra Leone, drives the point home by stating that the question is no longer whether there are theatrical aspects to ritual but what these aspects are, why they take their particular configurations, and what purposes they serve. He underscores the idea that we already have theatrical aspects to ritual; thus further studies need to be carried out, exploring other aspects of drama - the aesthetics
of drama. Hence, this study has explored the aesthetic aspects and the communication process of *okwaroka* rituals among the Abagusii.

We, therefore, analyse *okwaroka* to determine whether in its performance, the ritual meets its intended function: that of propagating an upright society and how through the ritual, these ideals are communicated.

1.7.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Various scholars have advanced various approaches to the study of folklore. However, we have looked at those whom we find relevant to this study. First the ethnopoetic theory. According to John Foley Miles the performance arena refers to the locus in which some specialised form of communication is uniquely takes place. He further postulates that in such an arena the linguistic integers, which are in the case of *okwaroka*, the various ‘words’ or units of utterance constitute the idiom and they no longer defer simply to the literal meanings of the everyday. However, they are charged with associative values particular to the event taking place.

In the performance of *okwaroka*, *enyamweri* (python) is used by the poet to compare the ritual to the biological act of the snake shading off its skin to emerge anew. In this case, the concept of re-emergence, regeneration is employed by the performers. Equally, the word ‘*orokono*’ - a tree whose bark serves various functions, after the barks have been chopped regenerate to new ones. In the same vein, the words *ritimo* (spear) and *nguba mbibo* (thick shield) are employed by the performers to underscore the fact that the neophytes have been equipped with virtues that will enable them gel with other community members.
In this way the situated ‘words’ encode a set of different, highly focused meanings in order to convey— with communicative economy— messages indexed by performance other than textual strategies.

In similar fashion, Dell Hymes speaks of an interplay and relationship between linguistic items and their contexts:

Contexts have a cognitive significance that can be summarised in this way. The use of a linguistic form identifies a range of meanings. A context can support a range of meanings. When a form is used in context other than those that form can signal, the context eliminates from consideration the meanings possible to the form other than those the context can support. The effective meaning depends on the interaction of the two (19).

In the performance okwaroka, it was observed that the interaction of the item and context mutes the denotive force of Ekegusii traditional units of utterance and foregrounds the special metonymic performance-based meaning selected by the situated ‘words’.

The import here is that, context is fundamental and it is upon the audience who are the recipients of the communication to be aware of what is connotative in the linguistic items used. However, in light of Bauman’s and Hyme’s emphasis on the special channel opened by the combination of signal and context, it is easy to see how interpretation of okwaroka could go away, particularly when subliminal literary modes of cognition block the way of appreciation of performed verbal art on its own terms (10).

One useful index Parry and Lord propose is that of ‘word-by-word’ texture of traditional narrative poetry, that is, the singer’s own conception of the ‘word’. Parry and
Lord characterise the word not as a lexeme or a chirographically distinct item, but rather as a unit of utterance in a performance. ‘The minimal ‘atom’ in their compositional idiom was the poetic line, a ten-syllable increment whose integrity or wholeness is reinforced by the recurrent vocal and instrumental melodies of the same length.

They also propose a combination of lines, of a speech, of a scene, of a whole song as a rec or ‘word’, using the same term employed by contemporary linguists to denote something very different. Underlying the recurrence observed at all levels of traditional oral narrative, and understood as its major cause, was the criterion of utility of the okwaroka songs.

In the performance of esimbore, the oral poet uses the demonstrative verb phrase ‘this one’ to draw the audience’s attention to the neophyte. The poet then goes ahead to deliver his message by positing that ‘he has become a man, has become a man’. The performers in this instance highlight the metamorphosis from boyhood to manhood thus addressing the theme of maturation in okwaroka. Further, the poet indicates the response the ‘new’ man expects from the community members: ‘mother respect him mother respect him’. The poet, therefore, underlines that a man deserves respect from others including his mother.

But for all progress that has been made in various traditions at the structural level, correspondingly little attention has been paid to the possibilities of these units as meaning-bearing entities. The formulaic phrases are said to reduce to metrically apposite and essential ideas, with maintaining compositional fluency, there seems little room for conscious artistic contribution, that is, for assimilation of multiformity to the western model.
All the approaches discussed above have been variously used in the study of ritual drama. Researchers have used these approaches according to the demands of their research and we appreciate their place in a literary appreciation of ritual drama but for the aesthetic analysis of *okwaroka* we have engaged the Nzuri model. Our justification lies in the sense that the ethnopoetic theory embraces of Nzuri model and operates within the confines of performance.

This study is guided by the Nzuri model propounded by Welsh-Asante (1994). The model was adapted and applied to the study of the aesthetics of *okwaroka*. (Welsh-Asante 2) explains that at the heart of the idea of the Nzuri model “are the commonalities in the aesthetic”. The Pan-African aesthetic further aims to individualise the common characteristics that occur in the African aesthetic. It is these commonalities that we have individualised to the study of Abagusii aesthetic. She identifies forms of traditional performances where aesthetic aspects are inherent, that is: music, dance, theatre, art including body adornment arts, symbols, colours, rhythms, styles and forms that function as artistic instruments and cultural histories. The model also provides for categories of analysis and evaluation. In the evaluation process, a scrutiny the ritual performance according to Nzuri model aesthetic aspects by describing, examining and evaluating the ritual’s content has been carried out.
Thus, the Nzuri model provides us with appropriate criteria for discussing any aesthetic for African people. The structural representation of the model is in the form of a circle composed of three other inner circles. The circle is further divided into seven arcs. The three inner circles contained in the bigger aesthetic circle represent the key criteria in discussing any aesthetic for African people. The criteria are: spirit, rhythm and creativity in their order of occurrence from the epicenter.

These are sources that provide the axiological premise of the Nzuri model and offer solid foundation for the aspects of the model to actualise and concretise as artistic manifestation. The Nzuri model focuses on process even in its analyses of a product. It
contains four principles for evaluation. Two of the principles are used to govern the researcher’s notions about what had been created. The performance of *okwaroka* is viewed as a continuation of the Abagusii world view. Therefore, the ritual performance is evaluated as a manifestation of life - *obogima*, or style/attitude - about life. A commitment to finding the subject - place of Abagusii in any social, political, economic, architectural, literary, or religious phenomenon with implications of questions of sex, gender, and class.

The three sources for analysing the creative process of the ritual performance are incorporated as follows: The spirit, which is the first manifestation of the life force. The spirit is discussed in terms of motivation of the creative process and/or an answer as to why the ritual was created. Besides, the Abagusii tradition dictates that male boys be initiated into manhood, the performance of *okwaroka* derives its essence in the need and desire to freely pass on it customs, traditions, beliefs, and ideals; the community’s wish to educate the young generation and societal norms and values. The spirit is also manifested in terms of the connection of the metaphysical and the physical as demonstrated by emotion. The spirit is captured in progressive degrees of involvement in the performance of the ritual. The mode of ritual drama is participation. The spirit is drawn towards the centre, out of itself and to itself. The theme is developed in such a way that the ritual builds towards a crescendo of shared emotional response. The modality of African ritual drama ultimately demands the total participation of the whole self. When this level of self involvement is achieved, the tension and anxiety which have been created are released and resolved. This ascertains the [personal experience](#) emotional involvement and how this is transformed into a collective, psychological and
spiritual occurrence as each soul merges to produce one unified human psyche.

According to Welsh-Asante (4) rhythm is the vital energy and life force that permeates and guides all acts of creation and the material results of artistic thought. It is brought forth by the spirit source; it provides the vitality, the energy to realise or fulfill the desires of the spirit source. It empowers the community through the human agents to carry out all that pertain to okwaroka. The rhythm source is also explained in terms of the participant’s active engagement in the performance of the ritual that aids the realisation of the whole ritual as a creative enterprise. We have looked at the ritual in terms of how motivation takes place and how the creative product is developed. We have attempted to answer the question: how does the creation of the ritual manifest layers, or levels of the performers’ experiences? Hence, an examination of the involvement of the participants, when, where, how and to what extent is discussed. Thus, the rhythm source contracts, expands and sets in motion the performance of okwaroka.

Creativity is the imaginative element; one that enlarges and envisions the world as a specific society, as well as the artist him/herself. It is one of the material manifestations of spirit and rhythm. Creativity is both communal and individual, consequently affirming both. Lastly, creativity is the metatext for creation itself and through society’s creative expressions, clarity and purpose shed on the Supreme Being’s master plan (Welsh-Asante 4). The creative source is the most identifiable yet the most intangible. It has a dual role/quality of first, enriching the universe, and second, enriching the characters via inward discovery. That is, okwaroka’s performance effect on the audience and the performers.
This study adapted the aesthetic aspects by merging some of them in order to facilitate our analysis of the *okwaroka* aesthetics. This is necessitated by the fact that the aesthetic aspects of the Nzuri model override. To avoid duplication of material and redundancy of information, we merge those aspects that tended toward similar elements in analysis.

The seven aspects are engaged in the analysis of the ritual in the following way. The aesthetics of *okwaroka* lie in the ritual’s order of events. *Okwaroka* as a ritual entails stages in its performance. In order for this study to situate each stage and their essence, the study sought, first, to look at the interpretive nature of *okwaroka*. To achieve this we employed one of the aspects of the Nzuri model: form. Form entails the structure of the ritual, which in turn refers to time and space; it also entails shape which refers to the genre and composition as the texture of the ritual.

The performance of *okwaroka* involves doing things, even if doing things is saying. The multiple media used affords the participants an intense experience. The performance of *okwaroka* involves indexical features like the choice of site, the degree of elaboration of all which present and validate the social hierarchy depicted therein.

Meaning is the significance of expression in relation to individual and community. It is obtained from observed ritual behaviour so that a symbol’s manifest sense can be revealed. Meaning is also derived through the analysis of myths, through the fragmentary interpretations of separate rituals or ritual stages, and through written or verbally uttered doctrines and dogmas. It is also derived from observing not only what is said about a ritual, but also what is done with it and how it is used. Thus, observation of the people who participate in the ritual in any particular way as well as inquiries
made about why certain people are present on particular ritual occasions inform this study. In the light of *okwaroka*, meaning deals with the message that each element of the ritual communicates as well as the importance of that message. It is important in terms of how the ritual performance affects the community, and two, in terms of how the ritual expresses the ideals of the society.

Ethos is the quality of expression that exudes spirit, emotion and energy. In the context of *okwaroka*, it is explained in terms of descriptive nouns and adjectives that portray the emotion(s) of the ritual. The energy of the performance of the ritual is like a pang of conscience - a reality check. The vocal drama of the lead singers and the vigorous dance bring forth a feeling, it denotes deliverance. The performance has a ‘telling effect’ the kind that carries along both performer and listener from the present world to a world free of inhibitions as depicted in the words of the song and the actions of the performers. *Okwaroka*’s power, the ritual’s ethos lies in the transcendental effect the performance has to performers.

Function is the operative relationship of artistic product to individual and community. In this case function deals with classifying each ritual element according to Abagusii’s ‘roles of the ritual’. It thus looks at what the performance *okwaroka* has done for the performers and the community. The performance, thus, serves as a reminder of the value that lies in the ritual of *okwaroka*. It also calls to mind the world view of Abagusii and what their tradition espouse. This study regards the performance of *okwaroka* as a system of communication. For the study to realise the communicative aspect of *okwaroka* and its expressive modes, we therefore merge the aesthetic aspects of motif, mode, and method/technique.
Motif is the incorporation and use of symbols in artistic product that reflect a specific culture and heritage. It is used to determine and affirm the existence of Abagusii’s heritage particularly the use of symbols and their symbolic references. We thus examine the ritual content to identify the symbols and symbolic references and how they perpetuate the cultural heritage of Abagusii.

Mode is the manner in which artistic product is expressed. Of focus are the individual elements against the whole that enhance the artistic expression of *okwaroka*. In the context of the performance of *okwaroka*, mode is explored in terms of the moods or attitudes the ritual or the performer shows and evokes. Method/technique is the practical, physical and material means of realising artistic product. This is explained in terms of the performers’ use of paralinguistic features like ululations, tone of the song and way of dance.

The Nzuri model is so far attendant to the aesthetic issue because value is constructed by good/beautiful, right, and even ugly, lyrics and sounds. That which is good and beautiful constitutes that which is valued. The model also facilitates the address of matters of language, myth, and dance-art-music. It helps in shading light on the idea of truth on, and about Abagusii culture. *Okwaroka*’s artistic expressions are assessed as evolving myths - forms that expose their relationships with the community and interpretation of their cultural and social realities.

The study has been able to look into the common and shared perceptions and attitudes about experiences in particular ontologically ordered ways. Performance of *okwaroka* is seen as specialised thematic content that reflects the worldview of Abagusii. This becomes the expression in the form of songs and myth.
We, therefore, adapted the Nzuri model to this study to enable us analyse the aesthetic content of *okwaroka*.

1.8 Research Design and Methodology

1.8.1 Introduction

This section details the methodology employed in the study. Areas discussed include: description and case study with their qualitative dimension. Data collection methods include interviews; focus group discussion, observation methods and content analysis are also discussed to indicate how they have been applied.

This study relied on two complimentary sources of data: primary and secondary. In order to situate our work theoretically and generate a conceptual framework with which to work on the primary sources, secondary data was consulted and analysed to provide initial data for the study. Secondary material includes books, journal articles, seminar papers, MA theses, PhD dissertations and online journals, accessed through the libraries of Kenyatta University and University of Nairobi.

Primary data constituted both participant and non-participant observation, and interviews. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents including circumciser, neophytes, escort men, women dancers, and initiates’ parents. Focused in-depth individual and group interviews were carried out.

Recordings on audiocassettes, and still pictures captured group performances and individuals. Two research assistants were trained and employed to help in the research process. Participation and observation and the use of an interview schedule provided the researcher with an opportunity to have the actual field experience and raise further questions on the performance of *Okwaroka*. 
Data obtained from fieldwork was qualitatively analysed. Information on audiotapes was transcribed and interviews summarised and coded to come up with clear understandable statements and conclusion. The data collected was classified and analysed according to various stages of *okwaroka*. This was done by counterchecking, comparing and corroborating the information obtained from the field together with the theoretical framework, outlined research objectives and questions.

In order to obtain data, oral interview schedules, observation and focus group discussion were utilised. Tape recorders were used during interviews to get information conveniently without straining to write it down hence disrupting the flow and coherence of information from respondents. This helped instill confidence in the interviewees.

While using the oral interview schedule, the researcher’s probing and prompting gave room for greater depth of response. Where appropriate and necessary, English, Kiswahili and Ekegusii languages were used interchangeably. Further, still photo camera was used to capture some of the participants (mother, neophytes, escort men, male singers).

1.8.2 Research Design

This section deals with population sampling and administration of research instruments, data collection procedures, and the description of techniques used in data analysis all of which were utilised in order to answer the research questions and achieve the set objectives.

The conceptual perspective is based on a qualitative research that includes designs, techniques and measures that do not produce discrete numerical data. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (155), more often the data in qualitative research are in
the form of words rather than numbers and these words are grouped into categories. They further observe that human behavior is explained best by using qualitative research. Human phenomena that cannot be investigated by direct observation such as attitudes and other emotions are best studied using qualitative method. In order to achieve the research objectives, the research design was based on descriptive and diagnostic research approach. On the role of qualitative research in information transfer Mugenda and Mugenda observes further:

Because of the tendency of African communities to pass information orally, there is a strong argument that the most appropriate research and evaluation approach in Africa is the qualitative approach because it emphasises oral communication and gives respondents a chance to state their problems the way they perceive them and participate in seeking solutions to these problems as well as in effecting such solutions (202).

1.8.3 Descriptive Research Approach

In this study, most procedures pertaining to description research were adheres to. First, an oral interview schedule was pre-tested by using it as a guide in interviewing people who are familiar with Abagusii male circumcision tradition. This pilot study was carried out in Kenyatta University and Marani district (see map Appendix vii) prior to the actual circumcision period. Consequently, the gaps detected in the schedule were appropriately filled in order to reflect the entire scope of the study in finer details.
1.8.4 Case study research

According to Gillham (10), “qualitative methods are essentially descriptive and inferential in character and, for this reason, are often seen as ‘soft’. You may have significant statistical results, but these have to be described and interpreted: ‘facts’ do not speak for themselves. Someone has to speak for them.” This position justifies the use of qualitative methods to answer questions raised in this study.

We can therefore conclude that human behavior thoughts and feelings are partly determined by their context. The researcher understands the Abagusii community in real life situations and by studying them in their context and how they operate; he managed to contextually situate the performance of okwaroka in terms of rules, contexts, function, meanings, value and significance. This contextual approach led to the achievement of research objectives. Gillham further observes: ‘[O]bjectivity’ can ignore data important for adequate understanding (ibid.12).

Therefore, on the basis of the foregoing, the study adopted the qualitative approach in the collection and analysis of data. The researcher-administered oral interview schedule that was used as a guide in controlling the direction of interviews was in most cases effectively used. However, it is worth noting that due to the discursive and descriptive nature of the qualitative approach it was often time consuming.

1.8.5 Content Analysis

According to Achele (in Mwiria and Wamahiu, 40) “content analysis is more appropriately defined as a research technique for systematic analysis, qualitative,
quantitative or both, of the manifest or latent meanings of words, phrases, ideas or postures, objects, or artifacts.”

This research technique involves a detailed study of documents relevant to a study. Such documents take a number of forms including books, local newspapers, existing data bases of information, journals, relevant theses, audio and video tapes.

1.8.6 Sampling

Merriam (5) notes that “cutting across the two areas of field and laboratory techniques is the extremely difficult question of what constitutes an adequate sample of the music of a community, tribe, or larger grouping.” He further posits that “creativity is a never ending process under whatever culture rules it is carried out; thus, what might be conceived as a total sample one day, may be lacking the next. What percentage, then of an infinite sample constitutes reliability? The answer is that there is no answer.”

The study engaged two non-probability sampling techniques: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Kerlinger (129) notes that “non-probability samples are often necessary and unavoidable. Their weaknesses can be to some extent be mitigated by using knowledge expertise, and care in selecting samples and by replicating studies with different samples.” This study integrated purposive and snowball sampling that led to a complimentary/symbiotic relationship.

1.8.6.1 Purposive sampling

Mugenda and Mugenda (50) observe that purposive sampling allows a researcher to use cases that have the required information with respect to the objectives of the study. Therefore, subjects were handpicked because they were informative or possessed the
required characteristics. The sample size for this study was constituted by two neophytes, four neophytes' parents, one circumciser, five elderly men, five elderly women, three escort men, who were all purposively identified through snowball sampling.

1.8.6.2 Snowball sampling

Mugenda and Mugenda (51) argue that, in this method, initial subject with the desired characteristics are identified using purposeful sampling technique. The few identified subjects name others that they know have the required characteristics until the researcher gets the number of cases she or he requires. In this study, the researcher used snowball sampling by identifying some of his friends whose relatives or neighbours were to undergo circumcision. They in turn informed the neophytes' parents with whom they discussed the issue with a further possibility of carrying out our study there. The initiates' parents were then used to identify other informants who had relevant information regarding this study.

1.8.7 Data validity procedures

Perakyla (1997) and Leninger (1994) point out that it is possible to ensure validity of qualitative data, if the researcher follows procedures that minimise biases. The researcher put in place strategies that were used to ensure accuracy of the findings. Data collected through different techniques like observation, interviews and focus group discussions was triangulated to build coherent justification for various themes.

The researcher and research assistants compared notes at the end of every data collection to ensure that what was recorded was not subject to personal bias. Also, tape
recorded data was used in cases where there was uncertainty or incomprehension of the respondent’s actual words.

Since the research assistant was known within the area of study, most respondents were willing to provide the necessary information. The research assistant also followed similar interview guides and the researcher impressed on him the need for accuracy and thoroughness in keeping the field notes. The collected data in Ekegusii was transcribed to English.

1.8.8 Data Collection Methods

1.8.8.1 Introduction

Case study was the main method within which other methods such as interview, focus group discussions, observation and content analysis were utilised as explained below.

1.8.8.2 Interview

Interview method was employed when conducting interviews of key informants and in focus group discussions as explained below. The interviews were guided by an oral interview schedule as discussed below.

1.8.8.3 Oral interview schedule

This study used the unstructured interview schedule that is sometimes called an interview guide. In this type of interview, the interviewers ask questions or make comments intended to lead the respondent towards giving data to meet the study
objectives. Based on the open nature of unstructured interviews, probing is commonly used to get deeper information.

1.8.8.4 Key informant interview

This is used to gain data from individuals who are considered to be repositories of relevant information. Hence, target respondents include elderly members of the community who have experienced various changing phases of the practice of okwaroka. The interview schedule has open-ended questions focusing on the research objectives. The open-ended questions enable the interviewees to express their perspectives. In most cases they would come up with a new idea not captured in the instrument.

The style of the interview was conversational, and the objectives were realised through interviewer’s active engagement with the interviewees. This approach makes the interview situational and has a generative approach to the acquisition of data. All the target respondents were successfully interviewed and appropriate data was obtained.

1.9.8.5 Focus group discussions

According to Litosseliti (125), “focus group methodology has developed as a result of a broader shift from quantitative to qualitative research methods. It is important for qualitative research and can combine flexibility and adaptability with rigour and theoretical grounding.” This study engaged focus group discussions to gather views and opinions by giving participants a topic or a series of questions to discuss. The researcher’s main role in the discussion was to listen and moderate the discussion by probing and prompting views from the participants. This method was successfully applied by discussing research questions with groups of a few purposively sampled
respondents such as neophytes, parents, escort men and dancers.

Beckwith and Fischer (2002) in their desire to create a visual exploration of the meaning and power of traditional rituals and ceremonies in Africa, have postulated that photographs transport the reader into a world of powerful connections between the individual and community; body and spirit; land and peoples. Thus, this study has sought the visual impact of photographs in capturing the spirit of performance and context of *okwaroka*.

![Photo 1 Researcher and one of the informants Mzee Agustino.](image)

### 1.8.8.6 Participant Observation

Direct observation of the performance of the ritual and regular visits to the cottage were done in order to get a clear picture of the various elements of *okwaroka*. This enabled the researcher to observe the actual performance and to note the people’s attitude towards the ritual. It is important to mention here that most of the people in that community were cooperative in answering the questions and by letting the researcher be
a part of the performance.

During participant observation, the following were noted: the procedure, roles specification and participation of each performer, the nonverbal aspects of the ritual, namely, the costumes, props, body adornments, body movements and gestures.

The ritual observation was done with regard to its stages or ritual acts. These were roughly graded as pre-graduation, graduation and post-graduation. In the pre-graduation, the researcher observed the preparation stage, that is, the prior arrangements made by the participants in preparation for its performance. The next phase observed is the process of preparing the neophytes for the actual circumcision, and then there is the escort home, and the entry of the neophytes in their cottage. This is followed by the seclusion period. The researcher observed the activities of the neophyte and those of their supporting characters until they are deemed fully recovered. Also observed are the activities of the graduation period. That is, the ritual acts that are carried out once the neophytes have recovered and are ready to leave their place of seclusion.

1.8.9 Data Processing and Analysis

Data collected from the field was qualitatively analysed. Information on audiotapes is edited and interviews summarised and coded to come up with clear understandable statements and conclusions. Data was classified and analysed according to the various stages of *okwaroka*. Descriptive data and evidence relating to each research question was classified into distinctive classes based on their common qualitative characteristics. Being basically a qualitative research, the results were discussed in a narrative manner.
1.8.9.1 Units of analysis

Mugenda and Mugenda observe that the units of analysis, also called the units of statistical analysis refer to those units that we initially describe for the purpose of aggregating their characteristics in order to describe some larger group of abstract phenomena. In this study, the main units of analysis are the form, content and context of performance of *okwaroka*.

1.8.10 Conclusion

In summary, focus is put on research design, description and diagnostic research approaches, the qualitative dimension’s case study research and research strategy. The effectiveness of the two sampling methods used, namely: snowball and purposive sampling, is also discussed together with data validity, processing and analysis procedures. Further, data collection methods like interviews, focus group discussions, observation and content analysis are evaluated in terms of how they were effectively used.
CHAPTER TWO: RITUAL SETTING OF OKWAROKA

2.1 Introduction

The Abagusii social and cultural tradition includes folklore practices and genres like poetry, dances, songs and folk theatre. Like other ethnic communities, circumcision ceremonies form part of Abagusii’s folk theatre. As with other African ethnic communities okwaroka serves a plethora of functions: social, mythopoetic, pedagogical, recreational, artistic and aesthetic.

The performance of okwaroka occupies a central position in the Abagusii cultural life. This chapter is an attempt to capture the context of the ritual as practiced by Abagusii. This study sets to examine the socio-aesthetic paradigm, the physical setting of the performance of okwaroka, and the belief system of Abagusii and explore the ways in which these factors engender artistic variation and creativity. This inquiry therefore focuses on an analysis of okwaroka’s physical composition, setting and its socio-cultural conventions.

The focus is on aspects of socio-cultural aesthetics that impinge on artistic variation and creativity in the performance of okwaroka and on the process of active audience participation in the delivery and interpretation of the creative realisation of okwaroka.

Stinson avers that:

Rituals are a means for society members to communicate values and ways of living, through psychological, social and symbolic interactions and teaching.
Anthropologists categorise ritual in three specific ways: those which are cylindrical, those which address misfortune and rites of passage (12).

*Okwaroka* falls in the latter, an illustration of a transition from boyhood (*oboisia*) into manhood (*obosacha*). *Okwaroka* is like an initiation school where young men receive cultural instruction on cultural expectations and responsibilities and their conduct as men. The artistic realisation of *okwaroka* is a traditional phenomenon that has its roots in the Abagusii culture. It is from this cultural grounding that the performance of *okwaroka* derives its meaning, significance and function. Hence, the performance and the aesthetic impact resulting from it are informed by the Abagusii cultural context. This chapter, therefore, concerns itself with the cultural aspects of *okwaroka*. These include: origin of the ritual, its main stages and their significance, participants and their roles and the significance of taboos, symbols and beliefs associated with its performance. This is also an attempt to portray the common and shared perceptions and attitudes about experiences in the performance of the ritual. *Okwaroka*’s performance is considered as containing thematic content that reflects the world view of Abagusii. This becomes the expression in the form of songs, myth, dance and symbols.

### 2.2 The Context of *Okwaroka*

The Abagusii consider it unsociable to perform *okwaroka* at a time not traditionally designated. Hence, the performance of *okwaroka* takes place in the month of December of each calendar year. Performers and audiences who were interviewed claimed that performing *okwaroka* during another period in the calendar year is unmotivating and uninspiring to their creative impulse and artistry. This period is
referred to as *obware* and is usually after the September harvest; hence there is enough food for the revellers during the festive period.

The sociability function of *okwaroka* begins once the lads receive a confirmation of their imminent circumcision from their parents. The performers-audience who in these cases is circumcised young men and the lads begin the process of interpreting and appreciating the performance of *okwaroka*. The Abagusii’s socio-cultural milieu dictates that the neophytes are taken through maturation games known as *emburu*. These games are meant to enhance mental growth in the boys before circumcision. The prospective neophytes are led to the grazing fields where they assist the already circumcised in tending the cattle. In the field, the older boys could go to a mole’s hole and defecate there. Then they cover the hole nicely and call each neophyte separately and order him to put their hands into the mole’s hole and catch it. In this instance, the young men become the audience as the lads try to catch ‘the mole’. As one lad puts his hand into the hole, he catches feaces. The lad is laughed at and jeered by the young men. That way he becomes wary of any deceit. Besides *emburu*, the neophytes are taught the basics of putting up a small hut. Where they err, the older boys correct them. This way, after their circumcision, they are able to put up *riburu*.

Collective participation of both the performers and audience in the delivery of *okwaroka* renders its aesthetic value. According to Mzee Nyakundi and Omabene, the prospective neophytes start practicing and preparing for *okwaroka* by getting engaged in various activities with the help of circumcised older boys. When a lad has come of age or has shown signs that he wants to be circumcised, the parents discuss among themselves and then agree on whether to carry out the ceremony or not. If they agree,
then preparations begin. According to Mzee Nyakundi, the parents ensure that there is a
cottage for their son(s). At the same time, they carry out the business of informing
relatives and other close members of the community. The lads are tasked with the
invitation of circumcised young men who will be the escorts during circumcision. This
is a sign of commitment on their part. Another way of engaging themselves is by
collecting tree stumps or heavy logs used to sustain the ritual fire during seclusion.
According to our informants, whether informed or not, people still come.

The performers - audience each plays their individual role in relation to the
whole ritual as an artistic enterprise. This participation is fundamental with regard to
Abagusii’s world view. This is usually realised through the use of material
paraphernalia such as costumes. When employed this way the material paraphernalia act
as multimedia for socialising and entertainment. Their respective roles are examined
below. In so far as material culture complements the creative nature of the performance,
the aesthetics of okwaroka derives from sociability mechanisms such as communal
entertainment and collective artistry through the use of multimendia and paralinguistic
resources such as gestures and other body movements, as well as other shared generic
conventions of okwaroka’s performance. The performer-audience’s individual role in
the artistic realisation of okwaroka is discussed below.

2.3 Protagonists

These entail the living people - the Abagusii community. Together they
experience the crossing of the ‘abyss of transition’ which is the spirit of the ritual. This
‘abyss of transition’ is bridged by the protagonists in the ritual drama of okwaroka which
encompasses the community’s conflict of continuity and the role of the artists in relation to the Abagusii’s cultural heritage.

2.3.1 Neophytes

They form the thematic focus of *okwaroka*. During the performance of *okwaroka*, the performers make numerous references to the neophytes hence drawing attention to their fundamental place in the artistic realisation of the ritual. Through the use of the demonstrative pronoun, ‘this,’ the oral artist use the phrase ‘this one’ in the circumcision song to draw attention to the neophytes. The Abagusii tradition dictates that the neophytes are referred to as *abarel ebibwe* and the seclusion period be referred to as *obware*. In the song, *nyasuguta*, performed by the women dancers the neophytes’ are referred to as the ‘owners of the grass’ one that symbolises their good fortune. The artistry of *okwaroka* is pedagogical in nature and this is intended for the neophytes.

2.3.2 Parents

The neophytes’ parents are another category of characters who actively participate in the performance of *okwaroka*. The parents facilitate the smooth and successful rendition of the ritual by first declaring their intent to circumcise their son. After breaking the news to the community they proceed to prepare the stage for the performance. As part of the performers-audience, the parents on their part said that they prepare the stage by ensuring that a cottage is in place and in good condition, and that there is enough food for the revelers. The parents also provide the ritual cockerels to the young men and identify a patron and circumciser. In addition, the parents also provide the traditionally agreed form of payment.
In the spirit of collective participation, the parents mobilise and lead community members in executing various roles that are traditionally defined. The mother on the other hand marshals fellow women participants to welcome her son home. As observed in this aural environment, she leads fellow women in song and dance. They perform among other song *nyasuguta* and *echae ya morero*. Besides they contribute to the happy mood by punctuating the songs with ululations and colouring the occasion with costume. The mother is the one who also provides the ritual milk in *egesanda* (calabash) used in blessing the initiates during the graduation ceremony.

2.3.3 Young Men cum Escort Men

They form part of the supporting characters. The young men/escort men add to the plot of the drama by participating in the performance of *okwaroka*. They enhance the central role of the neophytes by engaging in activities that lead to the eventual unfolding of the drama, that is, circumcision. They help the neophytes in preparations and by providing moral support. They ensure that the setting is appropriate by preparing and securing the cottage. Besides, they support the protagonists by collecting stumps and heavy logs for the ritual fire. It is from this group that the father of the initiates picks the patron. On the eve of circumcision, the young men/escort men assemble at the cottage. Here, they add to the building of the plot by mocking and teasing the neophytes. They also mock each other. They also take the neophytes through dramatic ordeals meant to prepare them for the ritual cut. This group dances most during the night. At midnight, the neophytes go to sleep as the young men entertain themselves with music. They also escort the neophytes to and from the circumciser. This forms the climax of the plot. The young men/escort men ensure that the neophytes are ready
mentally, and also keep vigil to ensure that they do not run away. The young men/escort men punctuate the performance of okwaroka with esimbore. At dawn, the neophytes wake up, while naked, they are led to the river. At the river, the neophytes are immersed in the cold water where they stay for sometime. It is believed the cold water numbs their bodies and reduces pain. The escort men then lead the novices to the circumciser where they line them up. During the cut, the young men with their swords and spears threaten each of the neophytes so that they do not cry or attempt to run away. They are the ones who signal the dance troupe of the success of the exercise. Once the circumciser has successfully administered the cut to the neophytes, young men escort them home.

Besides escorting the neophytes, during the seclusion period they visit the neophytes and assist the omosegi (patron) when necessary.
Photo 2 indicates the escort men leading the neophytes home thus fulfilling one of their duties.

2.3.4 Patron

He is one of the main supporting characters chosen from other escort men by the fathers of the neophytes. He acts as the guardian. The patron guards the neophytes from any aggressive abuse, takes care of them during seclusion. After the cut, he pays the circumciser and he is the first soloist during the singing of esimbore. At the same time, he provides the neophytes with ekerundu - a herb believed to stop excessive bleeding and ensures they were secured with a blanket, after which he arranges the escort men around them.
Osoro and Atandi said:

A patron is a young man who has been circumcised whom the neophyte respects. During this period the neophyte is not going to meet the parents. The patron is the one who guides the neophyte through the seclusion period. He is the one who conducts circumcision rites for the neophytes. He brings them herbs and he uproots medicinal roots for them.

Besides the patron acting like the ‘bestman’, he is charged with the responsibility of nursing and nurturing the neophytes. He is the link between the parents and the neophytes and ensures that the neophytes are well fed. He also receives orders of the menu from the neophytes which he relays to the parents. Once the food is ready, he fetches it for the neophytes. His other role is to carry out some of the rites. Before he embarks on any of this, he performs a ritual that allows him to perform them-ekigoroigoro, which takes place on the third day after the cut. He provides the neophytes with porridge specially prepared from fermented sorghum flour. Once they have taken it, this not only gives precedence to other rituals to be performed, but also allows the neophytes to indulge themselves in various adventures.

The patron, with the help of the neophytes and other young men, put up riburu (a small hut-like structure within the dwelling room of the cottage) where the neophytes sleep. As noted, the neophytes are taught skills of construction by the young men. Once riburu is complete, the patron places the beddings of the neophytes known as amaburu in the chamber.
It is the duty of the patron to fetch the ritual grass and plant it in the cottage. He also kindles and takes care of omorero. Besides that, he looks after the wounds by checking on the neophytes regularly and applying medicine. The patron assumes the role of teacher/advisor. He takes the neophytes through the secrets of the ritual at the same time teaching them about the traditional values of the Abagusii community. He is the one who provides them with their first bows and arrows and trains them on their usage.

The patron leads the neophytes out and into the cottage while they are hunting. He provides and also applies the ritual ash on the neophytes and makes a special piece of cloth - egesena for them. It is his responsibility to teach the neophytes on nature as understood by the Abagusii community. His other role is to inform the parents about the neophytes’ recovery so that they can prepare for the graduation ceremony. According to (Mose 45) the patron is present all the time. His role is to answer to the needs of the neophytes and to instruct them about the values, beliefs and practices of the society. The society depends on him to enlighten the neophytes on societal norms, the expectations of the society on the neophytes and the challenges that come along with their new status.

On the eve of circumcision, participants throng in, the young and the old, male and female. This period is characterised by eating, drinking, dancing and mocking of the neophytes. This takes place at various points in the homestead. All the women folk and children gather at the kitchen while men gather at the cattle shed while young men are at the cottage. The setting is that of happy revelers indulging in the festivities of the occasion.
The patron, together with the young men, reveals to the neophytes the secrets of the ritual, the nature of the legendary animal - *enyabububu*. It is also at the patron’s home that the neophyte spends his first night before returning home.

### 2.3.5 Relatives and Neighbours

This group of actors helps in planning and organising the ceremony. They fulfill this by way of material aid and moral support. Communal cohesion and bonding is seen in the different roles the participants play. Roles are enacted with regard to gender. They also serve to welcome the neophytes back into the community after seclusion.

Besides that, before the neophytes enter the cottage, the parents engage in a wrestling contest. Once they start, the rest join in; women supporting their fellow woman as the men also support the father. As observed, no harm is meant since no one is hurt. Commenting on the same, Mama Fridah said, “this is a contest between the parents of the neophytes but their agemates come in to help. It is a show of joy before the neophytes enter the cottage”.

Mzee Nyanga’u agreed with her sentiments saying:

*It is a contest between men and women. When the neophyte is about to enter the homestead the father, accompanied by his agemates and the mother also accompanied by her agemates weigh each other’s strength. They engage each other in a tussle as they pin each other down until they tire. Any lady could attack any man; this time there are no social boundaries.*
2.3.6 Circumciser (*Omokebi*)

The ritual cut points at the climax of the performance. An actor chosen by pre-conceived guidelines acts out the role. Among the Abagusii, the circumciser is and should be a man of honour in the community; one who is trusted for his experience in carrying out the operation. He must have the traits that the community cherishes. The parents of the neophytes identify a circumciser and duly inform him of their intention to have their son circumcised.

Wanyama in his study of the Bukusu circumcision songs underscores the significance of the circumciser by saying that “a circumciser is expected to be a role model to the person whom he circumcises. He is expected to be always neat and well behaved” (64). He ensures that his tools are clean and ready. During the operation, he ensures that the neophytes do not wince or scream by cautioning them before hand. In the process of the operation he advices on how the wounds would be nursed. After the operation he is paid and then he performs a small ritual - that of releasing the escort men and the neophytes. He is the first to intone the circumcision song, *esimbore*, then the leader follows suit and the journey home begins.

Mzee Agori, a circumciser, said that circumcision is like the present day schools where the neophytes are taught the ways of the Abagusiii community. Commenting on *esimbore* he said, “It is an indicator of the performance *okwaroka*. If any person happens to pass by and hears the song he or she is definitely informed of the occasion”. As observed, he was the first one to intone the song. Asked why, he said that the ways of Omogusii dictate so: “I have to open the way for them so that they go safely”.
### 2.3.7 Women Dancers

The women dancers contribute to the development of the drama by accompanying the mothers of the neophytes in welcoming them home. They add to the beauty of the performance by punctuating it with song, dance, ululations and decorations. They sing and dance ahead of the escort men in rhythm to their songs. Commenting on women dancers’ adornments, Mzee Nyakundi and Mzee Omabene said:

> The yellow flower signifies hope and determination while the green colour points at life. During the rainy season most trees grow and flower giving farmers. When the women dancers decorate themselves in green and yellow they portray their optimism in the future through the neophytes.

### 2.4 Taboos, Beliefs and Symbols

*Okwaroka* like other folkloric art forms is an embodiment of the way Abagusii perceive their world and the belief systems of their culture in which they exist. The pedagogical value of the medium of *okwaroka* for transferring knowledge over generations is fundamental. As a medium of knowledge transfer, the artistic realisation of *okwaroka* serves to underpin the Abagusii’s belief systems and how it in turn influences *okwaroka* as a creative enterprise and the audiences’ reception of its performance.

Among the Abagusii, *okwaroka* is a ceremony that highly regarded as sacred. The Abagusii generally refer to *okwaroka* as *enyangi y’abware*. *Enyangi* loosely translates as “wedding” and this cements the sacredness of the ritual. Besides, the
sacred symbols of the ritual – *omorero* (fire), and *esuguta* (blady grass) – underscore the sacred nature of *okwaroka*.

In addition to the proxemic, spatial, and temporal domains of an aesthetic performance, the audiences interviewed averred that revealing the procedures of *okwaroka* to uncircumcised lads would subvert its social import. The general consensus being the neophytes’ prior knowledge of the performance of *okwaroka* would hinder the deployment of multimedia resources in an innovative manner. For instance, if the masquerade of the legendary animal, *enyabububu*, is revealed to the neophytes, its aesthetic benefit of instilling bravery in the neophytes would not be realised. The aesthetics of secrecy surrounding the performance of *okwaroka* explains why only circumcised young men attend to the neophytes.

The way of participating in the performance of *okwaroka* does not allow for soliciting or leaking ritual details. The performers who use the pre-conceived regulations creatively isolate participants who are not supposed to share the secrets. To begin with the circumcised boys are not supposed to divulge the details of the performance of *okwaroka* outside the circle of the circumcised male among Abagusii. Owing to this fact, the uncircumcised boys are always fearful of the ritual because of uncertainty. Consequently, uncircumcised boys and women are barred from soliciting for information about *okwaroka*.

The neophytes are required to have at least two cockerels to present to the young men on the eve of circumcision. The Abagusii consider it unsociable for a neophyte to present a female fowl to the young men. Performer-audience who were interviewed claimed that lack of a cockerel or presentation of a hen was unethical and uninspiring to
the performance. The aesthetics of *okwaroka* demand that each neophyte presents at least two cockerels to the young men/escortmen.

Instances were observed during fieldwork where performers (neophytes) were not allowed to enter other neophytes’ cottage. During interviews, it was realised that the Abagusii tradition casts a spell on one who does violate this condition. If a neophyte enters another’s cottage he ‘transfers’ his blessings to the host neophyte. The other consequence is that of becoming an imbecile.

From the above, we have seen that the performers-audience favour tradition. During fieldwork, it was observed that the neophytes and the patron zealously guard *omorero* and *esuguta*. Interviewed after the performance of *okwaroka*, the patron posited that the life and fertility of the neophytes depends on the life span of the two. If the fire burns out or the grass withers, then a curse befalls the neophyte, a situation reversed through sacrifice.

The aesthetic beauty of the seclusion environment and its convivial atmosphere is equally captured in the manner of greetings among neophytes from other cottages. The Abagusii tradition does not allow the neophytes to shake hands. However, the same tradition creatively provides for the form of greeting. When they meet, the neophytes cast some ash to the air and the other group responds by casting theirs to the air, indicating an acceptance and exchange of greetings. Similarly, young men who visit the neophytes at their cottage seek permission before entering. They are required to make a sound like that of a cock. In response, if the neophytes make a similar sound, then the young men enter.
Among the Abagusii, the value accorded to the aesthetics of the performance of *okwaroka* help explain why performing of *esimbore* at another time other than circumcision period is a taboo. Due to the fact that parts of the contents of the song are obscenities, it is believed that if one performs it at a different time apart from circumcision, they are mentally challenged. More so after carrying out interviews with the circumciser and performers of the song and their audiences, they held the view that it was unsociable and a display of uncouth behavior. It is a taboo to perform the song outside the context of *okwaroka*. Its performance institutes ‘respect’ and thus should be reserved specifically for this special occasion. In the same light, not every one can perform the song - uncircumcised lads, women, children and men who are not part of the escort cannot sing it.

Abagusii believe that if the parents or one of them is suspect of promiscuity, tradition provides for remedial measures to avoid the risk of the neophytes bleeding excessively. The one whose parents are suspected is given a concoction at the river which he sips then spits into the flowing river as a sign of washing away of the parent’s sins in order to pave way for his circumcision. Similarly, before he enters the compound, the neophyte eats a cold crust from cooked *ugali* to prevent excessive bleeding and enhance quick recovery.

Once the seclusion period is over the neophytes do not sleep in the cottage. They spend the night at the patron’s place. The beddings used during seclusion - *amaburu* - are not used again. These ones are cast outside and burned. Once the neophytes return home the following day, they do not enter the cottage until they hunt and kill an animal or a bird.
We can therefore argue that the performance of *okwaroka* responds to the demands imposed by the Abagusii’s tradition aesthetic considerations.

2.5 Ritual Episodes

Delany (893) postulates that rites of passage in adolescence are a cross-cultural phenomenon. They have existed throughout human history and may be a significant factor in the development of a stable adult personality. Delaney further says that these rites contain basic elements which for the purpose of this study we have referred to as phases.

2.5.1 Cultural Plot of *Okwaroka*

The staging of *okwaroka* is a cultural necessity that is routinely characterised. The critical study of the performance of *okwaroka* presents an entry into the complex interplay of the crisis between ‘men’, and ‘boys’ and the Abagusii’s cultural legitimacy of the ceremony. The performance of *okwaroka* has culturally defined luminal phases: preparation, ritual cut, seclusion and graduation.

2.5.1.1 Preparatory Phase

The preparation for the performance of *okwaroka* begins once the lad has shown signs of his desire to be uncircumcised or when the parents have agreed to have their son circumcised. The early preparations include choosing *omosegi* (patron) and *omokebi* (circumciser). The parents, with the help of relatives, and neighbours organise the ceremony by ensuring that all the requirements needed during the performance are availed. On the eve of circumcision, the neophytes are shaven. That night, the
neophytes discard their clothing and remain naked for the rest of the night in the home where they are hosted.

2.5.1.2 The Ritual Cut

At dawn, once the neophytes are led to the circumciser (*omokebi*), where they are lined up. The neophytes go to *omokebi* one by one, holding a special tree to their back. The escort men armed with their spears threatens the neophytes in case he twitches or cries. The circumciser too reminds the neophyte that he should not spoil the fame of his knife by crying.

The circumciser holds the foreskin between the thumb and the forefinger; he pulls it forward and then cuts in sawing motions. An underneath white skin is exposed which is also cut. He then orders the neophyte to hold the penis between his fingers. After the successful cut, the escort men make war cries. The same procedure is repeated with other neophytes. The cut neophytes are shown where to squat - a distance from those who have not been cut. The cut neophytes are given *ekerundu*, which they hold with their right hand.

Zenani (108) observes that crying or grimacing is regarded as unmanly and a sign of weakness. As observed, the neophyte stands and then holds on to a tree on his backside. To deter the neophyte from crying, the escort men tease him until the circumciser is through after which he makes a war cry and then pats the neophyte. The escort men respond to the circumciser’s intonation of ‘hiiiii’. This is in response to the successful cut of the neophyte.
The Abagusii tradition demands that the circumciser is paid before releasing the entire group. Once he is satisfied with the pay he leads them in intoning *esimbore* to which all the escort men present happily respond. From there, the journey home begins amidst singing and dancing.

2.5.2 **Seclusion Period**

Following the successful operation, is a four week period of separation from the rest of the community. During this period, the neophytes are deprived of their freedom. During the first days, they do not eat hot food. Since they have not healed enough, their movement is limited to moving from the cottage to the pit latrine and back.

During this period, a series of rites are performed. To allow the neophytes to be engaged in any activity and to enable the patron to perform other rites, a small ritual, *ekteigoroigoro*, is performed. The neophytes are required to drink cold porridge prepared from fermented sorghum flour. This they do in the presence of the patron and other young men. After this ritual act, tradition then permits the patron and the neophytes to engage in activities that pertain to *okwaroka*.

The performance of *okwaroka* is traditionally regulated. The first duty of the patron is to inform the neophytes of the rules to observe during seclusion. Equally, the neophytes with the help of the patron and two young men put up *riburu*, where they are going to sleep. This special sleeping-place does not need a bed rather the beddings – *amaburu* are spread on the floor. During seclusion, the patron kindles the ritual fire which is tended by the neophytes, ensuring it does not burn out. Another activity is that of uprooting and planting of the ritual grass in the cottage.
Once the neophytes have healed enough, the patron and other young man present take them for hunting expeditions. As noted in the field, a young man always goes ahead to clear the way. In the thicket, they learn about various trees, roots, animals and birds that they hunt. During this period, they are free to hunt domestic fowl, goats and sheep. If they happen to kill that day, they take their trophy home, which they roast on the ritual fire. During the period of obware, tradition allows the initiates to hunt domestic fowls without fear of punishment. It is common knowledge among the community members that they should keep their fowl since you cannot claim compensation for chicken killed by ebibwe (jackals) – neophytes.

The rules of okwaroka dictate that the neophytes do not bath. As observed they only applied ash on their bodies. It is worth noting that this ash has to come from the ritual fire only. Their way of cleaning hands before meals is different from the ‘normal’ one. Abagusii tradition concerning okwaroka demands that they clean their hands where the ritual grass is. One places the back of the hand on the palm of the other and then made back and forth movements as the patron pours water. The procedure is repeated for the other hand. During fieldwork, it was noted that they only clean their hands before meals only. As they clean their hands they sing the song nyasuguta to the ritual grass as a way of appreciating its service to them – a symbol of life.

Their endurance is tested when the patron gives them bitter herbs and roots to chew. They are also tested if they can withstand pain by exposure to the stinging nettle (risa). Once they have healed enough and the crust has come off, the patron informs the parents who prepared for their reintegration to the community.
2. 5. 3 Graduation Ceremony

This provides the denouement to the performance. The parents set the date when their sons would leave the seclusion place. The patron invites young men to help him out. The parents also inform neighbours and relatives of the coming ceremony while making frantic efforts to ensure everything is in place. On the eve of the graduation, the patron with the assistance of the young men reveals to the neophytes the true nature of *enyamaruma*/*enyabububu* – the masquerade of a legendary animal. The setting is the cottage. They demonstrate to them how to make and play it to produce scary sounds.

One young man places a pot in the hole they had used earlier. The pot is filled halfway with water and then is covered with dry cowhide that is in turn fastened to its neck. Then a smooth dry wooden stick is vertically placed on the cowhide and by using the palms of both hands the stick is rubbed in back and forth motions while at the same time the hands are moved up and down. As one makes these motions another pours cold water directly on top of the wooden stick. The result is a resonating sound like that of a groaning wild animal. The neophytes are amused and happy at the discovery. They are made to swear never to reveal its nature to the uncircumcised boys. This is therefore a secret shared exclusively among the circumcised. Circumcision is only complete when each neophyte has seen, held and used the masquerade.

The following day at dawn, the neophytes wake up and go to their parents' house where they seek blessings from their parents. Then they go back to the cottage where they relax awaiting sunrise. On this occasion go out naked to tend the cattle till noon when they return home. One of our respondents, Mzee Nyang'au said that this was to allow people to see them.
In the meantime, at the homestead, revelers celebrate the successful circumcision of the lads. The young men clear the cottage by taking out riburu and amaburu, which they burn using the ritual fire which is then put out and the splints thrown away. They uproot esuguta and throw it away. The young men then sweep the cottage clean. The fence surrounding it is brought down and the makeshift pit latrine is filled up.

The patron takes the lads to the river to bathe. He bathes each of them then gives them new clothing as required by tradition. He then leads them home where they are jubilantly received by the revelers. At home, they are blest by the eldest male member of the community present. They then receive gifts and they are welcomed back into the community.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has been an attempt to explore the aspects of the performance of okwaroka. We have realised the ritual as a sacred entity that is to be revered. Due to this, the ritual’s bedrock is the high element of secrecy. This chapter has also explored the various participants, their position and roles with regard to the performance of okwaroka in line with the dictates of Abagusii tradition.

In the same vein, it is worth noting that the performance of okwaroka is a cultural entity based on the cultural guidelines of the Abagusii community. The beliefs, taboos, norms and values of Abagusii are enshrined in the ritual. Okwaroka is a channel of propagating Abagusii’s ideals and values through its artistic rendition.
CHAPTER THREE: THE ARTISTIC REALISATION OF

OKWAROKA

3.1 Introduction

Drama is an effort to capture both the ritual and the graphic images of transformation. This study examines the relationship of performer, audience, setting and content material in *okwaroka*. Hence, this chapter concerns itself with the concept of performance among Abagusii dramatic context. It is an attempt to explore Abagusii’s ritual performance as a creative entity in which there exists a creative and fluid relationship between the performers and the audience, realised through the employment of various modes of expression. The study seeks to unearth *okwaroka*’s aesthetic implication and relevance in the context of its performance.

Alembi (2) posits that drama in Africa is rich in both content and style; its richness is seen in the many theatrical techniques it employs and in the variety of purposes it serves. He further observes that for a theatrical performance to be complete there must be a performer and audience. However, it is important to note that whereas in the European theatre tradition, the distinction between the performer and the audience is clear; the opposite is true of African drama. That is, there is no clear-cut line between the audience and the performer.

Karani further qualifies the above position by averring:

In African indigenous theatre, the line between the actors and the audience is thin. The interaction was a communal experience and it reflected the collective spirit of the society (13).
Various reasons come into play as to why the ritual is performed. The Abagusii community desires to freely pass on its customs, traditions, beliefs, and ideals. The community wishes to educate the young generation on societal norms and values. This is coupled with the desire to preserve and project its world view. This leads to a myriad of activities that are culturally defined and regulated. These include okwaroka. The concept of continuity in many African communities is paramount. The need for the community to ensure that there is a continuous class of adults in the community precipitates the performance of okwaroka.

During field work, it was realised that okwaroka first of all is a preparation to attain a desired state. The Abagusii create an initial zero state which they liken to a ‘beginning’. A fundamental crisis emerges that need to be resolved by the community. Consequently, the participants (actors and actresses) through creative enterprise of okwaroka contribute in resolving the drama, that is, the emergent crisis.

Beckwith and Fisher (38) contend that:
- In traditional African societies, the passage from one stage of life to the next is marked with important ritual and ceremonies. From the moment of birth, an African is connected to family, to community, and to the ancestors.
- The above observation is replicated among the Abagusii community. Within the social setting of Abagusii, a time comes when a child moves to the next stage of life and assumes new roles and responsibilities regarded as more adult. This period is known as obware. During circumcision neophytes get an opportunity to receive instruction of what is expected of them in their next stage of life.
Typically, the traditional male rite takes place before marriage and entails: ‘physical brutality, seclusion, testing, esoteric knowledge, death and rebirth imagery, name changes, dance, masked costumes, and dietary and sexual taboos’ (Silverman 421). He further says that these rites play a social role, mediating inter-group relations, renewing unity and integrating the socio-cultural system. The study investigated and brought to the fore the social role of okwaroka.

Okwaroka as a rite of passage prepares the youth for active life in the community. Through circumcision change is effected among the youth and helps to socialised them. Through actual participation in chinyangi (rites) in which song, ritual, reciting of various rules of conduct, the neophytes are taught duties, rights and obligations of manhood so that they eventually emerge from seclusion as full fledged men who can marry and procreate and privileged to participate in the society’s council and affairs.

To attain the new status, it is imperative that the community performs okwaroka. The ritual performance in this case facilitates the transition from oboisia, boyhood, to obosacha, manhood, an epitome of maturation among the Abagusii community.

Maturation is not attained by the mere act of the cut but through ritual enactments that inform and instill morals relating to adulthood in the neophytes. Hence, it allows a child to develop with a sense of direction and meaning (Beckwith and Fisher 12). Therefore, ritual performance is both meaningful and functional to the performers and the entire Abagusii community.

The neophytes also gain knowledge on the building industry by actually putting up a cottage, if there is none in the home where they are expected to spend their
seclusion. According to Mzee Nyakundi and Mzee Omabene, at the grazing grounds the neophytes learn the trade of construction. Young men instruct them how to build a small hut. Where they err, the young men correct them. Once they know the trade they are considered capable of constructing their own - riburu.

During convalescence, the neophytes are taught not merely obedience and respect to their parents and elders, but also the importance of courage, endurance and manhood. Obedience to authority and rule of law, courage and endurance are emphasised at the beginning when the boys are being circumcised. For example, the boys are warned by the young men before they escort them to isamokami against making any sound or movement lest they get clubbed or speared to death.

From the onset of the performance, focus is on the protagonist - the neophyte who is like a bride. In the song esimbore the poet proclaims that the neophyte is undergoing a transition. He informs the participants by declaring that the neophyte has become a man:

This one this one-this one
Has become a man – this one
This one this one-this one

The scene and the poetic atmosphere in okwaroka are intimately linked. Through its performance okwaroka’s stereotypical nature is creatively captured. The effectiveness of the ritual is based on its repetition of a song, phrase or word. For example, in the song esimbore, it is repeatedly performed so that the participants can grasp it fully and digest it in their objective consciousness. Similarly, one finds a refrain in the song aimed at directing attention of the spectators on the importance of okwaroka
and annul its disquieting effects. In the song, the poet draws attention to the neophyte by singling him out by employing the demonstrative pronoun ‘this’. Attention is also achieved via repetition of ‘this one’ at the beginning of every stanza coupled with the refrain of the song reiterating the central position of the neophyte.

At the end of the performance of *okwaroka*, it is hoped that a relatively innocent boy, after a series of rituals, will emerge a man, physically, emotionally and mentally prepared for his new status.

During the performance of *okwaroka*, knowledgeable members of the community are selected by the parents to take charge of the ritual performance. Selection is carefully done noting that *okwaroka* is regarded as a profound and sacred entity. It is the prerogative of this selected group to decide when and where *okwaroka* is performed. The ceremony is set in the month of December after the harvests of September, signaling plenty of food for the revelers. The neophytes are then drawn together or sometimes the ritual can be performed for an individual neophyte. Even though a neophyte may undergo *okwaroka* individually, the common time for its performance means that the neophytes of the same age-set are pooled together.

Fundamentally, initiation entails transformation and is a central component of traditional African cultures since time immemorial (Ampim 1). *Okwaroka* as an initiation ceremony involves a ritual of isolation of the male neophytes, separating them from the rest of the community in order to prepare them for transformation.

According to the dictates of the Abagusii tradition, during seclusion, the initiates are not supposed to make contact with the outside world. At the same time they are prohibited from sharing the secrets of the ritual. During sequestration, the neophytes
undergo various transitional rituals. They are induced into a liminal state where they are
neither boys nor men. It is during this seclusion period that they foster a new identity.

As observed, to earmark the start of the period of instruction is seclusion to a
sacred place, a specially built cottage some distance from the homestead. In this
seclusion, the neophytes lose their boyhood identity to gain a new status of manhood.
The boys are thus sequestered for a period of 4-5 weeks during which they receive
instruction of what is expected of them as men, fathers, husbands and defenders of the
community.

During seclusion, the neophytes undergo the *ekeigoroigoro* ritual which gives
leeway to the performance of other sacred rituals. For instance, the neophytes apply ash
on their bodies to disguise themselves. The ash is also meant to give them a look like
that of *ekebwe*.

--- Beckwith and Fisher (14) postulate that:

Male initiation... in this cultures, tests the initiates' courage in the face of
physical trauma, providing training for new roles in society, and
bonds individuals to their peer groups. These rites powerfully mark
transitions from one stage of life to another and give individuals a strong
sense of social definition and personal pride.

In an interview with one of the neophytes, it was realised that he covets the
ritual because of the new status and the privileges that come along with it. He claimed
that the thought of him being circumcised made him feel great. Besides he is regarded
as a man locking out uncircumcised boys who could not abuse him. Another privilege is
that those errands considered feminine will not be assigned to him by his mother.
The performance of *okwaroka* is a significant social feature that aids in training boys in preparation for a shift from childhood to adulthood. In an interview with Mzee Orina he highlights part of the instructions the neophytes receive. He says that:

He receives instruction on respect; how to behave in the presence of his uncles and aunts. He is supposed to greet them as father or mother. While in seclusion, he is supposed to hide and not to be seen in public at all.

Through the performance of *okwaroka* the social hierarchy of Abagusii is impressed upon the neophytes. The community creatively establishes social boundaries in its youth without rupturing social ties that bind the community together.
Van Gennep (47) postulates that:

When viewing rites of passage as rituals associated with times of change and crisis in the lifecycle, the ritual becomes a means of re-fashioning a body “at war with itself”, with the healing being part of the transformation. Rites of transition involve the stages of separation, transition and incorporation.

This is an illustration that the performance of *okwaroka* is a sign that allows for the integration and acceptance of neophytes by the community members. The Abagusii community’s expectations are passed on following *okwaroka*. Accompanying this is the acquisition of privileges associated with their new status.

Both ritual and drama transport the participants into a world in which actions escape from the logic of everyday experience and whose rules the participants must accept in advance (Graham-White 7). This is evident in the performance of *okwaroka*. *Okwaroka* as a rite of passage has traditionally laid conventions that the participants adhere to failure to which the artists are warned of dire consequences. Besides this, *okwaroka* depicts liminality. As observed, the artistic rendition of *okwaroka* entails the following phases: the preparation stage, the cut and seclusion, and lastly, the graduation and eventual integration of the neophytes into the community.

Plastow (27) argues that drama is used for teaching purposes: “...researchers have emphasised the didactic element present in many traditional dramatic rituals. Writers such as Mlama (270), Lihamba (237) and Fiebach (179) have argued that many rituals have a high degree of social function. Initiation rituals for both boys and girls have commonly included instruction which could involve dramatisation, teaching
children about roles they would be expected to perform as adult members of the society

Plastow (28). These dramatisations attune the individual to his immediate society and to the society’s perceptions of the wider universe. In the performance of *okwaroka*, the neophytes are subjected to physical ordeals. These are meant to harden them, wean them into the new ‘harsh’ adult life. These prepare them to encounter bravely the hardships of life. It was observed that the mother of the neophyte in welcoming her son home dances while carrying a *panga* raised high. The machete is artistically used by mother to relay to her son the message of masculinity and the responsibilities that accompany the new status.

A male member among the Abagusii community is expected to use his hands to provide for his family. A machete is one of the tools and the mother is not mincing her words through the act of dancing with a machete as her prop. The dramatic act conveys role definition among the Abagusii community. Role specification is culturally defined and every member through the stages of development has traditionally prescribed responsibilities.

Plastow (28) further argues that traditional drama also teaches direct lessons about expected patterns of behaviour. Through *okwaroka*, the expectations of the Abagusii community on the neophytes are spelt out through the performance of *esimbore*:

- His mother will respect him his mother will respect him - this one

There is a call for mutual respect and distance between the mother and the neophyte. This is reiterated when the poet highlights the errands that she should not assign him.
He will not fetch water he will not fetch water - this one
Not go to posho mill not go to posho mill - this one
Not go pluck vegetables not go pluck vegetables - this one

The neophytes are taught to show respect to their seniors. Traditionally defined, seniors are the elders – age-wise and those circumcised before one. Also imparted in them is their sense of their communal duties such as communal guarding. They are also trained on how they should relate with the womenfolk.

According to the patron, one of his duties was to inform them of the womenfolk they should relate to sexually and those they should not. He said:

"I have to inform them of the womenfolk they can relate to sexually and those they cannot. Top on the list is their mother, their aunts, their sisters, their cousins, widows, and married women. Never should they contemplate relating to the above sexually."

The social aesthetics of community and family relations are inculcated in the neophytes. Inclusive of the training, are instructions on matters relating to sex and what to expect of sexual experiences. As observed, on the eve of circumcision the escort men demonstrate to the neophytes of the love making episodes. They are shown how to perfect their game to the pleasure of their partners. Besides the demonstration, they are informed of female partners they can have intercourse with and those they should not.

The Abagusii community is also keen on instilling a sense of responsibility among the new adults. This is the duty of the escort men and the patron. During
seclusion the patron takes the opportunity to instruct the neophytes on the community’s expectations. The neophytes are informed of the perennial ‘enemies’ of Abagusii community. They are taught more institutionally than before about the Abagusii ‘enemies’ who are to be watched and kept at bay. The history of the ‘enemies’ is enshrined in the song *esimbore* the escort men sing.

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Fight Kipsigis land fight Kipsigis land - this one
Fight Maasailand fight Maasai land - this one
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The mention of the kipsigis and the Maasai by the poet provokes in the neophytes the desire to protect the community from any external aggression. In the same breath the poet indicates that the neophyte has the strength, courage, determination to face the challenges of the newly acquired status.

Apart from listing Abagusii’s enemies, the song also reminded the neophytes of ‘weapons of war’.

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Has become a man has become a man - this one
Now morning now morning - this one
Made for spear made for spear - this one
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The poet informs the participants-audience that the neophyte is a man. Consequently, a man is required to have his fighting gear – a spear and a shield – which have been prepared for him by the circumciser. The spear and shield are one of the Abagusii’s attestations to manhood. Thus, they have been armed with courage and endurance qualities they need at the battle field.

The social aesthetic of collective responsibility is reinforced through the tending of sacred symbols: *omorero* and *esuguta*. The first duty of the escort men at the very
beginning of the seclusion period is to drill the ritual fire for the neophytes. Once it is lit, the fire is not allowed to die out until the end of the seclusion period. For this reason, it is the collective responsibility of the parents, the patron and the neophytes to ensure that the life of the fire is sustained. Before the circumcision period, the father ensures that there is enough firewood. The patron and other young men and the neophytes ensure the life of the fire is sustained.

Tending *esuguta* after it is uprooted from the forest and planted in the cottage, the neophytes and the patron are once again mobilised to ensure that it is carefully tended and that its cut head produces the shoots again. It is feared that should it wither through neglect, the consequences would be as grave as when the fire goes out. Both the *omorero* and *esuguta* are believed to be connected with the neophytes' physical well being or fertility.

— Peek and Yankah (417) observe that songs can be performed without musical accompaniments. This is also true of *okwaroka* songs. They note that during the performance of the song, strict rules of etiquette govern both the performers and the audience, especially with respect to the criteria of gender age and social class. This is noted during the performance of *okwaroka* where the performance of *esimbore* is a preserve of the male fraternity and not every male member but middle aged and circumcised ones. The elder male members are not expected to perform the song unless accosted along the way. The same rules applied to songs performed by women dancers. The songs *echae ya morero* is a preserve of women while *nyasuguta* is performed by both women and the neophytes. Although in this case old women who felt strong enough could participate in the performance.
Kituku (2) on the human voice he explains:

Voice was the vehicle in which knowledge was passed from one
generation to another. Voice unified a family, clan, or community.

Enforcement of customs depended on voice. When a person
died... his/her voice was no longer to be heard. It was as if the whole
library has been destroyed.

This study considers the human voice as a key element in the performance of
*okwaroka* songs. In the performance of *okwaroka*, voice is realised through word of
mouth, song, ululations and war cries. Voice, in the way of song, has provided the
Abagusii community with a channel through which they can express their world view,
values, virtues and ideals. In the performance of *okwaroka*, young men use a word of
mouth to relay to the neophytes the expectations of the community.

This is so because song is integrated in the performance of *okwaroka*.
According to (Mbiti 3), “Africans are very fond of music. Therefore, music, dance and
singing are found in every community”. This aspect of African oral tradition is evident
in the performance of *okwaroka*. The artists have incorporated three songs: *esimbore*,
*nyasuguta* and *echae yamorero*.

Song also transmits knowledge, values and it is a way of celebrating important
community and personal events. Combined with oral tradition and dance, a visual art
form is created for the message being communicated.
3.2 The Aesthetics of *okwaroka*.

Through the artists engaged in the performance of *okwaroka*, the ritual is recreated via their knowledge of Abagusii tradition. It is worth noting that all those involved in the artistic rendering of *okwaroka* are regarded as being knowledgeable of Abagusii’s cultural values. Starting with the escort men whose qualification must be that of having undergone the ritual. The circumciser too is a master of his trade. The same applies to the patron who must know all that is entailed in seclusion.

These performers - audience engage in dance and song as a communal character. This is so of the male escorts and women dancers, who, despite singing different songs harmonise them into a dialogue. Through *esimbore*, the male escorts ask the women dancers to ululate. In response ululations are heard thus completing the communication cycle.

Notable during its performance in mimetic terms is the action of the mothers of the neophytes holding high a machete as she darts through the compound. This is a significant action intended to have a symbolic effect. Besides that it also helps create a celebratory mood in the audience. Besides carrying the *panga* high on the way home as the women dancers welcome the escort men, and in the brief confrontation as the women retreat, they cut shrubs in their vicinity. An indicator of the neophyte’s expected responsibilities and the tools they will use. The same feat is attested to by the escort men. The escort men raise their spears high a sign of victory and safety. The performance of *okwaroka* may thus be seen as a spectacle combining elements of mimicry and celebration. This is evident in the zealous adherence to the finer details which give credence to the spectacular and aesthetic appeal of the ritual.
In pre-colonial and post-colonial drama and theatre in Africa, according to Enenkwe (158), ritual drama is more than story telling. It is more of a ritual experience that seeks to create and in the process, affirm desirable models of community life. The actors in *okwaroka* are ferried to a ‘new’ world void of restrictions that affords them ecstasy not available in the normal daily life. The performers of *esimbore* are at liberty to use obscenities that affords them ‘innocent joy’. His is true of *esimbore*.

Lad little pain felt - pain felt
Lad little pain felt - pain felt
Lad little pain felt fuck mother - fuck mother

The idea of ‘lad’ belittles the earlier stage. ‘Little’ pain shows that the gain is greater than the pain experienced.

Lad little pain felt fuck mother - fuck mother

In this instance the singers employ poetic license and drop the euphemism. Besides the ritual helping them purge otherwise bent-up emotions, it helps the Abagusii community to enhance continuity in its hierarchy by adding new members to the adult class. At the same time, it aids in maintaining social order by imparting desirable modes of conduct in the neophytes.

The image of the Abagusii worldview is portrayed to themselves and to the outside world through the performance of *okwaroka*. *Okwaroka’s* artistic nature is attested to in the sequence of ordered ritual episodes moving through time and space. Right from the preparation phase, the ritual cut, the seclusion period, graduation and the eventual integration of the neophytes into the community helps to draw its audience into the performance.
Okwaroka's timing is of essence. The performance takes place during the month of December after the September harvest. This means that there is enough food for the revelers. The ritual is also performed within the confines of the Abagusii community. The sacred space is also provided for in terms of culturally designated sites. These include the cottage, the river, and the circumcision point under a sacred tree. Besides the ritual being performed in the calendar month of December, the sacred time ends when the neophytes are fully recovered and integrated into the community.

According to Mlama (270) language, voice, song, and gestures are the most important materials employed by the performers. In the context of okwaroka, these are employed to indicate the dramatic nature of okwaroka. The poets creatively employ language in delivering their message. In esimbore, the poet is concerned with drawing attention to the neophyte. He does so by repeating the demonstrative pronoun phrase “this one,” which singles him out from the rest of the performers.

The highly tonal Abagusii language makes it possible for a powerful rendering of the song. Besides this, it makes the song more inviting as the refrain comes in with vigour and energy. The language resource enables the poets to play around with the Abagusii lexicon leading to semantic harmony. The vocabulary reservoir is enough for the poet to show his ingenuity while delivering the performance.

Once the soloist intones the song, the audience (escort men) is prompted to respond enthusiastically. In doing so, the audience becomes co-performers in the dramatic act.
3.3 The Spectacle of Song And Dance

Song and dance that punctuate the performance of okwaroka are one of the basic sources of entertainment. They are also a basic ingredient in the performance. Pomp and colour are added through the use of stage props which include long sticks, spears, pangas, ash, special cloth-egesena, and egwagwa.

Losamba (27) point out that dance is an expression of the mimetic impulse through the rhythmic movement of the dancers and the employment of gesture, messages can be communicated. Crow (3) shares the same view by arguing that it is quite common in Africa for communication to take place without a word being uttered, or for words to be uttered musically (or rhythmically). The performance of okwaroka is not void of mimetic acts like that of the neophyte’s mother running through the compound, the father sitting at the entrance to the cow pen, the wrestling match - all of which add to the aesthetic of the ritual.

Okwaroka’s dance becomes a spectacle when it is complemented with costume, song, and ululation. As observed during the ceremony, women dancers decorate themselves with egwagwa - creeping plant that has green leaves and yellow flowers. The women also carry green branches as they sing and dance along. To complete the costume the age mates of the neophyte’s mother carry pangas. Besides the costume, dance is accompanied by song. The women sing and dance to echae ya morero and nyasuguta. The songs are punctuated with ululation.

The performance of okwaroka is not art for arts sake but art for life’s sake. The ritual serves well the people who give life to it. The ritual derives its value from the
desire of the Abagusii community to create a social order, class and perpetuate its world view.

Song in the context of okwaroka adds to the development of the ritual’s plot. The songs that punctuate the performance of okwaroka serve to lengthen the performance by facilitating the movement of the actors from one point to the other. The escort men and the women dancers use song to move from the circumcision point to the cottage.

The actors equally use song as a channel of communication. The Abagusii community reaches out to its intended audience through song. The neophytes are told of their responsibilities, how they should carry themselves afterwards.

The song nyasuguta informs the neophytes of their responsibility in tending to the ritual grass.

On path let dig  
Land lacking let dig yes  
Dog white passed river other side  

White dog splashed tail how about it  
White dog splashed tail how about it

The song refers to the ritual grass planted in the cottage where the male initiates spend their seclusion. Traditionally, within the Abagusii community, neophytes are expected to wash their hands near it so that the water they use, together with any water they may use in the cottage, should be poured on that long grass. It signifies life and continuity. Every time water is poured on it, it grows, symbolising the growth and maturation of the neophytes. Therefore, the word ‘Nyasuguta’ is a derivative of ‘esuguta’.
In Ekegusii, the prefix ‘Nya’ denotes possession. Thus, it is used to refer to the neophytes as the owners of the long grass. The word is used therefore to refer to the neophytes. In this case it is a proper noun. In this context, it is used as somebody’s name. The women named Nyasuguta are therefore those who were born near the long grass-esuguta.

Their mothers are also informed on how to endear themselves to the new adults:

Mother respect him mother respect him, this one
Send not to the river send not to the river
Send not to the garden send not to the garden-this one

The singers through the song inform the neophyte vividly that his roles have changed. At the same time his mother is cautioned not to assign him the errands meant for boys.

The songs performed during okwaroka do not only entertain the participants but also convey the thematic concerns of the Abagusii community. The performers employ poetic license to invoke the idea of coition by referring to the experience as hot tea. They invitingly inform the escort men including the neophyte of the desire for sex for reproduction.

Hot tea give us-hot tea give us
Even without sugar give us - hot tea give us
Even a little give us - hot tea give us

The song is intended as a sexual provocation of the male folk among the audience. The call for sex is telling as the neophytes are expected to be engaged in fruitful intercourse once they marry. It is a responsibility they are informed of without the community mincing its words.
As noted during the performance, the age factor is also implied. Young children and the elderly are not actively involved in the performance. Mostly, they are observers; young children drown in the new revelations while the elderly taking a ride back to the good old days.

The performance of the songs is a group activity with the poet and the audience joining and interacting in singing and dancing. The interaction process cannot be complete without a positive response from the audience. The poet needs the audience’s response for continuity of the performance and to enable them to deliver their message.

As observed, the performance of the songs is marked by an element of parallelism. In the context of *okwaroka* there are two groups of singers and each group sings a different song. The escort men perform *esimbore* as they lead home the neophytes. The mothers of the neophytes come to welcome their sons amidst song and dance. As the escort men perform *esimbore*, the women dancers at the same time perform *nyasuguta* and *echae ya morero*. It may seem that they are in opposition but both are contributing to the aesthetic realisation of *okwaroka*. This technique achieves emphasis of performance and makes it memorable and meaningful.

Further, the performance of the songs point out at the aesthetic device of the poet’s mastery of poetic discourse. This is evident in the repeated syntactic and semantic forms and the resultant rhythm achieved through alliteration that carry the message of the song. The poet’s ingenuity is depicted as they are able to draw from the immediate environment to enhance the content of their songs: *nyasuguta*, about the ritual grass; *enyamweri*, snake; *echae ya morero*, tea, is a recent phenomenon brought
about by the white people but its imagery has found its way into the ritual. Most people prefer taking tea while it is hot. The same has been used to refer to sex.

Repetition is a common feature of style that makes immeasurable literary impact of the poetry on both the audience and the performer. For example, in the following circumcision song, the constant repetition of the demonstrative words ‘this one,’ rivets attention and focus on the neophyte:

This one this one - this one
Has become a man has become a man - this one
This morning this morning - this one
His mother will respect him his mother will respect him - this one
He will not fetch water he will not fetch water - this one

The neophyte is the central character in the male circumcision song. By constant reference to him, the poet centralises his thematic concerns and emphasises them. The singers also highlight the metamorphosis from boyhood to manhood.

The element of repetition is also evident in the women dancers song *echae ya morero.*

Hot tea give us
Hot tea give us
Hot tea give us

It was observed that when the women dancers came to the end of the song they repeated the phrase *echae ya morero toe* three times before ending it.

The repetition sustains the durability of the song. It also facilitates memorisation and cramming which are forms of recording poetry in the performer’s memory. It thus
makes it easy to remember it as a whole text. Due to this, alterations are not easily invented thus safeguarding the texture of the song.

Repetition serves to inspire both the artist and the audience. More often than not, repetition gives the audience a chance to participate in the performance activity. Repetition also lengthens the intensity of emotion.

There is the lengthening of the final syllables. This elongation contributes to the achievement of the intended rhythm. It also contributes to the poetry’s consistency and unity of rhythm.

Obeire momura obeire momuraaa-
Bono mambia bono mambiaaa-
Ng’ina amosike ng’ina amosikeee-
Tachi roche tachi rocheee-
Tamotoma chinko tamotoma chinkooo-

The elongated vowels agree with the final position of vowels in the preceding words, for example, momura and momuraaa. This elongation also contributes to the achievement of the intended rhyme. For example:

Obeire momura obeire momuraaa
Bono mambia bono mambiaaa

Such rhyme is one quality that makes the definition of Abagusii songs and recitations as poetry. Another notable feature from the above excerpt is in the alternate [a] and [e]. This is also artistic as it contributes to entertaining beats.
The rhyme, rhythm, and assonance in the song give it a musical quality and an enjoyable beat. The three components immensely contribute to the euphonic quality of the song. This further attests to deliberate and accurate artistic diction of the song.

In the diction of the song, there is deliberate replacement of certain lexical items which are synonyms to others for purposes of rhythm. For example, in the male circumcision song ‘enyamweri’ (python) is used instead of ‘ebasweti’ as this may interfere with the rhythm of the music. In the same song ‘orokono,’ a tree whose bark is used to fasten grass in the thatching of a house, is used instead of ‘omomiso’ because of similar purposes of rhythm. The lines are performed as:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{kwerorera enyamweri} & \ - \ korwa \ engoro \ imee \\
\text{kwerorera enyamweri} & \ - \ korwa \ engoro \ imee \\
\text{kwerorera orokono} & \ - \ rwekonoire \\
\text{kwerorera orokono} & \ - \ rwekonoirree
\end{align*}\]

This artistic or literary diction may bore the audience in certain circumstances and create the danger of having clichés. However, it is an attestation of the poet’s expertise and linguistic versatility. The poet makes a literary comparison of the operation to a snake that sheds off its skin to emerge anew. The concept of re-emergence, regeneration is employed by the singers. Through poetic license the singers draw their imagery from nature. Enyamweri refers to a snake and the moon. The Abagusii community believes that the moon dies and resurrects anew, the same way the initiates emerge from seclusion new beings. Orokonoo a tree whose bark serves various functions, after the barks have been chopped it generates new ones.
The songs of okwaroka depict qualitative features of style that qualify it to be standard poetry. It is noteworthy that these features of style are reflective of the cultural and traditional Abagusii modes of thought and expression.

The mood, the space and the conventions that govern the performance of okwaroka allow for the use of obscenities. It is generally understood by all participants that certain taboo words can be uttered during the performance of okwaroka without any reprimand. For instance, in the song sung by men, esimbore, the soloist and the chorus use taboo words in the presence of women.

Lad little pain felt fuck your mother – this one

In this instance, the escort men directly refer to the dancing group of women as uncircumcised girls. This is particularly fascinating knowing that some of the women dancers could be women of respect (abanyansoni) mothers or aunts to some of the escort men.

At the same time, it is quite normal for the women to dance provocatively at the escort men. The way they gyrate and shake their waists implies an invitation to sex.

Hot tea give us - hot tea give us
Even without sugar give us - hot tea give us
Even a little give us - hot tea give us

Through the song, women dancers invitingly call upon the escorts for sex by referring to the coitus act as ‘give us hot tea’. Transcending the taboo boundaries, some of the women dancers lift up their dresses to expose their thighs as they dance ahead of the women. At this time, the performers, besides the broken boundaries, will have been carried away through song and dance. Their words and actions clearly indicate this:
Those uncircumcised girls those uncircumcised girls – this one
Ululation ululation – this one
We cannot hear it, we cannot hear it – this one

In this aural environment, the poet utilises his poetic license and at the same time, the performers too are relishing the ‘artistic space’ as per their actions. They are without any inhibitions and this allows for maneuver of body movements and gestures.

Echeruo (138) posits that:

Drama in its very manifestation is very specifically communal in character. More than any of the other arts, it requires a group audience at all stages of enactment (and) quite often it demands the participation of the audience in action.

The performance of *okwaroka* songs; *esimbore*, *nyasuguta* and *echae ya morero*, involve instances of performer-audience.

Okpewho (262) also notes that:

The performing of songs plays the same role as the dialogue in a play. Though it does not lead to a conflict of wills between the characters, it certainly yields an emotional counter point that brings the performance to a charged climax. The language of the songs and the dramatic movements contribute to the sublimity of the presentation in the performance.

This aspect of drama as exhibited in the performance of *okwaroka* enables the ritual to penetrate into the inner nature of both actors and audience. The dramatic space that the ritual affords the artists makes it possible for the actors to reach greater heights.
of freedom of performance reaching out to their inner selves as is exhibited in the performance. For instance, women actors can expose their thighs without reproach or fear of reprimand. The male poets are afforded the luxury of singing obscenities while the neophytes are handed a chance of experiencing all these without reproach. The inner feelings, emotions and attitude otherwise not seen on a normal day are brought to the fore.

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Performance of the *okwaroka* empowers the Abagusii community. *Okwaroka* provides the people with a forum within which initiation into adulthood is effected. By doing so, it fulfills one of the desires of the community; continuity. The performance of *okwaroka* also serves to unite people by bringing them together as actors whether active or passive where they are afforded moments of escape from the mundane.

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*Okwaroka* is a manifestation of Abagusii’s cultural heritage. Participation in and performing *okwaroka* through generations, affirms the argument that the ritual has been ‘inherited’ over time. Through this inheritance, the ritual has served to preserve Abagusii’s tradition as well as belief systems, religion, principles and tenets.

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Performance of *okwaroka* entails ethics of practice that are culturally defined. The ethics represent Abagusii’s moral code which encompasses moral values and principles. *Okwaroka*’s performance is thus an expression of the same.

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It is considered unethical to break tradition when performing *okwaroka*. There are levels of conduct that must be adhered to. First, the sacred animals for slaughter especially those provided by the neophytes must be cocks. During the cut the neophytes are not expected to cry, the ritual fire should not burn out, the ritual grass should not
wither, they should not shake hands with fellow neophytes, they should not enter other neophytes’ cottages, and should not use the door as an entrance or exit during seclusion.

None of the participants is expected to engage in an act they neither have prior knowledge of nor prepared to. As noted, all those who act as escort men have undergone the ritual, thus, they are informed regarding the details of performance. Similarly, the sponsor is carefully chosen by the father. He is a man of integrity, one who is a role model to the neophytes. Besides, he is to be aware of all the ritual acts that are to be performed before, during and after seclusion. He has to be brave enough since any violation of the stipulated regulations results in consequences similar to those that can befall the neophytes. The circumciser too has to be a man of respect, considered to have a mastery of his trade. This caution is taken to ensure that no harm is caused at any stage of the performance.

Through the performance of *okwaroka* various actors are brought into a close and more intimate relationship with tradition and the divine. By doing so, the rite becomes therapeutic by liberating the actors from the normal daily ties to the earth and the physical world. As observed, the performance of *okwaroka* transcends norms and taboos by blurring the laid cultural values to render sacred liberty to the performers. This act of breaking the boundaries adds to the aesthetic of the performance by creating a dramatic and poetic licence which allows for self-expression and performance licence. The actors can thus dramatise episodes that would be considered as taboo. As noted, women are allowed to wrestle men, the escort men can sing obscenities; neophytes can hunt and kill domestic animals.
3.4 Summary

The performance of *okwaroka* functions as an occasion of bringing people together, to share in the entertainment and celebration of the community’s art. Every person who attends the performance participates either actively or passively. The performance of *okwaroka* amongst Abagusii is a communal occasion and enhances social cohesion and solidarity. The participation in the performance of *okwaroka* is a mark of acceptance and announcement of identity, a portrayal of one’s pride in belonging to Abagusii society. This provides a climate for the development of the community’s traditions. Through its performance, *okwaroka* has been realised as a communal entity that is religious in its essence but performed as a dramatic piece. The performers are regulated by pre determined rules which they have been conditioned to adhere to. Their readiness to conform to these rules adds to the aesthetic appeal of the ritual.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE MANIFEST OF RITUAL MEDIA IN THE PERFORMANCE OF OKWAROKA

4.1 Introduction
This chapter explores the utilisation of okwaroka by Abagusii as one of the traditional systems of communication. This study underscores the importance of okwaroka as a means of communication that is instrumental in promoting unity among the Gusii people.

As a system of communication, ritual involves both indexical features that refer to the social hierarchy and symbolic features that refer to the cosmos (Bell 111). We have first considered the ritual use of language and then second, the comparison of the ritual, as a language, to verbal or textual language, in the sense that its activities parallel the communicative functions of the latter. It has been argued that in ritual words are deeds that accomplish things. That is, there is an assumed identity between the word and the deed. Ritual in this case is not just an alternative way of expressing something but the expression of things that cannot be expressed in any other way.

4.2 The Ritual Medium of Okwaroka
The performance of okwaroka can be considered as being word and action. Abagusii community regards chinyangi chia abare (circumcision) as being purposeful. Their performance is a realisation of the desire of the entire Abagusii community to propagate its ideals and virtues. The concept of class and continuity is upheld. The need to create a new class of adults to take up new roles and assume new responsibilities emerges in the performance of okwaroka. There is much that a character goes through
and learns in the maturation process. As far as the society would want to perpetuate itself and propagate its societal norms the performance of the ritual should be endless. Thus, the ritual is looked at from the point of view of how the ritual performance affects the community and secondly, how the ritual expresses the ideals of the Abagusii community.

In the performance of *okwaroka* the artists are engaged in a concrete dramatic presentation of initiation as a communicative entity. As noted, during the introduction of the mythical legendary animal *enyabububu*, the neophytes believe that it is a real animal. On this occasion, the initiates are not aware of the researcher’s presence. Only the patron and two other young men present know about it.

*Okwaroka* as a tool of social communication aids in conscientising Abagusii whose desires it represents. It is a means through which the Abagusii community communicates its values, traditions and ways of living, through psychological, social and symbolic interactions and teaching. We consider communication in *okwaroka* to be complete when the periphery is able to produce and distribute it own messages. This is only achieved through active and artistic participation in the performance of *okwaroka*.

Albeit, the performance of *okwaroka* deals with various themes, in making an analysis of the communication process of these themes we look at the channels of communication in the performance of *okwaroka*.

An awareness of the aggregate demands of an artist’s medium is important. As Noss (7) indicates, “it is imperative for the ... narrator to combine and harmonise the skills of the dramatist, actor, public relations officer, dancer and musician in order to
realise his idea of a 'beautiful' or successful tale”. Similarly, for a performer in *okwaroka* to respond to the challenge to communicate emotion and ideas simultaneously he or she has to combine movement skills with an ear for song, a feel for acting, colour, costume and props and a live sensitivity to the mood of the audience, while ‘eloquence’ in song also imposes, in the performance situation, requirements of the skills of an actor.

Song is one of the media in *okwaroka*. Songs are used for religious ceremonies and rituals, to accompany work and other daily activities, to mark the stages of life and death, to educate, to recount history and current events, to provide political commentary, and to provide moral guidance. Song is an integral element employed in the performance of *okwaroka*. *Esimbore* is considered sacred and is ritual tied to the occasion it marks. According to Mzee Agori, the performance of *esimbore* is an indicator of the ritual *okwaroka*. If any person happens to pass by and hears the performance of the song he or she is definitely informed of the occasion.

With a high tone that epitomises the pride derived from being circumcised, the performers underscore the position that he who has been circumcised has become a ‘real man’. In this way, they enhance the strength of Abagusii beliefs - that of creating men out of boys. By way of the circumcision rituals and the rigorous training, before and during seclusion, the gap between boyhood and adulthood is culturally bridged.

The *esimbore* provides a channel of passing across to the neophytes the educational contents (Nyasani 212). The performance of the song elucidates the expectations of the society especially for male children. One of the informants
interviewed during the research, Mzee Augustino, pointed out that among the Abagusii circumcision is the equivalent of the modern school system. The male initiates are taught that their role is to be focused beyond the Abagusii community. That is why the neophytes are encouraged to explore other lands. This is clearly outlined in the song:

Let a spear be made for him, let a spear be made for him - this one  
And a thick shield, and a thick shield - this one  
He will fight in Kipsigis land; he will fight in Kipsigis land - this one  
And Maasai land, and Maasai land - this one  

One may think that the neophytes are being encouraged to wage war against the mentioned communities. But Mzee Augustino clarified that the song is intended to create the spirit of adventure among the neophytes. Equally, the song is a revelation of the virtues that have been instilled in the neophytes. The neophytes are considered to have strength, courage, determination to face challenges of the newly acquired status.

Another element of communication is the circle. According to Byrant (5):

Ancient esoteric teachings speak to us in the language of symbolism. Of all known symbols, the oldest is the circle. The circle has no visible, detectable beginning or end and, in that way, speaks to us of the nature of immortality, eternity, and unity. The motion of the circle is unceasing; its form unchangeable. The circle forms a boundary around the ground upon which the ritual or ceremony takes place, essentially making it sacred ground. The circle also provides the practitioner with protection by keeping negative energies and entities outside its parameters.
Byrant further argues that a circle may be cast literally by drawing a one on the ground, or perhaps using stones, crystals or some other minerals, or even shells. It may also be drawn symbolically through visualisation techniques. The circle forms an enclosure round the participant(s) in a sphere of energy that is much more pure than that which lies outside the ring. In the performance of okwaroka, while escorting the neophytes home, the escort men encircle them. In the context of performance of okwaroka, it depicts the message of completion. According to Richard Onsongo and Abel Nyakundi, the circle at one level portrays the aspect of completeness of the community, that the performer’s community espouses intactness and values every member’s life. At another level, it means that the performers’ allegiance to God (Engoro) and the ancestors (chisosokoro) is complete. They further pointed out that at a spiritual level it marks the community’s continuity.

As observed during the performance of the male circumcision song by the male escorts, the escort men arrange themselves close to one another and even closer to the initiates. The performance is in such a way that no single performer breaks away from the circle. To an outsider, this may imply that the performers are inactive. At this time one of the escort men dashes forward a little distance and then returns to the rest. We can, therefore, conclude that the circle formed by the escort men hints at a message of completeness of the society, that the performer’s community cherishes intactness and values the life of every member. He further postulates that the circle is an indicator of the performers’ complete allegiance to God (Engoro) and the ancestors (Chisokoro). At a spiritual level the circle is a mark of the community’s continuity. The Abagusii consider human life to be cyclic, that is, a person is born, lives through the
community’s development stages and dies to pass on to the ancestor’s world only to re-emerge in the newly born babies. Thus, the circle is created to express to Engoro and Chisokoro their acknowledgement of the noble link that they (the performers) cherish with the world of the living dead.

Through the formation of the circle round the neophytes the performers are informing the neophytes that they are expected to respect and ardently love their community. Loving the community in this case means being close to the rest of the members and not isolating oneself. This is the impression given by the physical arrangement of the performers. The intact arrangement confirms the perceptual connections that exist between structural togetherness and the emphasis laid on adherence to social norms at the thematic level. One of our respondents Mzee Agori said that the social norms and values include a mandatory obedience to the community’s elders, love for all members of the community and was intended to emphasise the theme of social cohesion, solidarity and consensus.
Photo 4: The escort men encircling the neophytes covered with a blanket just before the neophytes are led into the cottage.

At the entrance to the cottage, the escort men perform *esimbore* once again. On completion, the neophytes are led into the cottage. By doing this they offer a last opportunity to the participants to experience the beauty of performance and to indulge in the contents of the song for one last moment as it will not be performed until another circumcision season.

The women dancers who welcome the male escorts and the neophytes adorn themselves with *egwagwa* (a creeping plant that has yellow flowers). Some carry *pangas* and twigs. They sing and dance towards the escort men. At some point they dance at one spot before heading towards the escort men. As they near the escort men, they make as if charging at them in bid to break the circle that secures the neophytes. One of the escort men armed with a spear surges forward to confront the advancing dancers. At this moment it, may appear as a real fight as both parties are ‘armed’ but in
essence it is not. According to Mama Bilha, the surging forward of the women dancers is just a test of how firm and alert the escort men are and how well protected the neophytes are. She further says that this is the time to judge if the current escort men are any better than their predecessors in past ritual performances. This evidently attests to the fact that African ritual drama has no boundary between the performers and the audience. At one point the women dancers are performers and at the same time they are judging audience.

Performance of okwaroka results in communication between the living and the living dead or ancestors. This is achieved through dance and song. Okwaroka’s performance evokes intensity of emotion which results in a temporary spiritual transmigration of the artists. The women dancers in okwaroka display emotion through the provocative dance where they are in a world devoid of other members allowing them to provocatively dance without shame or fear of reprimand. This intensity is heightened by wild ululations that are punctuated by the highly tonal esimbore and war cries from the escort men. Such a performance conveys the elements of a cultural celebration, dedication and consecration as is often witnessed in marriage and funeral rites.

As the women dancers are confronted by the surging escort man, they retreat. As they retreat those with pangas cut the shrubs they come across. After going back to a ‘safe’ distance they dance vigorously in a fixed spot. They then appreciate the singing of the escort men by punctuating it with ululations. This indeed creates a mood of joy and ecstasy. Both parties seem to be carried away as the ground breaks free to what looks as competition between the escort men and the dancers. The highly tonal Ekegusii
language gives the male escort song a high pitch. As the soloist leads the song, the other escort men powerfully respond. At the same time the women dancers have broken into their own song punctuated with ululations. The environment of excitement that ensues results into overcoming of inhibitions such that as the women dance they do so explicitly and provocatively to an extent of some lifting up their dresses. This ‘free’ environment is not only utilised by the women dancers alone, the escort men too exploit it. In their escort song they use all manner of obscenities regardless of the age of the women dancers, regardless of the relations that exists between them and the women dancers.

This licentious nature of the performance is evident in the song of the women dancers. In their song *echae ya morero* (hot tea), the women dancers express a desire for sex:

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hot tea give us-hot tea give us
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The performers employ poetic license to invoke the idea of coition by referring to the experience as hot tea. They invitingly inform the escort men including the initiates of the desire for sex for reproduction. Since these songs are sung in public, the community members young and old are brought together in a theatrical experience.

From one of our respondents, Mzee Agustino, we infer that the explicitness of both parties is provided for in the community. No one is condemned by performing such action. He further said that it was a way of giving room to the initiates to experience for the last time the use of abuses as they are not expected to use them afterwards. Thus, in this environment, the society clearly sends a message that in
normal circumstances no one is expected to use taboo words. By doing so the Abagusii community propagates good morals.

The central message of maturation is enhanced or reinforced by related ideas in dance, and spectacle. This is affirmed through costume, dance and the use of props in complimentary roles to the primary verbal performance. In these contexts, distinctiveness finds expression in the total end-effect of a given performance. It is the result of a successful blending process of several artistic elements or forms stamped on the performance by the personality and ingenuity of the artist. An interesting aspect of this situation is that these 'other forms' of expression are intended by the artist to add significant dimensions of meaning to the central message of the performance, particularly in terms of helping to create or shape appropriate moods, responses and attitudes to the central massage or idea.

The use of song interlaced with explicit dance movements by the women dancers in the performance of okwaroka may suggest deliberate levity or seriousness and in this way sharply define audience attitude to the core verbal message. Subsequently, an audience's instant and vocal evaluation of a performance - in the form of ululations, explicit gestures and spontaneous participation - becomes important aesthetic expressions on the quality of the performance and the effectiveness of the composite communication process. Nevertheless, for the literary artist to impose a distinctive personality on his performance he has to be always in firm control of the performance, controlling and influencing audience participation and reaction. For, in the final analysis, it is the artist's hidden intentions of levity, humour, satire and/or moral earnestness which prevail, and it is through these dramatic elements compositely
formulated that those hidden intentions are revealed and communicated to an immediate audience.

Cries and ululations are part and parcel of the performance of *esimbore*. These are inflexible features of style because in all instances of their usage, they mark excitement. Ululation is a preserve of women while the escort men make war cries. The escort to the neophytes’ home is a moment of great joy and this portrays the attitude of the performers towards the occasion. Ululations and cries also enhance the mood of the performance. The happy mood of celebration is punctuated by the ululations of women and the interjections of the cries by the escort men. The happy mood is derived from the fact that the performance of *chinyangi chia 'bare* is an occasion that marks maturation and social development within the society.

The feature of performers carrying spears, long sticks and *rungus* by the escort men and the carrying of *pangas* by women dancers is a dual reflection of both excitement and security. The Abagusii community derives satisfaction and security from the fulfillment of the community’s ethos - circumcision. The carrying of these props points to the performers’ expectation of the neophytes. They are expected to secure the community’s values, customs, traditions and etiquette. The feature of carrying these props is exciting, amusing and yet very inspiring to both performers and audience.

Another ever present symbol is that of colour. According to Dzobo (88) colour has symbolic meaning in African culture and each colour conveys peculiar information when won or displaced at significant places or situations.
Similarly, colour is of significance among Abagusii. The colours signify differently and when employed in an artistic performance they are intended to convey specific messages. There is a general conception and use of colour among the Gusii people designed to relay certain meanings. The employment of colour by the Abagusii artists in *okwaroka* thrives on pictorial communication by combining the speed of its impact and freedom from linguistic boundaries to achieve instant and effective communication. Among the colours used to communicate different meanings among the Abagusii people in the context of *okwaroka* are yellow, green and grey. Combinations of these colours produce certain significant meanings for the community.

The carrying of short branches and the decoration of the women performers with *egwagwa* is a significant expressive mode. It was observed that the creeping plant that the women performers decorated themselves with had green leaves and yellow flowers. According to Mama Binyanya, the green colour signifies life (*obogima*) while yellow signifies determination (*omokia*) and hope (*ogosemeria*).

She pointed out also that during the rainy season when most trees flower, the yellow flower gives farmers hope of the following year being productive agriculturally. In the context of the performance of *chinyangi chia bare*, the decoration of the performers with yellow and green points to the community’s sense of optimism. The celebration of circumcision is an assertion of the community’s determination to preserve its cultural traditions. At the same time, the yellow flowers mark periodic events. After harvesting food in the months of September and October, it is normally wet and this is the ample time for circumcision. The yellow flower points to the New Year because once they appear; farmers start to prepare their gardens for the next year’s
agricultural activities. It is therefore representative of determination and hope. The concept of hope is green by the colour of symbolism.

According to Dzobo:

African world view is replete with symbols. African symbols are “sources of insights into African orientations to life” He further argues that “…symbols are used to communicate complex knowledge” (86-7).

The performance of *okwaroka* is coloured by symbols that have information to convey concerning the way of life of the Abagusii community. For instance, the referential words *ekebwe* (singular), *ebibwe* (plural) or *egesimba* (singular) *ebisimba* (plural) are wild animals according to the Abagusii community that prey on domestic animals especially fowls. These predators are known to hide themselves and their presence can only be felt at night. It is not easy to see them. These qualities are attributed to the lifestyle of the neophytes. The neophytes are allowed to hunt and kill domestic fowls without any reproach from the community. Equally, the neophytes are not supposed to be seen by the public. One can only sense their presence but cannot see them. The life of seclusion which exposes the neophytes to all manner of challenges is meant to harden them, prepare them for new ventures in the next stage of life.

Grass is one of the ritual symbols used in the performance of *chinyangi chia 'bare*. As observed, once the neophytes have entered the cottage *omosegi* plants two grass stumps on either side of the gate that leads to the cottage. According to Mzee Agustino, the grass is an indicator of the presence of neophytes in that homestead.

Besides that, the grass also served as a caution to passers by especially women from
using that particular entrance. It is considered taboo for women to use the same gate with the neophytes.

The other grass that is planted in the cottage is used by the neophytes to wash their hands before a meal. Apart from being used as an implement of cleaning hands with, *esuguta* is considered to be a sacred symbol. Once it had been planted in the cottage, the patron and the neophytes ensure that it is well tended and its cut heads produce new shoots. It is feared that should it wither through neglect, the consequences would be grave. According to Mzee Orina, *esuguta* is believed to be connected with the novices’ well being. If *esuguta* is properly watered and shows its health by bearing lively green shoots, it is believed that in future the neophytes would be healthy and give birth to strong and healthy children. If it withers, it symbolises a doomed future on the side of the neophytes. Thus the tendering of *esuguta* had to be zealously done in accordance with the requirements of the ritual.

The ritual fire is another expressive mode in *chinyangi chia ‘bare*. As observed the ritual fire was kindled by way of drilling. According to Mayaka (*omosegi*), the one responsible for kindling the ritual fire, the dictates are that the fire is not supposed to be lit with the help of a match box or a glowing splint but should be drilled. Once it is lit its tendering had to be observed with utmost zeal as neglect resulted in dire consequences.

Drilling is done with the help of a stick and another one slightly big called *ebirende*. One stick was placed on the ground horizontally, dry cow dung and the stick is held steady using the feet. The second stick is held between the palms and the placed on top of the other vertically. Then the drilling begins and continues until embers form
on the dry cow dung and then develops to fire. One of our informants, Mzee Mage, pointed out that the act of kindling the ritual fire is symbolic as since it represents a man and a woman in coitus. The horizontal stick, which is usually soft, represents a woman while the vertical stick, which is hard, represents a man. The act of rubbing connotes coition and the consequent friction that caused heat resulting to fire is symbolic of conception and childbirth. Therefore, if the fire goes out, it is symbolic of the death of the neophytes’ sexual fertility.

Hence, fire is a symbol of life. Its presence therefore implies procreational continuity. The fire that burns continuously in the neophytes’ cottage is a reminder to the neophytes of their contribution to the welfare of the community it terms of ensuring generation continuity. According to Mayaka (omosegi), the performers view fertility power as being immanent within the actual fire. Fire is seen as sacred and its sacredness centered on the fact that it was conceived as symbolising the sexual life of the neophytes. Now that the neophytes have undergone circumcision, they have entered the sacred life of procreation.

As noted, during the seclusion period, the neophytes do not bathe instead they apply ash on their bodies. According to Mzee Orina the neophytes, besides being referred to as abare they were also called ebibwe (plural) ekebwe (singular) meaning fox. Theirs is a life of a jackal. The ash applied helps to enhance the picture of being fox like. He further points out that the ash also does assist them during their outings. Once they apply enough ash on their bodies, on their way to hunt if they met people especially women they would release some of the ash they carry to scare them. Some would think that it is a real jackal and run away, given that again the neophytes are
known to be fierce. Those who see the ash are informed of the presence of the
neophytes and therefore change route.

He further postulates that in case the neophytes meet with another group of
neophytes they use the ash in exchanging greetings. The neophytes release some of the
ash to the air in greetings. Shaking of hands between neophytes from different cottages
is prohibited. However much the neophytes are prohibited from shaking hands, an
alternative is provided for in the regulations that govern the performance of okwaroka.
The snake that is alluded to in the male circumcision song symbolises the penis.

To see for himself a python from its hole
To see for himself a python from its hole
To see for himself a python from its hole, from its hole.

According to Mzee Nyakundi, a python in the Abagusii community is
considered to be dangerous since it eats most of the domesticated animals such as
chicken and goats. Besides that, Abagusii consider it to be a carrier of warnings from
the ancestors to the living. When a person spots a python, he perceives it as warning
from the ancestors. To propitiate, the person has to offer a sacrifice of a black or red
goat after consulting a medicine man (omoragori). Another way of appeasing the
ancestors is by naming of any child in the family (born after that event, whether male or
female) after the python. This explains why some people are called Basweti, another
name for the python. Therefore, when the poet in the male circumcision song
(esimbore) invokes the name of the python he arouses in the neophytes the fear they
have for the python. The penis is also dangerous because in the event of pre-marital sex,
it may result in unwanted pregnancy and worse still in the present age, it may lead one
to contract dangerous diseases like HIV and AIDS. The poet via the image of the python clearly raises the concerns of the community with regard to sex. The neophytes are cautioned against toying around with their “sharpened spears”.

Before the neophytes are led into the cottage, the mother runs round the homestead holding a *panga*. This signifies the protective role of a man. By her simple act, she informs the neophytes that from now on they are expected to protect the community (Mose 54).

![Photo 5: Mama Zippier, one of the mothers to the neophytes performing her duty, which is, to welcome her son home by symbolically running through the compound carrying a machete.](image)

This is a reflection of excitement, security, and at the same time, she is informing her son of one of his work tools. The Abagusii community derives
satisfaction and security from the fulfillment of the community’s ethos – circumcision.

The act points at the community’s expectation of the initiates after initiation: defend the community; uphold its values, customs, beliefs and etiquette. The action is exciting, amusing at the same time a source of inspiration to the participants.

As observed, after the neophytes have safely entered the cottage, the revelers converge at various points within the homestead to indulge in the delicacies of the feast and enjoy their participation in the performance. The fathers to the neophytes sit and eat from the cow pen. According to (Mose 52) this signified the pastoralist role of the men folk. It was also noted that some women sat under the roof of the kitchen and others ate from inside to signify their role in the domestic sphere. From the sitting arrangement one can decipher the traditional role specifications of each member of the Abagusii community.

As noted in the field, before the neophytes are taken to the circumciser, they are ordered to immerse themselves in the river. The immersion helps shape the mind frame of the neophytes of the operation ahead as it was meant to allay their fears. It is also meant to prepare the novices for the operation as it is numbs their bodies (Mose 45). This demonstrates that Abagusii’s understand their environment and how well they can utilise it to suit their needs: the use of cold water as anesthesia. According to Mayaka, the first immersion is meant to create the mood of the operation ahead.

Another bath takes place at the end of the seclusion period. It is one of the indicators of the end of the seclusion period. Symbolically it is a mark of transition; the fact that the candidates’ childhood is being washed away by water thus ushering in a new chapter in the life of the graduates. The bath consequently marks the end to one
stage and a beginning for a new one. This is further attested to by the new attire the neophytes adorn.

The blessing ceremony takes place once the neophytes arrive home after the river bath. The dictates of the ritual are that the blessing of the neophytes is done by the oldest present male member. According to Mzee Agustino, this is so because old people are believed to be more close the ancestors who in turn mediate with the spirit world. Thus, by the elder sipping milk from the bowl and then spitting on each neophyte, it is believed that the neophytes receive the goodwill of the ancestors and the spirit world. This clearly demonstrates Abagusii’s religious orientation and their desire to bring up a virtuous society by calling upon the living dead.

Abagusii believe that blessings come into the family through parents. Before the neophytes are taken to the river, the fathers also bless them. The fathers say “nakoire gwasi ya ng’ombe na abanto, bwaterania Nsango Nonchabo”. (“I implore upon you blessings for herds of cattle and people, you may bear Nsango and Onchabo.”) Nsango represent boys and Onchabo represent girls in the Abagusii language. People have a desire for good fortune, to ensure this; the parents wish the neophytes good luck in their future endeavours. This helps to consolidate the position of the parents in the home. 

4.3 Media Presentations in Okwaroka

The media channels and processes in okwaroka assume various shapes and are directed to achieving different goals and objectives. They can be any of the following: directives, entertainment, and instruction.
In the performance of *chinyangi chia 'bare* especially on the eve of circumcision pain is given prominence. According to Mose (50) pain is taken as a preparatory test for successful manhood. She further says that men who endure pain are considered more patient and courageous. These virtues are considered helpful when it comes to encountering challenges. Endurance of pain is a virtuous act as it tests the neophytes' commitment to maturity. By and large, pain makes the acquired status to appear much more prestigious.

Sex education is subtly but intelligently taught by the poet in the circumcision song. The foremost concern of the poet is to inculcate good morals in the youths of the community. Pre-marital sex is pointed out as being dangerous. It is in this case likened to a python:

\[
\text{And see for himself - a python from its hole} \\
\text{And see for himself - a python from its hole}
\]

The singers invite members to witness and experience the new born of the community. Besides, immorality is against the moral code of the Abagusii. This is also an indicator of the poet’s understanding of the cosmological background of the community.

The concerns of the verbal artist - the poet - are a reflection of his or her interpretation of the environment.

The *esimbore* is the most ample tool of passing across to the neophytes the educative information. This involves the societal expectations of the male children. The neophytes are taught that their role is to defend their community against any form of aggression. This is clearly outlined in the song:
Let a spear be made for him, let a spear be made for him - this one
And a thick shield, and a thick shield - this one
He will fight in Kipsigis land, he will fight in Kipsigis land - this one
And Maasai land, and Maasai land - this one

The singers underscore the fact that the neophytes have been equipped with
virtues that would enable them integrate well with members of other communities. This
also essentially means that the ‘work tools’ of a circumcised boy, a grown up male are a
spear and a shield; he is the community’s warrior. The reference to the Kipsigis and the
Kuria here does not mean that a warrior amongst the Abagusii is expected to fight or
protect his community against the Kipsigis or the Kuria only, but also any raids waged
by other neighbouring ethnic communities. At a deeper level, the poet is concerned
about one’s love for his community. This is a thematic embodiment of patriotism.
Whoever is a genuine member of his community (and this is judged by continued
participation in communal activities) is expected to protect his community. These
patriotism and nationalism are thematically interwoven in the song.
Photo 6: The traditional seating position of the fathers of the neophytes.

Esimbore also disseminates political teachings. Within this political education, the poet reflects on his community’s historical experiences. The Kipsigis and the Maasai are singled out as the enemies because they have for a long time, had relations with the Abagusii. This, according to one informant interviewed during the field research, Mzee Mage, is because of constant cattle raids by the neighbouring Kipsigis and Maasai and perennial boundary disputes along the border of Abagusii with the two ethnic communities are a long standing source of conflict. This does not suggest that the poet is only concerned with inter-ethnic hostilities. Instead, it depicts the poet as one much concerned with the historical and political developments of his community. In light of this understanding, therefore, the poet prepares the neophytes politically on how to handle foreign relations.
As indicative of the central role of father figure to the homestead and to the ritual performance in general, the convention is that he occupies the most conspicuous position in the compound. That is in the cattle pen at the time when the neophytes are being escorted home. As the entourage nears the homestead, they hide the neophytes in a bush and the leader appoints someone to watch over them the rest proceed to the homestead to feast. In the compound, old men together with the fathers of the neophytes are seated in the cow pen.

Social education and ethics is important in the male circumcision song. The dynamics of relating with members of the society and the network of expectations that the society has of the individual are a very integrated aspect of this song. That the social demarcations thereupon achieved once one is circumcised are not meant to create vertical classes but strengthen the awareness of each individual’s position socially. A circumcised male is told in the song to keep a safe distance from his mother and other female members of the society for example. This network of expectations especially that which hinges on the roles particular members of a particular age group are expected to play boil down to what may be called social education and ethics. Abagusii refer to it as education of becoming a man (chisemi chio ‘koba omonto omonene) or education of knowing how to handle oneself (chisemi chio ‘kwebwata).

Location and choice of site is another expressive element of okwaroka. To start with the location of the cottage is a distant away from the rest of the homestead. This creates a sacred distance from the profane.

The conventions are that not everyone can visit the neophytes. This guarantees privacy to the neophytes an aspect that is integral of okwaroka. Secondly, the
announcement of identity, a portrayal of one’s pride to belong to Abagusii society. This provides a climate for the development of the community’s traditions.

It is one of the forms of expression of the Abagusii cultural heritage. Through the performance of okwaroka cultural aspects of Abagusii are exposed to the community members and other people from other cultures. This results in a greater understanding and appreciation of inherent differences. This study regards okwaroka’s lexicon as being deeds that accomplish things. That is, there is an assumed identity between the word and the deed. Okwaroka in this case is not just an alternative way of expressing something but the expression of things that cannot be expressed in any other way.

From the above discussion, we can say that the performance of okwaroka provides an ample channel to the Abagusii community to pass on norms, values, and ideals. At the same time, it offers a vehicle through which desired communal status is attained. Lastly, okwaroka is an expression of Abagusii’s world view.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter we have explored okwaroka’s communicative nature, content and its aesthetic function. In our analysis, we have explored how the theme of maturation, how Abagusii’s cultural heritage has been explicated in the performance. Various channels have been employed by the artists in achieving this. To begin with, the adherence to and strict following of the rules and conventions that govern the performance of the ritual is an indication of the importance Abagusii bestow on the performance of chinyangi chia’bare.
Various ritualistic elements come into focus as modes of communication. The timing of the ritual is after the harvests of August and September; meaning that there is enough food for the revelers. The choice of the location of the performance: the site of the cottage, the circumcision site, provides the aesthetic space needed for a full realisation of the rival.

It is notable too that the performers - audience each play their role, which when fused with those of other characters, results in an aesthetic realisation of okwaroka. The costuming, the props, gestures, body adornments, the ritual symbols of the grass, fire, circle, snake and the punctuations of cries and ululations serve to express the attitude and mood of the performance. According to Mzee Agustino, it is because okwaroka serves the interests of the Abagusii community well that the ritual is still being performed.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section is an attempt to give an outline of what emerged during the study. It assesses its findings and interpretations in the area of the context of ritual drama based on okwaroka while focusing on the ritual’s aesthetics. This chapter also makes recommendations for possible future tasks on aspects of ritual drama which the researcher felt could be explored further.

Summary of Findings

This study set out to investigate the aesthetics in the performance of okwaroka as ritual drama. To do this, the study sought ethnographic data which was subjected to analyses for its performative nature, its interpretive nature and lastly, the communicative nature of okwaroka. At the beginning, we set out to examine ritual drama; its aesthetics and communicative nature. The aim was to find out the main ideas embodied in okwaroka and those elements that appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of the audience.

The researcher adopted a qualitative approach to the study that was explorative, descriptive and contextual in order to gain insight to the aesthetic experiences of the participants during the performance of okwaroka among the Gusii community of Marani District. Polit and Hungler (517) describe qualitative research as “modes of systematic inquiry concerned with understanding human beings and the nature of their transactions with themselves and with their surroundings”. This enabled the researcher to explore and describe the aesthetic experiences of the participants in okwaroka. Data
was collected by means of in-depth interviews and participant observation in the form of field notes. Tape recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed.

*Okwaroka* derives its essence when it is realised in a performance, thus emerging as a social mode. From this analysis, the study has established that this is why the ritual has survived generations. In its performance the ritual has a functional value to the society. The ritual is an embodiment of messages encoded in its expansive and expressive media and its performance leads to the transmission of these messages.

The performance of the ritual has its designated period: the month of December. This is usually after the harvest indicating that there is enough food for the revelers. Around this time there is a great desire in boys who believe they have become of ‘age’ to undergo the ritual. This is a testimony to the value attached to the ritual both by the participants and the community at large.

It has been established that this is entirely a communal affair. From its preparation stage and the execution of relevant duties where participants have conventionally prescribed roles they play. Besides that, each ritual act is performed at its designated site. The setting of the ritual which is at the heart of the village guarantees more participation. The timing is also opportune as it is during holiday when most members of the community are at home. This too allows for more participants cum audience.

Besides, the setting allowing for more participation, the performers own the ritual. They are the participants and the owners of the ritual. This promotes communalism which results in promotion of solidarity.
The performance of *okwaroka* in itself is a purposeful act. This is so in the sense that by the end of the performance a new status is bestowed upon the protagonists (neophytes). It has been revealed that *okwaroka* provides the basis for maturation of young boys. This is both physically and socially. Neophytes graduate at the end of the seclusion period after he undergoes training. In the same vain, *okwaroka* bridges the gap between adolescence and adulthood. At the end of the performance of the *okwaroka* the neophytes emerge as adults.

The ritual is likened to the modern day school system. In its performance, the ritual provides a forum for passing on societal morals and attitudes to the neophytes. The pedagogy dwells on issues related to sexuality, social relations, and responsibility as part of the maturation process. Thus, *okwaroka* forms part and parcel of Abagusii’s education system; the ritual itself is a mode of instruction in the society.

The performance of *okwaroka* is as a result of Abagusii’s wish to maintain social order. It is through the performance of *okwaroka* that a new world opens up to the neophytes. *Okwaroka* exposes new knowledge, societal norms, rules and regulations. In other words, the ritual provides an acceptable form of expression. The ritual derives its aesthetics first on the ground that through its performance it fulfils the intended function, that is, it adds new members to the category of adults.

*Okwaroka*, as part of its media, entails the following: songs which include *esimbore, echae ya morero* and *nyasuguta; egwagwa, pangas*, the circle; the snake; ritual fire; ritual grass; ash; cries and ululations; spear, sitting position of the fathers; eating areas of the revelers; darting of the mothers through the compound; the abusive
language; provocative dance of the women dancers; drilling of fire; the setting of the ritual; immersion in water; and the blessing ceremony.

The expansive paraphernalia used in the performance of *okwaroka* adds to its aesthetics. The props, costumes and body adornments the performers decorate themselves with provide the performers and the audience a taste of beauty, thereby triggering the required response. Consequently, provide an ample way of expressing Abagusii’s world view.

The study as a whole has established the performance of *okwaroka* results in the realisation of the aesthetic nature of the ritual. In light of its objectives, the study has established that there exists aesthetics in *okwaroka*. This is why the ritual is still performed by the society. The performance of *okwaroka* serves the quest of the society as a way of maintaining social order and as a way of propagating the ideals of the society. The ritual still remains relevant in the face of the changing trends in the world.

*Okwaroka* is an important part of tradition and identity of the Abagusii community. Through the ritual’s performance, a sense of personhood within the family and community is nurtured. The performance of *okwaroka* is used to maintain the high spiritual and moral values of the Abagusii.

**Recommendations**

The concerns of this study have been directed primarily to the aesthetics of *okwaroka*. It would be a challenging area of study if the gender formations in *okwaroka* were to be examined. We may ask ourselves to what extent the conceptualisation of *okwaroka* will purify society or empower females in the society. For instance, do the
**WORKS CITED**


La Fontainen Jean. *Initiation. Ritual Drama and Secret Knowledge Across the World*


APPENDICES

A i. GLOSSARY

Egesena (sg), ebisena (pl) - a special piece of cloth used by neophytes to cover their front part.

Egwagwa-a creeping plant that has green leaves and yellow flowers.

Ekerundu - pl ebirundu. A herb used in the Abagusii sacred ritual. The herb is believed to have the potential to stop lightning and hence can stop bleeding.

Enyabububu, enchage, enyamaruma - a masquerade of the groaning one; an imagined scary animal/leopard

Enyangi ya 'bana abamura-wedding for boys

Esaiga-cottage

Esuguta-chisuguta (imperata cylindrical) Blady grass - Grass used during circumcision ceremonies to symbolise the health of the neophytes.

Nsango- refers to male children

Nyokeu - a name used to refer to the newly graduated neophytes

Omorero-ritual fire

Onchabo-refers to female children.

Omoro-machete

Rigoko-the hard part the remains on the walls of a sufuria after cooking ugali
An interview with mzee Nyakundi one of the key informants.

**Researcher:** What are ‘maturation’ games?

**Nyakundi:** These are games meant to enhance growth in the boys before circumcision. Already circumcised boys could go to a mole’s hole and defecate there. Then they cover it nicely and call the boys and order him to insert their hands into the mole’s hole and catch it. AS the lad puts his hand into the hole he catches feaces. He thus learns the ways of trickery.

At the grazing grounds it is where they could learn the trade of construction. Young men instruct them to build a small hut. Where they err the young men correct them. Once they know the trade that is when they are considered capable of constructing their *riburu.*

**Researcher:** What is *riburu*?

**Nyakundi:** *Riburu* is a small hut a neophyte builds inside the cottage where he will eat from and sleep.

**Researcher:** Why are the neophyte immersed in the river before initiation?

**Nyakundi:** The immersion is to prepare them for the cut. This arrays their fears. Also the cold water makes their bodies numb reducing the pain experienced. After staying in the cold water for sometime the neophytes are escorted to the circumciser. The bath they after soon after they leave the cottage marks the end of the seclusion period. It also indicates their transition from childhood to adulthood.
I impress upon them that they are grown-ups now and this comes with new expectations. First, they should not fetch water; they should not fetch firewood as these are for girls and small boys. At the same time they should not go to the posho mill. Lastly, they should not go to fetch vegetables, leave it to their mothers or sisters.

Sample Interview with Mama Bilha and Mama Binyanya

Researcher: What is the essence of decorating oneself?

The yellow flower signifies hope and determination while the green colour points at life. During the rainy season most trees grow and flower giving farmers. When the women dancers decorate themselves in green and yellow they portray their optimism in the future through the neophytes.
(The singers are informing the audience that his roles have changed. At the same time his mother is cautioned not to assign him the duties for boys.)

*Omoisia omoke mbororo*  
Lad little pain felt  
*Omoisia omoke mbororo*  
Lad little pain felt  
*Omoisia omoke mbororo*  
Lad little pain felt fuck mother

(The idea of ‘lad’ belittles the earlier stage. ‘Little’ pain shows that the gain is greater than the pain.)

*Omoisia omoke mbororo*  
Lad little pain felt fuck mother

(In this instance the singers employ poetic license and drops the euphemism)

*Oyoo oyoo oyooo!*  
This one this one  
*Oyoo oyoo!*  
This one his one  
*Obeire momura obeire momuraaa*  
Has become a man, has become a man  
*Bono mambia bono mambia*  
Now morning now morning  
*Mambia kinyi mambia kinyii*  
Morning early morning early

oyoo oyoo oyoo oyoo oyoo oyoo oyoo oyoo
Fight Maasai land fight Maasai land
And Sobaland and Sobaland
Atarochi tiga ache
Does not see let him come see for himself
Otarochi tiga ache
Does not see let him come see for himself

(The singers invite members to witness and experience the new born of the community).
See himself python from inside a hole

*Kwerorera enyamweri*

See for himself a python

*Kwerorera enyamweri*

engoro

See for himself a python from inside a hole, from inside a hole

*Kwerorera orokono*

See for himself a 'rokono'

see for himself a 'rokono'

*Kwerorera orokono*

See for himself a 'rokono' made itself

*Kwerorera orokono*

See for himself a 'rokono' made itself, made itself!

The poets compare the operation to a snake that shades off its skin to emerge anew. The concept of re-emergence, regeneration is employed by the singers. Through poetic license the singers draw their imagery from nature.

*Enyamweri* refers to a snake and the moon. The Abagusii community believes that the moon dies and resurrects anew, the same way the neophytes emerge from seclusion new beings. *Orokono*- a tree whose bark serves various functions, after the barks have been chopped it generates new ones.
NYASUGUTA

Soloist

Ee Nyasuguta baria esabaria

Ee Nyasuguta journey

Ee Nyasuguta baria esabaria

Ee Nyasuguta journey

Nchera igoro tiga areme

On path let dig

Mboremo bwaborire tiga areme

areme

Land lacking let dig yes

Sese ndabu yaeta mache ng'umbu

ng'umbu

Dog white passed river other side

other side

Sese ndabu yasiara ekemincha naki rende

ekemincha naki

White dog splashed tail how about it

Translated to mean 'owner of long grass'. This is the long grass that is planted in

Response

Ee Nyasuguta baria

esabaria

Ee Nyasuguta journey

Ee Nyasuguta baria

esabaria

Ee Nyasuguta journey

Nchera igoro tiga areme

On path let dig

Mboremo bwaborire tiga

areme

Land lacking let dig yes

Sese ndabu yaeta mache

ndabu yaeta mache

Sese ndabu yasiara

rende

White dog splashed tail how about it

the cottage where the male neophytes spend their seclusion period. Traditionally within
the Abagusii community neophytes are expected to wash their hands near it, which is when they clean their hands the water they use plus any water they may use in the cottage should be poured on that long grass. It signifies life and continuity. Every time water is poured on it, it grows symbolising the growth and maturation of the neophytes. Therefore the word 'Nyasuguta' is derived from the name 'esuguta'. In Ekegusii the prefix 'Nya' connotes possession. Thus the word means the owner of the long grass. The word is used therefore to refer to the neophytes. In this case it is a proper noun. In this context it is used as somebody's name. The women named Nyasuguta are therefore those who were born near the long grass-esuguta.

**ECHAE YA MORERO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soloist</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Echae ya morero toe</em></td>
<td><em>echae ya morero toe</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot tea give us</td>
<td>hot tea give us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nonya ne rikoyo toe</em></td>
<td><em>echae ya morero toe</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even without sugar give us</td>
<td>hot tea give us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nonya ne 'nkeigo toe</em></td>
<td><em>echae ya morero toe</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even a little give us</td>
<td>hot tea give us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The performers employ poetic license to invoke the idea of coition by referring to the experience as hot tea. They invitingly inform the escort men including the neophytes of the desire for sex for reproduction.

Since these songs are sung in public, the community members young and old are brought together in a theatrical experience.
### A iv. OBSERVATION SHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Includes</th>
<th>Things to Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appearance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Clothing, age, gender, physical appearance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anything that can indicate: religion, social status, class, role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ash, <em>panga</em>, spears, <em>rungus</em>, long sticks, twigs and branches</td>
<td><strong>Neophyte:</strong> Adorns himself with ash.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mother:</strong> carries a <em>panga</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Escort men:</strong> carry spears, <em>rungus</em> and long sticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Women dancers:</strong> carry twigs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbal behaviour and interactions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Who speaks to whom and for how long, who neophytes interaction languages/ dialects spoken, tone of voice</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gender, age, profession of participants, dynamics of interaction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader speaking to neophyte and the leader neophytes the interaction</td>
<td><strong>Both sexes are present, the young, middle aged and the old.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversation amongst escort men, conversation amongst women dancers, conversation amongst wrestlers.</td>
<td><strong>Profession-farmers, drivers, teachers, 1 pastor, traders.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language of interaction is ekegusii.</td>
<td><strong>Dynamics of interaction: the elderly sit together, middle aged women converge together separately from middle aged men, the young also stay separately with regard to their sex. Children are together regardless of their sex.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>The profession does not affect interaction like sex does.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical behaviour and gestures</td>
<td>What people do, who does what, who interacts with whom, what/who is not interacting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young men/escort men- escort the neophyte home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young women-Assist in the domestic chores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women dancers- escort the neophyte home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother-leads the women escort, in charge of the food store, ensures revelers are well fed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father: provides food, provides cocks for the escort men, pays the circumciser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader/sponsor-in charge of the escort men, and the initiate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How participants/performers use their bodies and voices to communicate different emotions; what their behaviours indicate about their feelings towards one another; social rank and the occasion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women dancers-they dance vigorously, provocatively and gyrate their bodies to the rhythm of the circumcision songs, they lift the hems of their dresses to expose their thighs. They sing and ululate. This indicates a rule free environment, ululations indicate the happy mood. Social boundaries are broken in this case.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wrestlers-indicates the existing relation between men and women in the community and the free performing environment. How freely both sexes interact with each other.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Escort men-they use their tonal voices to sing as they escort the neophyte home. They use an obscene language indicative of the free</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal space</td>
<td><strong>How close people stand to one another in the performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the performance of the male circumcision song, the male escorts stay close to one another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At this moment the neophyte is surrounded by the escort men. Who also stay close to him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The women dancers keep their distance away from the escort men.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As they dance they do not stay close to each other as the escort men do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human traffic</strong></td>
<td><strong>people who enter, leave, And spend time at the observation site</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children, young men and women, middle aged men and women, the elderly both male and female.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>what individuals' preferences concerning personal space suggest about their relationships and the performance</strong></td>
<td>The escort men prefer or are encouraged to stay close to one another and more especially the neophyte.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The dictates of the performance require the escort men to stay close to one another.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>where people enter and exit; how long they stay; who they are (age ethnicity, gender) whether they are alone or accompanied; number of people</strong></td>
<td>Children enter the homestead and spend time around the kitchen while some aimlessly move around. Some children have followed their parents while some have come out of curiosity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young men (17-30)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enter the homestead and settle at the cottage while young women (17-30) who come head for the kitchen.

Middle aged men some join the young men while others join the father; middle aged women join the mother.

The elderly women and men sit together in a tent outside the main house where the grand parents of the neophyte are.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People who stand Out</th>
<th>identification of the people who get a lot of attention From others</th>
<th>The characteristics of these individuals; what differentiates them from others; whether people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neophyte, patron, parents, escort men, women dancers, master of ceremony. Women wrestlers, men wrestlers.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consult them or they approach other people; whether they seem to be strangers or well known by others present.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The neophyte is the protagonist, the owner of the ‘wedding’ naturally he gets most of the attention.

Patron/leader of the escort men-has the responsibility of leading the escort men and taking care of the neophyte during seclusion, bridges the gap between the
parents and the neophyte.

Parents: organisers of the ceremony, they bestow and exercise authority where and when necessary, most consulted in most issues.

Escort men: Hail from the village thus they are well known. Theirs is to escort the neophyte to the circumcisor and back home.

They carry spears, clubs and long pointed sticks.

Mother of the neophyte; in charge of women dancers, she leads them in welcoming her son home, on this occasion she is identified by the symbol of the panga that she carries.
A v INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. Heading

a. Name of Institution and Address: Kenyatta University, Literature Department 00200-43844, Nairobi.

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e-mail: nyarangow@yahoo.com

2. Title of Study: An Aesthetic Analysis of Abagusii Male Circumcision Ritual Drama: Okwaroka

3. Purpose of study: The study seeks a critical analysis of the aesthetics evident in the performance of okwaroka among the Gusii.

4. Procedure I am conducting a research for the award of a higher degree at Kenyatta University. I'd like to seek your permission to interview you about your experiences as a participant in the male circumcision ritual. This form contains information about the study I am conducting and will help you decide whether or not you would like to participate. I will read some information to you so that you understand why I have asked you to join us. Please ask for any clarification if you do not comprehend any of the
information. After I read this to you, you can then decide if you wish to answer the questions or not.

This inquiry is about male circumcision among Abagusii. You will be asked on the procedure and participation in the performance of *okwaroka* right from its inception to its conclusive end. We seek to know the individual rites, their essence, and individual participation in the whole performance.

**Your part in the interview:** You are required to respond according to your informed knowledge.

**Possible risks:** With regard to any information you provide us, rest be assured that no one will thereafter come after you with any ill motive. You are thus requested to feel free.

**Possible benefits:** You stand to secure yourself a chance as one of those who have projected the ways of Omogusii to the outside world. Secondly, you could have participated in the writing process of the worldview of Abagusii in the end product which is a ‘book’. Your name will feature as one of the sources. You will also be allowed to access data collected and it will be free to share the findings with the researcher.

**If you decide not to be in the interview:** There will be no problem.
Confidentiality: If you feel that there is some information you do not want to be disclosed be assured that into will not be leaked.

Compensation: In case of any misnomers an amicable way of compensation will be sought.

Participation withdrawal: You are free to withdraw from the research process at the moment of your choice.

Your rights as a participant: You are free to contribute to the level best of your knowledge.

After listening to this information, do you have any questions?  

YES(  )
NO(  )

Would you like to participate in this interview?  

YES(  )
NO(  )

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A vii Map Indicating Marani District