

**A TRADITIONAL RITUAL CEREMONY AS EDURAMA:  
A CASE STUDY OF IMBALU RITUAL AMONG THE  
BUKUSU OF WESTERN KENYA**

**By**

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## DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any university.

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## **DEDICATION**

To Prof. Francis Davis Imbuga, an all-round dramarist who lived and died by drama. He brought humour into Kenyan theatre and entrenched it in life as well as death. As a supervisor in this research, we are greatly indebted to his contribution. May the Almighty rest his soul in peace.

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**WASOLO IN 2010**

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## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **Ritual**

A set of religious or solemn ceremony involving a series of customs undertaken to obtain assistance from or intercede with the supernatural forces as in Embalu of the Bukusu people.

### **Ritual Drama**

Drama that emanates from and is mostly based on any rites of passage like the circumcision ceremony of the Bukusu.

### **Imbalu**

A body of rites and techniques whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the social status of the person to be initiated. It is also a process which includes circumcision, geared towards transforming the youth to an adult.

### **Edurama**

A whole process in which performance is both drama and a process of learning.

### **Seclusion**

Refers to the time when the initiates are kept away from the society during the healing process.

### **Education**

A process by which one generation transfers its culture to the succeeding generation. It is also a process by which people are prepared to live effectively and efficiently in their environment. This definition is attributed to Sifuna (1990:3).

**Kibukusu**

Dialect of the Luhya language whose mainstay is in Bungoma County.

**Bamasaba**

The “Bagisu” of Uganda who broke away from the Bukusu of Kenya.

**Myth**

Traditional story concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or solid phenomenon typically involving supernatural beings or events.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study is an investigation of how Bukusu traditional initiation can be considered as edurama. It first looks at the rite of passage as a process of transition. The study investigates whether or not drama existed in Bukusuland before the advent of colonialism. It also explores the conduct of the Bukusu initiation ceremony. Further it seeks to provide an answer to the type of drama and the nature of education that exists in Imbalu. The research which will be carried out in Sibembe village in Bungoma County will use sociological theory because this, as Imbalu, gives an explanation for the existence of a society. This also gives an analysis of the cultural context of Bukusu Imbalu. It is important to note that the research will rely on fieldwork that will entail physical observation of circumcision ceremony. Interviews of initiates, surgeons and experts will be carried out. What however is crucial is that the African tradition ceremony is considered as a school in which the initiates learn various issues concerning African society. In other words it prepares the youth for life in the community as the initiates are forced to practice the norms and values of society and expertise for playing effective role in society. In the end the findings of the investigation will be that Bukusu initiation ceremony is drama in the African senses as it uses African Language, it will be timeless and will have distinction between the spectator and the person. Above all it will be utilitarian and functional and therefore a process of Bukusu education.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 Overview**

This study on African drama as education is based on the Bukusu people of Western Kenya because of their enduring practice of initiation which is held every two years. Bukusu is a sub-tribe of the Abaluhya which, in Lubukusu means “child of one common father in a polygamous family”. They are one of the seventeen sub-tribes that comprise the Abaluhya cluster of the interlacustrine Bantu nations of East Africa from the larger Bantu speaking people, who have been in East Africa since the first millennium A.D. The Abaluhya, unlike their neighbours the Luos, are not a single entity and do not constitute a homogenous group of people. Along with their cousins the Batachoni, the Bukus inhabit Bungoma County in Kenya. The County is about 3,074 square kilometres in size. It is bordered by Kakamega to the East, Mount Elgon to the West, Trans Nzoia to the North and Busia to the South. Bukusu is the largest single ethnic unit in the Luyha land followed by the Maragoli. The County is divided into 4 divisions of 10 locations with the highest population density being in Kimilili.

According to the 2009 Kenya census, Bungoma had 795,595 males and 835,339 females totalling to a population of 1,630,934. The family unit – husband, children, and wife, constitute the basic social group inhabiting an individual homestead. The Bukusu practise a mixed agricultural economy. The traditional

principal crops are millet, sorghum, sweet potatoes, peas, a variety of nuts and bananas. Maize is both a staple food and cash crop. The other cash crop is sugarcane as testified by the Nzoia Sugar Company which is based in the County.

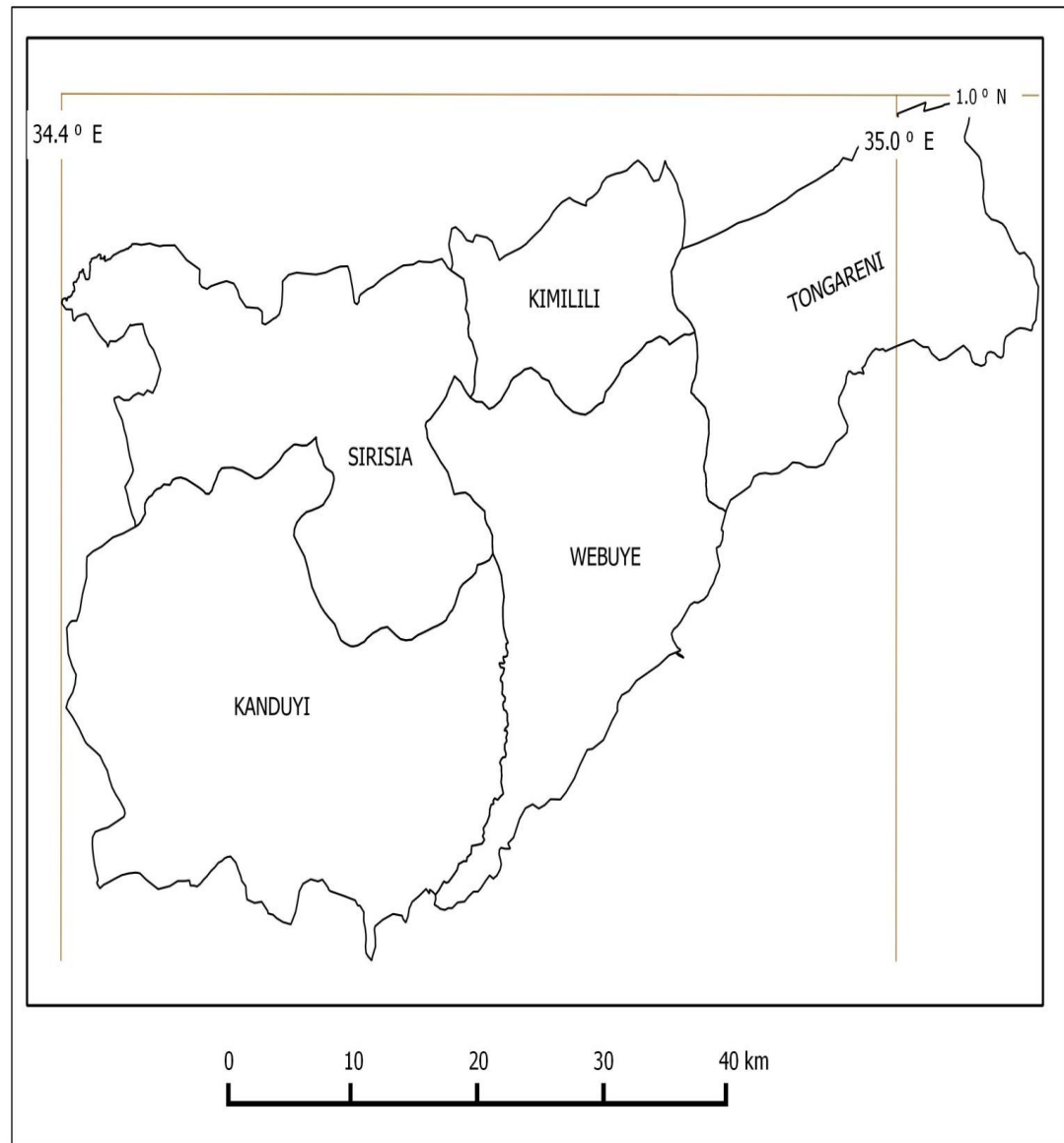


Figure 1.1: Map of Bungoma County.

Source: Survey of Kenya 2013.

This study is an investigation of how **Imbalu**, Bukusu initiation rite, can be considered as both drama and education. It is believed that this ritual is a traditional practice which the young Bukusu must undergo before being considered as adults. It is a process of transition that entails performances and activities that transform the personality of an initiate.

During **Imbalu**, initiates learn various issues concerning their society. It prepares the youth for eventual life in the community and orientates them to practise the norms and values of the society. It also develops their creative talent and personality in the sense not they stop considering members as undeveloped children.

**Imbalu** conforms to the functional and utilitarian nature of African drama in that it is a performance that changes the lives of the initiates. It also has an impact on the entire community. This is a performance that is not done on stage or in a building but in the open air and is a celebration of dancing and feasting that takes place over a period of time.

### **1.1.1 Origin of the Bukusu**

The Bukusu live in Bungoma County and speak the Kibukusu dialect. It is one of the numerous dialects spoken by the Luyha people. According to Fred Edward Makila, in his **An Outline History of the Bukusu of Western Kenya**, the Bukusu could have originated from Esibakele in Northern Sudan under their ancestor known as Mundu who lived between 200 and 100 B.C. Mundu begot two

sons Kundu and Masaba and migrated to Esirende where they practised agriculture. Kundu later parted from his family and established a home around Lake Kioga. Masaba however left Esirende later and settled at Nabiswe around Lake Turkana. He moved later and settled at Embaye. He married and had two sons Mwambe and Mbukusu. As a result of a quarrel between the sons, Mbukusu proceeded and settled at the foot of Mt Elgon. This group of people referred to themselves as the Babukusu as outlined by Fred Edward Makila (1978). See the migration map of the Bukusu people below.

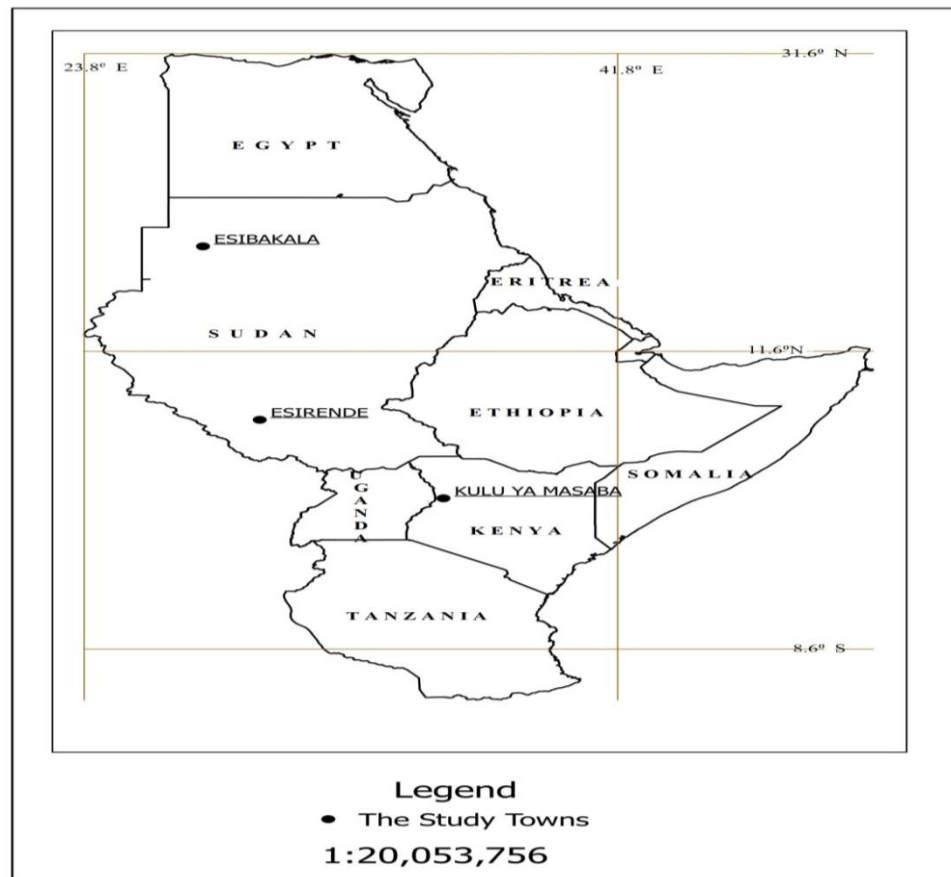


Figure 1.2: Migration of Bukusu People.

(Source: Author)

This origin of the Babukusu is corroborated by Wotsuna Khamalwa in his **Imbalu Initiation Among the Bamasaba in Uganda** (2004). Bamasaba are close cousins of the Bukusu. He says:

One day the Elgon Maasai attacked and raided the Bukusu. Mwamba single handedly pursued the raiders and caught up with them. Being warriors themselves, they marveled at his bravery and surrendered all his cattle to him. They also gave him a bull known in Maasai language as Ingisu as a token of their respect for his bravery. By the time his kinsmen decided to pursue the Maasai, they met him driving back not only their cows but an additional bull. When he recounted the episode, his kinsmen gave him the nickname Mugisu in reference to Maasai Ingisu (2004:20).

Fred Edward Makila (1978) also narrates the same story in his **An Outline History of Babukusu in Western Kenya**. He shows how closely related the Bukusu people of Kenya are to the Bamasaba people of Uganda. This is what he says:

One day, Mwamba was looking after his father's cattle when a band of Barwaa Bamasai fell upon the herd and drove it away. Mwamba risked his own life by running around screaming and shouting for help. Neighbours who heard the alarm rushed to the scene and started a long chase after the Maasai rustlers. Mwamba ran ahead of the others and within a short time he caught up with the rustlers. On seeing him approach single handedly without flinching, the Maasai were profoundly shocked. Not only were they impressed by the boy's great speed but they were also fascinated by his characteristic mettle. Instead of killing Mwamba before other pursuers arrived, the Maasai rustlers offered to return Mwamba's cattle and furthermore gave him a handsome bull as a fitting reward for his indomitable character. "We are giving

you a beast **Ingisu.**” When he reported this to his father, he was nicknamed Mukisu (1978:122).

Fred Edward Makila also talks of the closeness between Babukusu and Bamasaba because of sharing the same blood:

Bamasaba (of Uganda) in most respects are more closely related to the Babukusu than other Luyha’s in Kenya. The two tribes share a corporate past. They have similar codes of conduct, similar marriage customs and circumcision tradition (1978:123).

Mwamba later known as Mugisu became the ancestor of the Wagisu of Uganda who later changed their name to Bamasaba preferring to be named after the father of Mwamba: Masaba. Mukisu and Mubukusu later migrated to Sengeli. These two quarrelled and Mubukusu took his children to Lawalwo which was a plain located at the foot of Mt Elgon. After Lelekwe, the Babukusu, under the leadership of Silikwa later migrated eastwards and settled in the area which is now called Uasin Gishu. They named it Silikwa. During their sojourn in Silikwa, the Bukusu intermarried with plain and highland Nilotes.

Owing to many tribal wars the Babukusu left Silikwa and moved to Namanjalala. Again, owing to frequent skirmishes with the Kalenjin the Bukusu moved to the Western slopes of Mt Elgon. Later, they wandered through the shores of Lake Victoria via Tororo and by the time the British were coming to western Kenya around 1850, the Babukusu had occupied most of Bungoma and parts of Busia as well as Western Kakamega County.

### **1.1.2 Clothing**

Historically boys went about naked until they got circumcised. Once a boy was circumcised, he shed off attributes of childhood. Three days after the rites a boy dressed in **kamatasi** – skin cloth. After healing and getting initiated into adulthood, he was given a short cloak fashioned from a goat's skin or a calf's skin slit in the sides called **lulware**.

**Lulware** would be worn by an adult if he was poor. For a man to show that he was mature, independent and had ample wealth, he wore a cloak made from an average sized cowhide known as **likutu**. It was not slit on the side but tanned.

### **1.1.3 Food**

Staple dishes were made from millet, cassava, bananas, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, yams and arrowroots. Flour for ugali would be from elusine millet, cassava and dry bananas. In case of famine, green millet would be boiled. Grinding of cereals was done on a large grinding stone. Subsidiary dishes included pulses and green vegetables with the general word for relish being **clinyeyi**. This included **escala**, **namasaka**, **lifafwa**, **khafululu** and **maokoe**. Edible mushrooms were either cooked fresh or dried in the sun and preserved for future cooking.

Cattle were the most valued of all the domesticated animals and were slaughtered on special occasions such as circumcision, weddings and for other ritual sacrifices. Beef was basically roasted, cooked or dried up. Milk was drunk fresh especially by small children and it would be mixed with green traditional vegetables. Grown up people drank some milk too. **Kamalasile** – cattle blood,

was sometimes drunk fresh by men. In other occasions, it would be mixed with traditional salt and milk. This mixture could be stirred until a thick cake was formed. This could be eaten as a full meal.

Goats and sheep were used in ritual sacrifices. Sheep topped the list of sacrificial animals. Every home kept poultry. Chicken relish was common for visiting relatives and friends. Maternal uncles would present chicken to nephews and nieces who visited them.

#### **1.1.4 Socio-Economic Pattern**

Bukusu community is basically egalitarian. There is a code of conduct whose objective is to foster discipline, goodwill and learning within the family and amongst the ethnic group. Kinship relationship fosters goodwill amongst people. Most important, however, is the clan relationship in Bukusuland. Each member of the Bukusu exists in a clan. The circumcision age mates also refer to each other as **Bakoki**.

#### **1.1.5 Religious Beliefs**

Although many Bukusus have embraced foreign faiths such as Christianity and Islam, there are many adherents to traditional religious beliefs. These traditional beliefs and practices pervade the initiation rites and normally come to the fore during the initiation season.

The Bukusus believe in one God and this was even before the coming of Christianity during colonisation. The Bukusu god was viewed as the almighty and

creator of all things: giver, omnipotent and good. The god was called Were – this Supreme Being and creator of the world and all things in it. The divine trinity was headed by **Khakaba** and below him were messenger gods **Barumwa**, **Mukhobe** and **Malaba**.

According to historian Makila in his manuscript **The Significance of Chetambe Fort in Bukusu History** (1982), **Khakaba** was the creator and the maintainer of all forces that were good to man. After creating human beings, Were retained control over their welfare including the power to make them prosper or die. He gave out life and sent death. He also ensured that whatever they imagined was in the best interest of their subjects and whatever they uttered was most pleasing.

**Mukhoba** on the other hand was a guardian of rules. He guided their wisdom and speech. **Malaba** in the Bukusu was a guardian of human beings and animals. He looked after the welfare of people and their livestock. After creating human beings, Were retained control over their welfare. He gave out life and death. He also apportioned to each person wealth or poverty.

**Mukhobe** was **Orumumwa** we **Babami** – guardian of rulers who gave them wisdom and speech and ensured that whatever they imagined was in the best interest of their subjects.

**Malaba** was **Omwayi** we **Babandu** – guardian of all human beings and animals. He looked after the welfare of the people and their stock.

Intertwined with the above divine hierarchy is the cult of the ancestral spirits. The

Bukusu believed that in the spirit world, Were would influence the conduct of the departed ancestors.

A person prayed in the morning to welcome the day. Travellers prayed for safe journey. Hunters did the same for successful hunting trips. Prayer was said for the sick. God's blessings were sought out on all important occasions making a turning point in a person's life: at birth and in circumcision for a successful operation, at initiation when imparting rules of adulthood and at marriage and death. God's blessings were also sought when sowing and reaping. Special thanks were again given to God when a harvest was successful. The Babukusu also prayed when building a new hut. This is to say that before and after the coming of the white man, the Bukusu were and are still a very religious people.

Were lived in **Lukongo**. This could be a mountain peak like Mt. Elgon. Sometimes a religious shrine was erected in homesteads. On special occasions, there would be communal gathering on the shrine where an animal would be slaughtered. This was called **Namarima**. Every family head would erect **Namarima**.

#### **1.1.6 Imbalu – Initiation Rite**

Circumcision marks the end of childhood and is an introduction to manhood in moral behaviour and responsibility as well as exposing the child to traditional education. As Malika says:

Such symbolic maturity is preceded, accompanied and followed by a lot of tuition in all areas of life including sex education. Boys who delayed getting circumcised were jeered and ridiculed by the public especially by their own age mates who were circumcised as well as by girls who would readily snub their proposal for courtship (1982:122).

Makila emphasises the impact that this rite has on the initiate and the society as a whole. This ritual drama by its nature causes change in the individuals and has impact on the community. This initiation enables a child to personally enter adulthood physically, socially and spiritually and become a full member of the community. John Mbiti explains it this way: “What affects the initiate affects corporately the parents, the relatives, the neighbours and the living dead.” (1969:121).

It is important to remember that initiation is one of the most important rituals meant to produce able-bodied youth force, labour, military and leadership. Some of the initiates can become entertainers, dancers or storytellers. Initiation also cultivates solidarity among the youth – solidarity that could be essential in the protection of the society.

To get admission into the adult world, an adolescent has to pass through a series of initiation ordeals. This admission ensures that the initiate is in a position to share full privileges, duties and responsibilities of the adult world. He is ritually introduced to the communal living. Most learning takes place during the period of seclusion when the initiates are convalescing. They would normally be kept away

from the people and during this time, they would learn secrets of the society and other matters that would help them to be productive members of the community. In other words, after seclusion when the initiates rejoin their relatives, they have new personalities as they have lost their childhood. They have been introduced to adulthood and are prepared for matters of procreation and other types of education. Mbiti continues to say:

Initiation rites have greater educational purpose. The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which otherwise would not be accessible to those who have not been initiated (1969:122).

What is important regarding this ritual is that it is a perfect African education. As Walter Rodney says:

Formal education which is relevant to Africans had close link with their social life, both in material and spiritual sense and produces a well rounded personality to fit in that African society. It had a formal teaching programme (1989:23).

Initiation is a process of education in which circumcision is only an aspect. Before circumcision, a teaching programme is arranged and after the 'cutting', the initiates are sometimes secluded from society during which time they are taught. This is a crucial aspect of education. It is relevant and has close link to social life in material and spiritual sense and it is collective in nature and conforms to the successive stages of the physical development of the child. This reconciles with Sifuna's definition that education is:

A process by which a generation transmits its culture to a succeeding generation. Or better still, as a process which people are prepared to live effectively and efficiently in their environment. (1990:3).

Like Rodney (1989), Sifuna (1990) confirms that there is an effective African traditional education which is tangible, definite and intelligible. It is essentially an education for living with the main aim of preparing the youth for adult life. It is an education intertwined with social life and meant to socialise the young into norms and beliefs of the wider society. Sifuna (1990) still confirms that it is an education that places emphasis on the learning of practical skills and the acquisition of knowledge which is useful to the individual and the society as a whole. This education emphasises social responsibilities, job orientation, political participation and spiritual moral values.

**Imbalu** is held during even years with preparations lasting between May and July. The actual operation takes place in the month of August. To reinforce the resolve of the candidate during this time, everything is done to humiliate him like dressing him clumsily and jeering him through with songs. Once a date has been fixed, the candidate invites the paternal and maternal relatives, friends and neighbours to turn up for the occasion.

### **1.1.7 History of Bukusu Circumcision**

According to research conducted in Bungoma by Makila (1982), the history of circumcision in Bukusuland is shrouded in myth. To begin with, there were about eight circumcision clusters or age sets – **Chimbara**. These are: **Kalongo, Kikwameti, Kananachi, Kimikeu, Maina, Nyange, Sawa and Chuma**.

An age set was usually named after an event or a famous person. Age sets were in pairs and a man belonged to a particular age set throughout his life. An interview with Richard Wafula revealed that members of an age set (**Bakoki**) enjoyed comradeship relations which were accompanied by behavioural rules, rites and reciprocal privileges. The relationship was so emotionally elevated that marriage to an age mate's daughter was forbidden. He also indicated that each of these clusters lasted for six years except **chuma** that lasted for eight years. People who belonged to one cluster enjoyed greater degree of intimacy between them and they favoured each other in the customary distribution of **Lubaka** (cluster meat). This relationship was so important that marriage was forbidden within the cluster.

Circumcision clusters served as means of reckoning and maintaining security in social, legal and ritual matters. To complete a lifecycle of forty-eight age sets, it took about ninety-six years by which time it was expected that the surviving member of an age cluster would have died of old age.

Further interview with Alfred Wasolo, an elder in Bungoma, testified that: Circumcision clusters which could have started at around 1804 are attributed to the Saboats of Mt Elgon with whom the Bukusu started interacting with around 1800. Mango, ancestral father of the Bukusu and a very courageous Bukusu lived among the Saboats. Then one day a very big venomous snake called **Yaveve** bit his two children. When they died, Mango was extremely angry and he decided to kill the serpent. He took his sword and went to the snake's cave and hid himself in

a corner. As the snake came out, Mango cut off the serpent's head which hit the nearest tree. It got stuck there and the tree dried. To finish off his work, Mango went ahead and cut the coils of the snake.

He came out running and ululating and in recognition of his courage, the Saboats gave him a bride but he couldn't take her if he was uncircumcised. They advised Mango to get circumcised in order to get the bride. That was how the first Bukusu got circumcised. A song was then composed signifying the courage of Mango and the snake that Mango killed. It is a song that to this day gives courage to those who are facing circumcision. It is called **Sioyaye** (See Appendix 3, p.146). It is a song that refers to both the snake and the circumciser.

**Sioyaye** prepares one for the ultimate challenges that he will meet in life. It refers to both the snake and the circumciser waiting to circumcise. Since then, the circumcision of the Bukusu has been associated with courage. To be circumcised, one had to be courageous in carrying out duties and responsibilities as an adult and has to overwhelmingly be brave during wars which in the 18th century were numerous.

### **1.1.8 The Process of Initiation**

Before a child is circumcised, at the age of between fourteen and eighteen years old, he is asked if he is ready for circumcision because he is not supposed to show signs of fear during the "cutting" of **omkhebi**, the foreskin. If the initiate to be is ready, then he makes his own bells, **chifufu**. He then procures **virere**, rounded

bracelets like metal that he uses to play the bells. Bells are played in certain rhythm depending on the songs that are being sung. Uncles of the would-be initiate are informed about the impending ritual which involves all the paternal and maternal relatives.

### **1.1.9 Tiriki Initiation Ceremony**

Almost all the Luhya subtribes in Western Kenya practice initiation. The other subtribe with as vigorous ceremony as the Bukusus are the Tiriki people. The Tiriki's border the Nandis and it is said that the Tirikis could have borrowed initiation practice from the Kalenjin in the same way that the Bukusus got their practice from the Sabaoths. Even the word Tiriki is a Kalenjin word known as Terik. While the Bukusu circumcise during even years the Tirikis hold their initiation ceremony after every five years. The actual dates of circumcision are decided a selected Tiriki leader among the elders.

Preparation for circumcision is not as intensive as the Bukusus. Once the father has made a decision for his son who is about seven or eight years to be circumcised the first encounter is when the initiates are joined by old boys in the forest in a ceremony known as Chisulu. The following day the initiates are circumcised. As soon as this is done they wear masks-Ingolole to hide their identity during the village dance. After the dance the initiates are taken to an identified single house where again they are accompanied by older boys. They are taught how to remove childishness. In the morning during the first week of healing they wash in the river. After two weeks the initiates go out to dance for

the village. At this time the initiates are trained on how to behave as adults. The values of the Tiriki people are inculcated in the youth. After a month's stay away from home khwalukha ceremony is held when the initiates are escorted to their homes.



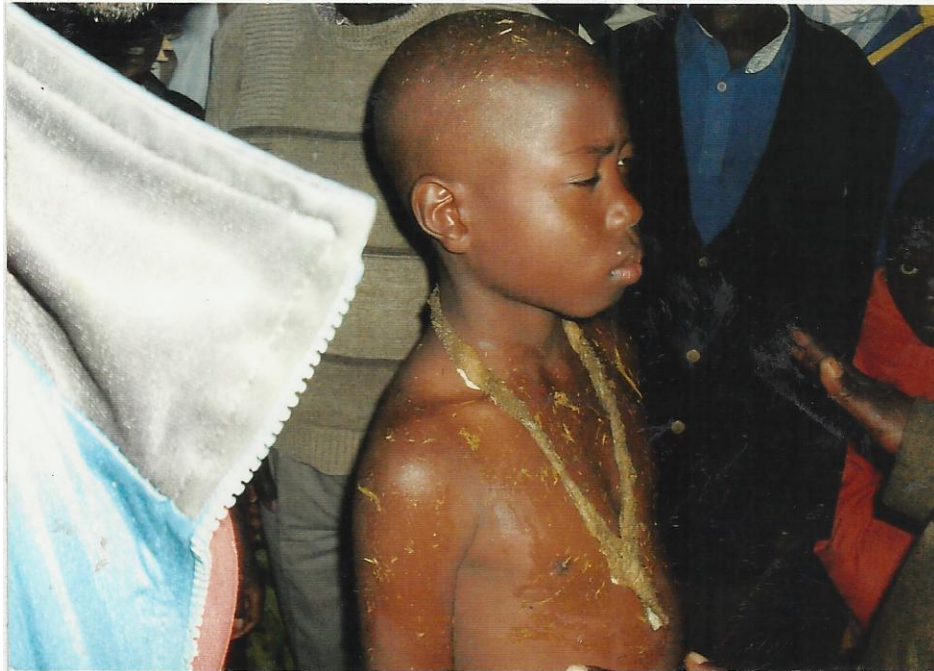
**Picture 1. Candidate wearing chifufu and virere**



**Picture 2. Visit to the maternal uncle's place. The candidate dances to and from the home**

As early as May, the initiate practises with playing the bells. The actual circumcision is done in August because that is the harvest time when there is plenty of food and drink. It is in May that initiates are given a guide to test their courage and it is when they visit all the relatives. It is also a period when among the uncles one is chosen to provide and slaughter a bull for the candidate. Three days to the circumcision the candidate brews his own beer in a ceremony called **hujuhira**. This beer will be used by the candidate's circumciser when the candidate is being educated into ways of adulthood. From this ceremony, the candidate goes to the maternal uncle who will be ready with a bull. The lower part of the slaughtered bull, towards the testicles will be put on the neck of the candidate – **luriki**. This indicates that the uncle values his nephew who is now fit

to be a man. The meat is then carried to the home of the father of the candidate. When they arrive at the home, all invited people are assembled and they sing around the boy. They sing songs with teachings, songs about current issues. Like in 1940s during the Second World War, they sang about pushing away the Italians – **Mpambile Omutali**.



**Picture 3. The entrails (Lisombo) of the ox are put around the candidate's neck**

Sometimes they sang against incest. Other songs included sex education, fatherhood and motherhood. After singing, the meat around the neck of the candidate is removed to get rid of **isola** and another bull called **lisombo** has to be slaughtered by the father. This time round, entrails of the ox are put on the candidate's neck. The next song that accompanies this is – **musinde wee**. Singing

and dancing continue up to 3 AM while the elders are drinking. Before the candidate sets for the river, he is forced to eat half cooked meat. It is important to note that the route used to the river is not the same as the one used from the river. There is the swampy section of the river which does not dry. It is kept forested. People respect this grove and they do not tamper with it. No grass is cut from it and the environment preserved – **sitosi**.



**Picture 4. The candidate being counselled by his grandfather**



**Picture 5. Lisombo is hung around the candidate's neck**



**Picture 6. Half-cooked meat is prepared for the candidate**



**Picture 7. The initiate is served with half-cooked meat**

It is at this grove that the mudding of the candidate takes place. The candidate dips himself in cold water and then is mudded with – **silongo**, on the whole body from head to toe. He is mudded by the one who showed exemplary courage during his own circumcision. From the river, **Sioyaye** is sung. The mudded initiate will walk back to the homestead at a quick pace but not to run because it is a taboo to fall down.

At home, the circumciser checks the foreskin if it can be pushed back. (See DVD Video clip). Then the aunt makes jokes with the candidate to ward off **Binaningo** (evil spirit). The aunt must have her face blackened with soil. Her presence is to make the candidate wealthy and generous and that he may brew and invite a host of friends. The boy is also supposed to stop behaving as a child. Her presence is supposed to show that the boy would marry a woman like herself and produce a

child. Then third, the father meets the candidate, faces west and the “cutting” takes place.



**Picture 8. The circumciser checks the foreskin just before circumcision**

During the operation women are kept away – the father, the paternal and maternal uncles stare at the operation. As soon the foreskin is cut off, the father and uncles will shout. After the “cut”, a whistle is blown to indicate a successful operation.



**Picture 9. *After the operation.* (See DVD Video clip)**

The celebrations begin. A small chair is brought for the initiate to sit on. But if he thinks he has been mishandled, he can refuse to sit on it. For him to sit, the father must give him an animal. Then the grandmother comes to wash the blood and carry away the foreskin and afterwards the initiate walks into a prescribed hut backwards in. The crowd will dance around the boy in jubilation and friends and relatives would celebrate and give presents.



**Picture 10. The initiate is garlanded after circumcision**



**Picture 11. Gifts from relatives**



**Picture 12. More gifts from relatives and friends**

What then does the circumciser do? The circumciser gives education to the child in the presence of the father and mother as we shall see in Chapter Four. He is told that he is a man and he should “not enter into a closed door.” That is, he should not sleep with a married woman. He can however, enter an open door – sleep with a single woman. He is further told to respect all people – youth and elders, fathers and mothers. He is assured that he will be rich and have children.

Ideally, this seclusion takes four months during which the initiate does not wash. His body is covered in mud – **silongo**. **Silongo** is the mud with which the candidate is covered at the river in the morning of circumcision. After healing, the initiate goes to the river at dawn and washes his body. He then wears new clothes and eats chicken.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This study would like to use the term **Edurama** which considers a performance that is education and drama simultaneously. There is need to establish that African drama exists in the Bukusu initiation ceremony and that it is also a learning process. Although there were many contexts in which African drama existed, the focus of this study is to investigate the drama that prevailed in the Bukusu initiation ceremony and the African features therein.

This study looks at performances that are not restricted to time or space but which operate in the open. We are looking at performances that have no distinction between the actors and the spectators and are without scripts. This study will further view initiation as a ritual and as drama within the African context and in addition see it as learning process through which all young people must go through. The investigation was to find out if the circumcision ritual among the Bukusu people can be interpreted as African drama and is in itself entertainment as well as education.

## **1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to view **Imbalu** as edurama: A case study of initiation ceremony among the Bukusu in Western Kenya.

The specific objectives are:

- i. To determine whether or not African drama existed in Bukusu land before 19<sup>th</sup> century and if that drama still exists within the Bukusu initiation ceremony,

- ii. To explore and determine the dynamics and conduct of the Bukusu **Imbalu**,
- iii. To determine the nature of edurama in Bukusu initiation ceremony,

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

- i. What is African drama and to what extent did it exist in the Bukusu **Imbalu**?
- ii. To what extent is edurama present in the Bukusu **Imbalu**?
- iii. What is the nature of edurama within the Bukusu **Imbalu**?

#### **1.5 Research Assumptions**

- i. Most of the **Imbalu** initiation activities are dramatic from the African perspective.
- ii. **Imbalu** initiation activities are highly educative and dramatic.
- iii. The eduramatic elements in the **Imbalu** ceremony reflect change, continuity and transformation

#### **1.6 Justification of the Study**

Study of indigenous African drama poses problems. For example, Anthony Graham-White (1974) speaks of the origins of drama in Africa but deals with colonial “drama seeking independence.” (89–116). His concentration is on West African drama, especially the Yoruba. David Kerr (1995) talks of pre-colonial theatre but concentrates on the African Popular Theatre that existed in West Africa before colonialism. His concentration is in Banama of Mali, the masquerades of the Afikpo people and the Egugun of Yoruba in Nigeria. He

further highlights theatre for development in Zambia. This study is also justified in the sense that it seeks to establish that concrete drama with unique African features and forms existed in Imbula East Africa before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It analyses the existence of that drama within the rite of passage of circumcision referred to as ritual drama and looks at initiation ceremonies as education.

### **1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

Ideally, this study is about African drama in education. It is to prove that drama existed in Africa before the advent of colonisation which brought with it Western art forms. There are examples of African drama in many African ritual practices. Although many African communities carry out circumcision ceremonies periodically, this study however restricts itself to the Bukusu community. Carried out during even years, the Bukus have an elaborate system which is vigorous and very visible. It takes place in the month of August and involves the entire community and nearly all the relatives of the initiates are involved. Since circumcision is home-based, the whole of Bukusuland is involved in the practice at the same time and period.

There are limitations. Initially, it takes place only once in two years. It is difficult to find circumcision ceremonies during odd years. In addition, there is the language barrier between the researcher and the Bukusu. The rural Bukusu tend to speak Lubukusu and only a few speak Kiswahili or English. This forced the principal researcher to take three research assistants who were Bukusu and had grown up in Bukusuland. Already one of the circumcisers we had identified spoke

fluent English. The other problem is the spread of Christianity in Bukusuland. The Christian faith has tended to water down the various aspects of traditional culture. But while Bukusus accept Christianity, they practise circumcision traditionally.

### **1.8 Methodology**

The choice of the Bukusu initiation ceremony was based on the fact that it is the most vigorous initiation ceremony in Kenya. Field research was carried out between July and August 2010 as these are the months when circumcision takes place in Bukusuland. The research was carried out in Sibamba Bungoma and where we had identified one surgeon, Wasolo, and initiates were also identified and, along with elders, they were interviewed before, during and after the initiation ceremony.

The selected elders provided information as to the social and historical background in general and initiation in particular. Others interviewed were the fathers of the initiates. The whole process was recorded on video tape and still camera which helped later in analyzing the results.

This work consists of five chapters. The first of which sets out the pattern and the goals of the study. The second deals with the origin and characteristics of traditional drama. The third chapter reviews the edu-dramatic elements of **Imbalu**. The fourth chapter deals with dynamics and conduct of the Bukusu **Imbalu**. The fifth chapter deals with interpretation, conclusion and recommendations.

It is important to note that besides fieldwork, library search was also carried out. Prior to fieldwork, a pilot study aimed at acquainting ourselves with the environment and the local elders was conducted.

### **1.9 Study Population and Sample**

This study targeted the Bukusu initiates who were to be circumcised in August, 2010. Only one circumcision ceremony was observed through all its stages. We chose to do this and record only one ceremony closely because the stages involved are the same. Therefore, observing several ceremonies would have been redundant. Four circumcision surgeons in Bungoma were interviewed and the work of one of them observed during the period of circumcision. Nine local elders provided information especially pertaining to the learning process entailed in the Bukusu initiation. Eight parents were approached as were nine initiates circumcised elsewhere.

### **1.10 Research Design**

Qualitative method of research was used. This enabled the researcher to observe and to participate in the circumcision process and to be involved in the entire process between 4th August and 6th August, 2010. This started with a visit to the maternal uncles, to the day of circumcision including trip to the river for mudding. Involvement ended when the candidate was 'cut' and left to heal. The songs were analysed for their educative purpose and the practice was from a dramatic point of view.

There was a questionnaire that had been worked out to get information from initiates, the parents and leaders (See Appendix 8 p.154). With the help of the research assistants the questionnaire was administered to twenty people in Bungoma during the period of initiation. Those given questionnaires were young people who had been circumcised recently but were of aged between 15 and 20 years, the elders, parents and some circumcisers. For some respondents it was necessary to give interviews rather than administer the questionnaire especially to colleagues at University of Nairobi who come from Bungoma and some selected elders. Five lecturers and experts in the area were interviewed. (See appendix 10 page 164). Most of these lecturers come from Bungoma and have all gone through the initiation and are conversant with the process of **Imbalu**. A tape recorder, video camera and still camera for photos were used to collect further information.

### **1.11 Data Collection**

The researcher used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from the field using questionnaires and interviews and entailed tape and video recordings as well as photographs. This recording helped the researcher to cross check while analysing a final report. During the primary data collection, views and ideas were obtained especially from five learned respondents who had been circumcised many years ago. We opted for these people because they are some of the prominent Bukusu who are in touch with the Bukusu cultural trends and history. Secondary data were obtained from relevant reports, websites, journals, newspapers as well as books in libraries especially post-modern library,

Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi, Margaret Thatcher library, Moi University and Deens office school of Arts and Social Sciences, Kenya Bureau of Statistics and the Kenya National Theatre. This was done towards the end of the project after observing the process of initiation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Literature Review

The coming of the Western civilisation into Africa saw the drastic disappearance of meaningful African traditional and indigenous ways of life. Bukusuland was not an exception. Imposition of Western values through Western education, administration and religion was done as if there existed a cultural vacuum in Africa. The assumption of the colonialists was that the 'primitive Africans' had no culture of their own and therefore, had no civilisation.

The colonisers did not realise that indigenous African education was closely linked to the African social life and was more concerned with the progressive development of the African youth. They did not know that precolonial education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society. Western drama which began with Greek civilisation (850 BC - 45 BC) with dramatists like Aeschylus and Sophocles was spread all over Europe during the Roman Empire (27 BC – 476 AD). As Rome conquered the rest of Europe, so did they supplant the dramatic conventions of the Greeks in places like England, France, Italy, Germany and Russia.

When the Romans discovered drama in Greece, they imported it to Rome and made it their own. The well-known artists during the Roman Empire were, Plautus, Terence and Seneca who operated within the Greek dramatic

conventions. It is, therefore, these conventions that the Europeans brought to the colonies when they colonised Africa. Through the church, schools and administration, colonialism instilled the notion that theatre did not exist in Africa and that all theatre had to be performed on a stage.

Denial of African drama was closely related to the denial of African literature. At the advent of colonialism in Africa, there was the belief that African literature had to be written. Oral Literature was for instance not studied in Kenyan schools until 1982 because it was not considered as literature.

It took an Englishman living in the United States, Anthony Graham-White (1974), to recognise in the 1960s that in Africa there was the unwritten drama – oral drama, which he baptized as traditional drama. In his **The Drama of Black Africa** (1978) he recognised three types of drama: traditional drama, popular drama and literary drama. All these had existed in West Africa before the imposition of Western drama in Africa.

Traditional drama was performed before colonialism and is still being performed throughout Africa. It is not written down. It is in vernacular and basically based upon the social organisation of the village. It was and is the drama that is a celebration of song and dance. Popular drama on the other hand was unwritten but aimed at an unsophisticated mass audience. Unlike traditional drama, these performances relied on improvisation. The language used was African and the spectator was free to connect freely and join in song and dance.

As Ngugi (1981) says in his **Decolonizing The Mind**:

Drama in the pre-colonial Kenya was not then an isolated event, it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasoned life of the community. It was an activity among other activities; it was entertainment...; it was moral instruction; and it was also a strict matter of life and death and communal survival (1981:37).

It is important to note that David Kerr, like Graham-White, wrote the **African Popular Theatre** (1995). He concentrated his study on African drama in Nigeria which for him was more prominent in both traditional and literary drama. The two had a liking of western African drama as opposed to Eastern Africa because West Africa was the first part of Africa to come into contact with European colonialism and most of the ancient empires and kingdoms like Ghana and Mali existed in there. East Africa was totally neglected by many scholars giving the impression that no drama existed in the region. Both Graham-White and Kerr tabulate the history of popular theatre in Africa from the 14th century to the present. In this way, they have considered various types of drama that existed before colonisation. Kerr also attempts to define African drama as “a display of actions to an audience in which there is an element of story or suspense and ritual as an action which is undertaken to give homage and obtain assistance from or in some way intercede with supernatural forces.” (1995).

A book worth considering in this study is myth, literature and the African world by Wole Soyinka. In this Soyinka analyses the interconnecting worlds of myth ritual and literature in Africa. “The ways in which the African world perceives

itself as a cultural entity and the differences between its essential unity of experiences and literacy form". The book gives prominence to the centrality of ritual in African life.

The confusion surrounding the existence of drama before the white man arrived in East Africa may have been ignited by David Hume (1826), a renowned philosopher, who in the 19th century did not believe that anything dramatic would come from Africa. He wrote:

I am apt to suspect the Negro to be naturally inferior to the white. There scarcely ever was a civilised nation of that complexion nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers among them, no arts and no science (1826:236).

For Hume, the African had no actors or spectators, hence no oral drama. Havemayer (1919) says this in his book, "compounds the west's ignorance on African drama by claiming that the African people's initiation ceremonies, "were dramatic because the languages were so limited that to convey their ideas, they had to resort to acting." (1919:25). **The Drama of the Savage People** (1919).

It is also a pity that as recently as 1932, the British Drama League that had not quite accepted the existence of drama in Africa resolved that:

No drama as such was so far known to exist among the raw natives... ritual drama as a deliberate approach to the unseen had not been found. **Native African Drama Journal** (1932:29).

Most of the stipulations by Hume, Havemayer and British Drama League are racist. They denied all black people's ability to invent and to perform drama but

above all, there was the belief that the black man was inferior to the white man, and could not, therefore, have anything close to drama.

In Basil Davidson (1984), a leading historian and author of great repute, said that Hume's contention was a result of misunderstanding, prejudice and misconception which was derived from Western culture of slavery and slave trade. He observes that:

A culture that knew black people for most part, only as the degraded objects of captive labour; a culture besides which requires for the good of society that black people should remain enslaved (1984:16).

All this is an indication of some ignorance of the African situation in Africa in the 19th century. All these researchers can be challenged because the early European development which started with Greek civilisation was based on Egyptian civilization (3500 BC – 1500 BC). Second, to be considered is the Ethiopian Empire of literate Amharic people through whom the Queen of Sheba had contacts with the Biblical King Solomon. Third, there was western Sudan where the sophisticated and educated Mandingo people lived centuries before the white men ever set foot on African soil.

A major fallacy was to do with the comparison of two totally different cultures opposed to one another. Colonialism neglected the special features of African culture. For instance, what parameters would one use to compare the Luo 'ohangala' with the English opera or the Luyha 'isukuti' with the German waltz? In any case, Africans were regarded by the Western world as culturally inferior

and their traditional practices were considered basic. Why had traditional drama gone unrecognised? This was because the Europeans who colonised Africa used conventions of scripted plays performed on the proscenium stage to judge African drama.

What these Western scholars were looking for were forms of western drama in Africa. Yet African indigenous drama had specific qualities which Western drama did not have – unique features that colonialism destroyed. Features that had to be fought, as Ngugi wa Thiongo would say in his **Decolonising the Mind**, “before the bible could hold sway in the hearts of the natives.” (1981:37) and Peninah Mlamba Muhando (1983:13) noted that, “the colonial ruler refused to address itself to the realities of the overall socio-economic conditions of Africa”. Robert Semaruga had earlier noted this in 1970 when he reminded us that:

The saddest thing about theatrical development in Africa has been the fact that theatre of Europe came to Africa and established itself in complete ignorance of and indifference to indigenous traditions. It did not superimpose itself onto traditions but rather led an isolated existence related only to the needs of the few who fell within its ambit. **Uganda Experimental Theatre – African Arts** (1970:52).

In terms of initiation, Wotsuna Khamalwa (2004) has written on the **Imbalu Initiation Among the Bamasaba in Uganda**. It deals with labyrinths of ritual and the identity, power and culture through **Imbalu**. Fredrick Edward Makila on the other hand attempts the history of the Bukusu in his **An Outline History of**

**the Babukusu** (1978). It is the only book on the history of the Babukusu people that is currently available. Makila also has another unpublished manuscript, **The Significance of Chetambe Fort in Bukusu History** (1982), which handles the social life of the Bukusu and their initiation practices.

Arnold Gennepe in his **Rites of Passage** (1919) gives comprehensive review of the various rites of passage that exist in Africa. He tackles these extensively from birth to death. However, he fails short of examining the drama that exists in them and the education that emanates from them.

In his **Development of Education in Africa** (1990), Daniel Sifuna speaks of African indigenous education as declining and being replaced by the Western education. He gives the goals and the philosophical foundation of pre-historical education and sets out the curriculum and methods of instruction that existed in traditional African society. According to him traditional, drama is:

That which was performed before the colonial era and which in many cases still is being performed. It is of course in vernacular, is not written down and is typically based on social organisation of the village, casually performed by a special society or age group often at a festival of some kind (Sifuna, 1990:3).

Walter Rodney in his **How Europe Underdeveloped Africa** (1972) on the other hand, deals with the negative consequences of colonisation in Africa but discusses initiation as the formal education in Africa before the coming of the white man to Africa. He argues that there was a formidable type of education which was related to the African environment and suited the conditions of the continent. He

considers the following features of African education as crucial:

Its close link with social life both material and spiritual sense; its collective nature; its many sidedness and its progressive development in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child (1989:239).

Jomo Kenyatta in his book **Facing Mount Kenya** (1938) has dealt with the crucial aspects of Kikuyu culture including initiation and education. Although he does refer to initiation as the traditional school for the Kikuyu, he neither relates education to drama nor does he look at Itueka as drama. This is one of the loopholes the study intends to fulfill. This initiation has enormous educational, social, moral and religious implications.

In J.P Ocitti's **African Indigenous Education** (1938), there is a great deal of concern with traditional education among the Acholi people in Uganda. He tackles learning through playing and working and through oral literature and ceremonies. Since Acholi people do not circumcise, his approach excludes the learning that takes place through initiation. He does, however, conclude by saying:

Any system of education whether simple or sophisticated is firmly based on some kind of philosophical foundation and the Acholi traditional education is no exception. One way of understanding how the Acholi brought up their children the way they did is by examining their outlook on life. What people do depends on, what they are and how they largely depends on their beliefs – their genuine beliefs of themselves and of the universe in which they live. It is largely true that what we think and believe and feel determine the way we act (1973:91).

The Bukusu conduct their initiation the way they do because of their beliefs and hence the ceremony determines their world-view. Kratz Connie, in his **Affecting Performance** (1994), deals with meaning, movement and experience in Okiek's women initiation in Rift Valley. His problem concerns ritual efficiency and how ceremonial performance and participation effectively transform the children.

**The African Child** (1959), by Camara Laye is an autobiographical novel that tackles the transition into manhood by the Malinke tribe of Guinea in West Africa. It deals with initiation process from Konden Diara, prelude to initiation, through circumcision to the time that the African child becomes a man. Camara Laye brings out an important aspect of African drama which is to do with non-existent stage or spectators performing and also the sense of this timelessness. Performances went for hours and hours and only stopped when performers were tired. In any case, another set of performers would take over and the performance would continue. Performance took place in any empty space and might move on the road from village to village, river to river or from ridge to ridge.

That year I danced for a whole week in the main square of Kourousses. We would dance until we were out of breath; but we were not the only ones dancing. The whole town would dance with us. Soon those who were spectators would be dancing too. They would crowd in the open space and would take intimate part in our revels outdoing us in frenzy – men and women. Each day we had to dance more for we were dancing and the whole town was dancing, in the afternoon and by torchlight in the evening and on the eve of the ordeal – the town danced all day and night (1959:93).

Laye is giving a description of what was happening on the eve of his circumcision. He does emphasise the lack of distinction between the spectators and the actors and how the non-initiates would join the initiates in dancing which would last a whole day and night. This timelessness and the lack of separation between the performers and the spectators is a crucial aspect of African drama.

In his **African Religion and Philosophy** (1994), John Mbiti talks extensively about four rites of passage. He tackles initiation and puberty rites especially among the Kamba and Maasai. That a child must grow out of childhood and enter into adulthood physically, socially and religiously. He says:

The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated. It is a period of awakening of many things, a period of dawn to the young (1994:122).

Mellitus Nyongesa Wanyama (2005) and Egesah Omar Badiru based in Moi University are perhaps the only two scholars to date to have carried out empirical research on circumcision in Bukusuland. Wanyama, a musician was more concerned with the shift in form and content in the performance of circumcision music. In his thesis: **Form and Content of African Music: A Case of Bukusu Circumcision Music** (2005), Wanyama states that:

Bukusu circumcision music is deeply rooted in myths, taboos and beliefs that form the basic philosophical foundations of the Bukusu cultural fabric and hence its contextual specific context – utilitarian nature. Textual repetitions serve the purpose of emphasising the messages imbedded in

the songs. Bukusu circumcision rite is just a mere cutting of the foreskin of the initiate's penis. There are various virtues embodied in the form, content and performance of the music that accompanies it. (2005:61)

Egesah Omar Badiru on the other hand working under the department of anthropology set out to understand why clinical male circumcision was gradually gaining acceptance amongst the Bukusu people.

In his thesis: **Male Circumcision Among the Babukusu of Kenya: Emerging Parttens** (2008), Egesah found that:

There has been introduction and gradual acceptance of clinical circumcision among the Babukusu as an alternate way of circumcising males... The gradual institutionalisation of the clinical circumcision means Babukusu are finding additional or alternative significances of male circumcision... The shift towards clinical circumcisions based on realities of life but coupled with retention of significance of traditional circumcision which is initiation to adulthood interpretes as a redefinition of male circumcision by Babukusu (2008:201).

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

Functionalism as a theory operates under the ethnological tradition. (those that deal with the (matter) contest and context of orature). Its main proponents were Bronislaw, Malinowski and Redcliff Brown. According to this approach folklore is a means through which social, cultural, and spiritual needs of a community are satisfied. According to functionalists, folklore and tradition operating within a social structure and cultural activity must of necessity have a utilitarian value for

its people. Malinowski defines “function” as “the part which (an anthropological fact) plays within the integral system of culture” and “the manner in which they are related to each other within the culture. His contemporary, Radcliff-Brown (1935-397) defines functions as “the function of any recurrent activity - the part it plays in the social life as a whole and therefore the contribution it makes to the maintenance of structural continuity. What this means is that everything a society does (e.g. tale-telling, marriage, commerce) has a practical use for its citizens and a specific place within the fabric of social norms. Such a fabric – the sum total of needs individually and collectively – is known as the functional unity of that society. Radcliff Brown sees this as constituting the harmony whereby the conflicts within the society are regulated on resolved and Malinowski thinks that it not only ensures the survival of the system, but guarantees the satisfaction of the basic needs of every citizen. Functionalism is therefore a theory which examines the peculiar network of needs within a society and the way in which this network ensures the contentment and survival of the social system – in Malinowski’s words (1944:41) “a theory of basic needs, and a deviation of instrumental and integrated imperatives” A Scientific theory Culture.

Malinowski’s research in the Trobriand Islands convinced him that cultural practices and lore reflect the great mythical generations and that they serve as sanction or charter for proper conduct because they preserve the way society has always behaved since time immemorial. Functionalists thus have a bias for preservation as contained in the concepts of “functional unity” and “charter”.

The functional integration and maintenance of society is thus a central theoretical interest at the root of functionalism. When applied to Imbalu, items of cultural identity were regarded as relevant in so far as they could be fitted in this framework. Malinowskian functionalism ignored several important facts about society.

- i. It is static, ignoring the fact of cultural change. Functionalism cannot stand its ground when applied to societies in a period of change. Malinowski insisted the Trobrianders at a point in their history – during the first world war – when they had very little contact with the outside world though we may understand a traditional society largely from the ways in which its justice outlook has survived, that survival may however be the result of adjustment to new circumstances which have imposed certain modifications on the old outlook. Social scientists who have studied such traditional societies in transition have not always corroborated Malinowski's functionalism.

It is these loopholes in Malinowski's functionalism that led to its revision by post-Malinowskian anthropologists like Edmund Leach and Raymond Firth. While they agree that the facts contained in a piece of oral literature and a people's art can give us a picture of the society from which the Literature and art comes, they have a particular sensitivity to the structural problems in the social fabric and

have thus been referred to as structural-Functionalists. The structural-functionalists are identified by a number of interests.

(i) They accept change as an inevitable dynamic of culture and (ii) they emphasise the conflict of social interests rather than on harmonization. They appreciate the fact that if we look deeply enough on the art, instead of seeing harmonization and functional unity, we shall notice tendencies towards disintegration of society. Thus, structural-functionalists have questioned the concept of functional unity.

In Social theory and social structure (Morton, 1968:81), Emile Durkheim saw the collective consciousness of a society as the semi total of all the individual interests and sensitivities held in some delicate balance.

It will be remembered that it is on this criterion that many functionalists base their model of society. According to Haralambos and Holborn:

Functionalism views society as a system: that is as a set of interconnected patterns which together form a whole. The basic unit of analysis is society and its various parts are understood primarily in terms of their relationship as a whole (2007:856).

This essentially means that the understanding of any part of society requires an analysis of its relationship to other parts and most importantly its contribution to its sustenance. Like the Bukusu, initiation cannot be looked at in isolation. It plays a big role in dictating the life of the Bukusu society. Initiation must be understood with reference to the contribution it makes to the Bukusu society and system as a whole.

Functionalism first emerged in the 19th century through a French sociologist known as Emile Durkeim. He developed the theory which was later refined by Taleott Persons – an American sociologist in the 20th century. What was developed is what is referred to in functionalism by Haralambos and Holborn as:

The various parts of the society ... seen to be interrelated and taken together they ... a complete system. To understand any part of society, the part must be seen in relation to society as a whole (2007:856).

In this way, a functionalist examines part of a society in terms of its contribution to the maintenance of the whole system. Functionalism begins with the observation that behaviour in the society is structured. This means that the relationships between members of society are organised in terms of rules or norms which stipulate how people are expected to behave. This will entail an example of the relationship between Bukusu initiation as part of the structure and its relationship to the Bukusu society as a whole. In other words, what functions would it play or what effects would it have to other parts of the Bukusu social structure?

## CHAPTER THREE

### ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN DRAMA

#### 3.0 Introduction

Guesses have been made from the ancient paintings, artifacts and hieroglyphics that indicated the importance of successful hunts, seasonal changes and lifecycles that have survived from the pre-historic period. Some early societies performed actions which moved from habit to tradition. Through constant repetition, these traditions developed into rituals. The rituals, as Campbell (1976) says, became related to the three basic concerns: “power, pleasure and duty.” This was because for a man at that early stage, there was need to have power to control and influence the environment in which he lived and to guarantee good harvest. Some rituals were practised as a duty to the gods and for glorifying the supernatural. These would also be performed for entertainment. Sometimes, certain societies had rituals that glorified supernatural powers and actions which would be presented in special costumes and masks. These were practised as a duty to the gods but also brought pleasure to those concerned. In ritual, acting roles would be done by elders and priests. In many cases, rituals became associated with myths, in which case, they developed a realm beyond themselves and acquired story-telling tradition. This connection intensified both their entertainment and aesthetic values. Later, these stories would be performed as theatre. Through this development, actors emerged with acting roles led by a priest. This was ritual drama as was practised in ancient Egypt.

In the rest of Africa, this filtered to other traditional societies and rituals became stronger and operational for generations.

### **3.1 Background of Drama in Africa**

Drama could be traced to the earliest people on earth. In the pre-historic and the Stone Age period, one sees a situation in which early men could sit around camp fires and imitate animals they hunted. This imitation was dramatic and it was thought to increase the game that they hunted and to ensure good hunting. Macgowan and Melnitz (1955:2) attribute this to imitative 'magic'. As imitation developed, man also discovered music and dance which became part of the process of imitating animals. A little later, masks were also invented and this became an essential part of animal imitation.

Over the years, drama has grown and became more elaborate as man moved beyond imitative magic. Man discovered how to use dance and music as well as masks in rituals that he hoped would bring rain and increase his crops. He invented initiation ceremonies that required dialogue. His ancestors became gods and he worshiped them with dance and song. Worship bred myth and myth had to be acted out if the human race was to live and survive.

As it was important for man to live and survive, he then developed a sense of ritual which moved away from mere imitation of animals to the acquisition and protection of crops. Man would pray for more rain to breed more crops in order to survive. Ritual ceremonies that pertain to birth, initiation, marriage and death

were invented. These ceremonies required dialogue to enable man to commune with ancestors and gods. This process of imitation, music, dance, mask, dialogue and ancestor worship became part of the ritual drama of existence.

In this way therefore, theatre could not have started with the advent of Greek civilization as claimed by the western world but earlier with the Egyptian civilization across the Mediterranean Sea. While the Egyptians did not construct special venues for their plays like the Greeks, they actually preceded the latter in public performances which were mostly pageant-like, religious in character and ritualistic. This is traced back to 2600 BC. In fact, in his, **The Histories**, Herodotus credits the beginnings of drama to the Egyptians. Born in 485 BC, he is known to be the father of history. He travelled widely over the Greek and Persian territories of the Eastern Mediterranean world. His massive histories included much of what he saw himself and found out from others. As already indicated, there is no written source of early theatre and drama. It is only Herodotus living in the classical times who provided some reliable data about the preceding century in which theatre developed as an artform. In his book **A New Translation** by David Waterfield, Herodotus is quoted as follows:

But anyway, the Egyptians were the first people in the world to hold general festive assemblies and religious processions and parades and the Greeks learnt from the Egyptians. My evidence for this suggestion is that these activities have obviously been going on in Egypt for a very long time, whereas as they have only recently started in Greece ... (1998:118).

This therefore confirms that drama existed in Africa before its advent in the western world via Greece where civilization existed as from 150 BC.

### **3.2 Imitation**

In his **Poetics**, Aristotle (translation by Wordman J.L **Philosophy of Aristotle** (1903): one of the greatest Greek thinkers lauded imitation as the basis of education but also attributed the genesis of drama to it. In his **Poetics** he says: “Imitation is natural to man from childhood.” (1903:416).

As part of this imitation, Macgowan and Melnitz (1955) describe situations in which man begins as a hunter. If he cannot spring on his prey from trees and if his prey is in the open, he will disguise himself as the animal he hunts and he will imitate the prey’s movement. This mimicry would continue when the hunter returned home and would celebrate his exploits by wearing the skin of the animal and playing both the hunter and the hunted.

Imitation became magic when man started to dance before the hunt. He did this because he believed if he imitated the animals, he wanted to kill and imitated killing them, then his prey would be plentiful and his hunt successful. Macgowan and Melnitz go on to say:

A Kaffir in Africa crawls around on all fours in a disguise that suggests the animal the tribe wants to kill. His fellows give their hunting cry and pretend to kill him with spears and the animal actor falls down as if dead. (1955:6).

This type of magic had a simple practical purpose: to control nature. Dance was inevitably a by-product of imitation. Man tried to imitate the unconscious rhythm of the animal. A little later, dance became speech and that is why most ceremonies in the early days were accompanied by dances. It is for this reason that all performers in Greek drama were dancers who sang and chanted. Indeed, before Greek drama started through Thespis, the Dionysus festivals were basically composed of singers and dancers.

### **3.3 Mask**

As already noted through Macgowan and Melnitz, the early man started drama through hunting by imitating animals (Macgowan and Melnitz, 1955:6). He would initially wear animal masks to disguise himself. The mask then symbolised a tool of expressing beauty and power. It became the most important element in ancestor worship. This worship emphasised the role that spirits played in human life. Macgowan and Melnitz state:

At an early stage man believed that everything around him was possessed by a spirit which was an 'animal' in soul ... anything that moved in the bush, the river, the smoke of a fire all had a spirit. The spirit in a tree or in a stone had more power than the spirit in man and it was harder to deal with. It could not be killed and it could shift about and take another form (1955:9).

The spirit assumed the quality of godhead. So essentially man developed masks to do business more effectively. The mask was a sort of animated fetish through which man could control the spirits. Of note here is that the ejwangwa, the nine spirits of Umaofia were masked. It is in this way that man created totemism – a

safe resting place for spirits and that is why man would adopt the “Indomitable Lions” (Cameroon football team), the gigantic “Elephants” (Ivory Coast national team) or the Ingwe (Abaluhya football club) to enable the team to win. As long as the animal lived, the people who took it as a totem would be safe and would win. Man imitated his totem and danced in masks that he curved in the animal’s image.

### **3.4 Ritual Drama**

There are as many definitions of ritual drama as there are theorists and anthropologists. It starts with Van Gennep, who in his **Rites of Passage** (1909) defined them as “rites which accompany every change of place, state, social pattern and age”. As in **Imbalu** which changes the status of the initiate, other rites that fall within these practices are birth, puberty and death. It is this definition of Van Gennep (1909) that influenced Victor Turner (1953) to give a definition of what ritual would actually be:

Prescribed formal behaviour for occasion not given over to technical routine (but) having reference to beliefs, and mystical beings and powers. (1953).

In this way; rituals, religious beliefs and symbols are in Turner's perspective, related. Working amongst the Ndembu people in Zambia, Turner even went further to say that the importance of ritual is to restore, reinforce or direct identity. It strengthens the place of the individual in the group or society. It is in this way that the Bukusu initiation ceremony must be looked at. According to Frist Staal (1979), performers are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks:

They concentrate on the correctness of an act, recitation and chant. Their primary concern is not cohesion but rules. There is no symbolic meaning going through the minds of the performers when they are engaged in performing ritual (1979:3).

Through rituals which are done repeatedly or annually, man is able to exert some control over his environment and also to tap some energy. For instance, dance done during the Bukusu initiation ritual is to increase the life force of the initiate and the community because it has spiritual dimensions which contribute to the welfare of the community and redirect identity as well as cohesion. Mircea Eliade (1958) looks at ritual of initiation where an initiate symbolically dies and is later reborn. For him, ritual is:

A body of rites and oral feelings whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated (1958).

### **3.5 Essence of Ritual**

For non-technological societies, ritual plays a very significant role. Not only does it ensure that people have tight grip of their society, but it also dramatises the confidence that they have in themselves. As every member of the community is practically involved, ritual creates a sense of unity. In initiation, those who are circumcised together develop a sense of togetherness and comradeship and can work together to defend the community. There is a kind of rehearsal for life that takes place when young people are initiated. The older people rededicate and restrict themselves to the values and beliefs of the community. Initiation ensures that people of the community uphold the communal values and beliefs and are re-

energised by ensuring that the older folk relive their own initiation and examine their own lives as Wotsuna Khamalwa notes:

Ritual brings change of status not only to the newly initiated but also for their parents and the entire community through the network of kinship. (2004:61).

Ritual associated to non-technical societies transmits cultural values to the young.

Hans Mol emphasises this point as follows:

Rites articulate and relate analysis of meaning and prevent it from being lost from sight. They restore, reinforce and redirect identity. They maximise order by strengthening the place of an individual in the group (1977:3).

The Bukusu **Imbalu** is, therefore, seen in terms of identifying the individual and therefore, ensuring that a boy changes his status into a man and identifies with adult men. Another dimension brought into this view of ritual by Frist Staal is that the performers are normally and totally immersed in the process that they have no room for anything else. He concludes:

Ritual then is primarily an activity. It is an activity by explicit rites. The important thing is what you do. Not what you think, believe or say (1977:3).

### **3.6 Myth**

The Mango myth is explained in detail in Chapter One and it shows how the Bukusu initiation ceremony is entangled with myth. Myth is actually a traditional story concerning some superhuman or some person or event and attempts to explain natural phenomenon. During fieldwork, most respondents referred to Mango as the first Bukusu to be circumcised. Most forms of African drama are

surrounded by myth. This is because there is a close link between rites and myths.

Myths play a leading role in ritual drama and as Hans Mol says:

Myths socialise through the emotional anchorage advantage of integrative reconciliations but they can do so only through presentation of binary opposition with instrumental symbolism. It is in the repetitive presentation that reconciling function of myth reside. (1979:261).

Myths embody chains of divine or miraculous origin and sanctions thereby sacralising human forms and beliefs. They actually superimpose the past to the present and convey the importance of the ritual drama. For the Bukusu, the beginning of circumcision is tied to Mango, one of the ancestral fathers of the Bukusu who killed a snake that killed his two children. Since this was a courageous act, the Sabaots asked to give him a bride but he would take her only after he got circumcised.

There is a stronger myth that is associated with **Itweka** which was the form of Kikuyu drama that took place before the arrival of the white men. **Itweka** which was a process when the younger generation was taking over power from the older generation started when the people ousted an autocratic king who had refused them to cultivate. As Kenyatta explains in **Facing Mount Kenya** (1938), in desperation the people revolted against him. After the dethronement of the king, the Kikuyu government changed from despotism to democracy. The **Njama ya Itweka** (a revolutionary council) was formed to draft a constitution.

To make the constitution inviolable, it was necessary to get the tail hair of a monster known as **Ndamath'a** which lived in a river. Magicians prepared the medicine that would be used to stupefy the monster and induce it to come out of the river without being dangerous to people. A young innocent girl who had not reached the age of puberty was sought to entice the monster out of the river. Her body was covered with beads in which medicine had been smeared. She was then given a magic gourd to draw water from the river. As the myth goes, the magician blew his ceremonial horn rhythmically to entice **Ndamath'a** to come out of the river. As the **Ndamath'a** came out of the river following the child who had drawn the water and sprinkled it onto the ground, the magicians and warriors hid in the bush along the path. As its tail came out of the river, warriors sprang out of the bush, cut it out and each one of them plucked as much tail hair as he could. They then rushed back into the bush. When the hair was plucked, it was painful to the monster. This made it mad and it went back to the river at speed. The sacred hair was taken to where the **Njama ya Itweka** was waiting. There was a great celebration. This acted as a seal of their deliberation to bond in their duty. This myth is well-elaborated by Jomo Kenyatta in **Facing Mount Kenya** (1938). However, talking to a number of Kikuyu, they say that the monster story never happened but was created to ensure that every Kikuyu adhered to the Itweka constitution which had been prepared to lead the people.

### **3.7 Initiation**

Initiation, a ceremony through which a boy became a man, was taken seriously

among the early Bukusu people. This was simply because its purpose was religious and educational. This was a ceremony which began with instilling fear and enforcing obedience to elders. This ceremony would also to acquaint initiates with ancestors.

It is best to start discussion of initiation with Arnold Van Gennep (1960). He looked at the four rites of passage: birth, initiation, marriage and death and viewed initiation as playing a religious role as in it, there was an inclusion of the sacred. According to him, initiation had to do with crossing from the profane to the sacred. It was a transitional stage. He in fact says that, being born, giving birth and hunting are all acts whose major aspects fall within the sacred sphere (1909). According to Mircea Eliade (1958), during initiation, an initiate dies and is reborn as a different person. He says the term initiation,

denotes a body of rites and oral teaching whose purpose is to produce a decisive alteration in the religious and social status of the person to be initiated (1958).

Initiation is equivalent to a basic change in existential condition. The novice emerges from his ordeal endowed with a different being from that which he possessed before his initiation.

Eliade sees initiation as a process in which the initiate starts the adult life by imbibing the values and norms of society. He is also introduced into the world of the supernatural, the living, the dead and those to be born. Through initiation, the initiate learns behaviour patterns and life skills including myths of the tribe.

Indeed, Eliade sees initiation as a learning process where the initiate is introduced to the traditions of the tribe but also religiously brought into contact with the supernatural.

Another important scholar in matters of ritual was Victor Turner who was vastly influenced by Arnold Van Gennep (1909). From Van Gennep, Turner found the basis for further development of ritual analysis. He convinced himself that "ritual is situated within a process of social drama, and is in itself a process in form." He then went further to identify two forms of ritual: Life crisis ritual and ritual of affiliation.

Life crisis rituals refer to rituals which mark transition of one phase of development of a person to another phase. "Such phases are important and points in the physical and social development of the ritual subject such as birth, puberty or death." (1907:7). Amongst the Bukusu life, crisis rituals would be initiation ceremony for boys and funeral rites.

### **3.8 Elements of African Traditional Drama**

The citation on page 36 from Camara Laye's autobiographical novel **The African Child** gives a glimpse of what African theatre is all about. "They danced for a whole week," not for two hours in Kouroussé. "They danced until they were out of breath." Another aspect of African theatre demonstrated is the lack of distinction between the spectators and the actors. Note that, "those who were spectators would be dancing too."



**Picture 13. Candidate dancing with other revelers at the uncle's compound**



**Picture 14. The initiate dancing towards the river**



**Picture 15. Dancing from the maternal uncle's village to the paternal home**

The distinction between the African and Western theatre depends on a number of things: the time factor, the role of the spectator, the venue of the performance, function of the performance and the language used. Western theatre relies on a script written by one person and performed by a team of actors, directed by a director assisted by a stage manager. The performance is geared for a proscenium stage in the auditorium inside a theatre. Here, the auditorium strictly separates the spectators down in the audience and actors up on the stage. Time to start and the length of performance is of great importance. In the African sense, drama starts ideally when all involved spectators and actors are present. Sometimes a drum is used to invite people to the performances which would also take as long as time allows. Performances where the spectators take over from the actors and would go

on until it was too dark or people simply got too tired to proceed with performance.

**Imbalu** as an aspect of African drama does not require the use of western type stage or a building for performance. It is performed in the open air. All what is required is an empty space. It is for this reason that in every Bukusu home, there is designated empty space, usually designated for performances of any kind. The African acting area is mobile. As performers mix freely with spectators they are forced to move from one homestead to another. During other times, this movement could be from a village to another or from ridge to another. Sometimes performances move from river to river and thus engulfing the whole of Bukusuland. With **Imbalu**, notification is done through dance which takes place from homestead to homestead especially to the maternal uncles who are notified of the impending circumcision. If there are other initiates then the whole of Bukusuland would be engulfed in this celebration. As Kenyatta would say: "this achievement was celebrated all over the country." (1938:187). On the morning of circumcision the initiate and the dancers would perform towards the river where the "mudding" would be done on the initiate before trooping back to the homestead for the "cutting".

In the case of **Itweka**, to which Kenyatta refers, the whole country was viewed as the stage. Bukusu circumcision ceremony is the same as the whole of Bukusuland is engulfed in initiation performances. It is not in one place. Indeed, this wider

venue is confusing to many Western scholars. White (1974) calls the situation "lack of definition of the acting area." The acting area is undefined and entrances are more likely to be made from the bush, a clubhouse or a religious building than from any specially erected scene house. If anything defines the acting area, it is the presence of the spectators.

### **3.8.1 Language**

Language used in African drama is of essence. Every community has a language it uses to express its culture, beliefs and values. Like with the Bukusu people the language is Kibukusu. A language that does not belong to a people who cannot fully express their beliefs and world view. An African play cannot use English, French or Arabic to describe its culture. Language is so essential in that African proverbs and sayings cannot adequately be translated into a foreign language. For instance, **Isukuti** can only be described in Luyha and not English.

Essentially, African drama relies on an African language that expresses the content of African culture. Ritual drama, as **Imbalu** which is so culturally embedded will have to rely on the use of an African language as opposed to colonial or any other foreign language. In Bukusuland, **Imbalu** is transmitted in **Kibukusu**, a language in which all songs are composed and sung in a language that expresses the activities pertaining to the ritual.

### **3.8.2 'Spectator'**

Spectator is a word coined from "spectator" and "actor" to refer to a spectator

who at the same time is an actor. In an African setting, there is no ideal spectator who confines himself or herself to the 'auditorium' without contributing to the performance on 'stage'. In African drama, there is no distinction between the actor and the spectator. As happens in the Bukusu initiation ceremony when the soloist and the dancers are tired, then other soloists and dancers amongst the spectators would take over the performances. When the spectator becomes an actor, then the performance will go for a long time. ..."the whole town will be dancing with us ... soon those who were spectators would be dancing too." (Laye, 1959:93).

White (1974) acknowledges the fact that in Africa, the spectators are not passive. They are usually part of what is going on. They may dance and flirt with the performers. They may run forward to reward a fine moment in the entertainment by giving a performer a gift. Sometimes they may sing a reply to the performer. They become active spectators. Within African drama Soyinka says:

The moment for chonic participation is well defined ... the so called audience is itself an integral part of that conflict. It contributes spiritual strength to the protagonist through its chonic.

### **3.8.3 Time**

Time factor does not affect an African performance. Performance normally starts when people are there to perform and lasts as long as people still have the energy to continue performing. The Western theatre starts at specified time and lasts for about two hours. An African play continues for hours, days, weeks and even

months. **Itweka**, for instance, would last for six months while initiation ceremony could last for two days with non-stop performances. **Imbalu**, the Bukusu initiation lasts for two days with preparations starting long before circumcision and **Lubito**, the counselling session coming much later when the initiate is healing.

### **3.8.4 Functionality and Utilitarianism**

African drama is performed in order to have an impact on the performers and the society as a whole. It is for this reason that the whole Bukusuland is involved when a single little boy is being initiated. All the relatives and the clansmen have to attend and witness the whole initiation process. **Imbalu** converts an initiate from a boy to an adult. He personally enters into adulthood physically, socially and spiritually and as it were becomes a full member of the community as John Mbiti would say: “What affects the initiate affects corporately the parents, the relatives, the neighbours and the living dead (1969:121).”

It is important to remember that initiation is one of the most important rituals because it produces able-bodied youth for labourforce and leadership. Some of the initiates become fruitful members of the community and could be entertainers, dancers and storytellers. It is also possible to see that the ceremony could cultivate solidarity amongst the youth, solidarity that could be essential for the protection of the community.

To get admission into the adult world, an adolescent has to pass through a series of initiation ordeals. This admission ensures that the initiate is in a position to

share full privileges, duties and responsibilities of the adult world. He is ritually introduced to the communal life. Further learning takes place during the period of seclusion called "**Lubito**" when the initiates are healing. They are normally kept away from the people and during these times, they learn the secrets of society and other matters that would help them to be productive members of the community. In other words, after the seclusion ceremony (**Lubito**) the initiates rejoin their relatives. They will have acquired new personalities as young adults. They would have been introduced to adult life and are prepared for matters of procreation and other types of adult activities.

As John Mbiti says:

Initiation rites have greater educational purpose. The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which otherwise would not be accessible to those who have not been initiated. (1969:122).

It is a period of awakening to many, a period of dawn to the young. It is ideally a period when they have learnt endurance, tolerance, obedience and the secrets of man/woman relationship. This initiation is underscored by Walter Rodney who argues thus:

Initiation in pre-colonial Africa was formal education which was relevant to Africans and had close link with their social life both in material and spiritual sense and that pre-colonial education produced a well-rounded personality to fit in the African society. It had a formal teaching programme (1989:23).

Essentially, therefore, **Imbalu** is functional and utilitarian as it has impact on the initiates and the society as a whole.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter sets out to establish whether or not there is drama in **Imbalu** and what constitutes African drama. It starts from when man invented drama to control and influence the environment in which he lived. We see rituals which were used to glorify the supernatural. Ritual drama that became fixed to the rites of passage as **Imbalu**. An element of African drama then men became myth as that of Mango in Imbalu. Finally, the discussion with the basic elements of African drama which are:

- lack of designated stage area
- use of African language in Kibukusu
- lack of distinction between spectator and performers
- no restriction of time
- the functionality and utilitarianism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EDURAMATIC ELEMENTS OF IMBALU

#### 4.0 Overview

Western education system has tended to move indigenous education towards virtual extinction. A survey carried out by Pewitt (1977) in Kenyan and Tanzanian secondary schools revealed that only a small percentage of scholars attached any value to African education and culture. The need to preserve African traditions, education and culture did not arise and has not arisen. Many people continue to be myopic about the impact of indigenous education in contemporary society. Walter Rodney states:

The colonisers did not introduce education: they introduced a new set of formal educational institutions which partly supplemented and partly replaced those which were there before. The colonial system also stimulated values and practices which amounted to informal education (1972:240).

He indicates that education was there in North Africa, Ethiopia and Western Sudan before colonialism. He speaks of the Al-Azahan University in Egypt, University of Fez in Morocco and the University of Timbuktu in Mali, long before the colonialists set foot in Africa. What happens now to the modern African child brought up in the village is that he goes through dual educational upbringing: the African and the Western. This is what happens to the Bukusu child. The Bukusu child is exposed to a Western curricular opposed to promoting African values and is likely to be caught up in the dilemma of two conflicting

educational setups. Chances are that many Bukusu young children will attend the current school system with Western curricula and at the same time face compulsory traditional education through initiation which they must undertake before they are recognised by the community as adults.

#### **4.1 Bukusu Traditional Education**

In the pre-colonial Bukusu society, education took many forms. Like in most African societies for instance, children would gather according to age-groups to play games, sing and share stories. Learning in this situation was basically oral. Other types of learning took place through festivals, dancing and most important, initiation. Very young Bukusu children, like elsewhere were taught through lullabies and songs. They were left free to choose the games and plays they wanted to play with very little adult interference. Slightly older children would play games that imitated adult life such as wrestling and games with wooden spears and shields and also bows and arrows. On their own as part of imitating adult life, they played 'baba na mama' an imitation of adulthood and sometimes built models of homesteads and cattle pens.

When a child was approaching the age of circumcision, the father became in charge of his education. The father would induct the young boy into agriculture for instance and the child would be taught names of various plants, roots and weeds – the good and the bad ones. This was essential as it prepared the young boy to be ready for the adult life. It also inducted him into the environment in which he lived in terms of what would be cultivated for food and what would be

used for medicine. If it was possible, the child would learn various trades like wood-carving and bee-keeping. On the whole, he would be taught to be a good observer so that he would undertake some of these chores when he grew up.

#### **4.2 African Traditional Education: Meaning**

Sifuna (1990) defines education as the “whole process by which one generation transmits its culture to the succeeding generation or better still as a process by which people are prepared to live effectively and efficiently in their environment.” (1990:3). Traditional education, therefore, refers to ways of learning and teaching which are based on knowledge accumulated by Africans over longer periods of time in response to their physical, agricultural, ecological, political and socio-cultural challenges. This education in Africa has been and is still a tool to prepare the young to take their place in African society and their roles and responsibilities in adulthood. The teaching aspects in traditional education include artistic performances, ceremonies, festivals, dancing and singing. Boys and girls are taught separately and for both every member of the Bukusu community has a hand in the educational upbringing of the child with the high point of this educational experience being the initiation ritual which changed the boy-child into an adult. Otiende (1982) goes further and says that education is the preparation of life into whichever society we are born. He refers to traditional education as customary education which for him is true education. According to Otiende (1982), African customary education preserves the cultural heritage of the family, clan and tribe. He further, says: “it adapts children to the physical environment.” But Rodney

puts it more candidly:

... the most crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education was its relevance to Africans... The following features of indigenous African education can be considered outstanding: Its closely linked with social life, both in material and spirited sense; its collective nature; its many sidedness and its progressive stages in development in conformity with successive stages of physical, emotional and material development of the child... pre-colonial African education hatched the realities of pre-colonial African society and provided well-rounded personalities to fit into the society. (1972:239).

#### **4.3 Imbalu as a Context for African Traditional Education**

What we call African Traditional education is what Sifuna (1990) refers to as ‘indigenous’ and Otiende (1982) in his thesis, calls “customary”. Whether traditional, indigenous or customary they refer to the type of education undertaken by Africans before the advent of colonialism. The three terms refer to purely uncontaminated education free from Western influence.

Both Otiende (1982) and Sifuna (2000) agree that African traditional or customary education is for living. Education within the African context is basically to prepare the youth for adulthood. From the very early years, traditional education placed emphasis on normative and expressive goals, Africans being concerned with beliefs and correct behaviour. This is instilled in the growing children from the time when they are still young. Expressive goals are to do with “creating unity and consensus” (Sifuna, 2000).

African education, before the coming of the white man, grew out of the immediate environment which involved acquaintance with the weather, landscape and animal life. The learning process therefore, just entailed adjustment to the environment. Hence, African education was a tool for preparing the young to play their respective role in African society.

Traditional education is actually the passing down to a later generation of opinion, beliefs, practices and customs as **Imbalu** actually does. It is a process of passing to the young Bukusu generation, practices and customs of their people. What is passed on is customary in the sense that it is established and accepted by the Bukusu society and indigenous in the sense that it belongs to the Bukusu people. So really when one uses ‘traditional’, ‘customary’ or ‘indigenous’ terms, one is basically referring to the same thing – training of the young to live responsibly in society. Otiende in fact says:

Education is the preparation for living into which society we are born. African customary education was true education. It was to conserve the cultural heritage of the family, clan and tribe, adapt children to their physical environment and to teach them how to use it. It also explained to them their own future and that of the community depends on the understanding of tribal institution, land, language and values they inherited from the past. (1982).

#### **4.3.1 Conservation of Cultural Heritage**

The aim of African education was to conserve heritage of the Bukusu people which embraced beliefs, opinions, practices, religion and customs. This conservation was at the family, the clan and the ethnic levels.

### **4.3.2 Adaptation to Environment**

From a very early age young people were trained to adapt to their environment and its features. Young Bukusus were trained to make full use of natural resources such as land through farming and hunting. The youth learnt about the landscape, the animals – domestic and wild animals and insects that existed in Bukusuland. As a result, they were trained to make use of implements such as hoes, axes and spears to tame the environment. Above all, the youth were taught how to prepare food and how to build houses.

### **4.3.3 Understanding Ethnic Institution**

Bukusu traditional education was to expose the young people to the nature and practice of the various ethnic institutions that existed in Bukusuland: institutions of law, languages and Bukusu values. The young were expected to understand the working of the Bukusu government as this was supposed to foster a close-knit communal society. Sifuna says:

The child learnt to imitate actions of others, to assimilate moods, teachings and ideas of those around him/her and thus acquired community identity. An individual was to live and serve other people in accordance with accepted manners, customs, laws, avoidance and taboos and a vigorous code of morality. Children were also taught their roles in the all-embracing network of kinship relationships and what their rights and obligations were within them. (2000:61).

### **4.3.4 Character Building**

As a young Bukusu entering into adulthood, a lot of emphasis is placed on character building especially in the development of physical aptitudes and

acquisition of moral qualities. Character training was important in young people because they were being prepared to take social responsibilities and to participate in military and political affairs of the Bukusu people. The Bukusu take unity and communal consensus of the people very seriously.

Warriorship is so entrenched in the Bukusu psyche that before a boy becomes a man and fits into the society, he must be a warrior. Living amongst warring tribes, the essence of bringing up warriors in Bukusuland was quite entrenched. As the young turned into adults, they were supposed to defend the community against the “marauding leopards” as the Bukusu called their enemies. The idea was that if the young man cannot stand the circumcision knife, then he would be unable to protect the community against the invading enemies. Bravery was, therefore, a trait necessary for a would-be warrior.

Resilience is another aptitude that goes hand in hand with warriorship. A Bukusu initiate must train himself to withstand difficult conditions and be able to recover quickly. Above all he must be observant as Mango was when he plotted the killing of the snake – **Yabebe**. Bravery and resilience are, therefore, the important traits that a young man must have.

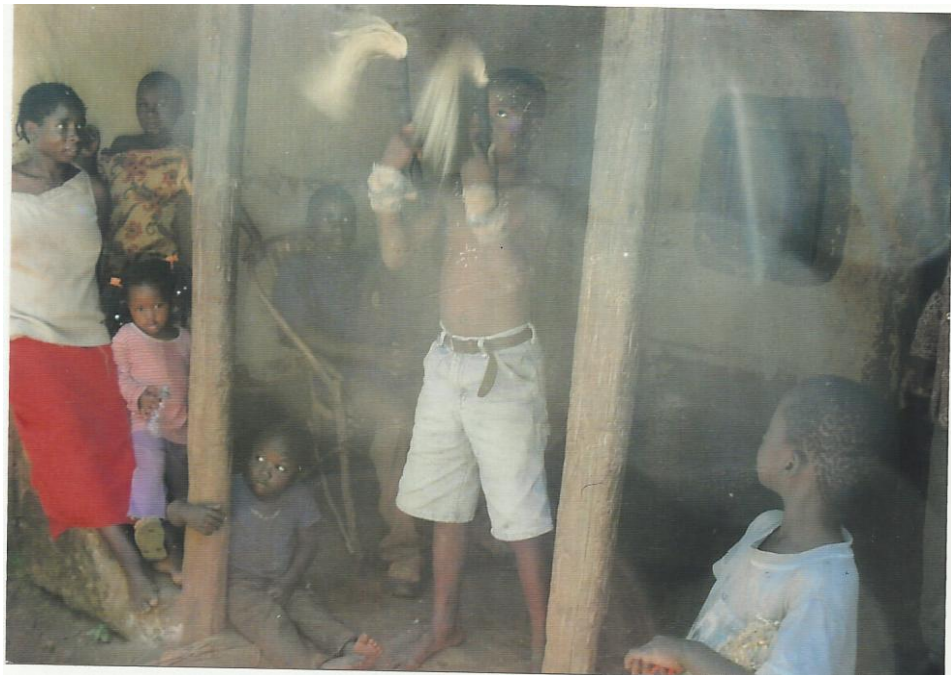
The circumcision songs are about bravery but at the same time satirical, making fun of cowards. Any person who was afraid of circumcision had no place in the Bukusu society. So ideally songs were supposed to psyche the initiates to face the knife with courage just like Mango was psyched to kill the snake.

In this sense, the circumciser is viewed as an enemy, a leopard – a marauder, a snake who should be vanquished and the only way for an initiate to vanquish him is to be courageous during the process of cutting the foreskin. The initiate must face him with valour. The songs which are sung are meant to prepare the young man to face the knife and that is why before he is cut, he suffers a lot of ridicule. He would, for instance, be told: “In this clan we don’t fear the knife. If you fear then you do not belong to our clan. In this clan we don’t fear.” The night before the circumcision he is even forced to eat uncooked meat as a way of ridiculing him.

The idea of singing is taken seriously by the Bukusu so much so that during preparation, the candidate has to go to the blacksmith to get **chinyimba** which he must learn to play. In the process, he also trains on how to sing and dance. This is done between June and July in preparation for circumcision in the month of August every even year.



**Picture 16. The initiate has learnt how to play Chinyimba**



**Picture 17. Candidate plays chinyimba**

#### **4.3.5 Lubito (Khubita)**

Real education for the young takes place during the healing process. **Lubito** is actually the school where formal teaching and counselling take place. It takes place when the initiate is healing and this is in seclusion in most cases. This is after the initiate has been circumcised and is convalescing in **Likombe** where he is basically under treatment. **Enguhu** is used most of the time during healing to quicken it. During this time, it is the circumciser who is in charge of giving elementary education to the young. He counsels the initiate in the presence of the father, the mother, the uncles and the aunts and mainly dwells on the transition between boyhood and adulthood. If circumcision is in August, **Lubito** is done in September/October or November/December to avoid interrupting the formal school programme. The circumciser stresses on what it means to be a man and kind of gives him a code of conduct as he needs to know how he conducts himself as an adult. The initiate will majorly be trained on how not only to behave as a man but how to relate with other people such as the weak, disabled, elderly and the poor. The initiate will also be counselled on how to look after a family as he would soon have a license to get married after graduation.



**Picture 18. Circumciser and assistants**



**Picture 19. The researcher with the circumciser just before he undertakes the circumcision**

The circumciser will inculcate to the boy the essentials of good government and leadership. It will be emphasised to the initiate that he should not “enter closed doors”; meaning that he should not have sex with married women. He should however go into open doors (sleep with unmarried women). In this way, the Bukusu community intended to maintain sexual decency. “To emphasise this, the initiate is told not to go to someone’s homestead when the owner of the home is not in and also to avoid incest.” So says Chris Lukorito Wanjala who was interviewed in regard to **Lubito**.

Emphasis is also placed on the fact that all his father’s age mates are his fathers and they should, therefore, be treated with equal respect. **Lubito** is a moment when an initiate “no longer wears his mother’s clothes. They start wearing their father’s.” Egesah noted that the circumciser may chant such messages as;

I circumcise you using **Lukembe**. It will never cut you again in your life and I want you to be a straight forward man in your life. I want you to produce children, I want you to respect your age mates and people older than you in the community and in the world (2008:103).

The initiates are generally introduced to life after circumcision. How they would for instance use the spear to protect the clan; how to use the jembe for farming to feed the family.

According to Chris Lukorito Wanjala:

**Lubito** trains the initiate to behave as a mature person and respect sex by not sleeping with all women including old married women. They really are trained to be hardworking and respectful (Interview).

Egesah (2008:106) asserts that **Lubito** is significant as a learning process because it instils a sense of focus and a sense of respect into the boy. It is a process that no Bukusu undergoes unless he is traditionally circumcised. It is a lesson to what responsibilities and functions the young man expects to meet in adulthood. It is a counselling period in the various taboos that exist amongst the Bukusu people.

During **Lubito** initiates are advised on the tasks that they are expected to perform as adults like the use of various instruments and tools such as spears and hoes. The education that takes place during this time is supposed to make the initiate a mature person who should respect various persons in the community and respect sex. The initiate learns how to be hard working and be able to farm and rear animals. He should be concerned with manly duties and not get involved in kitchen affairs. **Lubito** therefore, not only gives a sense of focus but gives guidelines on future expectations. It is a counselling session in preparation for life. Egesah sums it up thus:

**Lubito** is confined to the young men circumcised traditionally since it provides the form and spice for Babukusu initiation into adulthood – turning a child into an adult, history and tradition of the Babukusu. (2008:106).

### **Khutwika**

**Khutwika** happens during the process of **Lubito**. What actually happens here is that the circumcised boy is given a traditional name. It is a ‘name giving’ ceremony where the initiate is given a name of a hero, grandfather or great grandfather. When this is done, the initiate is advised to live as a mature person

and to give respect to all people including their property. He is advised not to steal other people's property including their wives. The significance of this is actually to sustain family lineage and to establish clan identity.

### **Khurula**

This takes place in the night before graduation when the initiate, accompanied by brothers and apprentices, go to sleep in the wilderness. When they leave home at about sunset, they carry beddings that they have been using since circumcision. These and other clothing are destroyed after the night in the wilderness. As they leave home for their wilderness destination, the boys light grass torch fire which they use on the way to the destination. As they run towards the intended place for sleep, the crowd shouts abuses on the persons who circumcised them. Egesah (2008:111) says that this symbolises “abandonment of all the past as they turn around into newer life the next day.”

As they run towards the venue, they are not supposed to look back. But at the destination, they light their fire which is kept burning all night long. They make their own meals and eat. They also construct a hut for the night.

The ceremony of **Khurula** is actually a rehearsal for life and shows the initiate what to expect in the new life. It is a kind of role play demonstrating the ability to be independent and to feed themselves. Above all, if the initiates can face the challenges of the wilderness at night, they can face all the challenges in real life. In terms of the initiation ritual, it marks the end of childhood when the initiates can now come out of **Likombe** – the healing hut.

### **Khukhwaluka**

This follows the day after the night of **Khurula** which symbolically marks the end of the healing and ushers in a newly circumcised man. It is indeed the climax of the whole initiation process culminating into adulthood.

From the wilderness in the morning, the initiate moves to the river where he washes himself clean and then puts on new clothes and goes home where he is received by song and dance. Depending on how many initiates they are, they move from home to home to receive gifts or tokens in a traditional way.

At the home, the initiate is served with a welcome meal which he eats with his siblings. After the meal, the boy is taken through a session of counselling more or else similar to **Lubito**. Counselling here is undertaken by the father and close relatives. The ceremony ends with feasting, drinking and presentation of gifts.

### **4.4 Methods of Teaching**

Bukusus had a variety of methods of teaching their young in preparation for adult life. In early childhood, games were part of the learning process in which children learnt through their own initiative but partly through the guidance of mothers but a little later for the boys the father took over.

#### **4.4.1 Productive Education**

Children started learning through the medium of work. Here, they learnt by seeing and imitating what the adults were doing as they worked hand in hand with the adults. This would be in such areas as farming, hunting, and herding for boys and

girls, cooking and collection of firewood. At a higher level, children also learnt through apprenticeship in such areas as blacksmithery and pottery. As Sifuna says, “this productive education enabled children to have the right type of gender roles” (200:63). Though apprenticeship was basically practical, this developed their endurance skills as well as involving them in theoretical and practical skills. They developed a sense of observation and good memory.

#### **4.4.2 Informal Methods**

The Africans had informal ways in which children learnt. These were numerous but the most pertinent were plays. Besides making their own toys (as opposed to the western world where toys were made for them), children also learnt through imitating their parents in make-believe plays. Imitation became the medium of learning where children would imitate adult activities like building huts, farming and hunting. This imitation promoted the child’s memory and language.

Learning by imitation played a major role in the children’s learning process. Young children imitated older boys and then later on imitated the adults. Children from various homesteads would come together and play and in that way shared ideas and practices emanating from various homesteads. This expanded the scope within the clan.

They would also take part in wrestling which was not only a way of keeping fit but was a process of entertainment. Through wrestling, young people socialised and created a bond that would later be useful in making them Bukusu men.

Alongside wrestling, there were other games like hide and seek which basically developed children's ability to think.

#### **4.4.3 Learning Through Oral Literature**

Like almost in many of the African ethnic communities at an older age, education was governed by indigenous oral tradition. The essence of this was that traditional education had to be transmitted orally especially those that related to customs, beliefs and clanism. As regards oral tradition, before and during Bukusu initiation, oral tradition such as song and dance were used to teach young people. In addition, oral literature was exceedingly used for this purpose. This included folktales, myths, legends, proverbs and riddles.

#### **Myths and Legends**

Myths were stories accounting for natural phenomenon or simply fables about the supernaturals or beings that man could not easily understand. They were imaginary and not real and were basically told to teach young people how things came to be. As would happen in nearly all African communities, Ocitti says:

The elders used myths firstly as a device to explain anything they did not understand. Indeed in a situation clouded by ignorance, doubt and uncertainty, there were many things to explain to the young ...” (1979:63).

The Bukusus used myths to develop the intellect and imagination of young people. They would for instance, be told about the beginning of things such as how life started and why there was death. Legends on the other hand were used to explain things that happened or were believed to have happened in time immemorial.

Legends could also be about great people who lived many years ago. Some of these could be actual people or simply imaginary people. Such tales were told to the young to build their mannerism. Legends were fabricated tales which were fragments of actual history and were closer to real life than myths. Makila (1982) enumerates some of the important people in Bukusu history and gives an account of about thirty legendary people in Bukusuland. These were people who were prominent in the annals of oral tradition. Most of these are household names in pre-literate Bukusu community. Nonetheless these are people whose stories are told to the young Bukusu in order to encourage them and to urge them to copy their examples. Some of the Bukusu legends were either political leaders, sages, prophets, diviners or military leaders. One example of such legends is recounted below.

### **Kitimule Son of Wetoyi**

Kitimule son of Wetoyi was an Omutukwiika Mukitang'a by clan. Besides being a brave warrior, he was remarkably articulate in the art of diplomacy. A man of his calibre was often sent out on espionage missions and Namunyulubanda did not lose sight of this fact regarding Kitimule's suitability.

Babukusu who lived at Ebwayi used to see smoke rising from a nearby hill, and so naturally became apprehensive of their own security. Suspecting that the strange neighbours might be a community of Barwa (Kalenjin adversaries) who may one day invade their territory, they expressed anxiety and sent out emissaries for the purpose of discovering who these people were. Consequently, Namunyulubanda

selected Kitimule to head a team of eight people on an espionage mission detailing them to go and offer peace and friendship to the strangers, avoiding as much as possible incidents which might provoke a war situation. It took Kitimule and his team-mates more than two days to reach the nearest homestead. They had to walk stealthily most of the time hiding under the cover of darkness. They entered the new territory carrying branches of leaves above their heads as a sign of peace. The strange hosts received the team rather coldly, with caution and suspicion.

Kitimule discovered that the strangers were Bayumbu who spoke a language which was very close to Lubukusu. They lived in caves, intermingling with Barawa Bakinisu and a group of Maasai Buruku, who apparently were getting on well with them. Their overall political leader was known as Kibulo. They practised very strange customs which Kitimule found to be quite repulsive and inhuman. He became more inquisitive and asked them detailed questions regarding their identity as well as migratory movements. He learnt to his amazement that not only were the strangers real brothers of the Babukusu but also that they were newly arrived Bukusu clans like Basonge who had already been absorbed into the community. Each Bayumbu clan indicated that they were Babayi Basilika who hived off from their parent community (of Babukusu) at the time when Silikwa was subjected to internecine wars with Bamaasai Buruku. They moved to the south, arriving at a hill where, they were staying from an easterly direction. Some said they had come to the hill via Bukaya. Why their language appeared slightly different from Lubukusu was that they had absorbed Barwa

elements within their fold whilst in Silikwa and had since remained their good friends. Furthermore, they had made up a covenant with Barwa for the purpose of ensuring continued peace and cooperation. Apart from Kibulo, there were other influential clan elders like Wambeye.

As days passed by, the Bayumbu grew fed up with Kitimule's inquisitiveness and when they heard him insinuate that their ritual circumcision practices were not only abominable but indicative of rampant cannibalism, this was the last straw. They got hold of him and beat him thoroughly, cutting off three toes of his left foot. On witnessing the horrible sight, his colleagues bolted home. Fortunately, Kimitule was not killed. No sooner was he set free than he started limping home. When he eventually reached Ebwayi, crowds of people gathered around him, eager to hear what news he might have brought. On being asked what sort of people lived on the hill, he said that they were Bayumbu. Of their language, he said, it was similar to Lubukusu in many respects. And when he was asked about their disposition (whether they were friendly towards strangers), he shook his head and without saying a word pointed at the mutilated toes on his foot. The revelation that the Bayumbu were responsible for mutilating his foot shocked the people. As a result of that incident, Babukusu coined a proverb which says: *Reebanga Kitimule wanyoa Ebuyumbu*, literally meaning, ask Kitimule who first visited Ebuyumbu. The moral of the proverb is that before a person ventures into a new situation, he should first try to draw on the experience of those who may have preceded him.

It is most probable that Kitimule was punished for having blabbed about the human tortures he may have witnessed in initiation rituals. Excesses indulged in by *baliche* candidates (commonly practised by the Bamwalie cluster) are supposed to be guarded secrets, entrusted only to the initiates. The claim that he was possibly punished for being a suspected cattle thief does not seem to be correct. Babukusu's respect for the sanctity of human life may have provoked Kitimule to make veiled protests: no Mubukusu would have countenanced the indignities which we are told were perpetrated by the Bayumbu before the merger with the Babukusu took place. However, when Bayumbu were eventually received into Bukusu society, they seemed to have dropped some customs which showed cruelty towards human beings and disrespect for human dignity. They retained tolerable practices such as obscene dances, secret oaths taken under threats of charms and witchcraft, physical endurance tests and clitoridectomy. **Baliche** initiates never talk about these things to anyone, and they are bound under oath to remain silent about them for life. Should an Omuliche person happen to disclose secret oaths and practices he observed in the process of initiation, he would be 'cursed' or bewitched by the rest of adherents. Apparently, the punishment meted out on Kitimule was comparatively light in contrast to death through bewitchment.

There are some Babukusu clans which joined Bayumbu to form the sixth clan cluster (of Bamwalie). Babukusu were fully convinced that an independent Bayumbu community in the neighbourhood would pose a military threat. Everything possible had to be done to win them back into the tribal fold. A larger

delegation was, therefore, sent out without an armed escort, for the purpose of negotiating a unity pact with ‘Bamwile’ people. The delegation carried many gifts, including beer, grain and cattle. An element of ‘gun-boat’ diplomacy was, however, discernible in the delegation’s strategy notwithstanding the fact that Babukusu emissaries desired genuine peace and understanding with the newly-found brothers, they left Bayumbu in no doubt that they would be invaded in a short period of time if they failed to accept proposals for a complete merger with Bukusu inhabitants of Bwayi settlements. Fearing adverse consequences in the event of a breakdown in relations, Bayumbu agreed to an immediate merger. This boosted the numerical military strength of Babukusu. The tribe which had hitherto been encircled by enemy territory was at last in a position to build formidable strongholds on the flanks of facing Barwa and Bamia protagonists. Bayumbu being a small community by itself assumed Bukusu customs quickly, including declared allegiances to the Basilikwa cluster and adaptation of the clan oath of Namurwa. The historic merger that took place at Emwalie proved to be one of the most spectacular events in Bukusu history in peacetime, credit for accomplishing the feat going to no one but Kimitule, son of Wetoyi.

A series of intermarriages between the two communities took place after the merger, and it is said that Kitimule was the first person to appropriate for himself a bride from Ebuyumbu. One would be correct in saying that although the Babukusu were at first horrified and aggrieved by Kitimule’s suffering at the hands of the Bayumbu, they were certainly enraptured when it was realised later on that his

mission had, after all, brought about more positive results than had been anticipated

### **Learning Through Songs and Dances**

Luhyas are very prolific singers and dancers as testified by their performances in the Kenya Music Festivals and the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festivals. Dance and music form an integral part of the daily life of the luhya people. Most of the rituals, in Bukusuland are performed with the accompaniment of music and dance. In preparation for initiation, the initiates and the villagers dance from ridge to ridge and from the initiate's homestead to the river and back. All their songs and dances have meanings.

All the circumcision songs have meanings meant to train the initiates to take responsibility in Bukusu society. There are songs that are topical and are sung in all initiation ceremonies. Such songs like **Sioyaye** and **Mulongo** are like the signature tunes. But there are other songs that are composed depending on the prevailing circumstances like **Ompambile Omtalia** which was composed during the Second World War 1939 - 1945. During that war, the British government was fighting against the Germans and the Italians. This song was composed to encourage the initiate, to look for Italians and fight them. For the initiates to find the Italians, they had to be brave. Their bravery was measured by successfully going through the circumcision ordeal unscathed.

Many African ceremonies wherever they may be in Africa are always accompanied by songs and most of these are dramatized performances. The songs are not only part of entertainment but are used to convey important messages to the general populace and more importantly to the initiates during initiation ceremony. Also, Bukusu songs associated with circumcision go far and wide. As Wanyama (2005:61) says, “they are deeply rooted in the Bukusu myths, taboos and beliefs.” In the songs, we not only come to grips with the philosophy of the Bukusu people but also their history. In other words, the Bukusu circumcision songs are functional and as a result are deeply rooted in the cultural fabric. It is not possible to have Bukusu ceremonies without the relevant songs no matter how crude the songs may be.

What is important, however, is that songs make the basis of education. Initiation, therefore, becomes the school in which young people are trained to become adults. It is the type of training that one cannot experience unless one undertakes the traditional initiation. Those who circumcise in hospitals miss this type of education as is indicated in Chapter Five. The various circumcision songs have a function and teaching that they provide to the community and to the initiates. Some of these songs are:

**Babuya (See appendix 1 p.141)**

The Bukusu community is a society that wants to produce honest people and therefore, abhors witchcraft and food poisoning. Babuya brings to the fore the fact that these two are not good. An initiate should not be involved in witchcraft and

should not be bent on killing people. Wanyama notes that this song:

denounces a certain Bukusu sub-tribe called Babuya  
... who killed a teacher called Protus through  
poisoning by using chameleon flesh (2005:5,12).

In Bungoma County, the Babuya are known to practice witchcraft and other sub-tribes are discouraged from marrying their daughters. The would-be initiates should not therefore venture into Babuya in search for a wife.

**Amba Mutalya (see appendix 2 p.143)**

This song was composed during the Second World War when the British were fighting against the Germans and the Italians. The Bukusu way of life had been so disrupted by the war that they wanted to chase away the Italians and maintain their culture. During that time even circumcision ceremony had to be postponed.

The historical song required the Bukusu to uphold tradition by strengthening circumcision practice as handed to them by Mango. In the recent past, the song has changed to be a warning against HIV and AIDS with the young people being asked to be careful about their choices of sexual partners. In the song (Wanyama 2005: 5-12), reference is made to a proud girl who used to abuse men who could approach her for a relationship but later it was discovered that she was suffering from HIV and AIDS. This song therefore cautions initiates to be careful about the scourge and to choose carefully their marriage partners.

Except for **Sioyaye** which since Mango's time is like a signature tune, other songs tend to change with time. Most of the songs emphasise good neighbourliness and

matters that affect the Bukusu socially and politically. The soloists in Bukusu circumcision songs are given freedom and poetic license to extemporise and add new information to the songs depending on the audience and setting. They have the liberty, using appropriate language to scorn and abuse social deviants in the Bukusu society and as Wanyama (2005) says, it is one of the effective tools of shaming the victims and deterring any person from deviating from societal norms.

**Sioyaye (see appendix 3 p.136)**

**Sioyaye** is a song that was first sang when the legendary Mango was circumcised. The story goes that when Mango agreed to be circumcised, his old mother burst into tears and cried (Makila, 1978:176).

Wooeii, wooeii! Omwana wase wenge'ene

Ahaaa hooh, Mango sehakhubolele **Imbalu** ilamu bubi?

Wakhenya **Imbalu** ewemwene. Nono uliaho!

(Makila 1978:176)

It is said that the Bukusu turned this fateful words of Mango's mother into a song which became **Sioyaye** which is sung when an initiate is being brought from the river to the circumcision homestead. The song goes like this

Hee-heee-hee

Hee

Hee hee

Hee

Hee-heee

Hee-heeh!

Wangwe Maalule wekhale

Haa-Haah

Omusindwe we

Haa-haah hoo!

**Imbalu** yefwe ekhalakhale yebele

Hoo

Omusinde we

Hoo

Omusinde we

Hoo hoooooooooh!

Mango we Mwiala wakuwa **Imbalu**

Haahaaah

Wahhuwa **Imbalu**

Haa Haa

Wakuwa **Imbalu**

Haaha-hoo!

Omusinde oteremaka achia Ebunyolo

Haaaha

Achia Ebunyole

Haaaha-hoo!

**Imbalu** elumabubi eli ematabalu

Haaaha

Eli ematabula

Haaaha-hoooh!

Kumwoyo neukulimboro wibele

Hoooh

Omusindwe

Hoooh

Omusindwe

Hooo-hoooooh!

Loosely translated this would be:

The leopard which scratches hard is waiting in hiding to pounce on you. Our old age circumcision tradition should remain with us. It was handed down to us by Mango of Mwiala. A cowardly uncircumcised boy should take refuge in a far country. When the knife comes near the end it hurts badly. If you are uncircumcised or unprepared for the knife. You better give up now before it is too late.

**Sioyaye** words have not changed since it was composed during Mango's time. It is a Bukusu circumcision signature tune that addresses the history of the Bukusu initiation, Wanyama (2005) explains, "it focuses on the mythological origin of the Bukusu circumcision." When this song is sung it binds the Bukusu. **Sioyaye** is supposed to harden the resolve of the initiate to face the knife. It is supposed to harden him to be prepared and disparages him if he is a coward and afraid. No Bukusu would want to be ostracised to live with uncircumcised people. In other

words, they become warriors before they are circumcised. It is a taboo to sing this song before going to the river for mudding. It is a song that escorts the initiate to the circumcision grounds after mudding.

Every Bukusu boy must be prepared to go through pain that comes from the circumcision knife bravely. The song implores young boys to have courage and face the knife and if the boy is unprepared, then he must give up before it is too late. Normally after the mudding, the candidate goes back to the village naked and women are not allowed to see him. The song is, therefore, a warning as it is the last lap to the circumcision. Besides the women, there are the bad wishers or people with intention to carry out witchcraft. These people are warned to give way. The song also acts as a harbinger to notify those at threshold to get ready for the initiate and the circumciser who might be hiding within. The harbinger also prepares for the spirit of circumcision to enter him.

**Kwahera Omurwa (See Appendix 4 p.148)**

Unlike **Sioyaye** the song is sung after the foreskin has been severed. The words stress the need to celebrate for perpetual enemy Omurwa has been killed. From time immemorial, the Barwa had been Bukusu enemies with whom they had numerous clashes with over land and cattle ownership. Anyone who was circumcised was a joy as he added to the number of warriors who were supposed to help fight the Barwa.

**Mundubi Embaya (see Appendix 5 p.149)**

Pre-initiates normally eat together from one plate but once circumcised, they are allowed to eat from their own respective plate. It is a song that tells the initiate that he is now a respected person in the community who not only owns a plate but now becomes an independent man in thought and deeds. Wanyama (2005) notes that, this is one of the last songs sung in the process of Bukusu initiation.

**Luwaya (see Appendix 6 p.149)**

Literal translation of Luwaya is ‘the wire’ and in the song it means phallus. This song mandates the initiate to marry and to multiply to increase the population of the Bukusu. This would then strengthen the identity of the Bukusu and their solidarity.

**Mulongo (see Appendix 7 p.151)**

It was composed around 1990 for initiates. Ideally, after circumcision it is time to start love life. The initiates should look for young girls to partner with and not married women (closed doors) or a woman like Mary wa Napato. It is also an assurance to the initiate’s mother that he will go through the marshy land to find a girl and at some opportune moment he will build a cottage.

**Mary wa Napato**

This is a song for the initiates as well as other women. Mary the daughter of Napato is a loose woman who sleeps with any man because she is insatiable. Mary has been warned to refrain from being like this but she doesn’t listen to the warnings. Whereas, women should not be like Mary wa Napato. Initiates are also

warned to refrain from sleeping with any woman they come across. Since now they have the license to marry, they should select their wives carefully.

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter set out to look at the education that exists in **Imbalu**. It looked at traditional and customary education and how these were being used to prepare the young to take their place in the African society and how the African education was meant for the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage and adaption to the environment. This traditional education is also supposed to expose the young to ethnic institution and character building. Finally, the youth learn through productive education as farming, hunting and herding and also through oral literature as in myths, legends and songs. Songs like Sioyaye and Mulongo are quite important.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE DYNAMICS AND CONDUCT OF THE BUKUSU IMBALU

#### 5.0 Introduction

There are various reasons the Bukusus put forward for circumcising their sons. This was testified by interviews with various academics and elders (see appendix 10). Egesah (2008:124) has also given indication on some of these factors. First, a boy must be circumcised to pave way for the younger brothers to be circumcised since every boy is expected to be circumcised. It is also important for an ailing father to witness the circumcision of his son before he dies as he must give his blessing to the young boy.

Further, the ability to hold a successful circumcision ceremony is of paramount importance. The family of the would-be initiate must be financially stable and have sufficient resources to undertake the ceremony. People must be fed. The circumcision ceremony also goes a long way to bring 'prestige and esteem' to the family and the clan.

The other determining factor is to do with the willingness of the boy who must demonstrate the courage and compassion to circumcision. Further, determining factor that pushes young boys to want to be circumcised is peer pressure. Peer influence comes from brothers, step brothers, cousins, schoolmates, friends and neighbours.

Unlike other circumcising communities, the Bukusus did not create circumcision. They borrowed it from the Saboats as indicated in Chapter One. This followed Mango's public circumcision to testify his courage in order to marry a Saboat girl. It is this courage that every Bukusu male has been trying to emulate. Since then every Bukusu male has been circumcised in full view of the people. This public manifestation of bravery and courage has been associated with young Bukusu boys looking forward to becoming men ever since Mango was circumcised.

Being helmed by Nilotic warrior communities like the Pokots, Nandi and Itesos, Bukusus have developed defensive traits which have also given them a sense of solidarity which has been perpetuated by a strong sense of circumcision tradition. This is to the extent that "The Bukusu believe that if **Imbalu** dies, the Bukusus die too". Justus Makokha, a lecturer at Kenyatta University, insists that circumcision binds the Bukusu to membership of the community. However, in the modern life, perceptions of Bukusu initiation are starting to change.

Circumcision age-sets are taken so seriously that there is a lot of respect given to the people who are circumcised at the same time. This has affected the politics of Bungoma County. For instance, there have been cases where politicians have never been seeing eye to eye because if one is a Munyange, he is circumcised in the cluster or age set of Nyange; he expects a younger politician who is a Maina circumcised during the age set of Maina to respect him. This solidifies the fact that those who are older and circumcised earlier should be given respect by the

younger generation. It is for this reason that the initiates are always told to respect elders in whatever circumstances. There are four stages of circumcision that a Bukusu undergoes. These are:

**Omusinde** – is the uncircumcised male whose major role in the Bukusu community is running errands, grazing cattle and engaging in the early childhood education that we dealt with in Chapter Three.

**Omufulu** – is the next stage when a male boy has been circumcised but is healing and is perhaps wearing Kikoyis.

**Omutembele** – is soon after the initiate has undergone graduation. Both Omutembele and Omufulu belong to the transition stage when the initiate undertakes plenty of traditional education.

**Omusami** – is the circumcised young adult ready to play the major community roles of production and reproduction. Omusami takes care of security matters of the Bukusu and is the custodian of all knowledge, beliefs and practices.

A Bukusu male is defined by the year and the period he is circumcised. As a result, all **Bafulu** and **Basami** are circumcised during the same circumcision season and their lives are bound to one age set (Egesah 2008:121).

In the past, it had been difficult for initiates who had undertaken the ceremony in hospitals clinically to stand and speak amongst their colleagues who were circumcised traditionally. Even if they were circumcised at the same time, he

would be jeered at. Clinical circumcision is considered inferior to traditional circumcision.

First class citizens in Bukusuland have been considered as those circumcised in the traditional sense. These are the ones who danced in the village to go to maternal uncle's homestead; those who brewed their own beer; those who trooped to the river three times one of which included being mudded and those who were circumcised in public in the family courtyard.

Second class citizens among the Bukusus basically arise from families who come from mixed marriages where a Bukusu is married to a Kikuyu, Akamba or a Mzungu. For instance, the chances are normally that a Kikuyu or Kamba wife may influence their children to be circumcised clinically in the hospitals. Such families sometimes have the initiate undergo all the traditional stages of circumcision except the cutting of the foreskin which later takes place at the hospital. With the influence of Western civilisation and modern education as well as the penetration of Christianity and Islam, there are many Bukusus who may not belong to mixed marriages but who therefore carry out the circumcision process in hospitals. As a result of this there are about three types of initiation ritual in Bukusuland. This is indicated below.

### **5.1 Types of Initiation Ritual**

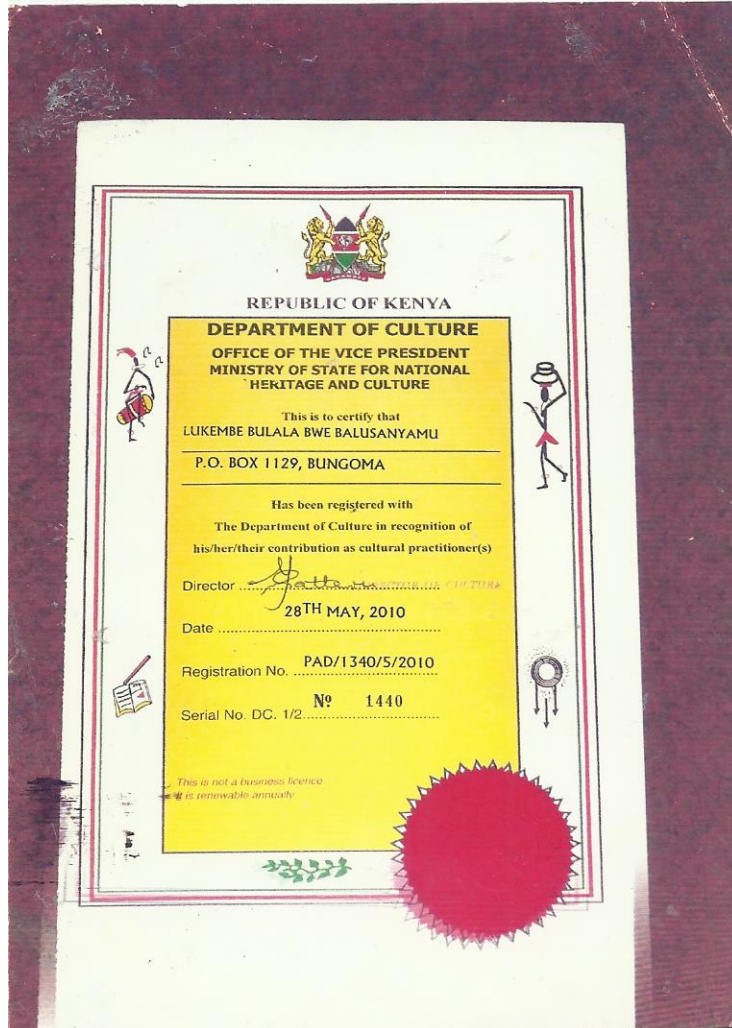
There are many factors in Bungoma County which have enabled the initiation tradition to keep on changing. We have identified three categories based on the

dynamics which are currently prevailing in the County. The infiltration of the County by outsiders especially because of intermarriage has tremendously had an impact on the Bukusu traditional circumcision. The acceptance of modern life through western education, which has brought new thinking and new techniques have changed the patterns of the Bukusu traditional life. The acceptance of Christianity and Islam has also impacted on the practice of initiation. There is also the movement from the rural to urban areas which has interfered with the life pattern of the Bukusu people. Many Bukus are educated and therefore, move to such urban centres as Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa, Nakuru and even Kampala and Dar-es-salaam for jobs or career opportunities. Some of these Bukus sometimes find it difficult to travel back to Bungoma County for rituals. They would, therefore, prefer for example to undertake clinical circumcision in the centres where they work and live. As a result of these circumstances, there are three types of circumcision initiation that can be identified:

### **5.1.1 Traditionalists**

These are the people who have stuck to the traditional way of initiation as spelt out in Chapter One. They are the conservatives who have not been changed by Western education and Christianity. They undertake the ritual step by step, use traditional instruments and apply traditional medicine during the process of healing. These are in the majority in Bukusuland and as a result an organisation of circumcisers known as **Lukembe Bulala Bwe Balusanyamu**, has been formed to ensure the perpetuation of the tradition and to train young circumcisers. The

organisation is registered with the Ministry of Culture and meets regularly especially in the year of circumcision to decide on the actual dates and process of initiation. The organisation determines the conduct of the initiation and the instruments to be used including the medicine to be applied after 'cutting'. A certificate is provided to the new members of this organisation after training and only they are allowed to carry out circumcision in the entire Bukusuland.

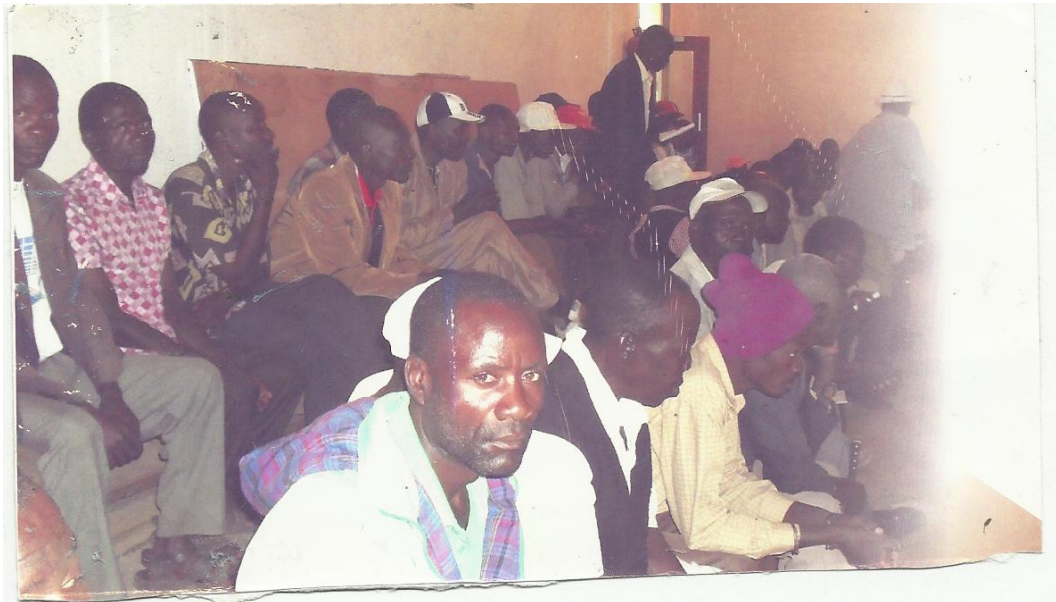


**Picture 20. Lukembe Bulala Bwe Balusanyama**

Lukembe Bulala Bwe Balusanyama is an organisation in Bungoma County for all the circumcisers. It is an organisation that is recognised and registered by the Kenya Government and only those who are members are allowed and entitled to conduct circumcision ceremony. They meet once in two years between July and August to make arrangements for the Bukusu initiation ceremony including deciding on the dates of a ceremony carried out during the even years. Only those

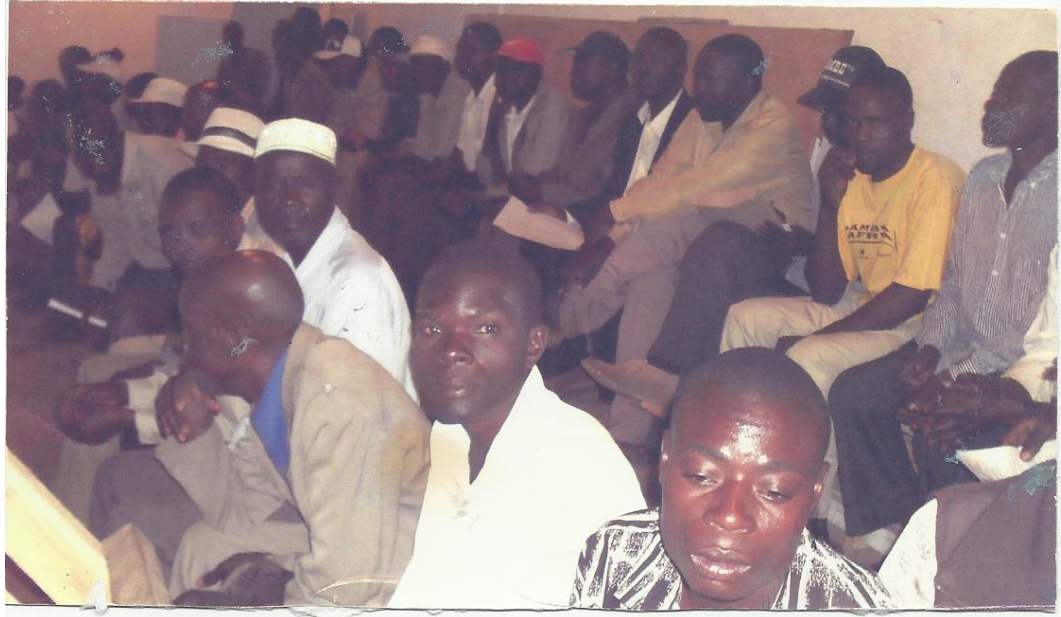
registered by the organisation have certificates allowing them to carry out the ritual.

The initiates here will have gone through public circumcision that included performances in the maternal uncle's home and danced to the river three times, singing **Sioyaye** from the river naked and being circumcised in full view of villagers. It is also imperative that an initiate through the pure traditional ritual will have partaken of **Lubito** during the healing period.



**Picture 21. Lukembe Bulala Bwe Balusanyamu**

Lukembe Bulala Bwe Balusanyamu is an organisation that has both the old and the young. The youth are inducted by the old to enable them to carry on when the old circumcisers retire and are unable to continue taking part in the operation.



**Picture 22. Those in attendance in the meeting of Lukembe held in Webuye in July 2010**



**Picture 23. The organisation office**

### **5.1.2 Partial Traditionalists**

These are people who blend the traditional and the modern way of circumcision.

The initiates will go through part of the traditional ritual which include song, dance, eating and drinking and visit to the maternal uncle but instead of going to the river for mudding, they go to the hospital for clinical circumcision. Some Christians practise this type of circumcision and counselling is done by the Pastor

instead of going through Lubito.

Most of these partial traditionalists are also influenced by the prevalence of HIV and AIDS. They fear using the traditional knives and using African medicine and therefore opt for the hospital process which they consider more hygienic than at the village courtyard. Most Christian groups have changed some of the Bukusu songs to Christian songs because Bukusu songs are considered as being extremely crude.

### **5.1.3 Pure Modern**

The people who undertake modern circumcision are mainly those who have shifted from the rural setup to live in urban centres far from Bungoma County like Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa and Nakuru. Most of those who undertake modern circumcision are Bukus who have dissociated themselves with the rural village. They therefore, have an opportunity to travel to Bungoma in August when initiation takes place in traditional circumcision. Some of them because their parents are educated and are perhaps Christians or Muslims chose to be circumcised clinically. Egesah says:

Clinical circumcision is gradually emerging amongst the Bukusu because of the influence of education, cost, health and religion in otherwise a traditional circumcision. Babukusu are constantly re-evaluating male circumcision to adapt to contemporary realities (2008:38).

Egesah continues to argue that the Bukus are gradually re-defining male circumcision and its meaning and are now gradually taking up clinical

circumcision as a ritual way of initiating the youth into adulthood. His argument is that traditional circumcision is failing to live up to changes of contemporary life.

Boys circumcised clinically have no pre-circumcision ceremonies as stipulated in Chapter One. It is also important to note that circumcision takes place far away from the initiate's home. It is done in a hospital. The traditional **Lubito** which take place while the initiate is healing is also absent. Instead of **Lubito**, a church elder, priest or Imam are invited to advise the initiate about his new life. So essentially there is no graduation ceremony here as happens in the traditional circumcision as the church takes over advising the young man on future responsibilities and conduct based on Christian principles.

## **5.2 When Circumcision Goes Awry**

The worst thing that can happen to a family is if a son fears the knife, fidgets, gives out a loud cry or calling to his parents to rescue him from circumcision. For such an initiate, Barasa (2012) says that the crowd gives instant punishment without the help of the circumciser, by forcibly cutting off the foreskin:

A circumcision candidate who exhibits signs of cowardice is regarded as an outcast and will forever not fit in the socio-cultural structure of the society for bellowing out his parents names when faced with the surgeon's knife thereby causing his family unfathomed agony. (Standard on Sunday, 18th August, 2012).

As happened to this son, his father would no longer engage members of his age-set Bachuma in any cultural practices. Barasa says that father of such a coward

would have his eldership in the Bukusu community revoked and “members of his clan would for a long time come to walk dejectedly with heads bowed down.” His mother “will never again freely socialise with other women and share intimate conversations with them at market place. Her clan Babuya was blamed for what befell her son.

### **5.3 The Changing Faces of Initiation of Imbalu**

Initiation as a tradition in Bukusuland is becoming less vigorous as westernisation is becoming more entrenched. Initiates no longer go round villages calling on all the relatives because of the expenses involved and the energy that those movements entail. Population increase has made this difficult. Initiates simply call on the close neighbours and relatives and do not have to make long journeys to the maternal uncle. This is less pompous. In modern times, ceremonial animals are also not slaughtered. Instead, the cattle are preserved for sale to cater for the initiate’s school fees or for marriage in future. This is because schooling these days is regarded by the Bukusu to be more important than circumcision itself. **Lubito** or counselling that is part of the traditional initiation is discarded by many initiates after hospitalisation. They do not go for seclusion which is an important aspect of training the youth to be adults and yet **Lubito** in traditional initiation is a crucial moment that every initiate must go through.

#### **5.3.1 Timing**

Timing of circumcision in Bukusuland is influenced by the school calendar and the farming season. Circumcision takes place in August in alternate even years, a

time when those who are likely to be circumcised are on holiday. August from time immemorial has been the time schools are closed after mid-year examinations. It is also a period that ushers in the examination term – third term when all the national examinations – Kenya Certificate of Primary Education and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education are done. These normally take place in November. Arrangements have been made by the Bukembe Association that students in the examination year do not undergo the ritual. Those between classes Five and Seven and those between forms One and Three could be circumcised and not those sitting for examinations in Standard Eight and Form Four.

As initiation is time of celebrating when there is a lot of dancing, eating and drinking, August is the appropriate time because it coincides with the harvesting time. There is plenty not only to eat but also to give away as presents. In addition, the fact that the ceremony is held bi-annually also gives those involved ample time to prepare and also to identify prospective candidates. **Lubito** after circumcision takes place in December of the designated year. This scenario does show how heavily the traditional ritual is dependent on the schooling system as all attempt is made not to interfere with learning.

### **5.3.2 Setting**

**Imbalu** is an open air performance which takes place in a number of places and not restricted to buildings. Performances usually start at the homestead of the initiates with a movement to the maternal uncle's home specifically to notify them of the pending ritual and to receive blessings and presents. There are also, as

indicated elsewhere, three times that the performances move from the homesteads to the river. The first movement to the river is when the initiate brings water for brewing his own beer. This is to prepare the initiate for future chores as an adult. The second movement to the river is the night preceding the morning of circumcision. This movement is made to the river to symbolically plunge the initiate, into the spiritual world, and through the mudding which is not washed until after seclusion. When he makes the third trip to the river, it is to wash off the mud and to symbolically return to normal life – this time as an adult. This is the idea. There are specific performances at the homestead, the maternal uncle's home and performances to the river.

Utilitarianism of **Imbalu** begins with these river movements when the initiate is symbolically being transformed into an adult. There is spiritual engagement especially with the movement to the river for mudding the morning before the circumcision.



**Picture 24. The initiate and the villagers dancing towards the river for mudding**



**Picture 25. The initiate after the mudding and getting ready for circumcision**

The first movement to the river is an induction of the initiate into the daily chores of adult life. The last trip to the river is basically to wash away childhood and to welcome the initiate into the adult world. In modern times, the dynamics surrounding **Imbalu** have also influenced the setting. Gradually, the actual cutting of the foreskin is moving away from the courtyard in the homestead to the hospital if the circumcision is partially traditional or purely modern. The participants that take participants across the ridges could be set in the homestead instead of moving to other venues. Restricted setting also reduces the number of people involved in the ceremony. Instead of the whole village participating, it is only a handful of relatives who make appearances.

Education takes place in the songs and dances which teach the initiates as indicated in Chapter Three. At the end of seclusion there, would be **Lubito** which is a counselling exercise for the initiate before the third trip to the river whose symbol is that the initiate has washed the youth and starts a new life as an adult. All the songs sung have significant messages underscoring the fact that African drama is utilitarian and functional. **Khwera Omurwa** (see Appendix 4 page 148) was composed after the Bukusu had vanquished their perennial enemy. It is sung after circumcision to indicate a successful operation. Wanyama says “In this case circumcision is compared to a hard task of fighting a strong enemy and the joy that is achieved after defeating such adversaries” (2005 – 5:48) (Refer to Appendix 5 page 135).

**Mudubi Embya**, on the other hand, says after circumcision emphasises the fact the initiate has become independent in his thoughts and deeds and is now ready to eat from his own plate rather than share with others. **Sioyaye**. (Refer to Appendix 3 page 132), addresses the historicity of the Bukusu circumcision with emphasis and here Wanyama is even more candid about the education role of circumcision.

He says:

It focuses in the mythical origins of the initiate; a theme that further inculcates and bonds the Bukusu community members respect ownership practice and preparation of the ritual. For that matter it is performed when the initiate is being escorted to the river (2005 – 5:49).

### **5.3.3 Identities**

During circumcision there are many identities. Many youth expecting to be circumcised in future join the celebration because it is entertainment and also preparation for them. There are also those who may have been recently circumcised and who therefore play the role of encouraging the initiates during the ceremony. Old men, some of whom are elders, also attend these celebrations to ensure that the tradition is conformed to. These include maternal elders and paternal elders.

Women who attend the ceremony are mainly aunts. The main aunt jokes with the candidate normally to ward off **Binaninga**. The presence of the aunt is to make the candidate wealthy and generous and to make sure that the boy stops behaving like a child. Other women who attend normally take part in singing and dancing

and later on, after the cut, to offer presents to the initiates. Young girls are not required during the mudding and the cut but are usually present to take part in the performances.

#### **5.3.4 Social Interaction**

**Imbalu** is an occasion which brings together almost all the people in the clan or village. For purposes of interaction young people whatever their status take part in the dances across the rivers and ridges. It is a period at which the Bukusu assert their culture and bravery. Elders have an opportunity to guide the youth in the ways of the people. They also meet to discuss various issues that affect the various Bukusu clans. Not only do they interact with one another as elders but they have the opportunity to give guidance. Circumcisers would normally brave the night before circumcision initiation with revelers and have a special traditional drink which they partake. During this time, they interact with the candidate to be, the elders and other young people present.

**Imbalu** has rules and regulations which all initiates must adhere to. At the initial stages of performances the candidate is dressed in **khukhwisa**, women's iron beads, **bitundi** – a warrior's cap, **birere** – elder's wristlets and “**chinyimba**” – chimed bells. The grandmother would wrap chains around the candidate's chest and waist. His grandfather on the other hand would put on his head cap on the candidate's head. The mother of the candidate plays the role of preparing beer to be used at this ceremony. As part of induction, the initiate makes his own **chifufu** that he will play during the duration of the initiation period. He must learn how to

play **chifufu** and learn all the circumcision songs and dance patterns. Ideally, this is for purposes of interaction with other people who attend the ceremony.

Since **Imbalu** is a social ritual, the candidate would go round inviting paternal and maternal relatives, neighbours and friends to show up on the day of the operation. Invitees would, as part of their appreciation of being remembered, slaughter a goat or give the candidate a fowl.



**Picture 26. They sing songs with teachings about current issues on the way to and from the maternal uncle**

In the morning of the mudding before sunrise, there is a mixed party of men, women and children accompanying the candidate to the mudding place. Mudding is done by a man renowned for his bravery in circumcision.

### 5.3.5 Actual Performance

Various ceremonies are unique in themselves. This is because performers tend to create and recreate new rules and regulations. In this way, performances are not static as participants will strategise to suit prevailing circumstance. So, one ceremony in Bukusuland cannot be the same with another in terms of structure, décor, props and language. Language will vary depending on the prevailing issues. The songs will change. For example, ‘Catch Me an Italian’ or **Mpambile Omutalia** which was composed during the Second World War when the British colonisers of the Bukusu were fighting against the Italians, and is no longer being sung. There is also another which was composed to refer to those who were first circumcised in hospitals. The belief was that they were circumcised on boards and that it was shameful to be circumcised in hospital. The setting has also changed. In the past, the climax of performances was at the river. There were three times that the candidate moved to the river:

- 1<sup>st</sup> to bring water to brew his own liquor.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> the night proceeding the day of circumcision for mudding.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> going out after seclusion to bathe off the mud.

**Murembe** has been reduced to take place between the homestead and the hospital. The fact that there would be no dancing in between the ritual drama has been reduced. The audience is restricted as there are only a handful of people who attend. Hitherto because it was a ritual involving courage many people used to attend.

The spectacle that engulfed Bukusu **Imbalu** in the past is a pale shadow of its former self. It is not panoramic as many people are disenchanted. There is little to eat and to drink. Also, because candidates do not go round the village dancing and calling all the friends and relatives, there is less pomp. The fact that ceremonial animals are not slaughtered, the splendour associated with **Imbalu** has waned. Instead, animals are preserved for sale to pay school fees for the candidate's education.

#### **5.4 Changes in the Imbalu**

**Imbalu** has undergone drastic changes. It is not what it used to be a couple of years ago. Its vigour and vitality is waning. Not every Bukusu is circumcised traditionally and some of the traditional circumcisers are opting for modern devices like western scissors instead of the traditional knife. What has happened over the years to necessitate these changes?

##### **5.4.1 External Forces**

###### **Christianity**

This has widely spread in Bungoma County and other parts of Kenya. Christians have insisted that Bukusus be circumcised in hospitals. It has minimised the role of performances such as dancing to the maternal uncles' home and dancing to the river. There is no mudding done for Christian candidates. In some cases, the circumcision songs have been replaced by Christian songs making **Imbalu** lose its traditional impact. With **Lubito** which refers to seclusion of initiates when they are counseled, the pastors are invited to do it the Christian way using the Bible.

This has tended to reduce the impact of the Bukusu tradition as recently projected by Dini ya Musambwa. Christians have tended to associate Bukusu **Imbalu** with thuggery where young people drink **busa** and become chaotic in the village. They also associate it with looseness of girls and therefore, condemn it as primitive. Christians have not christened some of the traditional circumcision songs but have composed their own songs. In certain instances, the clinically circumcised initiates spend the night in the Church where they are told the importance of circumcision within the Biblical context. The effect of Christianity on the Bukusu way of life and circumcision must be viewed within the context of **Dini Ya Msambwa** to which majority of Bukususes subscribed in the forties and fifties.

### **Dini Ya Msambwa**

This was a religious faith founded by Elijah Masinde and the Bukususes. As already indicated in Chapter One (1.1.5 page 8), **Dini Ya Msambwa** owes its existence directly to Bukusu gods Were **Khakaba**, Were **Murumwa** and Were **Mukhobe**. When Dini Ya Msambwa began, it was basically to revive the Bukusu way of worship. The movement spread from Bungoma to Uganda where the Barmasaba, the Bukusu cousins live. It also reached Kabras and Pokot (Simiyu 2000). It stood for African spiritual rights against foreign religion.

When the Christians came to Bungoma, they encountered a traditional way of worship with which circumcision had been associated. The demise of Dini Ya Msambwa started when Elijah Masinde wanted to use it as a political weapon against colonialism. He not only preached against the colonial government but did

not want Africans to be conscripted into the Second World War which he regarded as a European war. He was jailed many times after independence and Dini Ya Msambwa as proscribed in 1968 and since then, Christianity has swayed.

### **Western Education**

Those who have received Western education have mostly tended to cut links that they may have with traditional culture and have therefore, shunned traditional way of circumcision. The educated Bukusus and their children as well as Christians opt for clinical circumcision. This has tremendously reduced the number of those who face traditional circumcision. Western schooling has dictated the time at which **Imbalu** takes place.

### **Intermarriage**

There is extensive intermarriage between the Bukusus and other communities for whom circumcision is not essential. For instance, the educated Bukusu who have married Europeans. Most of these Europeans could have been married abroad during studies by these Bukusus. As a result of business interaction and professional engagement, circumcision is no longer a necessity. Such intermarriages have tended to reduce the impact of Bukusu traditional circumcision. Children born in such marriages are mostly circumcised in hospitals. Furthermore, it is very evident that Bungoma County has become quite cosmopolitan due to a number of factors such as religion, trade and modern ways of life through Christianity, Islam and formal education.

### **Health Implication**

Apart from the pain the initiate undergoes during the ‘cut’, there are relatively fewer health problems encountered during traditional circumcision. But in spite of this, there are many people who keep off the ritual for health reasons and opt for clinical operation. There are cases where there has been excessive bleeding and others where infections have occurred resulting in immobility and sometimes eventual death.



**Picture 27. Various types of knives being prepared**

Egesah (2008:30) speaks of 243 deaths and 216 genital amputations between 1995 and 2004 in the Eastern Cape of South Africa which forced the Province to pass legislation against traditional circumcision. But this has not been the case in Kenya where it is rare to have deaths and genital amputations. However, in

Bungoma County, the fear of infection has tended to push the Bukusus towards preferring clinical circumcision to traditional one.

Globally, the scourge of HIV and Aids has completely transformed the outlook towards circumcision. For fear of being infected with HIV and Aids, many circumcisers use one knife per candidate instead of a number of candidates sharing one knife. There are also those who choose not to circumcise at all for fear of being infected with aids. This has impacted negatively on the traditional circumcision setting and performances.

### **Rural – Urban Migration**

Many people in Bungoma County moved to work and live in mega towns. Some of these people are semi-skilled and skilled people and have joined their educated counterparts in urban towns. Most of these people have, because of economic reasons, chosen to stay in towns with their children and not to return to Bungoma for the ritual ceremony. This movement back to the rural areas has changed the perception of the candidate. In the past, it was difficult for a candidate who has undergone the ceremony in hospital to stand amongst his peers and speak. He would be booed because he was considered to be a coward. The irony, however is that most of those who went to school and were circumcised in hospitals are the ones who seek leadership in Bukusu County. Most Members of Parliament are of this class. This also explains the difficult situation the Bukusu find themselves in. As much as they would prefer to continue with traditional circumcision they also find schooling as a rite of passage as more important than circumcision.

## 5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter intended to look at the dynamics and conduct of **Imbalu**. It sees how the Bukusu helped by the Nilotic warrior communities have developed offensive traits and it is this that perpetuates the sense of circumcision ceremony. We have discussed a situation in which there are three categories of Bukusus. First, class citizens are those who are circumcised traditionally. Second class citizens are those who go through both traditional and hospital. The third class citizens are pure modernists who rely on clinical circumcision. Finally, we see how **Imbalu** has gone through formidable changes brought about by the Western school system, Christianity, intermarriage, health implications and rural-urban migration.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 6.0 Introduction

This is a study of **edurama**. It sets to investigate how **Imbalu** – Bukusu initiation rite can be considered as a process of learning as well as being drama. Drama in education is when education and drama take place simultaneously. It is when a dramatic performance becomes a medium of education. **Imbalu** therefore gets into the realm of ‘Drama in Education’. This is when performing and the actual process of dramatisation elicits a situation in which learning takes place especially from the point of view of the performers, participants and the initiates. The researcher set out to:

- a) determine whether or not African drama exists in the Bukusu initiation ceremony.
- b) establish whether or not in that drama there exists elements of education making it **eduramatic**.

The study was conducted in Bungoma County, in Western Province of Kenya. The choice of this was because the Bukusu initiation ceremony is the most vigorous and the most public in this part of Eastern Africa. Qualitative method of research was used to enable the researcher to observe the actual initiation process. This entailed being involved in the entire process between 1st August to 10th August 2010 and later in December for **Lubito**.

## 6.1 Findings and Conclusion

The Bukusus are more concerned with the preparation of their sons into adults in order to perpetuate the Bukusu lineage and culture. This transition is seen as widening memberships into the Bukusu family and enlarging the warrior and labourforce. By and large, most Bukusus go into circumcision to fulfill an age old tradition. If the grandfathers and fathers went through it, why not the young?

Circumcision has come to be considered as the Bukusu identity as it opens the way to adulthood. As one elder said, “It is a covenant that the Bukusu prophets entered into with God and cannot therefore be broken.” The majority of elders see the Bukusu initiation ceremony as a transmission of customs and culture from one generation to another generation. It is for the essence of initiation that some members of the Bukusu community now opt for clinical circumcision. Whichever way a Bukusu must be circumcised whether traditionally or clinically.

For fear of not being allowed to marry, nearly all Bukusus go for circumcision. Out of ten respondents only one said he was compelled to be circumcised. At eighteen his parents thought he was getting too late and forced him to undergo the ceremony.

There is general agreement that the real effect of **Imbalu** is the education that goes with it. Besides reducing the risk of HIV and Aids, **Imbalu** paves way to decision-making. Most of those who took the ‘cut’ noted that their ego had been boosted as there was tremendous change in their character. They felt more

confident and even had to improve on their mode of dressing. Most of those circumcised in 2010 believed that since they were taking adult responsibilities, they would be held responsible for whatever they did. After a successful circumcision, the initiates considered themselves courageous and brave. They would from henceforth, be prepared to face any kind of atrocities.

Further, circumcision is considered as a link with forefathers and ancestors. This link is also coupled with the respect that one must accord to the Bukusu community. “Respect elders and parents for you to be respected,” so goes the saying. Sense of belonging and being part of the Bukusu fraternity was also emphasised as the initiates prepared to take over adult lives. The acquisition of new roles and responsibility led to the initiates being inducted into wealth creation. The initiates were constantly reminded “to enter only into open doors and not the closed doors.” This was essentially to remind them to respect other people’s wives. It was forbidden to have sex with a married woman.

**Lubito** which normally takes place in December is a moment that parents look forward to. This is the moment of counselling and of graduation into adult life. It is a process of healing when the initiates are taught many things about life in Bukusuland by elders, circumcisers, parents and relatives. When they graduate, they truly become adult Bukusus.

Once a decision has been made to circumcise in consultation with the parents, the initiates must inform the relatives and invite them to the impending ceremony

with the maternal uncle being the last relative to be invited. There are pre-circumcision activities that prepare the boy psychologically, physically, socially and economically, climaxing to the eve of circumcision. The circumcision day is an important day as there are activities and performances that constitute drama accompanied by teaching. The third stage is the **Lubito** where messages and teachings are passed on about adult life. The initiates learn how to play the bells before circumcision as liquor to be used during the ceremony is also brewed. The initiates to be are involved in splitting fire wood for cooking and grinding of maize and millet. They are also practically involved in liquor brewing. On the eve of circumcision, the initiate dances with guests to the uncle's homestead. There is a whole night of dancing involving the initiate and the villagers. The following morning everybody troops to the river for mudding exercise before dancing back to the homestead for circumcision. This essentially is African drama when people sing and dance from village to village and from ridge to ridge. African ritual is not confined to space. **Imbalu** is such drama that exists wherever there is an empty open space. As a ritualistic performance, every member of the clan and village must be available during the process. This would entail a large number of people who cannot be confined to a building. Being a public ceremony to catch the attention of the public is crucial for all the activities hence the performance to the maternal uncle's home and other places. The circumcision songs sung during these dances are not only for entertainment but have relevant teaching to the initiate and the community. Essentially education takes place for everyone who is

involved – both participants and spectators.

**Imbalu** is a medium of learning in which participation and involvement necessitate learning. It is a learning in which the initiates learn through playing and dancing and also actually practise ‘living’. Like in all drama, it requires the use of the body, mind and feeling. This conforms to **Play Way** espoused by Cardwell Cook (1919) at the turn of the 20th century. **Play Way**, learning through play was seen as a sure way of young people to learn inside or outside school. Learning then was seen to come from “action”, “doing” and “experience”. For the Bukusus, **Imbalu** “experience” and doing have been a sure way to induct the young into adult life.

Learning by doing is also exemplified by John Dewey (1950), an American who insisted that learning should be by “doing” and through “experience” and the **Imbalu** process gives sufficient “experience” to an initiate so that when he comes out of **Lubito**, he has learnt sufficiently what the Bukusu life is all about. Of note is the fact that there is little distinction between the singers/dancers and the spectators. At one point all sing and dance. At another only a few perform while others spectate and rest. However, there comes a time when those who were resting are now on stage and those were on stage are made to rest. Soloists change roles. In this way performance is sustained for the whole night. These songs had messages to the initiate and to the villagers. They were songs that instilled courage in the initiates. Some of the songs as indicated in Chapter Five addressed

the issues of morality especially as regards to sex. There are those that required the youth to give respect to the elders. Some of the songs dealt with taboos and the crucial traditions of the Bukusu people including their history. The dances accompanying these songs also not only make the initiates strong but bring the various clansmen and villagers together. These songs and dances can be viewed in the video clip appendix 9 and the pictures in the **Imbalu** pictorial from page 126. Like in all African, drama there is no time limit. People have had the energy to perform for two days non-stop. As a typically African drama in the pre-colonial East Africa, **Imbalu** conforms to characteristics of African ritual drama.

**Imbalu** is a kind of African drama that Anthony Graham-White (1974) and David Kerr (1995) referred to in their **Drama of Black Africa** and **African Popular Theatre** respectively. Graham-White surveyed the main types of drama and discussed common themes and their developments and indicated briefly the direction African drama was taking. In the process, he dealt with the origins of drama in Africa concentrating mainly in West Africa especially Nigeria. He did not attempt to do anything in East Africa.

Kerr (1995), however, attempted to trace the different forms of popular theatre in Africa since pre-colonial times to the present time. In his book he gives roughly a chronological account of the development of African Popular Theatre along with an examination of its economic, social and political background linked to the conditions of production. Like his counterpart, Graham-White, Kerr's pre-colonial

African Popular Theatre dealt basically with West Africa. Indeed, it is as a result of this that I laboured to research on what would be pre-colonial African drama in East Africa. But this was also out of belief that African drama whatever it is is basically utilitarian and productive and hence **edurama**.

This research has therefore filled a gap created by the absence of any study in East African drama and more so the pre-colonial drama. We must admit that there is still a lot to be done on **Itweka** in Kikuyuland and **Tero-buru** in Luoland.

**Imbalu** is based on a rite of passage and its performance takes place during the initiation period by the Bukusu people. The following characteristics make **Imbalu** drama:

**Imbalu** is performed in an African language – Kibukusu and not in a foreign language. The interaction of those involved and the songs they sing are in Kibukusu. It is this language that expresses Bukusu culture formidably. Second, in conformity with other African types of performances, **Imbalu** have no time limit. People sing and dance throughout the night and day. Dancing only stops at the time of circumcision. Third, there is no set venue for the initiation performance. There are performances at the homestead of the initiate; performances are also taken to the uncle's home. Most of the time it is on the path to the river. **Imbalu**, therefore, fits the bill of African Drama. There is also no distinction between the spectator and the performers. Everybody performs at one time or another. This explains the differences between the Western drama and African drama. In

Western drama, there is a script written by one scriptwriter. In African drama, there is no script as the process and songs are communicably composed. Western drama is restricted to time and operates within these timelines while at the same time, there is sharp distinction between the spectator in the auditorium and the actor on the stage. It is this lack of distinction in the African sense that we term the participant in African drama a **spectactor** – a participant who is both a spectator and an actor.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Western drama was imposed on Africa through Western education and Christianity. However, Western drama has not been fully entrenched in the African society. The situation in Africa now is that elements of African drama have been injected into some western drama to create some duality – drama that is both African and western or which is neither one of the two. There is, therefore, need to research on the new drama which is an agglomeration of both. A good example of duality is the **The Gods are Not to Blame** by Ola Rotimi (1971). Rotimi borrowed from the Greek mythology based on **King Oedipus**. He took an African ritual drama and merged it with western form of drama. This is a good example of duality existed in Africa. Rotimi calls Oedipus, King Adetusa and Jocasta Queen Ojuola.

Africa has had its undiluted drama which existed before colonialism. There are some examples given by Kerr (1995) in West Africa: Before the 14th and 15th century in the Bamana kingdom of Mali. There was drama known as **Kote-Tlon**

which was performed for the feudal lords. These were unmasked improvised comedies which moralised on the techniques of agricultural production. These comedies ridiculed antisocial elements in the Bamana community such as infidelity and greed. During the same time in Nigeria, the Afikpo people also performed **Okumpka**. These masquerades were satirical plays performed for the wealthy people and elders more or less the same time as those of the Bamana in Mali. It is important to note that similar performances also existed during the middle ages period of the Golden age of drama in Europe when dramatists like Shakespeare wrote and performed plays for kings and queens. Within the same period, the Yoruba people of Nigeria developed **Egungun**. As Kerr (1995) explains the origin of **Egungun** are obscure. A renowned Yoruba oral tradition suggests that the Nupe people brought it to Yoruba town or Oyo when they invaded it in the 18th century. He goes on to say that **Egungun** was connected with the widespread and much older tradition of masquerades. Kerr also brings in myth associated with **Egungun** and says:

Myths about **Egungun** say it came from a union between a monkey and a woman; the monkey is still a sacred animal in the cult. Yet other myths stress the sacred role of the python. (1995:11).

These myths indicate that the pre-feudal origins of **Egungun** derive from a rural culture where animals were very important. This Yoruba theatre had a lot of influence on colonial and post-colonial theatre in Nigeria. Two researches are required here: (a) to find out the impact that **Kote-Tlon**, **Okumpka** and **Egungun** had on contemporary West African theatre in terms of form, acting, costumes and

use of language. (b) to find out what connection was there between the performers for lords and the wealthy people in West Africa and the drama for royalty in the middle ages and golden age of drama in Europe.

In Kenya, the Kikuyu people had a government called **Itweka** which emerged after the dethronement of the kings to pave way from despotism to democracy. As explained by Jomo Kenyatta (1938), this achievement was celebrated all over the country through feasting, dancing and singing for six months. A revolutionary council – **Njama ya Itweka** was formed to draft a democratic constitution. The government system was based on a rotational system to avoid the tendency of returning to a despotic government. The community was divided into two categories: Mwangi and Maina. Each group would rule for a generation and then handover the government to another group. The six months of celebration happened during the handover of power to a new generation. The question is is there drama that goes with **Itweka** which needs to be researched on? Yes there is.

## **IMBALU PICTORIAL**

### **CIRCUMCISION CEREMONY OF JARIUS WASOLO IN 2010**

#### **1. The Candidate**



1.1. The candidate Jarius Wasolo getting ready for the ordeal the following day

#### **2. The Family on the Night of the Mudding**



2.1. Aunts sitting with outstretched legs on the floor to watch the performance



2.2. The father of Jairus Wasolo the initiate



2.3. The father, mother and step-mother of the candidate



2.4. The grandfather of Jarius Wasolo and clan elders waiting for the candidate's arrival from the river



2.5. Nieces of the candidate who attended the ritual

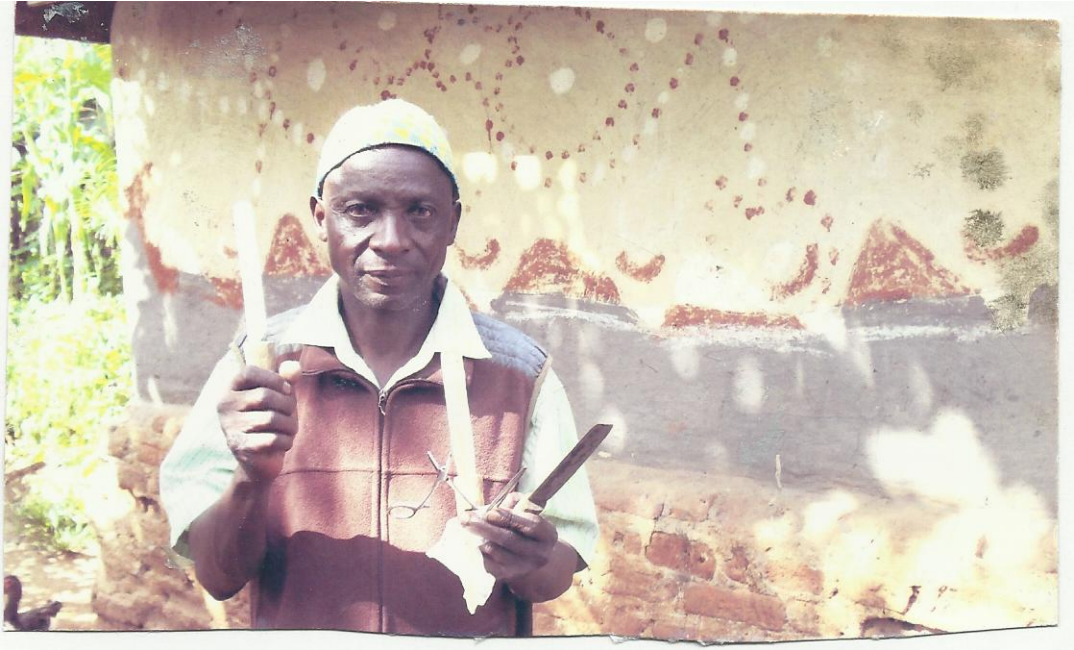


2.6. Word of advice from the maternal uncle and aunt



2.7. The uncle offers a bull to the initiate

### 3. Before Circumcision



3.1. The grandfather testing the knives

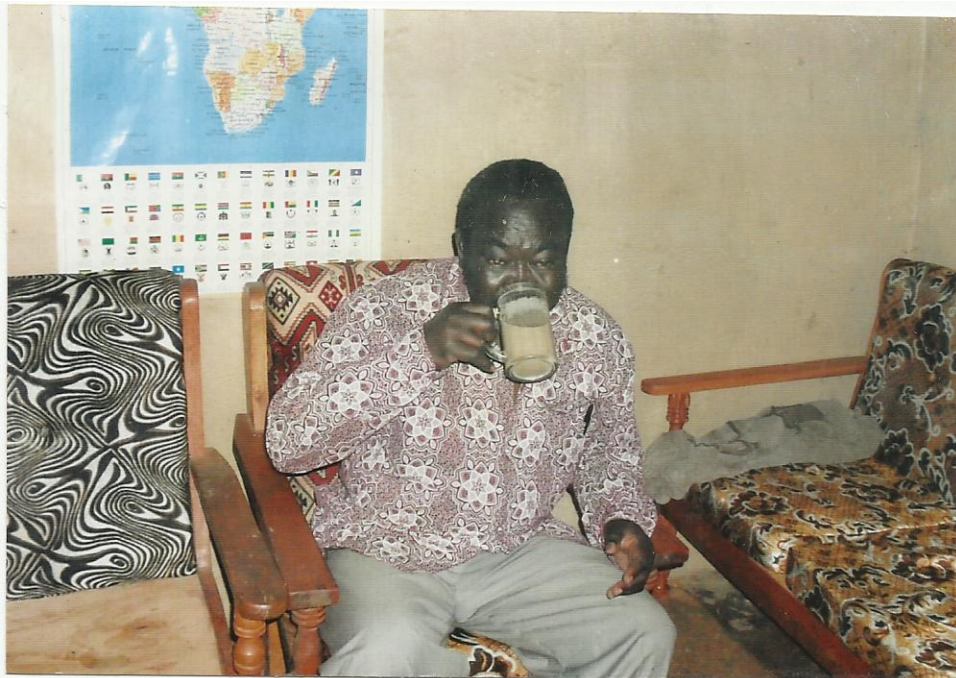


3.2. Traditional anesthetic used after the cutting of the foreskin to keep away pain and to prevent off infection

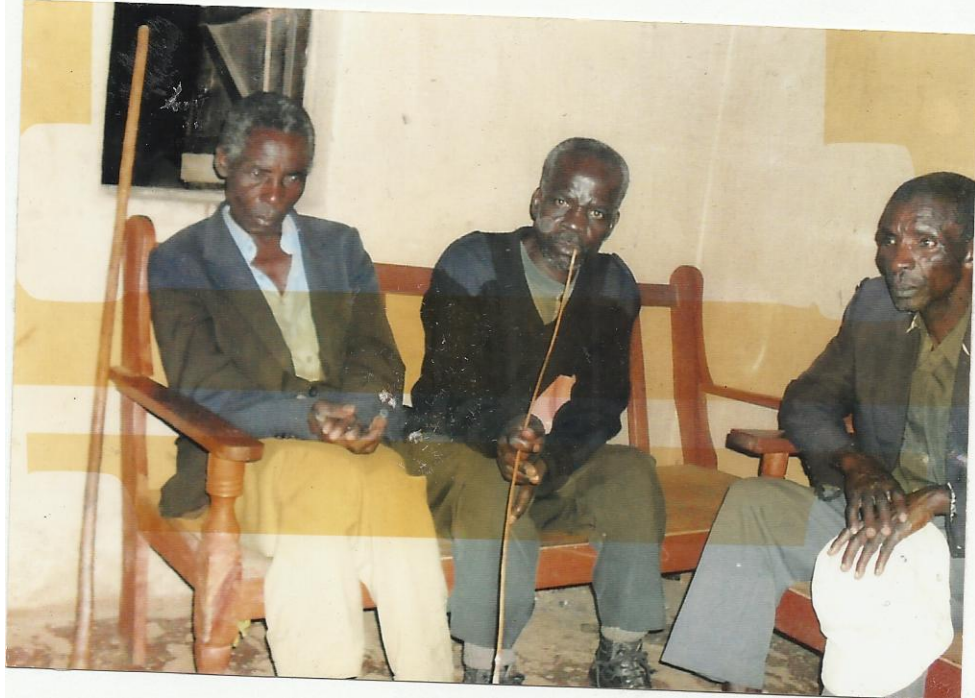
#### 4. The Liquor (Busa Moment)



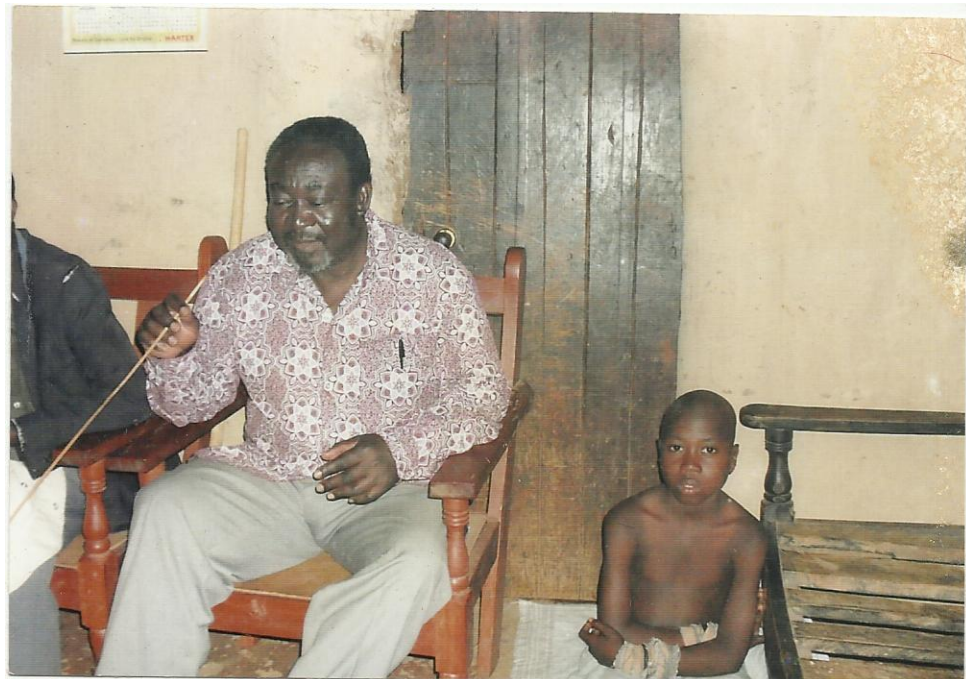
4.1. It is celebration on the eve of circumcision



4.2. Researcher trying other styles of drinking busaa



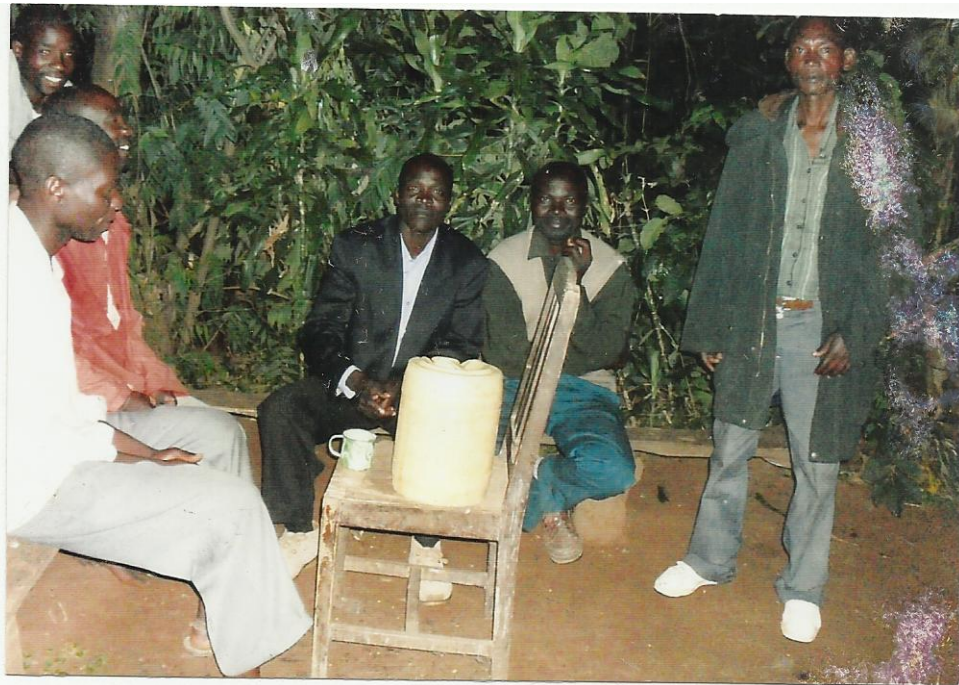
Picture 4.3. Elders who besides drinking liquor also provide counselling to the young



4.4. The researcher and the candidate Jarius Wasolo



4.5. The pot from which revelers drink **busa** using traditional straws



4.6. Liquor is in abundance.



4.7. Elders partake of busa on the eve of circumcision

## 5. Tools of Trade



5.1 The knife used for circumcision in Bungoma County



5.2 Heating the knives to be used the following day for circumcision

## 6. Circumcision



6.1 Scene of circumcision



6.2 The circumciser at the ready



6.3 The circumciser in action

## 7. After Circumcision



7.1 Gifts from relatives

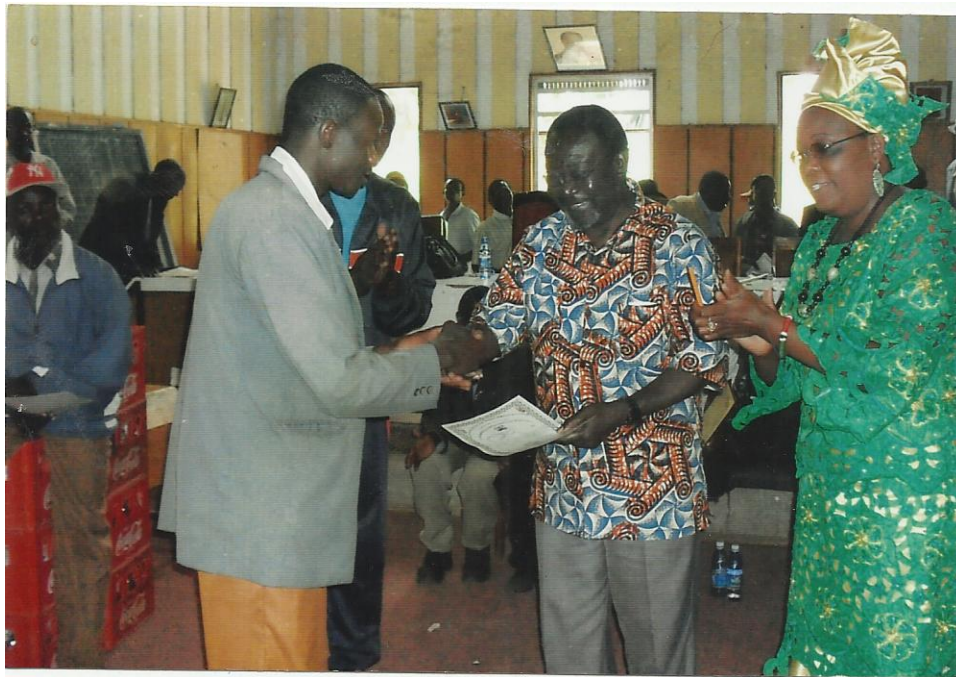


7.2 Enjoyment and more gifts as people disperse

## 8. Lukembe Bulala Bwe Bwe Balusanyamu Meeting



8.1 Researcher addressing members of the Lukembe Bulala Bwe Balusanyamu in Webuye in August, 2010



8.2 Researcher issuing certificates to Bungoma circumcisers in the year 2010

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## **GLOSSARY**

Bakok	-	circumcision age mates
Bamasab	-	the relatives of Bukusus who live in Eastern Uganda
Binanga	-	evil spirits
Birere	-	metal rings worn by the initiate
Busa	-	traditional brew
Chifufu	-	the bells that the initiate makes
Chimbara	-	circumcision clusters in age sets
Enguhu	-	herbs used in the healing process
Hujahira	-	the brew that initiates brew three days to circumcision
Kamalasile	-	cattle blood
Kamatasi	-	skin cloth
Khalaba	-	the traditional god of the Bukusu who was the creator and maintainer of all forces that are good to man.
Khuchukula	-	the initiate's preparation of the traditional brew
Khukwalukha	-	the climax of initiation when the initiate graduates

Khurula	-	initiate sleeping in the wilderness the day before graduation
Khutwika	-	naming of the initiate traditionally
Likombe	-	a house where the initiate heals
Likutu	-	cloak made from an average sized cowhide
Lisombo	-	entrails of an ox
Lubaka	-	cluster meat
Lukonyo	-	place where Wele the god lived
Lukutu	-	a cloak worn by wealthy people made from cow hide
Lulware	-	goatskin slit on the sides to be worn by the boys
Luriki	-	central part of the chest of animals
Namarima	-	shrine in every homestead where animals would be slaughtered
Omkhebi	-	the foreskin of the penis
Omukasa	-	an elder
Omunyolo	-	the Luos

- Omusinde - uncircumcised person
- Silongo - the mud used for mudding the initiate
- Sitosi - the damp and swampy section of the river where the mudding takes place
- Virere - rounded bracelet like metals
- Yaveve - a big poisonous snake

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### BABUYA (Circumcision Song)

#### (Lubukusu)

#### Soloist

#### Response

1. E babuya ekholo embi khembole babuya  
ekholo embi nalobili

e babuya

ekholo embi eh

2. E babuya ekholo embi khembole babuya  
ekholo embi we naloma

e babuya

ekholo embi eh

3. E babuya khwama nabo ekibuchori  
nebera omwana Protasi

e babuya

ekholo embi eh

4. E babuya ekholo embi khembole  
batekhela bandu chikhaniafu

e babuya

ekholo embi eh

5. E babusia bitasi earo yakhilwa baenja  
naseti yabala ekwena

e babuya

- ekhologo embi eh
6. E Rirrr! Ndi sinya musinye kang'ali  
musinye kang'ali
- e babuya
- ekhologo embi eh
7. E basani khwechuba khwakhomba liloba  
okhatima waila omukoko mubuya
- e babuya
- ekhologo embi eh
8. E khwama elukulu oli khwola mungo  
khwanyola omwana waromba kumwoyo
- e babuya
- ekhologo embi eh
9. E khwama atayi nekhwola mungo  
khwecha machula Nekhwecha khwalua
- e babuyanye
- ekhologo embi eh
10. Sirrr! Ndi sinya, musinye kang'ali,  
musinye kang'ali
- e babuya
- ekhologo embi eh
11. E sirrr! Ndi sinya musinye liloba,  
musinye kang'ali
- e babuya
- ekhologo embi eh

12. E babuya khwama nabo ekibuchori ne

bera mwalimu Protasi

e babuya

ekholo embi eh

**(English Meaning)**

(Babuya is a bad clan)

Meaning: Babuya is a bad clan that everyone should reject, especially those ones coming from the clan of Kubuchori who killed the young Protus. They also cooked chameleon to poison people. The rags they tie together can only be split by a nacet razor blade – a blade sharp enough to dissect a crocodile.

Babuya is a bad clan and everyone has vowed not to marry girls from there. When we arrived from the mountain we found the children's heart rotten and also arrived home with nothing and tired.

## Appendix 2

### AMBA MUTALYA (Circumcision Song)

#### (Lubukusu)

#### Soloist

#### Response

1. E bali nekhwimbilisia bulai mutalya  
kuno khusuna mungaki nekhwilao  
Amba Mutalya
2. E bali enje chelechenje kumumu kufwa  
mulamwa kasenda engubo  
Amba mutalya
3. E bali ututu bali ututu munyanga echo,  
munyanga echo khusuna mungaki  
nekhwailao  
Amba mutalya
4. E bali nacha khusikulu sia chelebei nenja  
khukhesia nende wele  
Amba mutalya
5. Bali nekhwimbilisia busa mutalya kuno  
baluyia bosu ne bengila  
Amba mutalya
6. Bali nekhwembilisia busa mutalya kuno  
**Imbalu** yecha ya ndololwe  
Amba mutalya
7. Bali nekhwembelesia Lundi  
Ah webale oyee

8. Kuno mutalya kwe baluyia  
Ah webale oyee  
Amba mutalya
9. **Imbalu** yacha yebaluyia mukenya muno  
ndi Mango papa wakirera  
Amba mutalya
10. Bali mbukutu bali mbukutu munyanga  
echo ndi mango papa wakirera  
Amba mutalya
11. Bali nalangilisia lundi nalanga bona  
khane nalanga nende omupofu  
Ambala mutalya
12. Bali nakhesia kwana kukhana kwanja  
khukoma kuli kumpafu,  
stiupiti khane Mango okubolele  
Amba mutalya
13. E kumpafu, sitiupiti khane ukimwi eli munda  
Amba mutalya
14. Bali khwapima khutemperecha oli saa tano  
muchama kwabimba  
ne likosi  
Amba mutalya
15. Bali ututu bali ututu munyanga echo  
khane ututu eli ne liloko  
Amba mutalya

16. Bali nekhwembelesia Lundi  
Ah webale oyee  
Amba mutalya
17. Kuno mutalya nawe oloba  
Ah webale oyee  
Amba mutalya
18. E kuno mutalya kwe baluyia  
Ah webale oyee  
Amba mutalya
19. Bali mbikita bali mbikita mumbikita  
bali mbikita munyanga echo  
omundu kecha nga Mango  
Amba mutalya
20. **Imbalu** yeche ye baluya munyanga  
chino ndi Mango papa wakirera  
Amba mutalya
21. Bali mureberesia bulayi mutalya kuno,  
motile lola, mukhwese lola  
khane mutalya kwe sikhale  
Amba mutalya
22. Bali nalanga kwana kukhana kwanje  
kukhoma ndi khane mawe  
okubolele  
Amba mutalya

23. Kuli kumpafu, situpidi khane Ukimwi eli

munda

Amba mutalya

24. Bali khwareberesia lundi khwareberesia

khwalanga maiwa mwibula

Amba mutalya

25. Bali khwalangisia lundi khwalangisia

khwalnga mai wamwikhenya

Amba mutalya

**(English Meaning)**

We sing and jump, up and down in broad daylight when my sister-in-law undressed herself. As I jumped up and down I went to Chelebei hill to greet God.

We sing this mutalya many times for all the luhya people to be circumcised. We sing and sing this Mutalya song in anticipation for this painful circumcision ritual.

This is Mutalya of the Luhya people. Circumcision of the Luyha people in Kenya which was founded by Mango. It was Mango our father who brought circumcision in those days. I called repeatedly only to discover that I had called a blind man. I also greeted a young girl who insulted me “foolish stupid”. So it was Mango who taught her these words. But the stupid girl was carrying AIDS in her stomach. We measured the temperature up to eleven o’clock then the guy started having a swollen neck. They said that it was the **ututu** that had been used to perform witchcraft.

As we sing again it is important to know that this is Mutalya of the Baluhya. In those days a man called by the name Mango. He was our father who brought this practice of circumcision. You may ask what is this mutalya? Mutalya belongs to our ancestors. Do you remember the girl with AIDS who insulted me! We found the mother who bore her in great pain and also called the father who carried her away.

### Appendix 3

#### SIOYAYE (Circumcision Song)

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. Ewe ewe ewe musindewe	hoo o
2. Ewe musindewe	ho o
3. Ewe musindewe	hoo oo
4. Ewe ewe ewe khwarakho	hoo o
5. E siboyo	ho o
6. Sye bakhale	hoo o
7. Omusinde oteremaka acha ebunyolo	haa ho
8. Acha ebunyolo	haa ho
9. Acha ebunyolo	haa ho oo
10. Ewe ewe wew sye bakhale	hoo o
11. Oh siboyo	ho o
12. Sye bakhale	hoo oo
13. Omusinde oteremaka acha ebunyolo	haa ho
14. Acha ebunyolo	ha ho

- |                                      |        |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 15. Acha ebunyolo                    | ha ho  |
| 16. Ewe ewe ewe kumwana we           | hoo ho |
| 17. We kumwana we                    | hoo o  |
| 18. Ese ekhubolela                   | hoo oo |
| 19. Omusinde oteremaka acha ebunyolo | haa ho |
| 20. Acha ebunyolo                    | ha ho  |
| 21. Acha ebunyolo                    | ha hoo |

**(English Meaning)**

You, the uninitiated. We have started this song of our forefathers. If you are afraid then go to the homeland if you fear the knife then go to the hospital. It says the leopard that scratches hard is waiting to pounce on you. Our old-age circumcision tradition handed over to us by Mango remain intact. If you are a coward you should go and live with the Luo. You must be prepared for the knife but if you are afraid you should give up noe.

## Appendix 4

### **KHWERA OMURWA (Circumcision Song)**

#### **Soloist**

1. Yaya khwera omurwa
2. Khwera omurwa yaya khwera omurwa
3. Khwera omurwa papa khwera omurwa
4. Khwera omurwa sande khwera omurwa
5. Khwera omurwa chuma khwera omurwa

#### **Response**

Aah khwera omurwa  
Aah khwera omurwa  
Aah khwera omurwa  
Aah khwera omurwa  
Aah khwera omurwa

#### **(English Meaning)**

My brother we have killed Omurwa

We have killed Omurwa my brother

We have killed Omurwa my father

We have killed Omurwa my age mate

We have killed Omurwa my chuma age group

## Appendix 5

### MUNDUBI EMBYA (Circumcision Song)

#### Soloist

#### Response

1. Oh, lelo!  
embya

Lelo endia mundubi

2. Mayi walomanga  
embya

Lelo endia mundubi

3. Papa walomanga  
embya

Lelo endia mundubi

4. Senga walomanga  
embya

Lelo endia mundubi

5. Khuku walomanga  
embya

Lelo endia mundubi

Oh, lelo!  
embya

Lelo endia mundubi

#### (English Meaning)

Today I am independent. Hitherto mother, father, auntie and grandmother who did not respect me but today I am independent. Today I have become a man.

## Appendix 6

### LUWAYA

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. E luwaya	Aa
2. Yaya oli luwaya	Luwaya
3. E luwaya	Aa
4. Sande oli luwaya	Luwaya
5. Eluwaya	Aa
6. Khembole ndi luwaya	Luwaya
7. Luwaya	Aa
8. Luwaya lwasala omusinde	Luwaya
9. Luwaya	Aa
10. Sobona lwasala omusinde	Luwaya
11. Sakieli Biketi	Aa
12. Omuyayo 'khamwa e Tulweti	Luwaya
13. Ewe Tabalia	Aa
14. Mukulima wandabwa	Luwaya

15. Bama ba kusimba	Aa
16. Vincenti milembe kiolile	Luwaya
17. Bana ba Kusimba	Aa
18. Wilsoni milembe kiolile	Luwaya
19. Muengele-munyala	Aa
20. Vincenti milembe kiolile	Luwaya

**(English Meaning)**

Let me talk about the wire my brother and age mate. The wire (the penis) gave birth to the initiate. It gave birth to Ezekiel Biketi from Babayo clan of Tulweti market Tabalia. It gave birth to a farmer called Wandabwa. Greetings to Kusimba children Vincenti and Wilsoni a man of Baengele-bunyala clan.

## Appendix 7

### MULONGO

<b>Soloist</b>	<b>Response</b>
Mulongo	Haho
Mulongo	Haho
Mulongo	Haho
Esse omutecho yanduma	Haho
Khwama wa khocha bona	Haho
Ekhafu bera mungo	Haho
Mutikiye enjeko Mulongo	Etila omwanao mukhana Mulongo
Khwola engo efwe Mulongo	Etila omwana omukhana Mulongo
Khukhwese lipala Mulongo	Etila omwana omukhana Mulongo
Muume buuma Mulongo	Etila omwana omukhana Mulongo
Mukhwese bukhwesa Mulongo	Etila omwana omukhana Mulongo
Mulongo	Hahoo
Mulongo buchuna wandayase	Haho Mulongo
Mulongo wakoli wandayase	Haho Mulongo
Mulongo Asiaka wandayase	Haho Mulongo
Khukhwesele elala Mulongo	Haho Mulongo

Omwana muyaka Mulongo	Etila omwana omukhana Mulongo
Oyuno chifu Mulongo	Etila omwana omukhana Mulongo
E bandu be nyuma musuyule bibii	
khuche mutauni	Khane omwana akwa munda
babandu be nyuma musuyule bibii	
khuche mutauni	Khane omwana akwa munda
Mulembe Cheni	Haho Mulongo
Mulembe Cheni	Haho Mulongo
Mukhwese bukhwesa mbuka	Haho Mulongo
Mukhwese lipala mbuka	Haho Mulongo
E lola nyuma nama Mulongo	Etila omwana omukhana Mulongo
E khwama nzoia Mulongo	E tila omwana omukhana Mulongo
E khwola Kimaeti Mulongo	E tila omwana omukhana Mulongo
Ewe engo wa senge Mulongo	E tila omwana omukhana Mulongo
Enda ya Sikhoya	E tila omwana omukhana Mulongo
Musyule bibili Mulongo	E tila omwana omukhana Mulongo

## Appendix 8

### DVD Video Clip

## Appendix 9

### Questionnaire

#### Initiates

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. When were you circumcised? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Was it out of choice or compulsion? (Tick whichever is applicable)

(a) Own choice

(b) Compulsion

4. Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How does circumcision change one's life? (The essence of circumcision)

(a) \_\_\_\_\_

(b) \_\_\_\_\_

(c) \_\_\_\_\_

(d) \_\_\_\_\_

(e) \_\_\_\_\_

(f) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Where did your circumcision take place?

(a) Shrine

(b) Homestead/yard

(c) Riverside

(d) Open air

(e) Hospital

7. Who was involved in the process of initiation?

(a) Your parents only.

(b) Relatives and clansmen (mother's side and father's side).

(c) The entire community.

8. How long did the circumcision take place?

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9. What about the initiation process? (Preparation and healing)

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10. What activities and performances were there?

I. \_\_\_\_\_

II \_\_\_\_\_

III. \_\_\_\_\_

IV. \_\_\_\_\_

V. \_\_\_\_\_

11. Who composed and prescribed the activities and performances?

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- (a) Prescribed by one person
- (b) Prescribed by the community
- (c) Traditionally prescribed over the years
- (d) Composed communally

12. Was there a script for the activities?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

13. If so, who wrote the script? \_\_\_\_\_

14. What did you learn after circumcision? (For adults)

- (a) \_\_\_\_\_
- (b) \_\_\_\_\_
- (c) \_\_\_\_\_
- (d) \_\_\_\_\_
- (e) \_\_\_\_\_
- (f) \_\_\_\_\_

15. Who were the people in charge of education/counseling?

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16. What changes did you undergo?

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17. What did you actually learn from Lubito?

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**Elders**

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. When did circumcision as a rite of passage begin?

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3. Why does the Bukusu community value circumcision so much?

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4. What role have you played in any circumcision ceremony?

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5. Of what benefits do you think initiation is to the initiates and the community?

(a) To the initiates?

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(b) To the community?

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**Parents**

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Why is circumcision important to your son?

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3. What role did you play in his circumcision?

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4. What performances and activities do you take part in?

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5. What role does your wife play?

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6. If initiation was stopped, what would happen to the young people?

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**Circumciser**

1. When did you start working as surgeon? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How is your work recognised in the society \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Are you involved in other activities of circumcision besides the work of cutting?

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4. After circumcision how do you counsel the newly circumcised boy?

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## **Appendix 10**

### **Research Assistants, Interviewees and Respondents:**

- (a) Steve Namaswa – an administration assistant in the Literature Department at Kenyatta University. Namaswa is a Bukusu from Bungoma County.
- (b) Elijah Wekesa – Master of Arts student at the University of Nairobi studying Planning and Management. Currently he is working at the Ministry of Youth under Youth Enterprise development fund. He is a Bukusu.
- (c) Emmanuel Khisa – student of Literature at Kenyatta University. He is specializing in Drama in Education. He is a Bukusu who basically conducted the administration of questionnaires.

Bukusus were initially involved in the research as they had inside knowledge of the Bukusu initiation ceremony having themselves gone through it.

Interviews were conducted with prominent Bukusus and some elders to get the detailed insight of the Bukusu initiation ceremony. Significant information was given to the researcher by interviewees who were talked to away from the scene of initiation. The researcher intended to capture their understanding of the Bukusu initiation ceremony and what they saw as both education and drama. The major ceremony interviewees were:

- a) Chris Lukorito Wanyala – professor of Literature at the University of Nairobi. He comes from Chesamisi in Kimilili District, Bungoma County. He is also a dramatist in his own right.

- b) Richard Wafula – a Senior Lecturer of Kiswahili at Kenyatta University. He is the General Secretary of the Kenyatta University chapter of the UASU. He is a Bukusu from Maina in Tongareni, Bungoma North County. He has exclusive knowledge of the initiation ceremony. He is a versatile dramatist as well.
- c) Evans Anyule who is a Tiriki. He provided information regarding the Tiriki areas in ceremony. He is an accountant at Kenyatta University.
- d) Alfred Wasolo – the grandfather of the initiate Jairus Wasolo who was at the center of this research. He took part practically through the process of initiation and provided information as and when necessary. We held a candid talk about the process and outcome of initiation. He believes traditional circumcision in Bukusuland will not fade away in spite of external interference.
- e) George Nyandaro – a lecturer of Literature at Kenyatta University. He has vast knowledge in matters of circumcision from various communities. He is a versatile dramatist who is conversant with dramatic elements of performances as well as having vast knowledge in Drama in Education.
- f) Justus Makhokha – a lecturer at Kenyatta University in the department of Literature. He is a Bukusu from Naitiri Location, Tongareni Constituency, who has specialised in African Literature.

Questionnaires were administered to initiates, elders and parents of the various initiates in the Bungoma County. The researcher had the opportunity to hand out

questionnaires to various people. First, there were those who had been recently circumcised in and around Bungoma town. Most of these were circumcised in 2010. Others who availed themselves had been circumcised in 2002, 2006 and 2008. One was circumcised in 1998. This recent initiates were identified and approached by research Assistants who availed them after the 2010 circumcision to respond to questionnaires. These were also administered to selected elders, parents and circumcisers. The following responded to the questionnaires.

**Initiates**

1. Simiyu Natembeya
2. Kuloba Wanyama Seth
3. Wafula Nyongesa Emmanuel
4. Tembo Waswa
5. George Wafula
6. Stephen Wekesa Mukhwana
7. James Mangoye
8. Kevin Wakoli Wenani
9. Job Simiyu

**Elders**

1. Musee Khisa
2. Wanyonyi Wafula John
3. Stephen Nakewa Kusienya
4. Anazedi Nyongesa
5. Richard Wekesa
6. Wanguli Wekesa
7. Wangila Mbuku
8. Henry Wenani
9. Joseph Simiyu

**Parents**

1. Enock Makheti
2. Fwamba Wanyama Patrick
3. Tom Nyongesa Wanjala
4. Chrisandus Waswa
5. John Kuroba

6. Stephen Wekesa Mukhwana
7. Job Wafula
8. No name given

## **Appendix 11**

### **Interview with Key Informants**

- a) Where is your home in Bungoma County?
- b) When and where were you circumcised and what was,
  - i) The setting like. Were boys circumcised at the same place?
  - ii) Was your circumcision traditional or clinical?
  - iii) Who was the decision maker about your circumcision?
- c) What stages did your circumcision take from beginning to the end, ie what is the process of initiation?
- d) Is there any differences in the process of your initiation and the present one (2010)?
- e) When and where did Bukusu initiation begin?
- f) Why do Bukusu lay a lot of emphasis on circumcision of boy?
- g) Why is circumcision a life and death matter for the Bukusus?
- h) What activities take place during initiation and where do they take place?
- i) Is there any designated place (stage) for these activities?
- j) Who/which people take part in the activities?
- k) Is initiation utilitarian and if so how?

- l) Is initiation a process of learning?
- m) What is the significance of mudding the initiate?
- n) What is the essence of lubito
- i) Does an initiate get education as he becomes an adult?
- o) What really are the dynamics and conduct of Bukusu initiation?
- p) What changes have taken place in Bukusu circumcision?
- q) What has caused these changes?
- r) Do you envisage a time that Bukusu traditional circumcision will die and possibly be replaced by clinical circumcision?