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# Songs and dances among the Abagusii of Kenya : a historical study

Evans Omosa Nyamwaka

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**SONGS AND DANCES AMONG THE ABAGUSII  
OF KENYA: A HISTORICAL STUDY**

**BY**

IFRA



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*NYAMWAKA EVANS OMOSA*

**A THESIS**

**SUBMITTED TO GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS OF EGERTON UNIVERSITY**

August,2000


## DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

This Thesis is my Original Work and has not been presented for award of a degree to any other University.

Signature  Date 20/8/2000.

NYAMWAKA, EVANS OMOSA

This Thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the Candidate's Supervisor.

Signature  Date 21-08-2000

PROF. MWANIKI H.S.K.

**DEDICATION**

*DEDICATED TO MY DEAR FATHER, SAMUEL NYAMWAKA OINGA,  
MY DEAR MOTHER, SIBIA KWAMBOKA NYAMWAKA AND  
MY BROTHER, GIDEON OYAGI*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I wish to thank our heavenly Father for having created me and exposing me to the world of intricacies whereby I have encountered several experiences which have shaped me to what I am today. Praise be unto Him, the creator of heaven and earth.

Secondly, I wish to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to the many individuals and institutions who gave me a lot of assistance in the production of this work. As far as institutions are concerned, I wish to thank Egerton University administration for having offered me a chance for Post-Graduate Studies. My thanks also go to many other Universities such as Kenyatta, Nairobi and Moi for allowing me to conduct research in their libraries. I owe the Kenya National Archives a big debt of thanks for I got a lot of support from the institution. The other institutions which gave me a lot of assistance, are teachers' colleges such as Kericho, Narok and Kisii. Others include secondary schools, which offer Music, and Music teachers in various institutions. To all these I give a lot of thanks and appreciation.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study based on the History of songs and dances among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial, colonial and to some extent, the immediate Post-Colonial period. It traces the origin, establishment and development of songs and dances among the Abagusii. The study analyses the role played by songs and dances in the reconstruction of the cultural history of the Abagusii. The focus is on the role and dynamism of songs and dances in the community's history. A major factor of the dynamism came as result of the interaction between the Abagusii and the neighbouring communities such as the Maasai, Kipsigis the Luo and the Kuria. These changes also resulted from the Abagusii interaction with the British colonisation and its cultural policies. The imposition of hut tax and abolition of cattle villages (Ebisarate) by the colonial administration compelled the Abagusii men to seek wage labour outside their homes so as to raise money for tax payment. By 1940s a large number of Abagusii men were out on migrant labour, leaving their wives with increased agricultural activities and household tasks. When they were performing all these tasks, they composed and performed some work songs and dances to either keep their low spirits high when working or express resentment against colonial administration for interfering with the community's independence. The colonialists introduced new musical instruments, songs and dance styles that the Abagusii incorporated into their singing and dancing styles. They also introduced settler economy, cash crop production and formal education as well as western religion all of which had a lot of impact in the dynamism of songs and dances among the Abagusii.

This study will contribute to the preservation of cultural values incorporated here into the Gusii historiography. Further, the research findings are intended to aid researchers who may want to understand similar or different aspects of the Gusii songs and dances. The Ministry of Culture and Social Services may use findings from this study to plan for the dissemination of cultural activities in Kisii districts.

The study methodology employed field interviews supplemented by secondary and archival materials. All these provided valuable data which was collected, sorted, verified, classified and organised to produce this thesis.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Beni Ngoma - This was a popular culture which spread throughout Eastern Africa during the colonial period. It took its name from the essential musical feature and instruments.

Dance - This term is used here to refer to songs in terms of form, composition and performance.

Mogusii – This is a man who is believed by the Abagusii to be their ancestor.

Gusiiland – This refers to the territory /land occupied by the Abagusii. Currently, it consists of three districts namely: Kisii North, Kisii Central and Southern Kisii.

Music- This term is used here to refer to traditional songs and dance performances.

Omogambi – This term was used to refer to a village elder or chief.

Obokano – A Lyre, an eight stringed instrument which accompanied most of the songs.

Rirandi – Is an instrument made of a big guord resonator to produce loud sound.

Ong'eng'o - This is a musical bow, which is believed to have been introduced to Gusii land by the Luo.

Ekonu – It is a cylindrical laced drum played with sticks or with bare hands, said to be originally a Luo musical instrument. It is sometimes called entanda.

Embegete – This is a bowed tube lute.

War with the Germans – This term is used to refer to the First World War

War with the Italians - This term is used to refer to the Second World War

## ABBREVIATIONS

E.A.P.H. – East African Publishing House.

E.A.E.P. – East African Educational Publishers.

E.A.L.B. – East African Literature Bureau.

K.A.E.R.A. – Kenya Archaeological and Ethnographic Research Agency.

K.N.A. – Kenya National Archives.

D C – District Commissioner.

U. O. N – University of Nairobi.

O.I – Oral Interview.

N.D. – No Date.

SDA - Seventh Day Adventist

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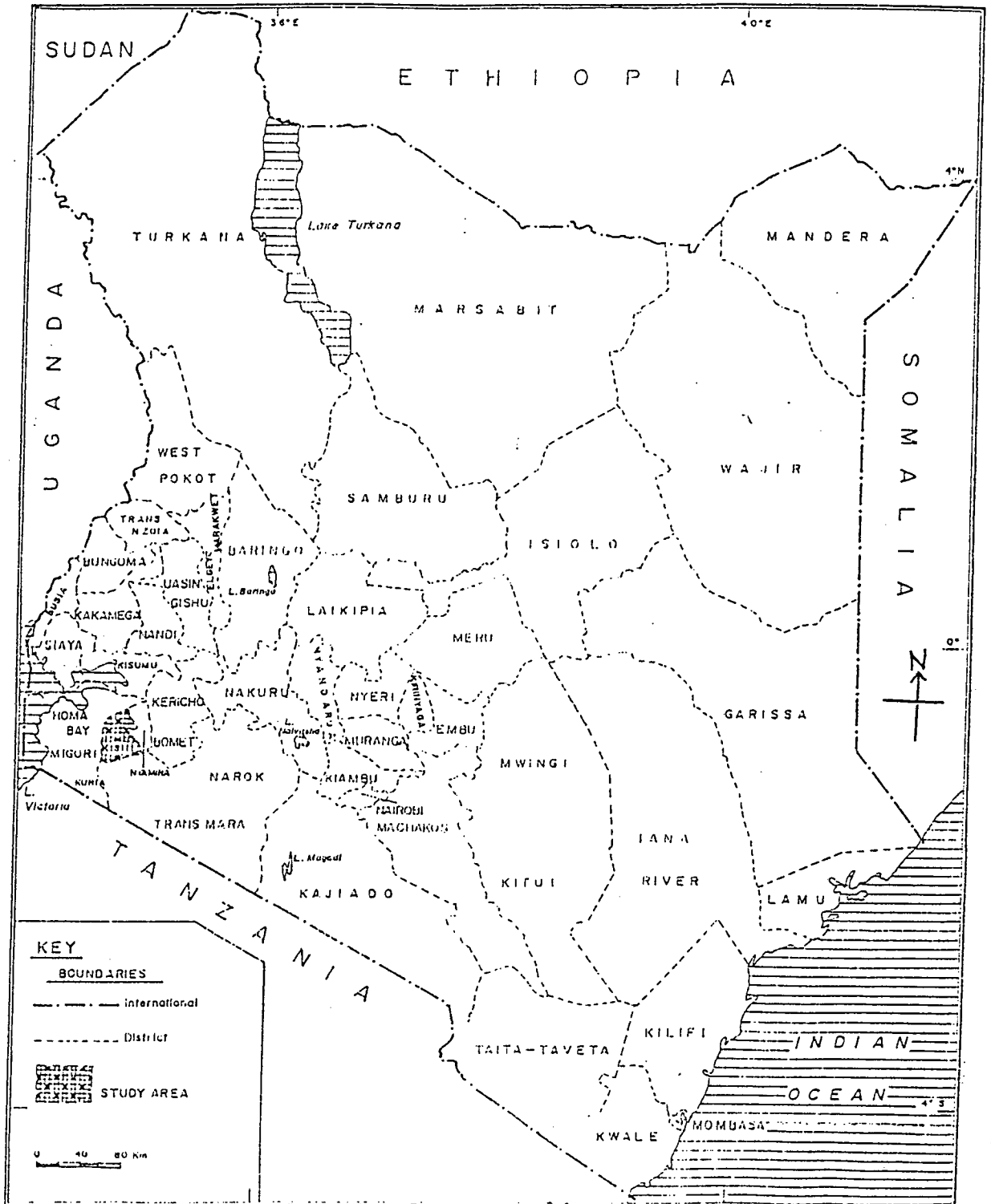
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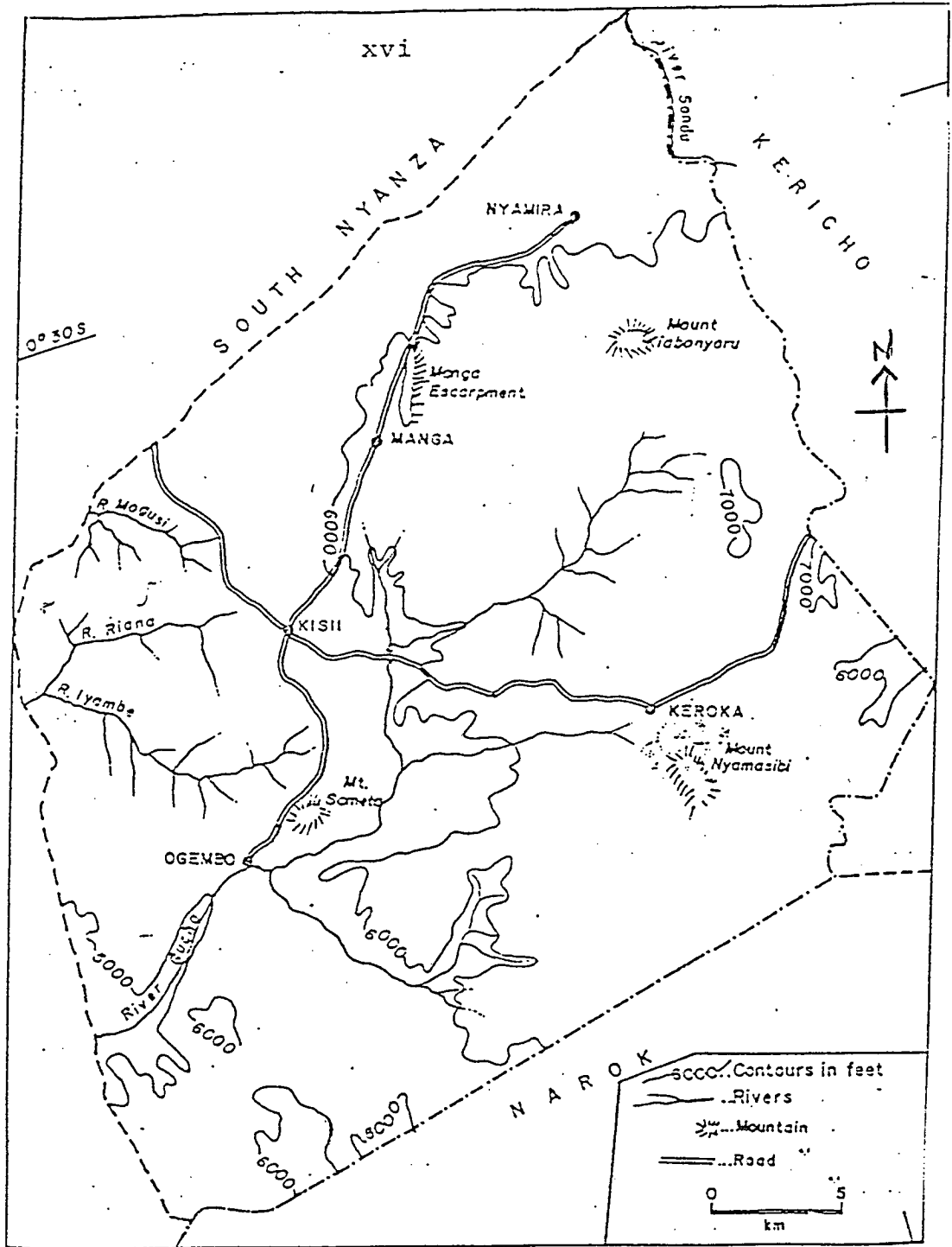
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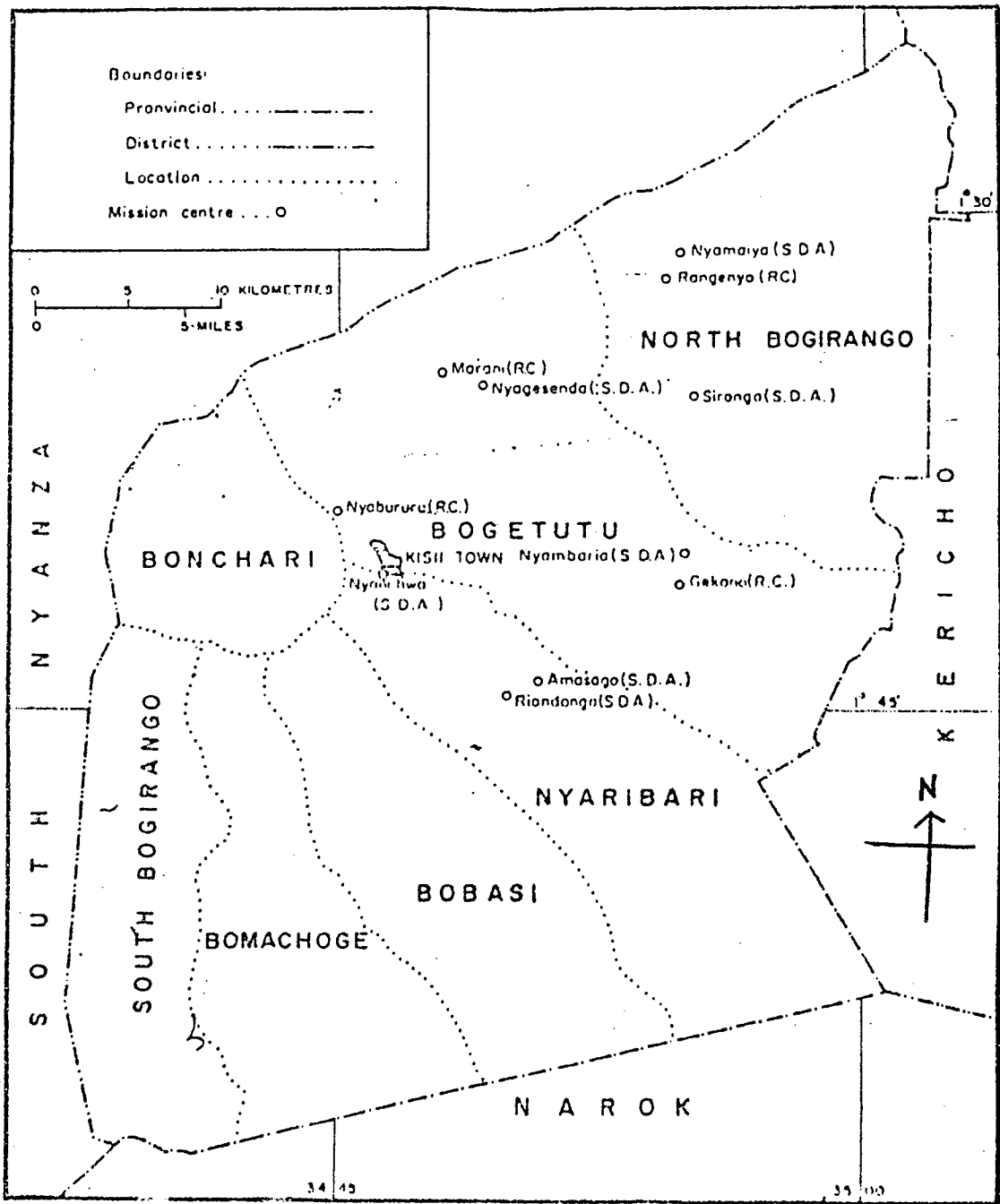
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Map I: Kenya, showing the Location of Gusiiland



Map II: The Physical Environment of Gusiland



Map III: Administrative Divisions of Gusiland

# CHAPTER 1

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Context of the problem

Songs and dances pervade the whole spectrum of traditional life. In most societies there are songs for every stage and occasion of a person's life, from the cradle to the grave. When children are born there are naming ceremonies at which songs are sung and dances performed. As soon as children are old enough to play on their own, they begin to learn numerous play songs and dances. Initiation, the stage at which people are accepted into society as adults, is accompanied by a great deal of singing and dancing among other things. In most societies, marriages are celebrated with the singing of nuptial songs. At work people sing as they perform their daily duties. Moments of leisure and informal celebrations are great occasions for performing all types of topical and satirical songs and dances. If a person becomes eminent in his society, or her praises may be sung by professionals and amateurs alike. In worship and divination, singing and chanting play a crucial role. And for the occasion of death, there are dirges or funeral songs<sup>1</sup>.

African songs range from those which are performed with no accompaniment at all, through those which are accompanied by clapping or foot stamping only, to those accompanied by only one instrument and those which may be accompanied by a whole orchestra of drums, flutes, string instruments, xylophones, gongs and clapping.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>H.S.K. Mwaniki, Categories and Substances of Embu Traditional Songs and Dances (Nairobi, 1986).

<sup>2</sup>G.S.Zake, Folk Music of Kenya (Nairobi, 1986).

Music of every society, whether instrumental or vocal, has its own characteristics and can be estimated rightly only on the evidence supplied by accurate recordings. The Gusii music has been part of oral literature which has been passed from one generation to another through narratives and testimonies. The characteristics of Gusii music, and even other folk music, are often such that they cannot be accurately transcribed by means of ordinary western musical notation. They require additional signs and full verbal commentaries. This study has taken the Gusii community of Kenya as its focus. The Bantu-speaking Gusii inhabit the south-western part of Kenya. Presently they occupy Northern Kisii, Central Kisii and Southern Kisii districts in Nyanza province. According to the Gusii tradition, the Abagusii and other related people like the Kikuyu, Akamba and Bukusu originated from a place called "Misri"<sup>3</sup>, a place whose exact location is not known. The entire Gusii people recognise a common ancestor, Mogusii, who is thought of as the founder of the Gusii community and the person after whom it was named.

Following centuries of migration, the Abagusii settled in the present Gusii highland (hereafter referred to as Gusiiland) during the closing of the nineteenth century<sup>4</sup>. Today they are surrounded by non-Bantu speaking groups. Between them and the Lake Victoria, are the Luo, a Nilotic speaking people. To the south and south-east are the Maasai, and to the east and north-east are the Kipsigis, who are both Nilotic speaking groups. To the south, though separated by a corridor of the Luo, are closely related Abakuria, a Bantu speaking community. Gusiiland was until 1961, part of the large south Nyanza district in western Kenya. And also until 1988, both Kisii and Nyamira were under one district

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<sup>3</sup>W.R. Ochieng, A Pre-colonial History of the Gusii of Western Kenya from C. Ad 1500 - 1914 (Nairobi, 1974)

<sup>4</sup>S. Moenga, Omwoyo, "The Colonial Transformation of Gusii Agriculture", M.A. Thesis, Kenyatta University, 1990, p.2.

named Kisii. But presently, the Abagusii occupy the Kisii North, Kisii Central and Kisii South districts. The Abagusii had been migrating as clans and over the three centuries of migration, clan identity assumed a prominent form. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, such clans as Kitutu, Nyaribari, Mogirango, Bassi, Majoge and Wanjare had become prominent in Gusiiland.

## 1.2 Literature review

Literature on the study of Gusii culture, songs and dances in particular is some what scanty in nature. There are few scattered materials concerning the history of the Abagusii which gives background information to our study. The following are some of the few works that parallel our area of study. Although not all the works herein talk about the Abagusii in particular.

J.J. Mbotela has written accounts on the transformation of African music and dances. He asserts that the missionaries were pleased to give Africans musical instruments for bands, knowing that they were better than the African drums. Africans would entertain the missionaries every evening while they were to wait for these "new arrivals". Indeed there was always great excitement when everything necessary was made to improve upon African music and dances. At first, Africans were taught to play flutes and in tonic solfa. They learnt to play a variety of instruments of which they did their best to know. They learnt and interpreted many good hymns. On feast periods like Christmas and half-term holidays, they used to entertain people of various destinations with their bands. As well, they played at farewell parties for prominent people. Such people included bishops, Christians of various places, missionaries and other people in the Christian missions. Men and women would come from their work, excited to hear the



bands. African parents rejoiced that their young children had skills to give this new pleasure. All the boys and girls were happy and contented, and hoped that they would soon have their own music.<sup>5</sup> Mbotela's account will be useful in our study in the understanding of Western influence on the Gusii songs and dances.

B.W. Dietz, et al have written on pre-colonial African musical instruments and their role. They assert that in African societies, musical instruments were agencies of political and social control. Their dynamic pulsation stimulated the rhythmic patterns of the life cycle. They served musical-political functions. The music they emitted bridged the gap between politics and culture. However, the above scholars have only considered a few musical instruments such as, horn, drum and flute which were not uniform in all pre-colonial African Societies.<sup>6</sup> T.O. Ranger has written on "The Beni mode as objective of study". In his history of African cultural history, Ranger, asserts:

The particular form of popular culture on which I have chosen to focus on is the Beni "Ngoma" which takes its name from its essential musical feature. This is an attempt to reproduce the effect of a military brass-band, though the elaboration of this attempt might vary from the provision of a full bungle to a drum.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed the dances performed to this Beni music have also varied considerably but all have been based on the idea of military drill. Sometimes dances took the form of a parade, a procession, a march past and sometimes circling drill steps. Singing, according to Ranger, was always an important part of Beni performance. Almost universally, the language of Beni songs was Swahili and they normally took the form of simple commentaries on the current affairs. Invariably these kind of songs and dances according to Ranger, were very important activities of the Beni members.

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University, 1990, p.2.

<sup>5</sup>J.J. Mbotela, The Freeing of Slaves in East African (London, 1956).

<sup>6</sup>B.W. Dietz et al., Musical Instruments of Africa (Chicago, 1965)

<sup>7</sup>T.O. Ranger., Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890 - 1970. The Beni Ngoma (London, 1975), p.5.

Throughout the history, Beni spread in Eastern Africa as a distinctive culture. Ranger discusses the origin of Beni “Ngoma” and the great war of civilisation, Beni in the towns of Eastern Africa between the first and second world wars, Beni in Diaspora between the wars and end of Beni “Ngoma”. In his discussion, Ranger discerns the role that was played by Beni especially in East African region in uniting Africans to rebel against colonial administration.<sup>8</sup>

Ranger further comments:

The Beni “Ngoma” was a popular culture in “traditional” Swahili towns, in the new ports and industrial cities, and in rural environments all over Eastern Africa. It was one of the series of brass-band responses by people in the transitional period from the pre-industrial to industrial Society.<sup>9</sup>

It should be noted that Beni was very much an Eastern Africa phenomenon and drew upon traditions of dances competition which long antedated the specific musical and dance forms involved. Beni offers many advantages to the researcher who wants to use it as a “trace element” in the cultural history of Eastern Africa.

P.N. Kavyu has written on an introduction to Kamba music. He has attempted to discuss on the various occasions on which the Kamba people sung and performed various dances. He has provided for a translation of Kamba songs and their accompanying dances. Kavyu maintains that music and dances were powerful instruments in the unification of Kamba people. Kavyu’s work has provided a wide range of knowledge of music and dances in reconstructing the cultural past of the Kamba community.<sup>10</sup>

H.O. Anyumba has written an article on historical influences on African music which is relevant to our study. In his article, Anyumba argues that music is an important

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<sup>8</sup>Beni “Ngoma” was a popular culture which spread throughout Eastern Africa during the colonial period. I took its name from the essential musical features and instruments. It was a military band against colonial administration.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, p.6.

<sup>10</sup>P.N. Kavyu, An Introduction to Kamba Music (Nairobi, 1977).

tool in the study of African history. It is through music that we get to understand about African societies' economy, social life, religion, education, politics etcetera, in a wide context. Each song is, to a certain degree, a "comment upon aspects of society". Topical songs consequently concern a given instant or period of historical time, relating to some significant place, behaviour, person or practice. How far back they can be used depends on how far back living persons can remember when, how and for what purpose they were performed. "Obsolete" songs or African folk tunes are a relic of a historical past. According to Anyumba, the changing songs may be an eternal indicator of changing social institutions and the need to create songs more suited in spirit to new conditions. Songs can be a very subtle index of dynamics of change.<sup>11</sup>

H.S.K. Mwaniki has written on the Embu songs and dances. In this cultural study of the Embu, Mwaniki has categorised occasions in which songs and dances were performed. He has provided for a selection of Kiambu songs in their original form and language and also translated them into English, as well as interpreting them by the use of commentaries. Mwaniki's well researched and documented work has practically aroused an inspiration that popular culture in Africa is a rich field that can be researched on and given a historical perspective.<sup>12</sup>

B.A. Ogot<sup>13</sup> has written on the content of and the role played by the Mau Mau hymns with a view of shedding some light on the interior view of the movement and its ideology. The songs expressed the sufferings the Mau Mau had undergone and the need for them to fight for their independence or to regain their stolen land. In this context, he

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<sup>11</sup>H.O Anyumba, "Historical influence on African music": A survey in B.A. Ogot Hadith 3 (Nairobi 1977).

<sup>12</sup>H.S.K. Mwaniki., Categories and substances of Embu traditional songs and dances (Nairobi, 1986).

<sup>13</sup>B.A. Ogot, "Politics, Culture and Music in Central Kenya: A Study in Mau Mau Hymns 1951 - 1956" In Special Issue of Kenya Historical Review, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1977.

defines culture as the expression of people as they move through time and space and complexities of human relationships such as in health, sickness, work, joy, life and death.

G.S. Zake,<sup>14</sup> has written on folk music of Kenya. In his works, Zake has attempted to highlight some of the major characteristics of folk music. He has analysed its development, performance and the role it played among the various communities in Kenya. The history of folk music and dances among the Abagusii will be studied on the basis provided by Senoga Zake.

In the study of the Kuria community of Kenya, K.M. Otube et al. have written works on the art of music and dances among the Abakuria. In their works, they have discussed the Kuria ethnology, the language, the technique and the place of music in the cultural ceremonies among the Abakuria.<sup>15</sup> The above scholars have discussed the Abakuria music and dances from the anthropological point of view. They have paid little attention to the dynamism of these cultural aspects that are subject to change. The works that mention or attempt to shed light on the history of the Gusii and their culture in general are anthropological, sociological, philosophical and historical in nature.

P. Mayer<sup>16</sup> and R.A. Levine<sup>17</sup> who were anthropologists wrote the Abagusii history from the anthropological point of view. They wrote about the Abagusii organisation in the political, social and economic spheres. However they paid little attention to cultural history of the Abagusii community. Although their work is somewhat scanty in nature it gives a base on the understanding of the Gusii history. Ochieng's<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>G.S. Zake, Folk Music of Kenya (Nairobi, 1986).

<sup>15</sup>K.M. Otube et al, The Abakuria of Kenya: The Art of Music and Dance (Nairobi, 1989).

<sup>16</sup>P.Mayer; The Lineage principle in Gusii Society . (London, 1949).

<sup>17</sup>R.A. Levine, Nyansongso: A Gusii community in Kenya (New York, 1950).

<sup>18</sup>W.R. Ochieng, A Pre-colonial history of the Abagusii of Western Kenya C. AD 1500 - 1914 (Nairobi, 1974).

works, including the one in Ogot,<sup>19</sup> have discussed the origin, migration and settlement of the Abagusii. It is from Ochieng's work on the Abagusii cultural history, that many scholars who have written on the Gusii history have based their writings. The work provides a framework for the understanding of the community's social, economic and political life in general. However, none of these has concentrated on the Gusii culture, music and dances in particular as far as the colonial history of the Abagusii is concerned.<sup>20</sup>

V.C. Uchendu and K.R.M. Anthony have examined the Abagusii culture and social organisation with a view of establishing the Gusii agricultural base. According to them, the Abagusii share fundamental similarities in the structure, elements of which are impeded in three main institutions: the lineage system, the clan system and the neighbourhood group. They see lineage and clanism as important aspects of kinship. They continue to assert that lineage membership, defence obligations which disappeared with the conquest of the British, invention and common sacred interests in ancestors as well as legal interests in lineage land, strengthen the Abagusii community. The two authors have not concentrated on the Abagusii cultural history, music and dances in particular. Their study interest was to get the socio-cultural foundation in the understanding of agricultural history of the Abagusii community as a study of economic, cultural and technical determinants of agricultural change in tropical Africa.<sup>21</sup>

C.J. Choti has written on the transformation of the socio-economic organisation among the Abagusii in Kenya. His focus is on the role of women in socio-economic transformation. In his introductory chapters, he has examined culture and socio-economic

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<sup>19</sup>W.R. Ochieng', "The Abagusii of South Western Kenya," in B.A. Ogot (ed.) Kenya before 1900, (Nairobi, 1976), pp.80-86.

<sup>20</sup> W.R. Ochieng', Op Cit., (Nairobi, 1974).

<sup>21</sup>V.C. Uchendu and K.R.M. Anthony, Agricultural change in Kisii district - Kenya (Nairobi, 1975).

structures among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period. He also discusses the various colonial policies and how they altered the Abagusii way of life. Although Choti's work is not directly related to our study, it provides a base of Gusii Society in which to fit in songs and dances among the community.<sup>22</sup>

According to Levine<sup>23</sup>, wealth among the Abagusii is a powerful tool in quest for political power and social prestige. Levine notes that the Abagusii culture emphasises on ancestral worship, authoritarianism, interpersonal hostility, clannishness, and very high acquisitive values. He sees the Abagusii as people who resort to court tribunals for the resolution for minor conflicts and the use of "powerful" individuals and "men of influence" as instruments of social control. However, he has not paid any special attention to the Abagusii cultural history, music and dances in particular. S.N. Bagonko<sup>24</sup> has written on the coming of christian missionaries to Gusiiland and the impact they had on the Abagusii education, health and the general living styles of the Abagusii. His contribution has been on the development of education among the Abagusii as opposed to the cultural history.

S.M. Omwoyo<sup>25</sup> has written on the Gusii past in the context of origins, migration and settlement. His concentration focuses on the transformation of Agriculture among the Gusii during the colonial period. Omwoyo's main contribution has been in the field of economic history. Indeed, the problem with the above cited works is that the authors have discussed the Gusii community without paying much attention to the Gusii cultural past, music and dances in particular.

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<sup>22</sup>C.J. Choti, "Women and Socio-economic Transformation in Kenya, 1850 - 1963, A case study of Abagusii." M.A. Thesis, University of Nairobi, 1998.

<sup>23</sup>S.A., Levine *Nvansongso: A Gusii Community in Kenya*, (New York, 1956).

<sup>24</sup> S.N. Bagonko, "Christian missionary Education and its impact on Abagusii of western Kenya" A paper presented at the University of Nairobi, 1977.

<sup>25</sup>S.M. Omwoyo, "The colonial transformation of Gusii agriculture". M.A. Thesis, Kenyatta University 1990.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The Abagusii cultural history, music and dances in particular, is a phenomenon that has not received any comprehensive historical study. Specifically, no research has been carried out on the evolution, development, continuity and the role it played in shaping the Abagusii history during the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial periods. Furthermore, musical instruments, songs and dances of the Abagusii have not received any specialised historical research and documentation.

### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The central objective of this study was to examine the place of songs and dances and their role among the Abagusii of Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were:

- (i) To trace the historical evolution of the Abagusii songs and dances in the context of the nature, the kind of songs, instruments made and their uses as well as the dances performed by the Abagusii.
- (ii) To investigate the changes that occurred in the Gusii songs and dances as a result of contact with other African communities in Kenya in pre-colonial period.
- (iii) To examine the impact of western culture and policies on the Abagusii songs and dances during the colonial period.
- (iv) To examine the role played by songs and dances in the economic, social and political lives of the Abagusii to post-colonial period.

## **1.5 Research Premises**

This study operates on the assumptions that:

- (i) Before the coming of the Europeans, Gusii songs, dances and the accompanying musical instruments were “traditional” in nature.
- (ii) The pre-colonial Gusii songs and dances continued to change greatly as a result of the interaction with other African communities and the physical environment.
- (iii) Western culture had a great impact on the Abagusii cultural history particularly songs and dances
- (iv) Songs and dances fostered solidarity and self perception among the Gusii in the First and Second World War periods and after.

## **1.6 Justification of the Study**

This study will contribute to the understanding of Kenyan cultural history. In tracing the evolution, development and continuity of the Gusii songs and dances, the study illuminates and documents the cultural aspects of Kenya’s history often neglected by historians. Historians, sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists and music specialists will benefit from this study in that it will contribute to their knowledge of Kenya’s cultural history. Songs and dances are educative aspects of our cultural heritage and hence there is need to carry out this study for documentation purposes. This study may be used by planners in the ministry of culture and social services in the planning of socio-cultural activities. The study may be of use to those who would want to understand the cultural history of the Abagusii and other communities in Kenya. The understanding of songs and



dances may be used to enhance cultural heritage both at local and national scale, thus perpetuating cultural identity and national character.

## 1.7 Theoretical framework

In analysing Africa's cultural change, various theories have been advanced. These are diffusion, functionalists, the product of change as a mixture of elements, dances and modernisation theories. In a sense, cultural change has been perceived as constituting significant alterations, which take place in social structures and social practices.<sup>26</sup> In this study, we shall mainly apply sociological approaches and thus enriching the perspective of cultural change with the vigour of historical method.<sup>27</sup>

According to diffusion theory, most of the content of modern cultures appears to have been gained through the process of diffusion. The term diffusion refers to the borrowing of cultural elements from another society in contrast to their independent invention within the host society. In order for diffusion to operate on a substantial scale there must be separate societies that have existed long enough to have elaborated distinctive ways of life.<sup>28</sup>

Culture has grown through a combination of the processes of invention and diffusion. It grew very slowly at first, mostly as a result of invention and as societies became differentiated the large-scale diffusion of traits became possible and the rate of cultural growth speeded up. In modern times and particularly in western world, the rate of cultural growth has become overwhelming.

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<sup>26</sup>R.M. Kloss, *Sociology with Human Face* (Saint Louis, 1976), pp 79-81.

<sup>27</sup>B.A Ogot, "The Remembered Past Reflection on the Natural and Value of Tradional Evidences", in Ogot, B.A., (ed.), *Hadithi 2*. (Nairobi, 1974).

<sup>28</sup> O.D. Dudley, *Culture and Social Change* (Chicago, 1964).

Diffusion theory is important to our study of Gusii song and dances in that it has largely concerned itself, among other things, to the detailed study of the relationship between musical instruments in Africa with those of other parts of the world particularly south west and south east Asia and to a much less degree the diffusion of instruments or their names within the continent.<sup>29</sup> According to Nketia these studies have been based on observation of materials, features of design and construction and certain ethnological postulations, the measurement of tuning systems and the application to the method of comparative linguistics to the analysis and the classification of names of musical instruments in selected culture areas.<sup>30</sup>

B. Manfred has made large claims on the settlement by the Indonesian colonies not only of Madagascar but also to the East Coast of Africa, the Congo basin and parts of west Africa. These claims have largely been based on remarkable similarities of certain musical instruments which suggest something more than mere "coincidence". The xylophone for example, is said to be too complicated to have been invented in two separate places.<sup>31</sup> We shall apply this theory in the study of the origin, development and existence of the Gusii songs and dances.

Functionalist theory of culture is another model than can be used in our study The most important principle lies in the functional concept of culture. The modern anthropologist of the functional theory is fully aware that he has to organise his evidence, relate the customs, ideas and practices to the fundamental core round which they are built.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J.H. Nketia, "Historical evidence in Ga Religious Music" in Vansina, J. et al (eds.) The Historian in Tropical Africa, London, 1964 p.279.

<sup>30</sup> J.H. Nketia, "The Instrumental Resources in African Music" in (Papers in African studies, No. 3, 1965.

<sup>31</sup><sup>31</sup> B. Manfred, "Observation on The Study of Non-Western Music" in Paul, C. (ed) Les colloques of Wegmont. (Brussels, 1956) p.6.

<sup>32</sup> B. Malinowski, The Dynamic Culture change: An inquiry into Race Relations in Africa (London, 1945).

To the functionalists, culture is the whole body of implements, the charter of social groups, human ideas, beliefs and customs. It constitutes a vast apparatus by which man is put in a position, which is better to cope with the concrete and specific problems which face him in his adaptation to his environment, in the course of satisfaction to his needs. Technical skills as well as organisation are based on the development of symbolism of abstract concept primarily embodied in knowledge, belief of legal systems and societal constitutions. To the functionalists the use of language, tradition and education, that is, the continuity of the traditions are made possible.

This theory becomes meaningful to our study in that it recognises the fact those creative activities such as singing, dancing, decorative arts and sculpture are functional in nature. The theory argues that artistic activities are forwarded on the physiology of sense stimulation and muscular as well as nervous processes. Dance, games and sports have practical importance. A functionalist approach to the role of dances is that the basic condition for an orderly social existence depends on the transmission and maintenance of culturally desirable sentiments.

Associated with this model is the cathartic theory. It is rooted in the notion that dancing may have some therapeutic value. Music and dancing especially rhythms, effects of musical instruments such as drums, can create tension, anxiety and stress under certain condition and release the same.<sup>33</sup> The history of dances will then be of great importance for the study of mankind. It is the hump of social anthropology, we will apply this theory in our study of Gusii dances and their accompanying songs.

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<sup>33</sup> P. Spencer, Society and Dance, (New York, 1985).

## 1.8 Methodology

The study employed data collection techniques, which started with Secondary sources and then proceeded to primary sources to obtain the relevant materials for this study. Secondary sources included Library materials such as published books and articles, theses, dissertations, journals, conference and seminar papers. All these provided Secondary information.

The main institutions where these materials were obtained included; the Main Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Laikipia Campus Libraries of Egerton University, the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library of the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University's Moi Library and the Institution's Music Department.

Archival research was conducted at the Kenya National Archives (KNA), Nairobi. The main documents studied at the Archives included Provincial (Nyanza) and District (South Kavirondo or South Nyanza after 1948) Annual and Quarterly reports and those documents relating to the integration of the Gusii socio-economic traditional life to the colonial capitalist socio-economic policies. However specific documents relating to Gusii songs and dances were lacking. This therefore necessitated my going to Gusiiland for field interviews.

Field interviews were conducted on the basis of prepared Sample Questions. During the period of field interview, the researcher either was introduced by those close to the informant or did self-introduction and explained the purpose of the study. During the interviews data was either recorded in cassette tapes or taken in note form. Either case depended mainly on the informants' moods and preferences. To avoid misinterpretation of the meaning that could have arisen from too literal translation, the tape recorded materials were transcribed at the end of each working day. Those who were interviewed

included knowledgeable Gusii men and women who were identified by purposive sampling technique. Custodians of Gusii songs and dances, music teachers in primary, secondary and Teachers' Training Colleges (TTCs) and the Gusii renowned musicians who included Christopher Monyoncho and Isaac Otworu were all interviewed. In total about 50 informants were interviewed. The interviews were, however, not entirely based on sample questions. Other questions often arose in the course of the interview. Respondents were interviewed on the areas they were conversant with.

My former colleagues, most of whom are teaching in various secondary schools all over Gusiiland contributed a lot to this research as they were my research assistants. After a brief training and rehearsing of sample questions, these research assistants were able to carry out the interviews successfully.

I visited the National Museum to study musical instruments. The data collected from secondary sources and the field was classified, verified and analysed thematically. It was sorted out and placed on the various themes as they occurred in the different historical periods. Finally, data was compiled and organised to produce this kind of work.

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## CHAPTER 2

### 2.0 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND, ORIGINS, MIGRATION AND EARLY CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE ABAGUSII

#### 2.1 Geographical background

In order to understand the place of songs and dances among the Abagusii, it is important to appreciate the aspects of climate, topography and the general environment in which they live. This is because it is against environmental background that the social, political and economic aspects of the society inter-play.

The Abagusii occupy an area in Nyanza Province, which is characterised by a high degree of physical diversity.<sup>34</sup> It extends over approximately 498 square kilometres with a mean altitude of 1,950 metres above sea level. Gusiiland according to H.S. Ominde is the most fertile and agriculturally productive region in the whole of Nyanza Province. It is well served by several permanent rivers and streams, which adequately drain the area into Lake Victoria. Its main rivers include Gucha, Sondu and Mogonga.

Structurally, Gusiiland is hilly with several ridges especially in the east. The plateau is bounded on the southwest by the Viinyo escarpment, a great cliff that rises to 300m above the plains of Kamagambo and its foot, and breached by the gorge of the Guja. To the northwest the Manga escarpment bound the plateau. From here, the country falls down in a succession of terraces to Kendu Bay, on the southern shores of Nyanza Gulf, a distance of some twenty-three kilometres.<sup>35</sup> The ridges are separated by deep flat bottomed valleys occasionally choked by swamps, streams and rivers, fed by more than 800mm of rainfall annually.

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<sup>34</sup> H.S. Ominde, "Land and Population in Western Districts of Nyanza Province of Kenya" - A Ph. D thesis, University of London, 1963, p.18.

<sup>35</sup> S.H. Ominde, Ibid. pp. 20-21.

The appearance of Gusi highlands has been likened to that of Scottish Highlands. Gusiiland has a cool highland equatorial climate. All months have more than 100mm of rainfall, which concentrated in two seasons. March to June constitute the short rainy season. Long rains come in October to December. This abundant and reliable rainfall pattern sustains a continuous flow of swift streams and rivers. River Guja and its feeders largely dominate the Gusi drainage system. This winding river traces its source in the North Mugirango and Kipsigis hills, traverses the Highland District by touching on all Gusi locations except Wanjare and eventually enters Lake Victoria at Kadem.

The geological base structure of Gusiiland consists of the Bukoban, Granitic, Nyanzian and Kavirondo rocks. The dominant rock is the Bukoban type. The Bukoban rocks were formed during the Precambrian era but are far younger than the Nyanzian and Kavirondo systems. Some Granite exists, having been ejected through the crust during the Precambrian age. The Kavirondian system consists of alternating lands of gritt or sandstones with huge lenses of waterlain conglomerates. Soapstone, used for carvings electrical insulators and chalk, is available in Tabaka in the Southern part of Gusiiland.

Most of the Gusiiland soils are quite fertile. A large part of the region is covered with dark red friable clay over the Bukoban rocks. These soils are deep and are rich in organic matter. A sizeable area is covered with red-to-brown friable clays with black clays in the plains. These soils have a lateritic horizon and medium organic matter content. Black cotton soil abounds in alluvial plains. Because of the fertile soils, food and cash crops can be grown in all parts of Gusiiland.<sup>36</sup>

The above, broadly, is the geographical character of Gusiiland and it was this feature, according to W.R.Ochieng, which conditioned the pattern of Abagusii settlement,

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<sup>36</sup> G.S. Were and D. Nyamwaya, Kisii District Socio-cultural Profile,(Nairobi, 1986), p.8.

their economy and to some extent, their political and social organisations, songs and dances inclusive.<sup>37</sup>

## **2.2 Origins, Migration and Early Cultural History of the Abagusii**

For the wholistic understanding of songs and dances among the Abagusii, it is necessary to have an understanding of their origin, migration as well as their early cultural history. The various stages of growth and development of the Abagusii community need to be addressed. Their various socio-political aspects should be borne in mind.

Indeed, it is against this background that this chapter attempts to account for the origin, migration and early cultural history of the Abagusii and how these patterns influenced songs and dances of this Community. A study of socio-economic and political conditions form a background to the understanding of a given people and their history. The early history of the Abagusii discussed in this chapter is based mainly on oral sources supplemented with written works.

### **2.3 The people: Abagusii**

The Abagusii are Bantu-speaking people who inhabit the southwestern part of Kenya. Presently they occupy Kisii North, Kisii Central and Kisii South districts in Nyanza Province. From interviews conducted in the field, it was evident that the Abagusii have settled here since they migrated from their mythical cradle land in the 'North', which they also refer to as 'Misiri'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> W.R. Ochieng, A Pre-Colonial History of the Gusii of Western Kenya from C. AD 1500 - 1914, (Nairobi, 1974),p. 176.

<sup>38</sup> O.I., With Iriasi Mogire, at Bogeke Village, Kisii Central, on 11.11.97.



According to Abagusii tradition, Mogusii was the founding father of their society. He is the person after whom their community is named.<sup>39</sup> The same source indicates that Mogusii was the son of Osogo. Osogo is believed to have been the son of Moluguhia, son of Kigoma, son of Riabaka, who was the son of Kintu.<sup>40</sup> The Abagusii tradition further asserts that Kintu first inhabited the 'big river valley in Misiri' (presumably the River Nile Valley in Egypt). It was this man who led the migration from 'Misiri' to Mount Elgon. Here the Abagusii appear to have lived between three and four generations before dispersing finally. Gusii traditions also indicate that Moluguhia, Mogusii's grand father, had sons who became the founders of the various Baluyia clans. The elder sons were Osogo and Mogikoyo. The Abagusii, Abakuria, Abalogoli, Abasuba and other related communities became the descendants of Osogo. The Agikuyu, Aembu, Ameru, the Akamba and other related communities are believed to belong to Mogikoyo's ancestry line.<sup>41</sup> From Mount Elgon, the Abagusii sources indicate that their ancestors and those of the Abakuria, Abalagoli and Abasuba moved southwards along the course of River Nzoia.

By the eighteenth century they had settled on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria. They finally moved eastwards and settled at Goye in Yimbo. Their settlement extended to Urima, Olowo Sare, and Ramogi. The Luo invaded the area and hostility developed between the two communities. The Abagusii later moved southwards. They further moved to the shores of Lake Gangu in Alego and hence to Sakwa, Asembo, Seme and Kisumu. They stayed at Kisumu from about 1640 to 1755. Nyakemogendi, the mother of Mogusii and Mogusii died at Kisumu.<sup>42</sup> Due to severe famine, drought and plague, the ancestors of the Abagusii left Kisumu for Kano plains in search of food and a better home

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<sup>39</sup> W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p.12.

<sup>40</sup> O.I., with I. Mogire, at Bogeka Village, on 11/11/97.

<sup>41</sup> W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p.14.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

The Abagusii migration to, and settlement at, Kano is thought to have lasted for four decades, presumably between 1760 and 1800 A.D. They settled by the lake shore from Dunga to Nduru, and spread into the interior along streams. Their furthest settlement inland was at present day Kibigori. They had a thin population and they led a scattered life. A family unit consisted a man, his wife and their children. They had mud earthen huts and very little contact with each other. According to W.R. Ochieng, the Abagusii pattern of settlement was largely influenced by Lake Victoria, and the rivers and streams that flowed into the Gulf of Nyanza while the majority of people crowded along the shores of the Gulf. A substantial number occupied river valleys. For instance they lived in scattered homesteads along rivers Miru and Ombeyi.<sup>43</sup> The Abagusii settled down in this area to graze their large herds of cattle, to hunt the large herds of wild animals, and to eat fish that were plenty in this area.

The Abagusii's stay at Kano witnessed a remarked evolution of the community. The period was characterised by expansion and transformation of individual family units into small but distinct clans. There was also the evolution of small groups, which had migrated from Kisumu under recognised leaders, into a number of "corporate" clans, which later developed into sub-tribes headed by various clan elders.

During their stay in Kano plains, the Abagusii had a mixed economy. They reared cattle mainly for meat and milk. They grew such crops as finger millet, sorghum, millet and roots. They hunted a large number of animals. Hunting, mainly done by the young energetic men and boys, was mainly for Chingera (Buffaloes), Chingabi (Gazelles), Ebisusu (Rabbits), Chiguto (Anti-bears), Ebirongo (Porcupines), and Chinchogu (Elephants). Most wild animals were hunted for food, some for their skin, which was highly valued for making shields, costumes for song and dance and for sale to the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. pp. 50-54.

neighbouring Luo community. Lions' and Leopards' skins were used for ceremonial purposes. The Abagusii entered into various hunting groups. They celebrated over the spoils of the hunt and distributed them to the beneficiaries immediately after the hunt.<sup>44</sup>

Various birds were trapped or killed using slingshots. This was mainly the work of young boys. Birds like Amachore (Weaverbirds), Amaruma (Doves), Chingware (Ducks), and others fell victims of traps.<sup>45</sup> All these supplemented the Abagusii diet. Interviews carried out in the field indicated that the Abagusii women also gathered wild vegetables, which included Chinsaga (spider flower), Rinagu (black nightshade) and Ototo (East African Spinach).<sup>46</sup> However, the kind of food that was hunted and gathered was never enough to satisfy people, it only comprised a small portion of the Abagusii diet.

The Abagusii Community adopted traditions connected with the founders of their community. A totem played an important role in the evolution of the Abagusii. A totem here has been defined as 'a class of material objects which primitive societies regarded with superstitious respect, believing that there exists between individual members of their society an intimate obligatory, and all together special relationship'.<sup>47</sup>

A totem may be a feared, emulated or dangerous hunted animal, an edible plant or any staple food. For our purpose, the clan totem, thus, is an object revered by a group of people who believe themselves to be of one blood, descended from one common ancestor, bound together by a common responsibility for each other, and are united by a common faith. Sometimes the members of a totem group may refer to themselves by the name of their totem, commonly believing them to be descended from the totem, and therefore related to it. In such circumstances a man naturally treats the totem with reverent respect,

<sup>44</sup> O.I., with P. Nyamatana, Mwaboto, Nyamira, 13/11/97.

<sup>45</sup> S.M. Omwoyo, "The Colonial Transformation of Gusii Agriculture", M.A. thesis, Kenyatta University, 1990, p.33.

<sup>46</sup> O.I., with T. Gechemba, Bonyamasicho village on 16/11/97.

<sup>47</sup> W. Benton, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 9th edition, (Chicago, 1973), see under Totemism.

the totem becoming an animal or a plant he will not kill or eat. It is however believed that totem animals could be kept as pets and would be treated with an almost religious respect, being things connected with founder ancestors. In this respect, leading Abagusii families are especially believed to have tamed and kept their totem animals in their homes, a symbol treated with a lot of respect. Disrespect to a totem would lead to a military defeat against the clan of a disrespectful man.<sup>48</sup>

The connection between a man and his totem is generally regarded as mutually beneficial. The totem protects the man in a number of ways, for example by revealing to him in dreams the fortunes or misfortunes that are imminent. The man, in turn shows respect to the totem in a number of ways, usually by not killing it. Working against this was followed by a penalty.

Functionally totems have a unifying role, especially as members of a totem clan would regard each other as kinsmen, and are therefore bound to help and protect each other. A totem is thus an ancestral to the clan and also to the individual, especially since it is connected with the "instituted morality, the totem is almost hedged about with taboos of avoidance or strictly ritualised contact."<sup>49</sup> In its religious projection a totem constitutes mutual respect and protection between a man and his totem and has consequently been defined as "the mystique of the family projected and extended into larger social forms."

As a result of increase in population, the conflict with their neighbours, the Maasai and the Luo, the Abagusii had to leave Kano plains to the highlands where they are presently. This was just a continuation of their migration. The most probable reasons for their migration were overpopulation, infertility of Kano plains, which was caused by

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<sup>48</sup> W.R. Ochieng, Op. Cit. p.57.

<sup>49</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Op. cit., see under Totemism.

overcultivation, lack of security and famine. Justifying why the Abagusii had to migrate from Kano plain, A.A. Onchoke asserts:

There was neither food, fruits  
nor crops. It was a terrible famine.  
The story goes that whoever had his  
brother got hold of his hand and started  
after their relatives who had gone before.<sup>50</sup>

According to A.N. Onchoke the early migration from Kano plains by a few clans was mainly caused by external attack from the Luo and tropical diseases such as Malaria. The Abagusii left Kano plains and moved to Gelegele near Sotik. From here a small group infiltrated the highlands, but the majority moved to Kilgoris. This kind of division could have been probably caused by internal conflicts between the migrating clans. The clans that had moved to Kilgoris which is in the present day Trans-Mara district settled at Ngararo in 1820. From here, after unstable and strained relationship with the Isiria Maasai characterised by cattle raids on both sides, the Abagusii were scattered during the battle of River Migori. They moved into the highlands, while some took refuge under the Kuria, and others among the Luo of Kabwoch near Nyagoe forest. Throughout the rest of the century, when the majority of the Abagusii were already in the highlands, they started gradually spreading out within the whole territory to be joined by the group that had taken refuge among the Luo in Kabwoch. Between about 1820 and 1850, these groups again re-crossed the Gulf separately to most of the present locations where they are found.<sup>51</sup>

At the beginning of nineteenth century, the Abagusii were either settled or nearly settled in most of their present homeland. The Abagusii had been migrating as clans and

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<sup>50</sup>O.I., with A.N. Onchoke at Kisii town, on 16/5/97.

<sup>51</sup>O.I., with J. Moraa , at Rigena market, 23/11/97.

over three centuries of migration, clan identity assumed a prominent form. Such clans as Kitutu, Nyaribari, Mogirango, Bassi, Majoge and Wanjale were prominent in Gusiiland.<sup>52</sup>

In the years just preceding colonial rule, Abagusii did not have any centralised political organisation. To a large extent, they derived their values mainly from religious experiences and beliefs. This view is supported by the scholars who have studied the Abagusii society such as P. Mayer<sup>53</sup>, R. A. Levine<sup>54</sup> and W.R. Ochieng. The community was made up of a collection of many political units, based on exogamous patrilineal clans or clan groupings, each of which often consisted of a large clan with a number of small clans or sub-clans or families, usually occupying a distinct territory over a ridge or succession of adjacent ridges.

T. Bosibori Observes that no one time did the entire Abagusii community fall under one 'tribal' leadership. This means that there was no ethnic authority which overruled clan authority either in dealings with neighbouring ethnic groups or in the management of internal affairs. The clan then was the most effective political unit.<sup>55</sup>

The Abagusii clans were aware of having originally a common ancestor, and they were connected by bonds of intermarriage and common beliefs and practices in such a way that they considered themselves as a unit in contrast to the surrounding groups with whom they did not maintain such bonds. The leader of each political unit was locally called Omoruoti or Omogambi, a title equivalent to a chief. This was a man who was accepted publicly and performed religious and political roles. Omogambi was assisted by council of elders, etureti. The etureti met when there was need to solve social, political and religious problems. Omogambi were regarded as living representatives of the original lineage

<sup>52</sup>S.M. Omwoyo, OP cit. p.27.

<sup>53</sup>P.Mayer, The lineage principle in Gusii Society (London, 1949), pp.20-25.

<sup>54</sup>R.A. Levine, Nyansongo: A Gusii community in Kenya. (New York, 1950).

<sup>55</sup>O.I., with T. Bosibori, Nyankononi market, on 10/12/97.

founders and were believed to be men who were divinely sanctioned to lead clans in communal sacrifices and social activities. They would be the first to cultivate, the first to sow, to taste crops on maturity and the first to harvest<sup>56</sup>

Besides the Omogambi, there were other notable leaders locally called Abarai. W.R. Ochieng has defined these leaders as persons who were talented or had qualities of leadership, played a directing role, wielded commanding influence, or had a following in any sphere of activity or thought<sup>57</sup>. They consisted of 'prophets' (for example Sakawa) elders, seers and rainmakers. The Gusii homestead was an internally self-governing unit. Omogaka (the father of the home) was the head of the family. He was assisted by his wife (Omokungu) to look after the children. A family consisted of husband, wife or wives in case of a polygamous family and children Omosacha (the 'husband') of the family had the role of looking for food and other family needs. While Omokungu had a duty of doing domestic work such as cooking and looking after the children. Conflicts, between members of a given home were handled by parents. Those of different homesteads were taken to the elders' council headed by the Omogambi<sup>58</sup> Religion was another unifying factor among the Abagusii. They believed in one God called Engoro who was believed to be the Supreme Being. Engoro was the creator of the world.

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<sup>56</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit, p. 196.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid. P. 197.

<sup>58</sup>O.I., with N. Ogeturenki at Bogeka, on 13/12/97.

According to C. Nyabonyi<sup>59</sup> Engoro among the Abagusii governed man's destiny, he brought rain to him and gave him all that he desired. W. R. Ochieng' holds the view that Engoro sent to man rain or storm, well being or famine, health or disease, peace or war depending on what he chose to give him<sup>60</sup>

The Abagusii believed that God's continued operation in the physical world was executed through his agents, the ancestral spirits (ebirecha). These spirits were believed to have great influence on the social and economic lives of the Abagusii. In the event of a calamity or disease, a seer or a diviner (Omoragori) could be consulted on the wishes of the ancestors, who more often than not, were believed to be behind the calamity<sup>61</sup> Sometimes, the Sun stood for Engoro and the two terms were used interchangeably.

In the words of G.A.S North-cote, 'God among the ancient Kisii people seemed to have slid on the scales of meaning between sun and ancestor worship.'<sup>62</sup> Individuals had direct access to God throughout the year by means of prayer. The Abagusii offered sacrifices to God which were conducted mainly by the heads of the various homesteads. At harvesting time or the start of a given year there was always thanks giving to God in form of sacrifices which was followed by festivals involving singing, dancing and beer drinking.<sup>63</sup>

Among the Abagusii, the family was a social arena where important human events such as birth, initiation, marriage and death took place in the pre-colonial period. These were marked with celebrations, feasting, singing and dancing. The entire Abagusii indigenous education acquired through infancy to marriage stage was put into practice throughout life. It was tested, refined and perfected.

<sup>59</sup>O.I., with C. Nyabonyi, at Nyacheki market, on 17/12/97.

<sup>60</sup>W.R. Ochieng OP. cit, pp 184-185.

<sup>61</sup>R.A. Levine, OP.Cit, P.60.

<sup>62</sup>KNA/DC/KSI/1/1908.

<sup>63</sup>O.I., with J. Kimanga, at Nyamira market on 21/12/97.



## 2.4 Cultural Practices among the Abagusii

The Abagusii cultural practices that are discussed here cover the Abagusii traditions right from birth, initiation, marriage, and adulthood to death. The various stages of growth and development among the Abagusii discussed here provide a firm background for the understanding of songs and dances of the community.

## 2.5 Birth

Reproductive fertility was a very important aspect among the Abagusii. It was considered as a blessing of any married person. Barrenness (Obogomba) was thought by the Abagusii to have been brought by the disappointment of the ancestral spirits (ebirecha) when, or if, the victim refused to offer sacrifice to them. It was also considered to have been brought about by the failure to perform some vital cultural rituals such as keeping one's fire lighting throughout seclusion period after circumcision. To some Abagusii clans, barrenness could also be caused by witchcraft.<sup>64</sup> In totality, the Abagusii considered barrenness a curse.

Marrying more wives solved a woman's barrenness in this community. If a man for instance realised that his wife was barren, he had to marry another wife or wives whom he bore children with. Children were indeed assets to any Gusii family. In the case where it was proven that it was the man who was barren, then the woman was allowed to 'try outside the house', which meant that the husbands' brothers or cousins could come in to get children with the wife.<sup>65</sup> However sacrifices were to be offered before by the parents to appease the ancestral spirits. During these sacrifices, animals like goats, sheep and hens

<sup>64</sup>O.I., with C. Moraa, at Mache- Achumbi-Kisii, on 28/12/97.

<sup>65</sup>M.M. Okeng'o, "An Analysis of the Poetry and Culture of the Abagusii of Western Kenya", A Project thesis Kenyatta University, 1990. p.4.

of a particular colour that could be black or white as the medicineman (Omoragori) suggested were offered. Songs and dances were performed during this ceremony.

A pregnant woman in the Abagusii traditional society was given special treatment. She could only do light duties in the house and in the fields. As the pregnancy matured, she was exempted from heavy duties. Pregnant women were not allowed to take part in certain traditional ceremonies since most of them involved dancing and hectic movement which could affect the health of the pregnant mother. Pregnant women, according to Abagusii beliefs, were not allowed to go near a grave during funerals. It was thought that the unborn baby was not supposed to be oriented to sorrows before coming to the physical world. A pregnant woman was not allowed to eat bitter foods. This was because it was thought that the unborn baby would be rude, harsh or disobedient if it consumed bitter foods from her mother during pregnancy. Among the Abagusii, it was a taboo to beat a pregnant woman. In case she made a mistake, she was warned by a word of mouth.

At the time of giving birth, the mother was helped by Mid-wives and her fellow women. A woman, at the time of labour was confined in her bedroom where she gave birth. If the woman was young and perhaps newly married, she went back to her parents' home when her maternity days approached. It was here where the birth of her first born took place. She stayed for two to three months after which her sisters and cousins escorted her to her marital home.<sup>66</sup>

Women to mark the birth of a child performed ululation. When a child was born, there followed moments of great joy accompanied by singing and dancing. A male child was received with more and prolonged ululation than a female child. The reason was that male children were thought to be the future protectors of the community. The Abagusii

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<sup>66</sup>O.I., with J. Mogire, at Nyanturago market, on 18/10/97.

had a saying that goes 'bamura mbanga bande (boys are not like others). This saying implied that boys were more reliable in defending the society against any external aggression. Female children received fewer ululations than male children did because it was thought that they would go to new and different homes when they grew up. And that their work would be 'centred in the kitchen'. It is worth noting that ululation accorded to male children were more peculiar than those performed for the female children in that they were accompanied by words of praise and whistling from men. Those of female children had few words of praise.

A mother who had just given birth was considered weak and had to remain in the house to regain her strength. After two weeks, the grandmother shaved the child. The Okogingera (shaving) exercise was, and still is, important among the Abagusii.

Children were given names that originated from their dead relatives and great parents among the Abagusii. Some people named their children after certain events, warriors of the community, elders who had died, or even after certain animals<sup>67</sup>. For instance children who happened to be born during the great famine that was experienced in early 1940 were called Nyangweso after the famine that was known as Nyangweso. When parents met certain strange animals before a child was born, the new born would be given the wild animal's name.

It was a bad omen to meet certain animals like Eguto (ant-bear), Enyang'au (hyena) or Chingera (buffalo). Once one met such animals he or she was made to believe that the ancestral spirits were warning him or her against bad conduct. Thus the most appropriate way of propitiating the ancestral spirits was recognising the ancestors' power by naming any child born within the family after the animal that was met. That is why

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<sup>67</sup>M.M. Okeng'o, Op. cit., p.8.

some people came to be called Nyang'au, (after the hyena), Guto (after the ant-bear), Basweti (after the python) and so on<sup>68</sup>. From 1 year to 3 years, the family mainly took care of a child, especially the mother. During this period, a child learnt the fundamentals of language from the mother and the surrounding people. Between the age of 3-7 years, children in the family were taught correct manners, and the general behaviour expected of children in Gusii society. A child was also taught how to greet various groups of people and how to handle household items such as fire, furniture, knives and food. Through lullabies, stories, myths, legends and songs, the grandparents instructed children and taught them the community's history, religious beliefs and laws.

Young girls were taught by their mothers and other mature women just as boys were instructed by their fathers and other elderly men. All the Abagusii children belonged to the community. Any adult person had the obligation of assigning duty, correcting by reprimanding or even severely punishing, guiding and directing any child in the community. Children were taught by elders to know their clans and relatives. The entire indigenous education among the Abagusii was acquired right from the times of childhood to death.

There was a popular saying in the community that 'Omote nigo ogokumbwa ekero ore omoke' (the tree is straightened when it is young). This saying referred to the timing of education in the community<sup>69</sup>. According to the Abagusii, an elderly person was to be relied on, on matters pertaining wisdom and objectivity in judgement. The Abagusii saying 'Monto monene ndiogo' ('an elderly person is medicine')<sup>70</sup> helps to emphasise the point that elderly people were regarded as knowledgeable and hence relied upon to give

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid, p.8.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, pp. 27-29.

<sup>70</sup>O.I., with W. Obare, at Nyamagesa market, on 27/12/97.

advice and guidance. Adult persons accumulated the knowledge and experience they acquired in their life-long education. In addition, various institutions worked at moulding the life of the individual through formal, informal and unconscious training. These institutions included the family, peers and the community at large<sup>71</sup>. In a word a Gusii knowledgeable person who gave advice and guidance and also was conversant with the Abagusii history and customs was a 'a moving and talking encyclopaedia'<sup>72</sup>.

## 2.6 Circumcision

Among the Abagusii initiation was a very important stage in the development of both boys and girls into adulthood. Male and female children were eligible for initiation between the ages of twelve and eighteen years<sup>73</sup>. Initiation practice was very important in that it was through it that the initiates were given certain special skills and teachings such as sex education. Initiates learnt very important attributes of bravery and patriotism.

In most cases, it was the child who suggested to his or her parents that he or she wanted to be initiated. The parents could agree or object. Agreement or objection on whether a given boy or girl would be initiated depended mainly on the age of the child and the appropriateness of the event.<sup>74</sup>

Once the male child's circumcision proposal was accepted, he went to the village to invite young men of the older generation to take him to the circumcisor (bware). Preparation for circumcision included the initiate's gathering a lot of firewood with which to light the seclusion fire, brewing enough beer (amarwa), for celebration as this was a 'kind of stuff' which was popular among the elderly men and women in any social ceremony. As well, enough food was prepared for the young men who would accompany

<sup>71</sup>O.I., with J. Kimanga, at Nyamira market, on 21/12/97.

<sup>72</sup>O.I., with S. Musioma, at Bogetutu Village, on 17/11/97.

<sup>73</sup>O.I., with J. Nyandika, at Bomobea Village, on 10/11/97.

<sup>74</sup>O.I., with M. Nyaboke, at Bochuria Village, Nyamira, on 16/12/97.

the initiate and other guests who would attend the ceremony. Girls of the older age and their mothers escorted girls to the 'circumcisor' (omokebi).

Circumcisors among the Abagusii community played a very important role. They were often considered as traditional surgeons. They inherited their profession from their parents. Sometimes initiates had to walk for long distances to look for one. The circumcisors were given such items as grain, a goat, a hen and the equivalent. This was because of lack of monetary currency among the Abagusii in the olden days.<sup>75</sup> Even after the introduction of currency, the above items had more value than money and were generally accepted as a payment for such a ritual exercise.

Male initiates had to be given certain tests the night before the circumcision day. These tests included, picking a burning stick from the middle of a burning fire, sitting on stinging needle plants (amase) while naked as well as standing still for a long time as sign of discipline. On circumcision day, male initiates were teased with spears, bows and arrows and other weapons. The major aim was to inculcate a sense of manhood into them. It should be observed that female initiates did not undergo such tests.

Initiates were often gathered together in one hut the night preceding the circumcision day. In most cases, these initiates came from one village. On the circumcision day, they had to wake up so early (as early as 2.00 am) to travel to the circumcisor's place. On their way, male initiates had to dip themselves in a nearby cold stream. This was meant to remove any form of fear among the initiates. It was also thought that cold water was anaesthetic and therefore could reduce pains during the cutting of the foreskin. This was done to the male initiates only<sup>76</sup>. Symbolically, this served as a mark of transition. It implied that a childhood stage had come to an end and

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<sup>75</sup>M.M. Okeng'o, Op. cit., pp. 14-15.

<sup>76</sup>O.I., with S. Nyakweba, at Nyamagesa village, on 29/11/97.

the adulthood one had begun. This was favourably compared with baptism in colonial times where a new life in Christianity started when a sinner repented and was baptised and led a new life<sup>77</sup>. The journey to the circumcision court was full of agonies on the part of the initiates. This was because they were often teased and told scaring stories, which were meant to encourage them to be brave. A great number of young men, married and circumcised, accompanied the initiates. A young man, most recently circumcised was given the circumcisor's payment to carry. After the circumcision, the initiates went into seclusion.

Every group of initiates from a given village chose a young man perhaps one who was closest to them and trustworthy to guide them throughout the ceremony.

The guide (Omosegi) had a similar role to that of a best man or best maid in a modern wedding<sup>78</sup>. The guide gave the initiates company and served them with food during the whole period of seclusion. It was also the duty of the guide to take care of the supply of firewood and also to guard against the extinction of the initiates' seclusion fire. The fire was meant to keep on burning throughout the seclusion period that lasted for about a month<sup>79</sup>.

From the interviews conducted in the field, it was established that throughout the period of circumcision, circumcisor's could hardly sleep. Their services were rendered throughout. At times villagers of a given village could invite a circumcisor who stayed there throughout the circumcision period. The initiates had to queue at the circumcisor's place for the service. This ensured orderly and quick service. The exercise followed the principle of 'first come first served'. The initiate on the line being served was required to

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<sup>77</sup>M.M. Oleng'o Op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-20.

hold a tree at the back while facing forward. When the circumcision exercise was in process, the candidate was teased with spears and arrows so as not to cry of pain as this was considered a taboo among the Abagusii community. No one initiate was allowed to leave until all the initiates went through the exercise. At the end of the exercise, the circumcisor was paid his dues after which he pitched a celebration song referred to as 'esimbore' (sacred song), thereafter followed a choral response from everybody. It is worth noting that orphans never paid initiation fee. This was because they were considered as an unfortunate group who required free services. As well, those initiates who were born after a number of their brothers and sisters had died and were left alone in their families, were circumcised free of charge. They were often referred to as 'abatakerwa' (dedicated ones) to the ancestral spirits. As male initiates were escorted home, esimbore songs were sung throughout the journey to the initiates' seclusion place. On arriving back home, women who included the initiates' mothers sung and danced from a distant to usher the initiates back home. The women were not allowed to see the initiates, as this would be bad omen<sup>80</sup>.

As far as the female initiates were concerned, they walked slowly home accompanied by a large group of elderly women after clitoridectomy. During such moments, a number of songs were sung and dances performed. This was an occasion of great joy. Most of the songs sung reminded the initiates that they had now moved from one age group to join another and therefore they were expected to start thinking seriously about their adult role after seclusion.

Seclusion period for both male and female initiates was between three and five weeks. During seclusion period, male initiates would go out to hunt for birds and other small wild animals. Male initiates in seclusion could not be seen by their mothers or any

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<sup>80</sup>O.I., with C.M. Buyaki, at Nyamasibi market, on 13/12/97.



other person of the opposite sex. On the other hand, their mothers and other community women could only see female initiates. It is worth noting that during seclusion there was education and training geared towards preparing the initiates for future life. Female initiates were especially taught about their future roles as women. They were given this kind of education by their grandmothers, mothers and other women of their community. Initiates in seclusion were given meals mainly consisting of meat, beans, ugali and milk. They were also given fruits and greens all of which ensured balanced diet. Different kinds of foods were given to keep the initiates healthy and to heal in good time so that they could graduate to join the adult class in the community.

After being blessed by their grandparents and parents, the initiates graduated and were now ready for marriage as they were now considered to be adults. They could now be entrusted with the various duties and responsibilities meant for adult members of the Abagusii<sup>81</sup>.

## 2.7 Marriage

Marriage (Enywomo) was a very important stage of development as far as the Abagusii were concerned. Every member was expected to marry so as to participate in the procreation process. Any member of the Abagusii who avoided marriage was considered an outcast. Any child born could not be named after the outcast. It was through marriage that the community could be considered a complete circle. It was believed that after birth, a person grew as an adult until he or she died and joined the world of the ancestors but emerged again in the offspring of his or her grand children. Whoever did not marry therefore, interfered with the cycle and was punished by the ancestral spirits. He or she would consequently become insane. In that connection

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<sup>81</sup>O.I., with M. Oinga, at Nyamagesa village, on 27/11/97.

therefore, no one among the Abagusii could allow any of their members to remain single for that was a state of bad omen<sup>82</sup>.

From oral interviews, it was established that celibacy was unheard of. No family could have its daughters unmarried. This was because a daughter could not be given a piece of land or could not be buried in her home of birth.

According to M.M. Okeng'o, when an unmarried woman died she was buried away from her parents' homestead. An unmarried man once dead would be buried close to the parents' home but one of the posts of his bed was thrown on his grave (korutwa Omworo) to show that he was a less worth member of the Abagusii community<sup>83</sup>.

In the olden days among the Abagusii, it was the parents who proposed the spouse and organised for marriage when their daughter or son was ready for marriage. When a son wanted to marry, it was left to the father to look for a spouse for him. His relatives especially the maternal uncles consulted each other on the matter. The lady to be married was looked for from the neighbouring clans. The woman who qualified had to be industrious, hardworking, well behaved and co-operative. Her family background had to be free from such vices as theft and witchcraft. Spouse 'hunting' exercise took about five to eight months<sup>84</sup>. When a given lady was spotted as the potential wife, the agent had to establish whether there was any form of clan relationship between the interested party and her family. It was a taboo to marry from the same clan and hence the issue of clannishness was a crucial point as far as marriage preparation was concerned.

When the interested party was fully satisfied with the agents' assignment, the bridegroom's father took off to the bride's home where negotiations took place. The negotiations mainly concerned dowry which was paid in kind. Animals such as Chiombe

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<sup>82</sup>M.M. Okeng'o, Op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>84</sup>O.I., with J. Ogoro, at Bonyamayio village, on 18/12/97.

(cows), Chimbori (goats), and Ching'ondi (sheep) were paid as dowry. This probably could have been due to lack of monetary possessions during the olden days unlike today. Negotiations at the bride's home were followed by further negotiations at the bridegroom's home. This was now a time of 'having a glance at the dowry' (Okomana chiombe). After the giving out the dowry, various ceremonies followed that culminated in the wedding ceremony.

A traditional Abagusii wedding took a period of two days. A day before the wedding, the bridegroom was accompanied by a number of young men to go and get the wife-to-be<sup>85</sup>. These people had to carry a pot of traditional beer (amarwa). At the bride's home there were also young and energetic men who were always invited from the village. On arrival, visitors from the bridegroom's side were given a warm welcome, which was a lot of joy and beer drinking. At the end of the day, enyameni (a mock fight) was staged between the men from the bridegroom's and those of the bride's villages. This kind of confrontation was meant to serve as a warning to the bridegroom's party that should they mishandle the bride, they were to get a rough treatment. This also emphasised the fact that the bride's community was strong and had to be given the respect it deserved. After the enyameni, the visitors then settled and the bull that was usually brought by the bridegroom's party was slaughtered. Everybody in the wedding party participated in merry making. There was usually song and dance throughout the night. The kinds of songs sung were usually full of advice to the bride and the bridegroom in preparation for their lives in marriage<sup>86</sup> or after the wedding. On the second day, the ceremony continued up to around midday when food was eaten after which the bride and the bridegroom and their escorts left for their home where they had to start a new life. After reaching their

<sup>85</sup>O.I., with C.B. Moraa, at Ichuni village, Keroka on 13/10/97.

<sup>86</sup>O.I., with J. Onkaga, at Nyamasibi market, on 19/11/97.

home, that is the bridegroom's home, they were welcomed with songs and dances. Thereafter food and drinks were served to everyone who was present in the ceremony. The ceremony continued till the following day when the normal life commenced.

Traditional marriage ceremonies among the Abagusii varied slightly from clan to clan. In some clans, a wedding day began with a mock-fight between the bridegroom's party and that of the bride. In other clans, the day began with festivities and by noon 'when the sun was usually in the sky'<sup>87</sup> the bride's grandfather (Sokoro) conducted a wedding. The bride's parents gave speeches to advise the couple. Gifts which included cooking pots, traditional plates, and cattle's skin were given after which the bride was released from her home. The bride and the bridegroom were accompanied by a procession to the bridegroom's home. The bride wore a piece of decorated goatskin on her head, while the bridegroom carried a spear (ritimo) on his hand, usually right hand<sup>88</sup>. On the immediate night, at the bridegroom's home, the couple had 'to know each other'. This meant they were to play sex for the first time. If the bride was proved to be a virgin, her father was to be added two more cows. Indeed this was a source of great honour to the family<sup>89</sup>. In case the groom became unable to break the membrane, he could use the sharp edge of a cow's horn to break it or a strong age mate who did it. In most cases, if a man failed to break the virginity of his wife, he commanded no much respect and could occasionally be teased.

Two days after the wedding, the bride's family brought ugali and a roasted goat's meat to the bridegroom's home. The ugali was usually cooked using finger millet flour. Oral interviews indicated that the ugali and meat served as recognition of worthwhile

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<sup>87</sup>M.M. Okeng'o Op. cit., pp. 26-27.

<sup>88</sup>O.I., with W. Obare, at Bonyamoyio village, on 28/11/97.

<sup>89</sup>M.M. Okeng'o, Op. cit., p. 28.

task of breaking the virginity of their daughter by the bridegroom. This kind of food was to be brought by the bride's sister accompanied by her cousins<sup>90</sup>. In turn the bridegroom's family appreciated by giving them finger millet grains of the quantity of the container they brought ugali in.

## 2.8 Death

In the traditional Abagusii community there was a firmly established traditional medical system but death had been there since time immemorial. The Abagusii had a common saying which stated 'Amakweri na makoro' ('death is as old as history'). Death was inevitably accepted and was understood as another stage in the development of human beings in the community. It was believed that the dead members of the society emerged back in the young children that were born in the Abagusii community. That is why the children were named after people who had died early on.

Among the Abagusii death was thought to be caused by old age, accidents, witchcraft and illness among other causes. It was very rare to believe that a person could die easily out of a disease. This was because the Abagusii had strong medicines, which were capable of treating all types of diseases<sup>91</sup>.

When a person died, he or she was buried either immediately or the following day in case he or she died in the evening hours. Gender, age and manner in which a person died dictated burial rights in the Abagusii community. For example if a person died as a result of being struck by thunder, he or she was buried at the scene where the incident had taken place. Likewise, if a person drowned in a river, when his or her body was recovered, he or she was buried near the same river. In case where a person committed suicide by hanging on a tree he or she was buried near the tree after which the tree was

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>91</sup>O.I., with R. Kerobo, at Nyakongo, Nyamira, on 28/10/97.

uprooted. According to M.M. Okeng'o, such deaths were often referred to as 'bad deaths' (ogokwa okobe)<sup>92</sup>. Deaths willed by ancestral spirits and so if the deceased were to be taken home for burial it would mean tampering with the ancestral spirits will in which case the spirits would react against those concerned.

Among the Abagusii, if someone died and it happened that he or she was not buried immediately, fire would be lit in the house of the deceased and was kept burning till the following day. All those who had social ties with the deceased attended the burial. These included village members, clan, deceased's lineage and in some cases people from other villages. When the burial ground was ready the corpse was brought out of the house ready for burial. If the deceased happened to be a man, both men and women carried the corpse. Women usually held the head and men the other parts of the body. The passage was usually the door facing the cows' pen (egesieri kiabweri). Before the burial, the articles used by the deceased were turned upside down (gotureka chingobo). If the dead was a woman, men usually held the head and women the other parts of the body while bringing the corpse out for burial<sup>93</sup>.

In the evening after the burial day, sacrifices were offered to the ancestral spirits. This kind of occasion was usually called emurwa, an occasion for cleansing. The occasion usually attracted family members and those of the deceased's lineage. This ceremony was carried out to cleanse family members (kobasibia). The sacrifice was given when all other people had gone leaving behind family members. In such occasions, a white or brown cock was slaughtered and roasted on the gravesite by grandsons, cousins, brothers and the close family members. A he-goat or a ram could also serve the same purpose<sup>94</sup>.

<sup>92</sup>M.M. Okeng'o., Op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>93</sup>O.I., with C. Moraa, at Keroka village, on 30/11/97.

<sup>94</sup>O.I., with A. Kwamboka, at Nyamagesa market, 26/11/97.

Grave digging was one of the most important burial rites among the Abagusii. In case an old man died, the eldest son broke the ground (goaka egekamago)<sup>95</sup>. Then the members of the community could join in the grave digging exercise. After which he was rewarded with a cow by the youngest of his grandmothers. The calves of that cow were supposed to be distributed to the grandsons of the deceased in case an adult male died, the sharp stick (egechuriau)<sup>96</sup> at the top of his house was broken as it was required by the Abagusii custom. Once the body was laid down in the grave, close family members then threw soil in the grave (koruta amaraba). If the deceased was a man, his wife or wives crawled backward towards the grave throwing soil enmass then they were followed by his sons, brothers and cousins and gravediggers. If the deceased happened to be a woman, the husband could be the first one to throw soil followed by the sons and then the gravediggers. After the burial, family members and relatives grieved in sorrow, chanted poems and songs blaming death for taking away an important member of the family.

During mourning, there was no shaking of hands between members of the bereaved family. Family members were not allowed to leave the compound. They had to stay in the compound until a ceremony that involved the shaving of the heads of the close relatives of the deceased was performed. The ceremony involved drinking of beer, eating of different kinds of foods such as ugali and meat, milk, greens and singing various songs to praise the late member of the society<sup>97</sup>.

Young people who had not married yet, upon dying were buried outside their houses. In the case where one never had a house, he was buried outside the parent's

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<sup>95</sup>M.M. Okeng'o., Op. cit., pp. 29-30.

<sup>96</sup>O.I., with M. Nyaboke, at Bochoria village, on 16/12/97.

<sup>97</sup>O.I., with C. Mogute, at Nyansiongo village, on 22/12/97.

house. It is worth noting that all the dead people among the Abagusii were buried with their heads facing north<sup>98</sup>.

## 2.9 Religion

Abagusii believed in one God whom they referred to as Engoro. They also owed their religious allegiance to the ancestral spirits (ebirecha). Sacrifices were given to the ancestral spirits whom the Abagusii thought were intermediaries between them and Engoro. If such sacrifices were not given, the ancestral spirits would give severe punishments such as death, failure of crops, chronic diseases, sterility of women, insanity, atrocious character, birth of idiotic children and so on. The Abagusii believed that when someone died, the body became soil and the soil went to the air to become a spirit. When family members among the Abagusii underwent difficulties and experiences, diviners and medicinemen were consulted to tell how the spirits could be propitiated. There were men and women spirits. Men spirits were thought to be powerful and could come instantly. Women spirits according to the informants interviewed seemed to come much later in one's life time.

The ancestral spirits controlled all endeavours among the Abagusii, which included social, political and economic activities. When someone was successful in his socio-economic life, the Abagusii people believed that the ancestral spirits were well with him. (Chisokoro nchiamorarerete buya). On the other hand, those who never succeeded were believed to be in bad terms with the ancestral spirits. In moments of joy and sorrow ancestral spirits' names were invoked. Traditional performance of poetry, songs and narratives were dedicated to them. Before any meals were taken, food was poured on the ground so that it could be shared with the ancestors. Traditional dancers could stamp the

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<sup>98</sup>M.M., Okeng'o., Op. cit., pp. 33-34.



ground so hard using their feet (ebisanyi) or poles (chimoti) to entertain and please the ancestral spirits<sup>99</sup>.

From the research materials available, it was found out that the Abagusii believed that the ancestral spirits had the ability to give a number of people gifts to become what they were. For example being blacksmiths, diviners, and oral artists, soothsayers and rainmakers. Those were talents that came from the ancestral spirits. The ancestral spirits punished the various personalities of these talents who never executed their duties. The Abagusii had a conviction that the ancestral spirits gave various professionals in the community guidance and insight into new discoveries in their individual field of professionalism. The ancestral spirits essentially controlled every activity that was performed by the Abagusii. They were the sources of knowledge and gave judgement in every single case amongst the community members<sup>100</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., pp. 36-37.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.0 EVOLUTION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GUSII SONGS AND DANCES IN THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

#### 3.1 Introduction

People's culture must have an origin and it is synonymous with their civilization, with all its process of continuity and change. Culture finds expression in people's values, beliefs and rituals as well as their material well being (or possession). It is reflected by their songs, dances, drama and language. It rests in people's social, economic, judicial, political and value systems<sup>101</sup>. The implication here is that the cultural identity of a people is based upon, and consists of, the totality of their values, norms, traditions, language and their inward and outward manifestations. All these combine and bestow upon a people or ethnic group a particular identity. A historical study of culture therefore encompasses broad descriptions of leading institutions, prevailing values, change through time as well as cultural flows through space; any element of culture such as songs, dances and drama as an origin and development over a given period of time<sup>102</sup>. Culture grows in two ways; first, through invention of new traits within the culture, secondly, through the diffusion of new traits outside the culture<sup>103</sup>.

Throughout its history, with new inventions, the cultural base of the Abagusii, songs and dances inclusive, was enlarged and potential number of new combinations of existing elements multiplied. The contact between the Abagusii and other communities

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<sup>101</sup>G.S. Were, "Culture Renaissance and National Development: Some Reflection on Kenya's Cultural Problem" In G.S. Were (Ed.) Journal of East African Research and Development Vol. 12. 1982, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup>B.A. Ogot, "New Trends in Cultural History 'The silence in old narratives'" in G.S Were (E d. ) Journal Of East Africa research and development vol. 12, 1992 pp. 38-39.

<sup>103</sup>Quoted in R.M Kloss, et.al, Sociology With Human Face ( saint Louis, 1976 ), p. 79.

such as the Luo, the Nandi, the Kipsigis, the Maasai and the Abakuria, contributed to a great extent to the evolution and the development of the Gusii songs and dances in the pre-colonial Period.<sup>104</sup>

In the pre-colonial era, proper organisation pattern of songs and dances among the African Communities in general lacked. It was more rigid than it is today judging from oral tradition about social control. There were songs and dances for individuals and social groups as well as the institutions that served them. There were occasions when such groups met for the purpose of recreation or ritual. Hence the encouragement of political organisation, the creation of new social groups, the creation of new ceremonies and festivals as well as the adoption of new customs and beliefs led to the evolution of songs and dances among African societies.<sup>105</sup>

The early Abagusii songs and dances required a corresponding re-organisation both in respect to the participants and the provision of appropriate musical types. The impetus for change did not always come from within. The musical traditions of the community's neighbours like those ones of the Luo, Maasai, Kipsigis and Abakuria sometimes provided stimulus for the direction of songs and dances among the Abagusii. But this often depended on the special relationships defined by cultural affinity, political superiority, mutual respect and the degree of their tolerance that their respective musical system provided as well as the adoption of new elements of features.<sup>106</sup>

The evolution and development of the Gusii songs and dances seem to have revolved around their contact with the environment, their political and social institutions, relations with their neighbours, religious values, warfare and trade among other things.

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<sup>104</sup>O.I., With S. N Mogere, at Bondaracha Village, on 3/1/1998.

<sup>105</sup>J.H. Nketia, 'African Gods and Music' in *Universitas* Vol. 1, (London, 1959), pp. 3-7.

<sup>106</sup>O.I., With P Nyamatana, at Mwaboto Village, on 4/1/98.

According to W.R Ochieng, the Abagusii evolved in the course of three centuries starting from 17th century, when they appear to have become a distinct group to the coming of the Europeans, in the second half of the 19th Century<sup>107</sup>.

Economically, the Gusii Highland environment had a lot of effects on the Gusii way of life. Rich volcanic soils, and reliable rainfall, ensured heavy yields of sorghum, millet, vegetables and bananas. The Abagusii of course were aware of their God (Engoro) who gave them good harvest and therefore started thanking Him through songs and dances<sup>108</sup>.

### 3.2 Abagusii traditions and the origin of songs

Among the Abagusii all young people of a clan were informally instructed in the traditions of their ancestors and society. After evening meals they would assemble around fires in the huts of elders who told them tribal traditions like stories, myths, riddles and legends. The elders answered questions from the youths that were directed to all aspects of the Abagusii life. To arouse interest and memorisation power of the youth in the community's traditions elders could use songs and dances. Songs especially touched on very interesting aspect of Abagusii traditions and hence kept the youth attentive so that they could listen to stories, myths, riddles and taboos for long hours.

Tradition, thus was not merely  
Some sentiments, or theoretical, or merely  
dead dogma but rather, a relevant  
and practical aspect of live of the community  
which was handed down from generation  
to generation and which was therefore  
a living embodiment of the past and present<sup>109</sup>.

<sup>107</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., pp. 174-176.

<sup>108</sup>O.I., with J. Kimanga, at Mwaboto Village, on 22/10/97.

<sup>109</sup>G.S. Were., A history of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya, C 1500 - 1930 (Nairobi, 1967) p. 14.

Songs, dances, riddles and story telling ensured memorisation and enhancement of the Abagusii tradition among the youth. Historical events of the past formed the ordinary conversational topics of the Abagusii elders when they were assembled around beer pots drinking, and everyone was proud to be able to add some fresh dimension and details to the already accepted versions. To keep them in good spirits, Abagusii elders could start singing and dancing around beer pots in praise of new ideas and wise thinking aimed at enhancing the creation of stable society. In their singing and dancing, the elders imitated the wild animals and birds, which they hunted. This kind of imitation was done at the climax of singing and dancing. It was only done for some songs.

From their own traditions it is evident that the Abagusii who had settled at Kisumu during their early migration experienced a 'terrible famine' in the region. We learn from A.N. Onchoke that:

There was neither food, fruits, nor crops.  
It was a terrible famine. The story was  
that whoever had his brother got hold of  
his hands and went to a new region occupied  
by relatives who had gone before to see whether  
they could get food.<sup>110</sup>

As the Abagusii migrated from Kisumu to Kano they found life more comfortable as they could now cultivate crops and raise animals for food. It was at his time that they composed songs to remind them the experience they had encountered at Kisumu. The following was one of such a songs:

*Enchara nembe yaitire Mogusii*  
*Echara nembe yaitire Mogusii*  
*Baminto aara Kisumo*  
*Yaitire Mogusii*  
*Torende endagera yaito*  
*baminto Mwamogusii.*

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<sup>110</sup>A.N. Onchoke, 'Okoba Omochakano bwa Abagusii, na Mogekeyo Omwabo', A history of Kisii, University of Nairobi, History Department File RPA A/2/3.

Famine is terrible it has stricken Mogusii  
 Famine is terrible it has stricken Mogusii  
 Surely there at Kisumo  
 It has stricken Mogusii  
 Let us take care of our food  
 All of us the Abagusii.

This song, since composed, has been passed over from one generation to another so as to encourage people to take care of food resources lest they were stricken by famine. Our knowledge of present day Kisumu location would make us believe the possibility of such famine, for Kisumu, then as now, is a permanently famine stricken area. The Luo at Kisumu heavily depend on their neighbours for grain, and this is reflected in their very name Kisumo, which is derived from the Luo word “Jokisumo” which can be literally translated as “people who depend on charity.”<sup>111</sup> From the account of Nyakundi it became evident that the Abagusii composed songs not simply for entertainment but to strengthen and make more logical or comprehensive the history of the community’s social, political and economic aspects of life. Through songs, the past life of the community has been passed from one generation to another. Trade activities between the Abagusii and the Luo in early nineteenth century led to the carrying back of musical ideas and instruments to Gusiiland. For example the Abagusii depended on the Luo for the supply of musical instruments such as obokano, jingles, drums and beautifully decorated head dresses of different types, particularly those made from feathers or fur which Gusii harpists or lyricists wore during musical performances. Even today musical instruments like the lyre, wind-horns and flutes of the Abagusii look extremely similar to those of the Luo and are even played very similarly. Some Abagusii elders allege that in pre-colonial times some famous Luo lyricists used to perform on Gusii Highlands in the homes of famous

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<sup>111</sup>W.R. Ochieng., Op. cit., p. 176.

Omogambi like Bagonko of Kitutu, Kiriama of Wanjale and Okech of South Mugirango. One such famous player was a man of Kwochia, remembered as Kawango. Because of his popularity among the Abagusii, Kawango decided to stay permanently among his fans. He used to play what Abagusii called 'Engoma', a guard wind instrument, which the Luo called 'abu'. When Kawango made his intention known that he could settle in Gusiiland there was a quarrel over him at his home. The question was finally settled in favour of an elder remembered as Masururu. He gave Kawango cattle which, he later used to marry three Abagusii ladies, namely Bosibori, Moraa and Nyaei. All these wives bore children and together, the offspring of Masururu and Kawango formed a huge clan in Wanjare known as Mwamasururu - Nyakwambora<sup>112</sup>. It should be noted that it was through Kawango that the early nineteenth century Abagusii lyricists like A. Ayieko, G. Ombati and N. Nyasing'a came to learn the art of playing the obokano<sup>113</sup>. From these elders the art of playing the obokano spread in Gusiiland.

According to Abagusii tradition the work of hoe making and other iron implements like axes, spears, traditional razors and other implements that they exported to Luoland became an origin of songs. The blacksmiths composed songs, which they sang as they worked, especially when smelting by use of bellows. The singing helped in the rhythm at the bellows, wadded off tiredness, brought enjoyment of the work and admiration from the onlookers who would often come to watch the blacksmiths or wait for their gadgets to be made. This was possible because, like the Embu, blacksmiths would collect iron sand only when the land was 'not black,' that was when the land was not green. The forges were

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>113</sup>O.I., with J. Monyeka, at Gesabakwa village on 18/12/97.

normally built by the blacksmiths compounds. People were therefore available because they would not be too busy and the forges were accessible<sup>114</sup>.

The blacksmiths sung to praise their work and tools, praise themselves, relate their experience or expectations or scorn those who feared the demanding work, tried to interfere or were not interested in blacksmithery. Praising his work and the expected benefits a blacksmith would suddenly sing. The following was such a song:

*Omatienyi noerete ng'a Nyangirisa o Yaye*  
*Nyangirisa Oyaye*  
*Omatienyi noerete ng'a Nyangirisa O yaye*  
*Nyangirisa Oyaye*  
*Ng'a aye eng'eria Nyangirisa O yaye*  
*Nyangirisa O yaye*  
*Ng'a nemeremo ngokora buya Nyangirisa*  
*Oyaye, Nyangirisa oyaye*

The month\* is over you my customer  
 You my customer Oh yes  
 The month is over you my customer Oh yes  
 You my customer Oh yes  
 Give me my due you customer Oh yes  
 You my customer Oh yes  
 That I am now working nicely my customer  
 Oh yes, my customer Oh yes.

As long as the blacksmiths had their hammers, they would make anything that they wanted such as spears (amatimo), swords (onchore), arrows (chinsara), leg rings (ebitinge), jingles (chinchigiri), among other valuable products. In this context songs served as a source of morale to keep the blacksmiths working for reasonably long hours<sup>115</sup>.

The traditional religion of the Abagusii influenced the evolution of songs and dances among them. Religion became a source of songs and dances in that, the

<sup>114</sup>H.S.K Mwaniki, Op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>115</sup>O.I., with J.O. Omari, at Bochuria market, Nyamira on 8/10/97.

\*The term "month" as used in the text refers to a period long enough for one to clear his or her debt he or she owes somebody.



community composed songs and dances to praise Engoro. Engoro created the universe, the earth and the forces operating in it. He was a source of prosperity and governed man's destiny, sending him rain or storm, well being or famine, health or disease, peace or war<sup>116</sup>. Occasionally he would dramatically manifest His mystery or power, through storm, thunder, earthquake, or lightening. It was thought that God's agents were ancestral spirits. The sun, the moon and stars were regarded as mysterious physical agencies through which Engoro manifested Himself.

The attributes of Engoro were goodness, pureness, impartiality, love and generosity. Since man was created by, and derived his being from Engoro, he shared the intrinsic qualities of God, so that any behaviour which did not reflect God's attributes was interpreted as rebellion, which would severely be punished by God through His intermediaries (ancestral spirits) unless the offender took remedial action to prevent the punishment<sup>117</sup>.

Engoro was believed to have lived in the sky<sup>118</sup>. The Abagusii did not have any clear mythical explanation concerning God's origin and his physical nature. Many Gusii elders interviewed during the field research asserted that stories related to the origin of Engoro and His physical power were beyond anybody's imagination among the Abagusii. It could be that such stories were well known to the early ancestors of the Abagusii. According to J.O. Omari, God could not be seen physically, nor did He interfere with the Abagusii way of life directly. His power could be manifested through physical forces such as earthquakes. Ancestral spirits were the main agents of God. They shared in Engoro's supernatural and mysterious power.

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<sup>116</sup>O.I., with J. Onkaga, at Nyamira market, on 15/11/97.

<sup>117</sup>W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>118</sup>See W.R. Ochieng, "Gusii god lives on the other side of the sky", TARGET, April 1969, p. 13.

The most striking aspect of the Abagusii religious system, though, was its lack of shrines. Individuals had direct access to God through prayer. This they could do anywhere. Homestead heads did sacrifices. If it was harvesting time, or the start of a New Year, thanksgiving was given communally, led by the Omogambi of every clan. Again this could be held at any convenient place within the clan territory<sup>119</sup>. During sacrifice offering and thanksgiving to Engoro, songs were sung and dances performed by the Abagusii in recognition of God's presence. This again became the origin of songs and dances among the Abagusii. The following is an example of such songs:

*Eke nekeng'wanso Omonene gianchere*  
*Baba eke nekeng'waso Omonene gianchere*  
*Ntwe ntobwati kende kobua ekio*  
*Omanene Otwabere ebibe biato bionsi*  
*Omonene otwabere ebibe biato bionsi*  
*Ekio nekeng'waso twakoire rero*<sup>120</sup>.

This is a holy sacrifice Lord accept it  
 Mother a holy sacrifice Lord accept it  
 Us we have nothing to offer except that  
 Lord forgive us all our sins  
 Lord forgive us all our sins  
 That is the sacrifice we have given today

The above song was repeatedly sung until sacrifice offering ceremony was over. This song was passed from one generation to the next and therefore it became a special 'hymn' for sacrifice offering ceremony. "This was done to appease the ancestral spirits in order that they might not bother members of the Abagusii lineage"<sup>121</sup>. Displeasure of God would be communicated by ancestor spirits through dream, and if God was not properly propitiated, the belief was expressed that the intermediary spirits would kill members of

<sup>119</sup>W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>120</sup>O.I., with J. Kimanga, at Mwaboto village, on 22/10/97.

<sup>121</sup>Levine's, *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

the offending homestead, through disease or disaster, drive them insane, kill their cattle, ruin their crops, or afflict them with sterility.

Before using such drastic steps, however, the spirits would send an omen to the offender as a sign of their displeasure, if he recognised it as an omen he had time to take remedial actions and prevent major disaster. A hyena or python seen in the daytime was considered as a bad omen, the sight of a crane standing with its young, peculiar sound emanating from civet cat, or owl, or dog all these indicated the displeasure of Engoro. These omens were diagnosed by Omoragori who prescribed the type of propitiation required<sup>122</sup>.

The sun, moon and stars were also regarded as mysterious physical agencies through which God manifested himself in a number of ways. The moon, for example was associated with femininity and therefore with fertility. Some elders believed that it was through the sun, moon and star that Engoro observed and shepherded the activities of man<sup>123</sup>. According to a number of elders among the Abagusii, the brightness of the sun portrayed God at His "fullest awareness" while the moon and stars symbolised God "watching over his creatures". In this respect the Abagusii therefore composed songs and dances of praise in communicating with God and the ancestral spirits. Songs especially were sung to appease God and the ancestral spirits. For example, the Abagusii experienced persistent famine and drought, during their stay at Kisumo<sup>124</sup>. They also encountered a terrible plague, which reduced Abagusii clans to small numbers. They sang and danced to Engoro for help and forgiveness.

Throughout their early history, Abagusii relations with each other and other communities

<sup>122</sup>W.R. Ochieng., Op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., pp. 188-189.

<sup>124</sup>O.I., with P. Nyamatana, at Mwaboto village, on 4/1/98.

became a source of songs and dances. This kind of interaction was witnessed in warfare, trade, social ceremonies and music competitions among other areas. For example around 1874, the Nyaribari warriors attempted to seize the Bassi cattle but were repulsed. A year later they succeeded in scaring the Bassi warriors who fled and abandoned the village and cattle to the Nyaribari. The captured Bassi cattle were later returned by Nyaribari, following an agreement in which the Bassi accepted to transfer their cattle village from Keroka to a place to the south of river Kuja.

As soon as the Bassi entered into peace with the Nyaribari their old friendship with the Majoge came to an end. This was because some Majoge young men had formed a habit of stealing cattle from the Bassi and using them for paying dowry in Wanjare and south Mugirango. Very often Bassi warriors would get angry and ask for war against the Majoge but their elders would pray them to lay down their arms for old friendship's sake. In the late eighties the Majoge cattle thieves got bolder and bolder and on one occasion organised an armed thieving mission to Bassi country. Their intention was leaked to some Bassi women who had gone to Majoge to visit their relatives. The Bassi ambushed the thieves and at Ekebengo, close to Etoro, the entire Majoge thieving mission was annihilated. To teach the Majoge a decisive lesson, the Bassi followed their victory with more attacks on Majoge huts, seized their cattle and killed those who offered resistance<sup>125</sup>.

Being happy with their victorious expedition, Bassi warriors sang the following song on their way home;

*Iyo o yaye iyo o yaye*  
*Twabaitire Ababisa*  
*Twabaitire Majoge*  
*O yaye! O yaye*  
*Ntwe nechindo*  
*Oyaye! O yaye*  
*Mbono togocha, twachire buya*

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<sup>125</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p. 156.

*Iyo O yaye iyo O yaye*<sup>126</sup>.  
 Iyo O yaye iyo O yaye  
 We have killed enemies  
 We have killed Majoge people  
 Oyaye! O yaye  
 We are lions  
 Oyaye! O yaye  
 We are coming, we have come well.  
 Iyo O yaye iyo O yaye

Back home the warriors were received with a lot of ululation from women accompanied by songs and dances.

The year that saw the defeat of the Majoge also witnessed activities of Maasai and Kipsigis in Bassi country from the direction of Sotik. The first home to be attacked was that of Manunu. The people of boma had heard of Kipsigis approach and had melted away hiding, but Nyabera, son of Manunu, knew that it was a Kipsigis custom to surround a boma, and kill the inhabitants before driving away the stolen cattle, so that there would be nobody left behind to make a noise which would endanger their passage with stolen cattle. When everybody else deserted the boma, Nyabera climbed onto the beam that supported his father's hut. About five or six Kipsigis thieves entered the hut. Finding nobody in they decided to move on to the next hut, but as each tried to make his way out, Nyabera speared them one after the other, from his position on the beam. Thinking that there was some devil in the house, the Kipsigis tried to rush out, but each in turn was speared.

When the Kipsigis who were left to surround the boma came to check what had happened to their colleagues they found all of them dead. Panic-stricken, they rushed out of the boma in headlong flight, at which event Nyabera began to shout. The villagers surrounded the fleeing Kipsigis and in the battle that followed, "there was unprecedented

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<sup>126</sup>See for example W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p. 156.

bloodshed”<sup>127</sup>. A few Kipsigis are said to have escaped with some cattle. This battle is still remembered as the battle of Kenyerere<sup>128</sup>. The Bassi people received news of the killing of the Kipsigis who had invaded their territory. They sang and danced for their victory. In their victorious songs as in the song above, they praised brave warriors such as Nyabera and others who had managed to kill some ‘enemies’ at the same time scaring others who wanted to invade the community’s territory.

The hunting and gathering system of appropriation of subsistence from nature was according to S. Omwoyo, common among the Abagusii and was practised up to as late as the nineteenth century. Under this system, little energy and time was spent in getting food. The Abagusii supplemented their cultivation of food crops by hunting and gathering. Women usually gathered wild fruits and vegetables. The wild vegetables hunted included spider flower, nightshade and East African spinach<sup>129</sup>. As women gathered fruits and vegetables, they sung various songs, which kept their spirits high in performing this task. The following was one of such song:

*Egetinginye ekengaini*  
*Kerigie obundi kiagache*  
*Kerigie Oboundi kiagache*  
*Embura egotwa gesoe mwaye*  
*Omaiya O Omaiya O*  
*Chingero bonyangero*<sup>130</sup>.

A Cleaver bird  
 builds its own house  
 builds its own house,  
 When it rains it shelters  
 O perfect person O perfect person  
 Songs and songs.

The above song was passed from one generation to another and later came to be accepted as a work song.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>129</sup>S.M. Omwoyo, Op. cit., p. 42.

Hunting and gathering among the Abagusii also became the origin of songs and dances. The young energetic men and boys, mainly for antelopes, dears, rabbits, ant bears, rhinoceros, warthogs, lions, elephants and buffaloes mainly carried out the hunting exercise. The Abagusii hunters entered into specific hunting activities and the fair distribution of the spoils of the hunt<sup>131</sup>. During hunting, hunters could quietly walk into the forest early in the morning armed with sticks, stones and spears all of which were used to attack the prey. On approaching the forest, they could use the dogs which usually accompanied them to spot the animals to be hunted. Upon seeing the animals, they could shout to scare them as they ran after them. After a successful hunt, the spoils of the hunt were distributed immediately. Hunters walked home singing songs of joy as young children and elderly men and women welcomed them home. Hunters could be heard singing:

*Ningi ekio obwate  
Nkagoye mbwate  
otakong'a ndome  
Nge'ende Korisia  
O yaye O yaye  
Oyaye O yaye.*<sup>132</sup>

What are you carrying?  
I am carrying a prey  
Give me I bite  
I go to graze.  
Oyaye O yaye  
Oyaye O yaye.

Upon arriving home, the occasion was usually climaxed by whistling and ululation to portray a happy mood for the successful hunt.

<sup>131</sup>S.M. Omwoyo, Op. Cit., p.43.

<sup>132</sup>A song sang by P. Nyamatana Op. Cit..

### 3.3 The development of Gusii songs and dances

After evolution, the Gusii songs and dances continued to develop in terms of melody, rhythm, instrumentalization, role and performance. This kind of development can be traced from within the history of the Abagusii and the contact between the Abagusii and other peoples as well as the environment in which the community found itself

As the Abagusii settled their songs were usually simple with an element of verse repetition. Half a century later such songs had distinct melodies and rhythms with limited verse repetition. The birds which the hunters came into contact with during their hunting exercise at Kisumu provided melody that was used in most of the folk songs. Such songs began to develop systematic rhythms. For example, birds like the weaver bird (richore) and doves (amaruma) produced sounds like:

*chwe chwe chwe*  
*churi churi churi*  
*ku ku ku ku churi churi*  
*kwe kwe kwe kuku kuku*

All these sounds were adopted and modified into meaningful melodies, which enhanced the performance of folk songs. W. Masese observed that whistling which usually climaxed singing was adopted from the sunbird. He further asserted that dancing styles among the Abagusii were imitated and developed from the wild animals such as antelopes, wildebeest and hare. Such animals usually ran and produced such sounds as: '*didi didi tititi ti ti chiritiri ti tiritiri*' as they were being chased during hunting<sup>133</sup>. A century later after the settlement of the Abagusii such sounds were incorporated into the Gusii folk songs and dances. This reminded them of their past history as a hunting community during their stay at Kisumu. During songs and dances performance, elders among the Abagusii used to decorate themselves with leopard skins and hats made up of feathers from wild birds.

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<sup>133</sup>O.I., with W. Masese at Mwaboto Kisii, on 18/10/97.



They danced in a circular manner as they remembered their past hunting history. After successful defeat of enemies in the most of nineteenth century, when the Abagusii were always in wars with the Maasai, Kipsigis and the Luo, the Abagusii warriors would decorate themselves with lions' skins. They usually praised themselves as they came back home. They sang songs full of praises as they moved slowly like lions. They could occasionally produce a sound similar to that of a lion. This again reminded them of their past hunting experience when they could even attack dangerous animals such as lions. Such songs were standard, with well-developed melodies and well pitched. The following was such a songs:

*Mbono tokare gocha sibouri Nyarimo Moo*  
*Mbono tokare gocha sibouri Nyarimo Moo*  
*Twairanire twensi ntwe sibouri nyarimo Moo*  
*Mbono tokare gocha Ntwe*  
*Sibouri nyarimoo Moo*  
*Twensi twairanire sibouri Nyarimo Moo Moo*<sup>134</sup>.

We have now come we lions - Moo  
 We have now come we lions - Moo  
 We have all come back we lions - Moo  
 We are now coming  
 We lions - Moo  
 We have all come we lions Moo Moo.

With time such songs were modified and could be sung in such places as beer parties, social ceremonies and for general entertainment.

The various songs and dances performed at birth, circumcision, marriage, work, beer party and death continued to change both in form and function from time to time. At the time of the Abagusii settlement for example songs sang during the birth of a child were usually few and simple in melody which was only repeated several times. Such songs lacked pattern and were not usually accompanied with musical instruments A half a

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<sup>134</sup>W. Masese, Op. cit.

century later such songs developed both in rhythm, wordings, melody and volume. Two centuries later both songs had developed from poems to full fledged songs with several songlets which carried several themes. These included; thanking God for bringing forth a new creature, advising the parents on the importance of proper child care and asking God to take care of the new born as he or she would become an 'asset' to the whole community. The birth of a baby boy was received with more ululation accompanied by songs and dances from women than that of a baby girl. This was mainly because boys among the Abagusii community were seen as future defenders of the community as opposed to the girls whose task surrounded, or centred in, the kitchen.

The early circumcision songs of the Abagusii during their settlement at Kano were usually single line melodies with short words with a lot of monotony as can be seen in the example below:

*Obeire momura obeire momura obeire moraa*  
*Obeire momura ee ee obeire momuraaa*  
*bono mambia, bono mbaie ee ee*  
*Obeire momura, bono mambia ee*  
*Oyoo Oyoo.*<sup>135</sup>

He has become a man he has become a man  
 he has become a man ee ee he has become a man  
 This morning, this morning he has become a man  
 He has become a man this morning ee  
 This one this one.

Clitoridectomy songs for female initiates also followed the same suit. They were often short and simple with limited dancing. A century later such songs among the Abagusii were accompanied with ululation and whistling, from women and men respectively. They were accompanied also with limited dances. Two centuries later, that is around nineteenth century circumcision among the Abagusii received a lot of

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<sup>135</sup>A song sang by S.N. Mogere, at Bondaracha village, on 3/1/98.

prominence. Circumcision songs developed both in volume and performance. In singing and performing such songs and dances, a variety of musical instruments and other improvisations were effected. When for instance women escorted the female initiates to their places of seclusion, they could ululate loudly and exuberantly as they jumped up and down. They usually carried short twigs as a form of happiness. Some even decorated themselves with flowers and leaves (egwagwa)<sup>136</sup> and danced very vigorously. In cases of male circumcision, women dancers especially young mothers and the initiates' mothers could go to welcome them when they were closer to the seclusion place. The women could carry mapanga and twigs while dancing and ululating loudly. Those with sharp implements could run forward and appeared as if they were charging at the male singers. They could run backwards as they cut some of the vegetation within the vicinity<sup>137</sup>.

The male counterparts could appear as if they were charging at the women with such objects as spears and long sticks. This was done to keep the women away so that they could not get a chance of seeing the initiates. Songs sang during this period carried many themes that emphasised maturation and social development within the Abagusii community. The male initiates were expected to defend their community physically against foreign invasion and attack. Both male and female initiates were expected to secure the community's values, customs, traditions, and etiquette. The carrying of spears and long sticks by men as they escorted initiates reminded them of their old days when they used to go into war with the neighbouring communities. It further served as a reminder to the male initiates that since they had now become men, they were expected to defend the community against external aggression.

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<sup>136</sup>O.I., with M. Nyaboke, at Nyamache market, on 16/10/97.

<sup>137</sup>M.M. Okongo, Op. cit., p.118.

The carrying of short twigs, and other decorations, that involved the use of flowers and leaves by women during the performance of circumcision songs in the nineteenth century was a very important feature in the history of the Abagusii. The green colour of leaves signified life while the flowers' yellow colour signified determination and hope in the wholistic life of the Abagusii. According to C. Nyabonyi yellow flowers gave Abagusii farmers hope of prospering agriculturally<sup>138</sup>.

In most of the nineteenth century the Abagusii circumcision songs had also developed in terms of words, themes and styles of delivery. Such songs had fully matured in the content as compared to a century before whereby such songs had few wordings which had very little hidden meaning. Proper tuning before performance was a common feature of the nineteenth century circumcision songs among the Abagusii. In female 'circumcision' songs for example the clitoris was symbolised by the chameleon. This was evidenced by the following song:

*Gwakunire enkuna kuna  
Gwakunire enkuna kuna  
Kuna Moyare ee baba kuna  
Nakunire enkuna - kuna  
Nakunire enyambu - kuna  
Nakunire enyambu - kuna moyare ee  
Baba kuna  
Kuna onkuneranie - kuna  
Kuna onkuneranie - kuna moyare ee  
Baba kuna.*

You have touched granny touch  
You have touched granny touch  
touch ee granny - touch  
I have touched - a touch  
I have touched a chameleon - touch  
I have touched a chameleon - touch  
Touch ee granny touch  
Touch and touch for me - touch  
Touch and touch for me - ee  
granny touch.

<sup>138</sup>O.I., with C. Nyabonyi, at Mwamosioma village, on 28/11/97.

Abagusii reference to the chameleon at this period was mainly from the perspective of colour. A chameleon changes its colours now and again. It cannot be noticed easily in any particular environment. The connotation given in reference to the clitoris as a chameleon was that of being 'sacred'<sup>139</sup>. 'Sacred' because its feelings were prone to change from excitement during copulation and pains at birth. This song was developed to caution the initiates to abstain from pre-marital and 'free' or 'unholy' sex. The songs reminded the initiates to preserve the Abagusii culture and customs, which condemned sex before marriage. Any girl, according to Abagusii customs, who had sex before marriage was, considered an outcast.

In male circumcision songs, the penis was referred to as a python, an animal which the Abagusii came into contact with as they were settling in their present highlands. A python was a dangerous snake, which was feared. It swallowed both domestic animals and human beings. Throughout the early history of the Abagusii, a python was understood as a carrier of warning from the ancestors<sup>140</sup>. When a person spotted a python, he perceived it to be a warning from the ancestors. A person under such a situation had to please the ancestors by offering a sacrifice of a black or red goat. As well he or she was required to name the immediate born child, a male or female in the family after the python. This explains why some of the Abagusii members were called and still are called Basweti (meaning python). In referring to the python during the male circumcision songs, performers aroused in the audience the fear they had for the python. The penis was seen to be dangerous because it could break virginity in the event of having pre-marital sex. Virginity was expected to be respected and safe-guarded. This message

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<sup>139</sup>O.I., with J. Moraa, at Bonyamoyio village, on 13/12/97.

<sup>140</sup>J. Moraa, *Ibid.*

was contained in the following circumcision songs:

*Twachire buya twachire buya aa aa*  
*Bono mambia, bono mambia ee ee*  
*Oyotarochi tiga ache - kwerorera*  
*Kwerorera enyamweri - korwa Engoro imee*  
*kwerorera enyamweri - korwa Engoro imee*  
*kwerorera enyamweri - korwa Engoro imee*  
*Korwa Engoro imee.*

We have come well we have come well aa aa  
 this morning, this morning eee  
 Whoever has never seen let him come  
 To see for oneself a python from its hole  
 To see for oneself a python from its hole  
 from its hole.

Another major development of circumcision songs in the nineteenth century was purposeful repetition of phrases. Repetition sustained durability of such songs. It facilitated memorisation and cramming. In such songs the final position syllables were usually lengthened. This elongation contributed to the development and achievement of the intended rhythm. It also contributed to the consistency and unity of rhythm. For example in the male circumcision songs, such elongation of the end position syllables was uniform throughout the lines. This was reflected in the following songs:

*Obeire momura, obeire momura aaa*  
*Bono mambia, bono mambiaaaa*  
*Ng'iria amosike, ng'iria amokikee*  
*Tachi roche, tachi rocheeee*  
*Tachi kwaa, tachi kwaaaa*  
*Oyo Oyoo - Oyoo<sup>141</sup>..*

He has become a man, he has become a man aaa  
 this morning, this morning aaa  
 His mother to respect him, his mother to respect him eee  
 Not to fetch water, not to fetch water eee  
 Not to fetch vegetables, not to fetch vegetables aaa  
 This this one - this one.

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<sup>141</sup>The above song was collected from Nyamagesa village during male circumcision ceremony on 30/11/97.

This kind of development led to the maturity of the Gusii circumcision songs which gave them a high quality of artistic value that defined them as true oral performance in their cultural history. The alteration of 'aaa-' and 'eee-' contributed to the development of entertaining beats.

Most of the early worksongs among the Abagusii as they settled after centuries of migration were simple with limited themes which mainly focused on specific tasks, which the Abagusii performed. Such songs were usually short and often repetitive. The song leader would vary the melodic line a bit each time a song was repetitively sung. Such a song was spontaneous. That is, it was instant not formally set. Artists were not given any tuning or rehearsals before singing. A singer could begin singing and dancing as his or her work and the audience inspired him or her. He or She could invent all devices suitable to his or her communication at that particular time.

During the early cultural history of the Abagusii, work songs were limited because the community had not settled. They were in most cases involved in warfare with their neighbouring communities and hence had little time to engage in most of the economic activities. For example at the turn of the nineteenth century, the majority of the Abagusii migrated to the Transmara and Ngararo, close to the settlement of the Isiria Maasai. Here, a number of Abagusii families, particularly those of Wanjare extraction, foresaw the bloody day of confrontation with the Maasai, and therefore erected their settlements. When the Maasai eventually attacked the Abagusii and drove them into Gusii highlands and eventually took refuge in Nyagoe Forest, where they hid until they were joined by those who sought asylum in Luoland<sup>142</sup>. Around this time, the Abagusii population was small indeed and they had only a few economic activities such as few animals, limited

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<sup>142</sup>W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p.165.

cultivation and hunting and hence work songs had not matured.

Gusii economy, during their stay in the forest as their population increased, consisted of the rearing of cattle, sheep, goats, and a few crops. They cultivated such crops as millet, finger millet, potatoes, and pumpkins. All these were supplemented with fruits, honey, milk, ghee, blood, and meat from fowl and hunted animals<sup>143</sup>. All these activities necessitated the development of songs and dances among the Abagusii in the mid nineteenth century. During this period it was not easy to dance while performing the many work tasks which had emerged. The songs, which accompanied these occasions, were developed in such a way that the tone, voice variation, head gestures and some limited body movements could be made. A half a century later, nodding of the head, ululation, shaking of shoulders and whistling by mouth were some of the Para-linguistic features that were developed to suit the performance of work songs. The mood created inspired, mainly the workers to perform their work with a lot of excitement and jubilation, which facilitated efficiency and enjoyment in performing the various work tasks<sup>144</sup>.

Further development of work songs during this period involved the use of imagery. In performing work songs, the performers could castigate the tendency of borrowing a neighbour's property or item for a long time without returning it. An item once borrowed was supposed to be returned to the owner for use. The following songs serve as an example:

*Omokungu oisiko mono kae Bosibori ensio yaye*  
*Omokungu oisiko mono kae Bosibori ensio yaye*  
*kae bosibori ensio yaye nero akona gosera*  
*mwaya ee*  
*Omaiya Omaiya*  
*Omaiya Chingero bonyangero.*

<sup>143</sup>O.I., with M. Nyaboke, at Nyamache market, on 16/10/97.

<sup>144</sup>J. Onkaga, Op. cit.



Woman of the neighbourhood return to Bosibori her  
 grinding stone.  
 It is the one she uses to grind in her house  
 O' perfect person, O perfect person  
 O' perfect person praise with songs and songs.

The above songs, besides motivating the workers to perform their duties perfectly, communicated an additional message about the Abagusii community and their material relations. Repetition again played a vital role in communicating the intended message in work songs. This was a very important development as several themes could be communicated in performing work songs. In such songs ambiguity could be avoided to achieve accuracy in communication.

The history of beer drinking among the Abagusii can be traced back when the community lived in Luoland. Here the Abagusii were regarded as refugees and therefore mistreated. The duties of refugees comprised herding the livestock, cultivating fields, and fencing homes, constructing granaries for the residents of Kabwoch and joining Kabwoch warriors against the Maasai. The Abagusii stay in Luoland was unpleasant, although they still counted on the security which the Luo afforded them against the Maasai<sup>145</sup>. Unhappy with the various kinds of mistreatment by the Luo, the Abagusii started grouping themselves to discuss their fate in Luoland. Here they started making a local brew (amarwa) which they drunk as they shared their views and terrible experiences in the 'foreign land'. One day, a Gusii medicineman called Maeri of south Mugirango and other two Gusii elders called Monyancha and Monyange met privately and hatched out plans for the Abagusii to escape from Luoland. Monyancha prepared plenty of 'native liquor' and invited a large section of elders, heads of various Abagusii groups living in Luoland. No Luo elders were invited. Monyancha addressed them saying:

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<sup>145</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p.1.

My brethren, you are all aware that  
the Abagusii are maltreated in Luoland.  
What can we do? It is to find out  
a concerted action that I have  
collected you here today<sup>146</sup>.

On hearing this moving speech from a senior elder, other elders broke into a songs and dances in praise of the wise leader. This manifested a sense of appreciation and belonging to the community<sup>147</sup>. After a moment of songs and dances the elders in the meeting agreed that the Abagusii should leave Luoland as soon as it was convenient<sup>148</sup>. The elders welcomed such a good decision with a songs and dances. During this period, the beer party songs and dances were simple, short and covered only one major theme. A half a century later beer party songs among the Abagusii developed a lot of symbolic complexities. Artists among the Abagusii did create their symbols basically from their understanding of their physical natural environment. For instance, beer was often referred to as 'the long water grass'. At a beer party one could hear an artists singing:

*Ning'o Oyio ondetereire*  
*Ning'o Oyio ondetereire*  
*Ning'o Oyio ondetereire*  
*Amache emunda andatereire.*

Who has brought this for me  
Who has brought this for me  
Who has brought it for me  
It is the waters of the long water  
grass that has brought me this.

The 'long water grass' in its actual meaning is the plants (reeds) that grow at the riverbanks. The Abagusii used it as medicine. In the old days, when somebody suffered from stomach upset the reeds (enunda) were squeezed and the water that came out was mixed with rainwater to form a precipitate that could cure the stomach upset. Therefore,

<sup>146</sup>Quoted in W.R. Ochieng Ibid. p.147.

<sup>147</sup>O.I., with W. Masese, at Mwaboto village, on 18/10/97.

<sup>148</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p.147.

in referring to beer as the water of long water grass (*amache enunda*) the above beer party songs communicated the message that beer was a good thing. It was thought to be a medicine of the souls as it treated some diseases. For example, when one ate meat of dead cattle and suffered constipation he was advised to take a little beer. But one was not required to take too much of it as it could lead to problems such as loss of vision, breaking of marriages, accidents and poor decision making<sup>149</sup>. Like in the case of circumcision songs, repetition was invoked in beer party songs to facilitate memorisation and cramming for easy remembrance of those songs by the future generations. Participants of such songs were inspired by repetition to be actively involved in the singing and dancing of such songs. At Nyamagesa village, it was observed during the field research that the participants of a beer party were inspired by repetition of a chorus of the beer party song, which was sung as follows:

*Siberia onge, aye siberia onge Mosaiga*  
*ae ae \_ae ae Mosaiga*  
*Toa nonde aye toa nonde okobayabaya*  
*Aae \_ ae ae Mosaiga*  
*Aye siberia ong'e, aye siberia onge Mosaiga*  
*aae \_ ae ae Mosaiga*<sup>150</sup>.

Sip and give me, sip and give me my agemate  
*aae \_ ae ae agemate*  
 Do not give, do not give to anybody who loiters  
*aae \_ ae ae agemate*  
 You sip and give me, sip and give me my agemate  
*aae \_ ae ae agemate.*

Such a song had also developed both in rhythm, themes, costuming, and relevance to numerous issues besides the enjoyment in beer drinking. They touched on community relations, preservation of the Abagusii culture, the past history of the Abagusii and the

<sup>149</sup>M.M. Okengo, Op. cit., p.98.

<sup>150</sup>A song sang by J. Monyeka, Op. cit.

importance of work among community members. Such songs had high musical quality and good beats.

In the early period of the Abagusii migration and settlement dances were usually simple with limited movements. As the Abagusii interacted with the neighbouring communities such as the Luo, the Maasai and the Kipsigis they borrowed some dancing styles, which enriched their dance performances. To enhance and cultivate dancing styles dances and songs competitions were organised by village elders during market days. Around this time, trading activities had increased in volume as the Abagusii were now settled with a number of economic activities and items for trade. Dances were competed in by people from different villages or clans. The following were some of the dances that were developed, rehearsed and competed for during music competitions.

First there was Mayenga (beer party dances) a slow motion dance which was performed in a circle with the shaking of bodies but not of heads. Secondly, there was Chigicha (twisting and shaking of shoulders) which was fairly quick dance with a lot of movement. Arms were thrown backwards and forwards and hips shaken very fast. This was too rigorous a dance for the aged and therefore left to the young. Thirdly, there was Sugusia (dancing right in a circle) a dance which was slow, stately and the feet barely left the ground. In this dance, dancers moved to the right in a circle facing inwards shaking their hips. There was also a dance, which was called koiyeria amareko (shake the shoulders)<sup>151</sup>. In this dance the obokano player enhanced the performance. He sat in the middle, while both young and the old stood in a circle. He could sing and play his music. The dancers responded with the dances, moving round, and shaking their shoulders forwards and backwards. After a few minutes they could kneel down holding their waist

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<sup>151</sup>G.S. Zake, Op. cit., p.103.

sideways and continued moving on their knees.

Entabanana ('jump and shake shoulders') dances were the most interesting of them all. In the dances, the obokano player who sat in the middle while dancers made a circle round him supplied music. When he played his music, dancers could jump forward while shaking their shoulders and then jumped backwards and shook their shoulders too. This was repeated many times rhythmically until they started sweating.

The young men among the Abagusii also had their dances, which they performed with spears and shields in the dancing arena. After a long, vigorous, but enjoyable dance, they would sit down to listen to stories told by elders. These stories touched on the past experience of the Abagusii. These experiences included war, with the neighbouring communities, past culture and customs as well as their economic activities<sup>152</sup>. In telling these stories the elders used songs as a record of memory to instil an element of remembrance among the youths. After listening to interesting stories, the young men did a lot of wrestling and vigorous jumping as a form of appreciation. Preparation for Ogokinana (wrestling) involved the sitting together in pairs. A chorus song from a leader could then commence, and at the command from the elder, a pair would come out to start wrestling. After a fall or draw, they would continue jumping upright. This went on until they settled down again to continue listening to stories that touched on the community's history. In the evening they could go home for resting.

There also existed Amarwa (beer party) dances with limited dancing. A number of people from different Abagusii clans and villages would meet at a chosen house where 'traditional' liquor had to be prepared two days in advance. Members were required to carry with them their own drinking straws and stools. The pot would be put in the middle

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<sup>152</sup>O.I., with C. Nyabonyi Op. cit.

and each member dipped his straw to sip the beer<sup>153</sup>. After drinking for a while they would dance and sing songs covering various themes of the past history

Throughout the nineteenth century songs and dances among the Abagusii continued to develop due to interaction with other communities. For example during this period the Abagusii and the Luo co-operated culturally and economically more than they did with either the Maasai or the Kipsigis. Economically the Abagusii and the Luo depended on each other for a number of reasons. The Luo people lived in a relatively drier country than that of the Abagusii. Their country favoured extensive pastoralism, while Gusii Highlands, wet and fertile as it has been always, favoured extensive cultivation. Although the Luo were also cultivators, very often their country was hit by droughts and prolonged famines - particularly Nyakach and Kano. During these periods of hardship the Luo heavily depended on the Abagusii for grains such as fingermillet. The Abagusii proudly referred to them as the 'granary' of the Luo, a claim that the neighbouring Luo do not deny<sup>154</sup>. The Abagusii also made hoes and other iron implements like axes, spears, traditional razors and arrows. These were manufactured mainly in Kitutu and North Mugirango, some two kilometres from Nyamaiya Omugambi's camp places which were famous for ornamental iron works. Here ebitinge (legrings), Omootoro (armrings) and earrings were manufactured. There were other iron working sites in Bassi, South Mugirango and Majoge. It is not easy to estimate how long the Abagusii had worked on iron, but according to their tradition they appear to have known the art 'since the time of Mogusii' which would mean since the sixteenth century. All these items found

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<sup>153</sup>G.S. Zake Op. cit., p.104.

<sup>154</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p.212.

market in Luoland<sup>155</sup>. The Abagusii ironware as Nyayiemi Moture and Fred Kieya put it, was very expensive.

These tools were very expensive  
A jembe, for example, would cost a cow  
The people who manufactured the tools were  
the richest people in whole district.  
They had a lot of cows and goats, and  
their food was milk and meat.<sup>156</sup>

Soapstone also was a very important item of trade between the Abagusii and the Luo. It was found on the hill tops of South Mugirango. Originally the dust from this stone was used for decorating the faces during funerals and other ceremonial activities whereby songs and dances were involved. The Luo used to import soapstone from Gusiiland to their country in exchange for goats, sheep and cattle. The Abagusii used the stone to make pots for the storage of ghee and fats. Because it was easily carved with a knife it was later used to make clay pipes, bowls and model of animals, birds, snakes or human beings<sup>157</sup>.

The Abagusii also depended on the Luo for cattle-salt, hides, ghee, milk, fish, pots, drums, baskets, beautifully decorated head-dress of different types particularly those made from feathers or fur which the Abagusii harpists, or lyricists wore during performances. Trade between the Abagusii and the Luo was mainly handled by women and children of both communities. This was mainly so during periods of hostilities. Abagusii women and children would carry all manner of merchandise deep into Luoland. Similarly Luo women and children from Kabondo, Nyakach, Gem or Kamagambo would travel deep into Gusiiland without any harm befalling them. From the field research it was found out that trade between the Abagusii and the Luo led to the two communities meeting in market

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<sup>155</sup>See the "B.O.S.S., African History and culture quarterly" - A publication of Bishop Otunga High School No. 2, April 1970, p.9.

<sup>156</sup>A quotation from W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, pp. 213-214.

<sup>157</sup>*ibid.* p.214. See also Daily Nation, February 14, 1969, p.15.

places where they culturally interacted besides trade. There were songs and dances competitions that were organised by elders and artists from both the two communities. Such competitions brought about cultural co-operation. The two communities ‘borrowed’ songs, dancing styles and even musical instruments from each other, which improved their quality of songs and dances<sup>158</sup>. This indeed contributed to the development of the Gusii songs and dancing styles. The two communities exchanged ideas, shared their past historical experiences and developed strong cultural ties. Abagusii borrowed some words of the Luo language particularly of the names like lyre, flutes, wind-horns and drums. Musical rings such as ebitinge and chinchigiri, of the two communities look alike meaning that they must have developed these instruments from each other during their interactions especially in market places during inter-community music competitions<sup>159</sup>. These instruments are often played very similarly. Some Abagusii elders allege that even in pre-colonial times some famous Luo lyrists used to perform on Gusii Highlands in the homes of famous people like abagambi, in the various social ceremonies which included; weddings, sacrifice offering, entertainment and in market places during times of wrestling competitions. It was from such occasions that the Abagusii learnt how to play the various music instruments such as engoma, a wind instrument which the Luo call “Abu”<sup>160</sup>.

During their early period of settlement, costumes and modes of dress during the performance of songs and dances had little meaning, as there were limited songs, which only dealt with specific themes. Further more, the Abagusii had little time for decoration. Most of their time during that early period was spent in inter-community wars and

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<sup>158</sup>O.I., with J. Onkaga Op. cit.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., see also W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., pp.215-216.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p.216.



conflicts. For instance as seen earlier, the Abagusii were in constant war with the Kipsigis, Maasai and the Luo.

In the mid nineteenth century, the mode of dress or costume in songs and dances performance was adapted and developed to enhance songs and dances performances. This was probably so because these performances had to be modified so as to compete effectively in music competitions which were organised at village, clan, community and inter-community levels. The women wore ebisero (goatskins) that were tied around the waist with a thin string made out of an ant bear's hide. Each woman wore two pieces, one covering the front parts and the other covering the buttocks. At the hem of the goat skin dress were stuck some tiny but shiny pieces of beads of several colours. The beads reminded them of their trading activities in the past. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Abagusii women realised that performance of songs and dances could be enhanced further if they were to cover their breasts to make them enjoy performing songs and dances without any fear of embarrassment in the eyes of the audience. Around this period, they started covering their breasts with a goat's skin, which was smaller than the one covering the buttocks. At the hem of this little skin were some thin covers of black, white and red fur, which beautifully punctuated the performers' breast shakes. This kind of fur historically reminded them of their hunting experience and the kind of birds they used to hunt<sup>161</sup>.

From the research data obtained, it was evident that a century later after their settlement, the Abagusii acquired jingling anklets from the Luo during their trading activities with the latter. The jingling anklets contributed to a rhythm with their movement of feet and the whole body. All these were advances that appeared in the development of songs and dances of the Abagusii. Performers around this period made a crescent formation and had their song leader standing slightly ahead of them

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<sup>161</sup>S.N. Mogere Op.cit.

but in the middle of the crescent. The weaving of jingle anklets became very attractive and hence arrested the attention of the audience. This was especially more appealing in the case of a wedding songs.

In the nineteenth century, the Abagusii songs were performed with a variety of accompaniment. Some of the musical instruments used were ekonu (the drum), chinchigiri (hunting horn) embegete\*, egetonto\*, and enyabububu\* Historically, some of these instruments like ekonu, chinchigiri and enyabububu were acquired from the Luo through trade contacts in Kabondo and Kamagambo markets in the early nineteenth century<sup>162</sup>. As the Gusii songs and dances continued to be developed and enriched throughout the nineteenth century improvisations were discovered which were also considered as 'instruments'. They included egechuria (whistling by mouth), okong'ata (trills) and ekerori (making sound such as a flute's by mouth). Besides serving as musical instruments, ekonu enene (the big drum) was used to send message of important events like birth, death and communal meetings<sup>163</sup>.

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<sup>162</sup>O.I., with J. Moraa, at Bonyamoyio Village, on 13/12/97.

<sup>163</sup>O.I., with J. Nyandika, at Bomobea, on 10/11/97.

\* These musical instruments have no English equivalent. These are single stringed instruments made up of animal skin and are played to enhance song and dance performances.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4.0 THE HISTORY OF THE PRE-COLONIAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AMONG THE ABAGUSII

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the origin and development of musical instruments among the Abagusii. It is in this chapter that we will understand the origin, development and the various functions played by Abagusii musical instruments besides entertainment. The origin and existence of musical instruments among the Abagusii is associated with the interaction of the community with their physical environment and their neighbouring communities. The Abagusii traditions indicate that the community had a rich and varied musical repertoire. Many instruments in Gusiiland seem to have developed from imaginative use of objects originally designed for other purposes. In the pre-colonial period, Abagusii musicians made and played several varieties of instruments. The drum for instance has its origin in the pot and the pitcher. The latter was used to mark the step of a dance and also as a charm against evil spirits<sup>164</sup>. So the drum was originally designed for religious purposes. Individuals among the Abagusii had direct access to God through homestead heads. This was usually done at harvesting time, start of New Year and thanksgiving. Originally bell or flutes could be used to ward off evil spirits. The sounds emitted by this instrument were strong enough to cast away evil spirits. Musical instruments among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period were equally used to repel evil or invoke a deity. The use of instruments for religious ceremonies has continued down to the present day, though at various times they have been a suspect of their secular associations<sup>165</sup>.

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<sup>164</sup>O.I., with J. Moraa, at Bonyamoyio village, on 13/12/97.

<sup>165</sup>See for example Encyclopaedia Britannica, new edition p.729.

## 4.2 The origin of musical instruments in Gusiiland

The origin of musical instruments among the Abagusii can be traced back to the period of initial migration and settlement of the community by about 1750. During this period, various Abagusii families had occupied the valley of River Sondu, as far East as the foot of Wire Hill in Kabondo<sup>166</sup>. During this period, the geographical character of the Gusi environment influenced the origin of musical instruments. The musical instruments of this period appear to have been natural objects capable of producing sound. The animals they hunted such as antelopes, buffaloes and elephants provided them with horns and bone pipes which were improvised as means of amplifying human voice<sup>167</sup>.

A call from a horn, or drum, was always used as a signal of trouble originally. The reaction was instinctive. Upon hearing the voice of either of these instruments, young men would leave whatever they were doing and dashed to places where weapons were kept, and rush in the general direction of trouble. The clan military leader would most often be among the first warriors to arrive at the scene, and the warriors would take their position according to this command. A half a century later the horn and drum were experimented on by the Abagusii during celebration and song performances and proved to be effective musical instruments which accompanied song and dance performance.

During their stay at Kano plains, in the pre-colonial period, the Abagusii discovered that tubes possessed acoustic properties that enabled them, by vibration of lips, to sound more than one note. From using natural objects as musical instruments it was an obvious step to construct instruments that would serve a similar purpose.

When the Abagusii migrated from Kano, their first stop was Gosia, near Ngoinyo Hill, in North Mugirango where they settled and continued with their large hunting

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<sup>166</sup>W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p.74.

<sup>167</sup>O.I., with J. Nyangua, at Nyamira market, on 12/11/97.

ventures, and cattle raids. Here they made bows and arrows, which they used as weapons to fight against their enemies. They later discovered that a stretching string could produce a musical note besides it being used as a bow. This resulted in the construction of a musical bow, that is one stringed instrument. This kind of development around this period brought about unity and togetherness of the various Abagusii families and clans who came together for entertainment purposes. They realised the need for unity, in order to assist each other and to let everybody feel assured that in case of hardships or danger, he was not alone but he had his “brother” solidly on his side. The Abagusii considered this a most important and indispensable rule “the rights and duties of blood solidarity”. This also meant that during migrations clan and family settlements were always huddled together, for mutual support<sup>168</sup>.

A half a century later, the Abagusii realised that the musical bow, the ancestor of all plucked traditional instruments could be modified and reinforced with a resonator to produce distinct musical sound. This was to discriminate it from the hunters' bow so that it could have an independent origin. This was done either by placing a pot on the ground beneath the instrument or a gourd attached to it or the player's mouth<sup>169</sup>. The string could either be struck by a stick or plucked with the fingers.

The pre-colonial Gusii society had people involved in various manufacturing skills. There were people specialised in the making of hoes and iron implements such as spears, knives and arrows. Industrial centres were all over Gusiiland. For instance, the Nyangoko iron works, in the Soironga Valley of North Mugirango, specialised in the manufacturing of musical instruments such as tap rings, bells, shakers and round rings all of which were used to enhance song and dance performance. Besides the manufacturing

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<sup>168</sup>W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p.89.

<sup>169</sup>O.I., with I. Otworu, at Keroka market, on 10/11/97.

of these musical instruments, earrings (ebetinge), legrings and omootoro were manufactured by the Nyangoko ironworkers. Other sites in the pre-colonial Gusii where musical instruments and other iron implements were manufactured include Central Bassi, South Mugirango and Machoge<sup>170</sup>.

The construction of musical instrument in the traditional Gusii industries required a high degree of skills and craftsmanship which included the piercing of a tube to a uniform of expanding width and the flaring of the bell of a wind instrument to increase sonority in musical performance. All these involved accurate workmanship from wood and metal. The Abagusii craftsmen in different skills had to combine efforts in the construction of pipes in metal and wood, in fashioning them to the right length, in securing uniformity of tone through a single blow, and in adjusting the great variety of sounds so that they could blend happily together. The best known craftsmen of musical instrument during the pre-colonial period were Omwenga, Oirere, Nyambeka, Obaga, Sanduki, Ombati and Motoki<sup>171</sup>.

The above craftsmen had to select materials such as wood or pine for string instruments, pots, animal skins and gourds that were to be used as resonators. After selecting the relevant materials for instrument making, the craftsmen would experiment until they were satisfied with the kind of musical notes these instruments made. That is to say that the skills of the craftsmen for musical instruments were acquired by long practice, and the principles that determined both tone and intonation were discovered through trial and error.

The musical instruments and other implements that were manufactured by the Abagusii specialists in the pre-colonial period were sold locally and others exported. The

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<sup>170</sup>C.J.O. Choti, Op. cit., p.64.

<sup>171</sup>O.I., with J. Nyandika, at Bomobea, on 10/11/97.

Luo provided a ready market for these commodities. The Abagusii also depended on the Luo for the supply of musical ideas and instruments such as obokano, jingles and beautifully decorated head-dresses that were used by the lyricists during the performance of songs and dances. As noted earlier or even today some musical instruments such as the lyre, wind horns and flutes of the Abagusii look similar to those of the Luo and are played more or less in a similar manner. The Luo instrument closest to obokano is the nyatiti which is eight stringed.

### **4.3 The nature of the Gusii musical instruments In the pre-colonial period.**

The Gusii musical instruments in the pre-colonial period were classified into four main categories. This kind of classification was based on the sound it made. In chordophones, or stringed instruments, a column or body of air was made to vibrate. The best example was the bell, Nyasinga, Onsongo, Ayieko and Ombati were the well-known specialists who made and played stringed instruments during this period<sup>171</sup>. People from such clans like Bassi, Majoge and South Mugirango who were lovers of traditional songs used to buy their string musical instruments from the above specialists. The payments for musical instruments was usually made in kind, in exchange with other goods such as iron implements like hoes, spears and arrows or even traditional beer. There were membraphones. In this case a stretched membrane vibrated. Drums were the major example in this class. As noted early the drum was imported from Luoland during the early trade contacts between the Abagusii and the Luo. The knowledge of making drums, as borrowed from the Luo, enabled the Abagusii specialists to make different sizes of drums for several other purposes besides being used as a musical instrument.

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<sup>171</sup>O.I., with J. Monyeka at Bondaracha village on 18/12/97.

During their stay in Nyagoye Forest of which Logan has estimated to be the period between 1825 and 1850<sup>173</sup>. Abagusii women made pots from a particular type of clay which was obtained from swampy areas along river beds. There were various sizes and shapes of pots. Some of these pots were used as a resonator for the production of musical sounds while some were used for fetching water, storing food and for cooking. It was around this period that stringed instruments were also adapted mainly from the Luo and were modified to produce more musical notes. Stringed instruments such as otete\*, enyabubu\*, embegete\*, egetonto\*, engoma\*, a hunting horn and obokano proved to be useful as musical instruments. Obokano was the most popular of all. The Gusii Obokano was made of six strings as compared to the Luo lyre, which had only three, and utmost four strings. These strings were mainly obtained from animal skin. The obokano was made of a wood carved body with extended arm. The end of the lyre was made up of wood of about one and a half metre to which the strings were fastened. At another end a crescent shaped piece of wood covered with a cow's hide was placed. The strings were stuck to the wood before the hide covered it. Two pieces of wood about two metres were placed from either side thus making an almost rounded form, stacked at the end with a hump shaped piece of wood covered with the hide.

On the hide at the slender end of Obokano, there was a stick placed across the hide on which the strings rested before they would be fastened at the end. The stick played a major role in the production of sounds by the strings because they hit at it once they were raised by the performer and produced a sound as a result of vibration which was caused by hitting on the stick. During this period Obokano could be played repeatedly to produce several notes. In this period also there were few specialists who knew how to play

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<sup>173</sup>M. W. Logan, Kenya national Archives, DC/Ksi 3/2/1907 -1924.

\* Have no English Equivalent as noted earlier on. However, they are stringed instruments which use animal skin as a resonator. They had a variety of sounds to enrich song and dance performance.



Obokano , Obaga of Kitutu, Sanduki of Nyaribari and Nyakerita of Bonchari were the major known lyricists in Gusiiland especially in the nineteenth century<sup>174</sup>.

#### 4.4 Merophones: Wind instruments

. Before looking at the origin of wind instruments among the Abagusii it might be initially useful to have a brief understanding of the relationship between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities from the point of view of military organisation and aggression. The history of wind instruments can be traced back in the pre-colonial period owing to the relationship between the Abagusii and their neighbours such as the Luo, the Kipsigis and the Maasai. In the pre-colonial period, the Abagusii did not have a single military organisation under one command. Each clan conducted its wars and raids separately. The highest form of military co-operation was at sub-tribal level.

The military leader of each clan would always be a well-known and respected clan warrior. He would be the man in charge of clan warriors whose ages normally ranged from eighteen to forty years. Most of the training was received at ebisarate, cattle boma where warriors communally looked after cattle, lived a Spartan life and kept off women. In the ebisarate the entire livestock of a village or sub-clan were driven in for the night. Everybody who had cattle would send a few of his sons to stay with cattle guards.

The young warriors who lived in these villages were normally armed and would keep watch in turns, at night, in case of attack. They were usually armed with spears, arrows, horns and drums. The leader in the camp would usually be chosen from the most senior and toughest warriors. When enemies especially cattle raiders invaded an ebisarate, the warriors would blow the horns and drums to announce danger after which the armed themselves ready to fight the enemies. With time it was realised that the horn

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<sup>174</sup>O.I., with C. Nyabonyi, at Mwasioma village, on 28/11/97.

and the drum could be used as musical instruments to enhance song and dance performances. This then became the beginning of the invention of wind instruments<sup>175</sup>.

Wrestling, hunting, song and dance as well as military practices were part and parcel of ebisarate. To send quick messages, the drum was used. This was because the drum had varying rhythms, which could be distinguished. Each event or occasion had a specific drum rhythm that communicated its sermon. Later it was discovered that a horn, a wind instrument could be used to send quick messages across the villages in case there was trouble. This kind of discovery made the Abagusii to develop a wide range of wind instruments for sending quick messages. It was also discovered that the horn and the flute could be used as musical instruments. Pipes were made of reeds, bamboo, or, in some parts the tip of an antelope horn. Engoma, a hunting horn dominated in this category. The performer blew across the end of the pipe, producing a single note. Flutes were also discovered as musical instruments during this period.

#### **4.5 Development and role of musical instruments**

As the Abagusii settled in their present day highlands by 1850, their social structure had been completed<sup>176</sup>. They had well defined social, political and economic organisations. And also, traditions of the community including virtues and taboos were well defined. The community members' participation in social processes such as birth, circumcision, marriage and death was mandatory. Religious ceremonies, merry making and beer party ceremonies were joyful moments whereby entertainment was necessary. This was usually accompanied by song and dance<sup>177</sup>.

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<sup>175</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., pp. 203-205.

<sup>176</sup>M.W. Logan, Kenya National Archives DC/KSI 3/2 (1907-1924).

<sup>177</sup>O.I., with J. Monyeka, at Mach-Achumbi Village on 18/12/97.

To enhance performance, performers in these ceremonies had to use musical instruments to add “beauty” and enjoyment to these occasions. Therefore musical instruments were developed to suit the various song and dance performances. For example the drum was developed in such a way that it could produce distinct notes which could discriminate it from other musical instruments. In this case a lighter piece of wood, lighter and well-treated and dried skin were used in the making of drums. It was also learnt by the Abagusii artists that a drum could last longer if it was properly maintained. At times the drum was beaten with free hands but on a rhythmic pace. In other cases some sticks were used to produce a variety of rhythms and notes from the drum. The format of drum beating greatly varied from one artist to another.

By around 1900 Obokano was modified and was fitted with eight strings so that it could play eight different notes. This kind of development ensured that Obokano could be played alone without any percussion instrument. Since Obokano around this period was made of eight strings it was not easy to integrate the sounds. It was supposed to be played by musical experts. Kebaso, Motoki, and Nyasinga, were the well-known lyricists in Gusiiland around this period<sup>178</sup>. They were often invited to the various community functions where they entertained the audience with their instruments. To make it last longer, animal skin and leg tendon of cattle were used as strings. These materials made the Obokano produce double bass and this could reach well down below the range of human voices. Words could be fitted the tune of Obokano on rhythmic fashion and the whole melody was repeated several times with apparently very few variations. Later, techniques of playing the Obokano improved. Instead of sitting at one point playing the instrument he played it over his shoulders as he moved round the circle dancing along with

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<sup>178</sup>O.I. , with T. Bosibori, at Bonyamoyio village, on 30/12/97.

the dancers. The player had to have the thumb and pointing finger of the right hand plucking the first and fourth string simultaneously. The middle finger of the left hand sometimes played the seventh string, while the thumb of the right hand sometimes played the second and the third strings. The sixth string when played could be touched by the left-hand thumb<sup>179</sup>. The Abagusii also have the same view.

In the early nineteenth century, the horn was developed in such a way that it could now produce double notes as compared to the early one, which only produced a single musical note. To achieve this, a horn player had to open a hole at the tip of the horn or reed and could open and close it with a finger or thumb. Two-tone messages could be sent from one hunter to another without alarming their prey. Further development of musical instruments involved ensembles of end-blown pipes, which could be frequently played together by a number of performers. Each performer in such cases had the responsibility of inserting his one note into the music at the correct moment<sup>180</sup>. In the pre-colonial period multiple holed flutes were developed to play a variety of melodies, the Abagusii as well used cattle horns as trumpets. Ensembles of open-ended instruments made of horns, gourds, or a mixture of both materials also served as musical instruments. The majority of artists preferred them because they were easily found since they were locally available materials. These instruments added beauty of melody and enabled human voices to blend well during performances.

In the early period of European occupation in Gusiiland the Abagusii developed idiophones, that is hard vibrating instruments. These instruments included objects that were struck, shaken, or otherwise set in motion. They produced either melodic sound, as with the xylophones, or non-melodic noise, as with rattles, bells, seed pods, clappers and

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<sup>179</sup>G.S. Zake, *Op. cit.*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>180</sup>O.I. with N. Ogeturenki, at Rigena Market, on 27/12/97.

tubes. Most of these instruments were acquired from the people whom the Abagusii interacted with through trade, working together in European farms and industries. This was as a result of being forced to work outside the district. Around this period, there were also other natural improvisations, which were also considered as “instruments”. Such were egechuria whistling, okong’ata, trills and ekerori, that is, making sound such as a flute’s by mouth<sup>181</sup>.

#### **4.6 The role played by musical instruments in the pre-colonial period**

Ribina songs were accompanied with the obokano, lyre, ebirori, flute, and chikonu, drum music. The ebirori provided signals as to when the dance movement, which accompanied the songs, should begin or when new songs were to be introduced. It was also used to punctuate the songs and to add some rhythmic interest when the performers reached its climax. The obokano, reinforced the melodic line at some points and gave chordal accompaniment to the tune. The chikonu, provided a continuous rhythmic flow of background accompaniment to the whole performance<sup>182</sup>.

On a specific Ribina day and place, clans women from various villages would meet with their chikonu, drums accompanied by their men with obokano to provide accompaniment to their songs and dances. The women wore chindege, leg bells, ebitinge, leg rings, amatete, beads, and the skin garment called chingobo decorated with etago, red ochre. This ochre was also used to decorate the hair. Women from various families would dance in turns, and there were always people from different clans to determine the

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<sup>181</sup>M.M. Okeng’o Op. cit., p.123.

<sup>182</sup>G.S. Were and D. Nyamwaya, “Gusii music and Dance” in Republic of Kenya: Kisii District Socio-cultural profile. (Nairobi, 1986) p. 181.

best dancers. Occasionally, however, the competitors could dance simultaneously during which time they would borrow dance styles and techniques from each other.

Both men and women during ribina ceremonies wore Chindege, leg or ankle bells in the pre-colonial period. Clitoridectomised girls also used them in the day they appeared in public after seclusion and at marriage ceremonies at the time of song and dance performances. These instruments were also worn during funeral dances. They could be worn on wrist, ankle or knee. The leg bells were also called chinchigiri among the Abagusii.

Egetureri, an antelope buck's horn was used by the adult males to accompany songs in wartime. It was also used during song and dance performances at funerals. As well, it was used by boys when they usually went to weed in the fields. Enkeroria, a bamboo flute, was used for entertainment when herding cattle. It entertained both the performer and the animals being herded. Engoma, an instrument made out of eng'era, buffalo, horn was blown as a signal of either a ceremony or trouble such as war.

Rirandi, an instrument made from gourd had the largest big gourd resonator sound chamber with a hole at the bottom which let out the sound. At the top of this resonator were attached a number of stems of elongated gourds joined together with beeswax and tightened with tree bark strings. With all these characteristics, rirandi, produced enough sound. It was usually played at social functions to provide rhythmic patterns within a welter of singing and drumming.

Ong'eng'o, a bow like musical instrument provided entertainment at marriage ceremonies and at other social functions<sup>183</sup>. As discussed in this chapter, the above were the major musical instruments that played a vital role in the history of the pre-colonial

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<sup>183</sup>O.I., with H. Isena at Gesusu market, on 27/12/97.

Gusii songs and dances. Other minor instruments were risakwe, reed rattles, embegete, tube flute and otete, one stringed instrument. All these played a role in the perpetuation of unity and understanding among the Abagusii and the neighbouring communities in the realm of entertainment and keeping of the Abagusii's culture including history.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5.0 THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION IN GUSII LAND AND THE CONSEQUENT IMPACT ON THE GUSII SONGS AND DANCES THROUGH COLONIAL PERIOD

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will examine the nature and the method of the establishment of the British administration among the Abagusii and the initial reaction of the Abagusii towards the setting up of colonialism. We will also examine colonial policies and their effects on songs and dances among the Abagusii.

While the Abagusii were busy settling down in their present homeland in the nineteenth century and evolving their socio-economic and political ideas and institutions, imperialist European powers had already embarked on the system of carving out the continent of Africa into pockets of their respective "influences". European penetration of the East African hinterland dates from the journeys by missionaries and explorers like Krapf, Speeke, Grant, Livingstone and Stanley. The imperialists followed their "discoveries". The British and the Germans colonised East Africa<sup>184</sup>.

In 1894, the British declared their protectorate over Uganda of which Gusiiland was part. Gusiiland was therefore part of the British Empire but the Abagusii remained unaware of this until late in 1904 when the British decided to interfere in the Abagusii domestic affairs. The Abagusii made some stealthy efforts to understand the nature and motives of the white people, whom they had been told had forcibly entrenched themselves in the territories of the Abaluyia, Kipsigis and the Luo. Around this period, the Kitutu section of the Abagusii had just taken reprisals against their Abagusero section for alleged offences against Kitutu women and children who had gone to trade in Luo land. On

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<sup>184</sup>W.R. Ochieng , O.p. cit., p. 220.



hearing the civil strife in Gusiland the Kisumu Provincial Commissioner S.S. Bagge sent a company comprising of about 100 troops and 50 policemen “to bring peace, law and order, among the Abagusii and also to bring them under the influence of the British”<sup>185</sup>. When the British troops arrived in South Mugirango, the Abagusii demanded to know or to be told what the white men were looking for in their country<sup>186</sup>. But unfortunately, the British never understood the language of the Abagusii. On realising that the Abagusii would not yield their independence easily, the British immediately attacked the ill armed and unprepared villagers. They tried to resist but about 100 Abagusii warriors were killed and about 3000 heads of cattle were confiscated. The British forces plundered and burnt the Abagusii homesteads and then retired leaving the Abagusii with their own casualties<sup>187</sup>. This encounter marked their first nationalistic contact with the British imperialism envying peoples independence and accusing them falsely of arrogance. The Abagusii however never forgave or forgot the incident. To keep a record of this historical event in their culture the Abagusii elders composed a song, which was, to be passed on from one generation to another. The song was sang as follows:

*Enyoni yachire baba ekona kouyauya  
 Enyoni yachire baba ng'a nero omosongo  
 Ekona Kouyauya ee baba  
 Ekona kouyauya mokire genda bwango  
 Nabwo batoretereire ee baba  
 Nabwo batoretereire Enchara nechikong'a  
 Kemunto Nyamacharara ee baba  
 Nabwo batoretereire chinsoti nechikong'a  
 Omonto Ochire Omobe ee baba  
 Omonto Ochire Omobe nga'nere oyio  
 Omosongo.*

<sup>185</sup>W.R. Ochieng, *A history of Kenya*, (Nairobi, 1985) p. 95.

<sup>186</sup>O.I., with J. Nyandika, Bomobea Village, on 10/11/97.

<sup>187</sup>W.R. Ochieng, (Nairobi, 1985), p. 96.

The bird has come which keeps on flying  
 The bird has come mother which is called  
 white man  
 It keeps on flying ee mother  
 It is flying my age-mate run after it  
 These are the ones who have brought famine  
 and cranes  
 Kemunto the 'jumper' ee mother  
 They have brought us vultures and cranes  
 A bad man has come ee mother  
 bad man has come in the name of white man.

The coming of the British into Gusiiland coincided with the period when there was famine and diseases in Gusiiland. There were also large flocks of birds such as vultures, cranes, hawks and weaver birds which destroyed most of the Abagusii crops on their land thus leading to famine. These impeding problems were associated with the coming of the Europeans. In the singing the above song the Abagusii kept a record of such historical events which were passed from one generation to another in the understanding of their history. The song could be sung severally to enhance memorisation<sup>188</sup>.

In 1907, the British decided on effective occupation of Gusiiland. The British sent the District Officer G.S. Northcote to Kisii where he established an administrative centre. Northcote chose Getembe as the new administrative centre, naming it "Kisii Boma"<sup>189</sup>. From April 1907 Northcote remained in charge of Gusiiland as an Assistant District Commissioner. He spent the remaining part of the year in constructing the necessary government buildings at the station site and in laying the foundation of British administration among the 'hostile' Abagusii. He had to select the chiefs and headmen for the various administrative locations. Northcote found it extremely difficult to decide on who among the clan elders of the sub-tribal units should be made chief. Gusi tradition has

<sup>188</sup>O.I., with N. Ogeturenki, at Rigena Village, on 27/11/97.

<sup>189</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p. 97.

it that the elders from each sub-tribe met and proposed names of the people they wished to lead them. Results indicated that Oyugi was appointed the chief of Wanjare, Angwenyi Chief of Kitutu, Chore of Bassi, Nyamosi of Majoge, Ndubi of North Mugirango and Sotik, Nyamwamu of Nyaribari and Oketch the chief of South Mugirango. Ombati became the chief of Mokusero. By the end of 1907 a start had been made to administer Gusiiland. With the appointment of chiefs and headmen, the collection of hut taxes started. Some Abagusii had begun to bring civil and criminal cases before the Assistant District Commissioner for settlement<sup>190</sup>.

Despite these advances, however many of the Abagusii people remained hostile to the British administration and refused to accept it. Northcote had, for example, great difficulty even in making contact with any prominent individual in several parts of Kitutu the nearest subtribe to the administrative office.

On 12<sup>th</sup> January 1908, Northcote, the sole European in the area, which was one of the least known parts of the protectorate, decided to make extensive tours of the Gusi territory, accompanied by only a handful of policemen. A man from Bogeka clan called Otenyo successfully ambushed and speared Northcote. Unfortunately for Otenyo and Abagusii, Northcote did not die as assumed by some after the incident. The Abagusii who assumed Northcote dead composed a song and sang with great joy to mark the major achievement in their history whereby their hero, Otenyo had speared a white man. In the song, Otenyo was praised for his timely action.

The song was follows:

*Moinyore Omogaka Otenyo  
Omorwani Oreng akarwania Omosongo  
Minto agaita Nyarigoti  
Otenyo Omoremu Oreng  
Omorwani Oreng akarwania Abasongo*

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid. p. 97.

*Minto agaita Nyarigoti(sic)*  
*Otenyo neritimo riaye mosongo ebunduki*  
*Akarwania Omosongo minto*  
*Agaita Nyarigoti(sic)*  
*Moinyore Omogaka Otenyo*  
*Agaita Nyarigoti( sic) <sup>191</sup>.*

Remember elder Otenyo  
 He was a warrior who fought Europeans  
 Well done he killed Northcote(sic)  
 Otenyo was courageous  
 He was a warrior who fought a European  
 Well done he killed Northcote(sic)  
 Otenyo with his spear a white man with a gun  
 He fought a European  
 He killed Northcote(sic)  
 Remember elder Otenyo  
 He killed Northcote.(sic)

The Abagusii sang the above song having imbibed Prophetess Moraa's medicine, which they believed would turn bullets into water, several clans, particularly those of Western Kitutu, North Nyaribari and East Wanjare, broke into open 'revolt' in which two Indians and one Luo in the Boma were murdered. When the Abagusii realised that Northcote was still alive after being speared by Otenyo, they were very much disappointed. Six days later Downing Street, London had received a cable from Governor Saddleler informing them of the incident. In Kenya the news of the "revolt" had reached John Ainsworth, the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner at Kisumu, on 14th January 1908. He immediately dispatched Dr. H.S. Beerderker to Kisii under escort to attend to Northcote. A Company of the 3rd K.A.R based at Kabianga had to be sent to Kisii immediately. Ainsworth also ordered W.R. Foran the head of the police detachment at

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<sup>191</sup> Ogeturenki Op. Cit.

Kisumu, to hurry to Kisii with all the available police. In total a column of fifty-four African police and 150 porters - all under W.R. Foran's command left Kisumu for Kisii<sup>192</sup>.

On the 15th January 1908, Foran's column arrived in the troubled district where several attacks by the Abagusii were "repulsed and casualties inflicted". They found that Northcote's wound was not serious though he was suffering much pain. To punish the Abagusii for this unbecoming behaviour the British reacted under Lieutenant Colonel J. Mackay, through a force which consisted of 14 British Officers, 327 NCO, a doctor, 50 Nandi levies and some 500 porters<sup>193</sup>. The British appeared determined to teach the Gusii a memorable lesson. As they marched towards Kisii boma they burnt huts, destroyed crops, killed anyone who tried to stop them, and captured any cattle they came across. In assessing, the effect of the attack Maxon writes:

Taken almost completely by surprise, the Abagusii suffered heavily from this day's operation. Large numbers of stock were captured by the force, many houses and cattle bomas burned and some 20 men according to the British estimates, killed<sup>194</sup>.

The punitive operations lasted from January 15<sup>th</sup> to February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1908, when the K.A.R and the Kenya Police were withdrawn. During the whole offensive the Abagusii faced their predicament with outstanding intelligence and courage. Although they attempted to defend, individually, their houses and herds, the Abagusii did not organise defensive action against the invading forces. Their cattle were seized and their huts and granaries were burnt down.

When the invading forces were finally withdrawn, the police wing was entrusted with the task of escorting to Kibos the captured stock - some 5,636 heads of cattle, and

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<sup>192</sup>W.R. Foran, The Kenya Police 1887-1960. (London, 1962) p. 26.

<sup>193</sup>W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>194</sup>R.M. Maxon, "The Gusii uprising of 1908" USSCC, 1969.

3,281 sheep and goats. It was estimated that about 160 Abagusii had been killed during the operations, and many more were wounded<sup>195</sup>. Indeed the massacre of the defenceless Abagusii men and women was outrageous. Even the Kitutu; who remained indifferent to the British were molested and butchered. Even the very victim of “native treachery” G.A.S Northcote, was very upset by the “inhuman behaviour of the punitive forces.” He wrote:

It would take too long to describe the absolute idiocy obstinacy and want of military operations in this country which they showed<sup>196</sup>.

When W. Churchill received some information of this “merciless expedition”, his outburst was:

I do not like the tone of these reports. No doubt the clans should be punished but 160 have now been killed outright Without any further casualties encountered .....it looks like a butchery, and if the house of Commons gets hold of it, all our Plan in East Africa Protectorate will be under cloud. Surely it cannot be necessary to keep on killing defenceless people on such an enormous scale<sup>197</sup>.

As far as the Abagusii were concerned this was definitely a butchery as many people died at ago a thing which had never happened before in their history. Most of the Abagusii praised Otenyo for making an attempt to kill Northcote so as to defend the community from falling into the hands of the ‘foreigners’. Although Northcote never died, Otenyo’s action brought a lot of glory and honour in Gusiiland. According to the

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<sup>195</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>196</sup>Northcote to his gazher: D.C/KSI/4/2. Kenya National Archives.

<sup>197</sup>C.J. Wilson, Before Dawn in Kenya, (London, 1952) p. 5

Otenyo's action brought a lot of glory and honour in Gusiiland. According to the Abagusii tradition, Moraa, a foster mother to Otenyo, and a prophetess, decided to use Otenyo to accomplish her desire against the British who despised her prophecy. It was no wonder that in the morning of 12<sup>th</sup> January 1908, Moraa gave Otenyo beer and medicine to protect him against the bullets. When Northcote appeared in the neighbourhood, Otenyo ambushed and speared him. He was tried in Kisii court for his action, and later in Nairobi where it is believed that he was shot. The prophetess was brought to the boma, now the Kisii headquarters for interrogation. Due to her advanced age, she was severely reprimanded and set free. But the Abagusii interpreted this release as a betrayal of her foster - son, the leader of the anti-British movement, they felt that Moraa became a collaborator. Accordingly, they composed a song in which they condemned Moraa's disloyalty to their course<sup>198</sup>.

*Moraa aye nomonyaborino, oo yaye  
Okang'aina momura oo Otenyo, oo yaye  
Agaita Nyarigoti, oo yaye  
Ningi arenge korigia? oo yaye  
Gosegasega ense yaito, oo yaye  
Ee oo yaye, oo yaye<sup>199</sup>.*

Moraa you are a deceiver, oo yaye,  
You deceived your son Otenyo, oo yaye  
To kill Northcote oo yaye  
What was he looking for? oo yaye  
Striding across our land oo yaye  
Ee oo yaye, oo yaye.

The Abagusii's second defeat made them learn a lesson of an armed resistance against superior weapons. But the British never trusted the acquiescence. They stationed a full company of soldiers in Gusiiland until September 1908. Immediately he recovered, Northcote proceeded with the establishment of the British administration in the district.

<sup>198</sup>W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>199</sup>W. Masese, Op. cit., see also W.R. Ochieng Ibid. p. 241.

Chiefs were provided with armed retainers and ordered to begin collecting taxes. Courts were established for peaceful settlement of disputes. Every branch of administration was firmly laid. Gusi territory was rapidly transformed from its former fragmented nature to a set of chiefdoms with specialised political rallies operating within a system of colonial administration, the district was thoroughly explored, a network of roads planned and some built. Dispensaries and offices were erected<sup>200</sup>.

## 5.2 Abagusii's reaction to the British settlement in Gusiiland

Abagusii reaction to the British settlement in Gusiiland was mixed feelings, that is, collaboration and indifference. The favourable possibilities of allying with the British appear to have been recognised by weaker Abagusii sub-tribes. Ombati of the "buffer state" of Mukesero lost no time in appealing to the British for assistance against their powerful neighbours, the Kitutu. Nyamosi of Majoge, whose country had been torn by civil strife since 1902, visited Karungu in 1904, with overtures of friendships. The larger Abagusii sub-tribes like Kitutu and Nyaribari remained indifferent. Although no European traveller or trader had visited the Gusiiland by about 1820 to 1860, the Abagusii, like other African groups, had known through their diviners, that "strangers with red skins" would visit their country. Among the Kikuyu Cege wa Kibiru had prepared his people to expect "white strangers to look like butterflies. The strangers will take your land" he warned, "do not fight them, for if you do, they will annihilate you with their sticks." In Luoland the diviner (Jobilo) had issued injunctions that nobody should show any "hostilities to the invaders lest they incur the wrath of the ancestors".<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup>Ibid. p. 242

<sup>201</sup>J. Mucuha, "Cege wa Kibiru" Research File No. UCN/HD - KPA B/2/2, History Department Archives, University of Nairobi, 1967.



Like the Kikuyu of Kabete and the Luo of Central Nyanza, the Abagusii also had their prominent diviners. Names of Abagusii prophets like Sakawa of Nyakoe, Moraa of Bogeka and Bonareri wife of Owura, ranked high in the Abagusii traditions. Sakawa for example had foretold the advent of “white strangers” and like the Kikuyu and Luo Diviners, he had advised strongly against any hostilities against the “white strangers.” He prophesied that there were to be police lines, hospitals, offices and churches in Gusiiland. Sakawa’s prophecy also revealed that the Abagusii warriors were to be disarmed by the “white strangers” if they showed any resistance. All these prophecies are believed to have come true. Judging from Sakawa’s popularity and advice the Abagusii were to receive the British in their land in the same way as many of the Luo sub-tribes in Central Nyanza had done<sup>202</sup>. It was unfortunate however, that violent entry by the British was destined to destroy the ground, which Sakawa had unwittingly prepared for them.

At the time the British entered into South Nyanza, they had largely abandoned their so called “peaceful policy of gradually bringing the natives” under their control “without using absolute force at once” and had come to rely increasingly on punitive measures as appropriate methods of bringing peace. It was this “sword and fire” policy which the British used to control the Abagusii when the latter strongly opposed the entry of the British into their land. For example S.S. Bagge, the Sub-Commissioner for Kisumu Province, dispatched a punitive expedition to Gusiiland towards the end of 1904. On receipt of the news that some Kavirondo tribesman who supported the British policy had been murdered by the Abagusii. This expedition was characterised by wanton burning of huts, seizure of livestock and senseless massacre of the Abagusii. This automatically poisoned the relationship between the Abagusii and the British administration throughout

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<sup>202</sup>B.A. Ogot, ‘British administration in Central Nyanza District of Kenya’, Journal of African History, Vol. No. 2. 1963.

the colonial era<sup>203</sup>. P.M. Gordon asserts that even after the Abagusii had been warned several times that they were a subject people and that they should stop molesting other subject people, they did not stop conducting “daring cattle raids” deep into Luo, Maasai and Kipsigis territories. If the British Protection of these groups was not to be a mockery, these predations had to be stopped<sup>204</sup>.

W.R. Foran noted:

The attempts by South Mugirango People of the Abagusii to enquire about the intentions of “ed strangers” were answered with bullets, indiscriminate shooting, the burning of huts and granaries, and the seizure of cattle. When one Nyaruba of South Mugirango protested when a policemen seized his fat bull he was shot dead on the spot and many others also suffered the same fate. Official estimate, which according to Gusii tradition would appear conservative, put the number of the Abagusii who were killed at 100 and 3000 heads of cattle captured. For the operation the platoon under captain Jenkins was issued with a bar (Kisii, 1904) in recognition of the fact that they had dealt successively with revolt of the Kisii in Kisumu Province<sup>205</sup>.

This kind of shooting was extended into Wanjare territory. When the Wanjare warriors realised that the British were out to finish them, they immediately organised a make-shift opposition against the insolent invaders who had unjustly meted brutal treatment to the Mugirango people, when they advanced on their camp, the British troops opened fire on them killing hundreds.

<sup>203</sup>W. R. Ochieng, *Op cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>204</sup>P.N. Gordon, *Op cit.*

<sup>205</sup>W.R Foran, The Kenya Police 1887 - 1960 , (London, 1962), P.26.

At this point, it should be realised that not all the Abagusii were against the establishment of the British rule in Gusiiland. Some of the Abagusii had associated the coming of the British in Gusiiland with fortune and development so they were not opposed to the British rule as such. For example Ombati mentioned above was friendly to the British that he had to tell them more “secrets” of the Abagusii. Ombati’s interview with S.S. Bagge at Kisumu for instance provided the British with just the pretext they had been looking for. For sometime, the administration had cast a covetous eye on the land of Sotik and the related Abagusii people as “an area of excellent land-which should be opened up to settlers. In fact Governor Stewart had addressed a letter to the foreign office in which he stated that it was important that the Gusiiland should be opened up since it was ‘well adapted to European settlement’. He however noted with regret that while some of the Abagusii were friendly and wanted the administration to establish “a Government Post in their country, a large portion of the tribe was ‘inimical’ and would most likely give trouble”<sup>206</sup>. It was against this background that Mumbo cult gained a lot of popularity and foothold in Gusii country. In the context of its spread and in the light of its manifestation among the Abagusii, Mumboism was an anti-European and therefore an anti-colonial movement. It was a radical movement with far reaching political ramifications. Onyango Dunde started it in Alego in 1913. Mumboism clearly rejected anything to do with Christianity, missionaries and European traders. The colonial administration often referred to it as ‘a perverted form of Christianity’ (or a type of bastardised religion) and a wholesale vicious movement surrounded by superstition, ill will and mysterious “dawa” (medicine).<sup>207</sup>

<sup>206</sup>G. H. Mungeam, *British Rule in Kenya*, (Oxford, 1996) p. 30.

<sup>207</sup>W.R. Ochieng, *A History of Kenya*, Op.Cit. PP. 96-97.

In September 1914, the British evacuated Kisii town on the approach of a German force. At the outbreak of the first world war, the Abagusii were completely convinced that Mosi wound Auma, the cults' high priest in South Nyanza was a true prophet and that the European regime was over. Nyanchwa, Nyabururu and Asumbi missions, trading centres of Riana and Rangwe and many government offices were plundered, sacked and burnt down.

As soon as the battle between the British and the Germans over Kisii town was over and Germans had been chased back to Tanzania, it was decided that some action had to be taken against the Abagusii and the Luo for the looting of missions and trading centres.

The Abagusii continued to have mixed resistance and collaboration to the British in the period of 1914 and after. In 1927 when the chief of Nyaribari died, the British placed the area under the control of chief Nzugu of neighbouring Kitutu, amalgamating two locations. A few people in Nyaribari were happy with the change. Protest in various forms followed and in response the chief native commissioner held a baraza (public meeting) in Nyaribari where he emphasised that the union would stand<sup>208</sup>. But Nyaribari opposition continued and by the end of 1929 the district commissioner was forced to admit that the majority of the inhabitants still refused to recognise the new administrative boundaries<sup>209</sup>. In 1930, the chieftainship was re-established with Nyaribari as a separate political division. By this period the British authorities had revised the judicial structure operating among the Abagusii. A central court had been established for all civil cases. The Abagusii opposition of these colonial policies was continuous and strong culminating

<sup>208</sup>Nyanza Provincial Diary (19th June 1927).

<sup>209</sup>South Kavirondo District Annual Report (here after SKDAR)

1929 KNA: DC/KSI/1/1/3. Until 1961, the Abagusii were administered with the South Nyanza Luo in what was until 1948 called South Kavirondo when it became South Nyanza in 1961. It was divided into two creating a separate Kisii District.

in a petition to the governor of Kenya to return the system of location tribunals<sup>210</sup>. In response to this, colonial officials abolished the central tribunal and reconstructed the local courts, and this remained in effect even after the Second World War<sup>211</sup>.

### **5.3 The Nature And Role of Abagusii Songs And Dances in The Early Period of European Occupation to 1919**

When the British entered in Gusiiland in 1904, the Abagusii still continued with their cultural practices such as worship, drama, songs and dances<sup>212</sup>. Their songs dealt with social activities such as birth, circumcision, marriage and death. They sang their melodic line with tonal inflections. These songs and dances were performed and passed orally from one generation to another because they were unable to write or record them since tape recorders and the music recording skills and devices had not come into Gusiiland. The Abagusii had complex rhythmical songs which were accompanied by dances that had several pattern formations<sup>213</sup>. The cross rhythms of various instruments played against each other developed an intense exuberance, which was evident in the mutual excitement, generated between the musician and the audience. The Abagusii did not use the total diatonic musical scale used by the Europeans in their songs and dances. They also had no musical scales and time signature tunes but rather sang in terms of notes that were classified as high, medium, or low. In some songs especially occupational, they used a five note or pentatonic scale, compared to the European scale. The five-note scale was not a true scale but rather had some of its notes lower than those of diatonic scale. Most of the Abagusii songs had a form, which was based on call and response. In this

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<sup>210</sup>KAN DC/KSI/3/2.

<sup>211</sup>O.I., with J. Nyandika, at Bomobea on 10/11/97.

<sup>212</sup>O.I., with S. Barongo at Masimba market on 9/10/97.

<sup>213</sup>O.I., with J. Monyeka at Gesabakwa on 18/12/97.

case the choir could repeat the exact words of the soloist while singing or could only sing the chorus while the soloist could be singing the verses using same melody.

The base of the Abagusii songs and dances in the early periods of the European occupation in Gusiiland rested on the use of traditional musical instruments. In searching for enhancement and accompanying of songs and dances the Abagusii developed various musical instruments to fit their needs. Some of those instruments had been their own creation while some were adapted from the contact with neighbouring communities such as the Luo during their trade contacts. The basic instruments were such as ekonuu (drum) Obokano (lyre), ekeroria (flute) and Orogunchara (horn)<sup>214</sup>.

The imposition of colonial rule in Gusiiland by 1907 fundamentally altered the pre-colonial socio-economic structures. It did not only disrupt crucial pre-colonial mechanisms of control over persons but also inaugurated a period of flux that lasted until the great Depression of 1929. The colonial administration encouraged cash economy such as trade and urged the Abagusii to grow new crops that included export ones. The state oriented such efforts entirely towards men, excluding women and children from access to agricultural extension services and credit<sup>215</sup>. Men were also urged to go for wage labour

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<sup>214</sup>J. Monyeka Op. Cit.

<sup>215</sup>J. Parpart and K.A., Staudt, Women and the state in Africa (London, 1989), P.37.

outside their villages and women became more bound to homes<sup>216</sup>. The Abagusii workers especially men, sang various traditional songs while working in the European farms and plantations', such songs expressed their feeling of bitterness and dissatisfaction towards forced labour, introduction of taxes and plantation farming whereby the Europeans benefited at the expense of the local people. Such songs were often simple and repetitive. It was at this period that they developed a famous song among the Abagusii that talked about the effects of the coming of the Europeans. The song was sang as:

*Enyoni yachire ekone Kouyauyaaa*  
*Enyoni yachire ekora kouyauya*  
*Ekona kouyauya mokiare genda bwago*  
*Ekona koyauya mokiare genda bwango*  
*Enyoni eyio ng'a nero "omosongo"*  
*Ng'a nero omosongo oyio nere "Bwana"*  
*Bangina mbaya korende nobororo*  
*Korende nobororo batoreteire "abasongo"*  
*Batoretare "Abasongo" nobororo bwoka.\**

The bird has come which keeps on flying  
 The bird has come which keeps on flying  
 It keeps on flying go quickly my age-mate  
 It keeps on flying go quickly my age-mate  
 That bird is a 'white man'  
 It is a 'white man' and he is the "boss"  
 Mothers are good but trouble has come  
 But trouble they have brought is "whitemen"  
 They have brought us "whitemen" with  
 trouble.

In singing the above song while working on European plantations the Abagusii workers referred to the Europeans as clever birds who had come to exploit them. The workers saw the Europeans as a people who had come to destroy their socio-cultural and economic structures. One very interesting thing was that Abagusii workers sang those songs of bitterness even in the presence of their 'masters.' On the inquiring what these

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<sup>216</sup>C.J.D Choti, "Women and Socio-economic. Transformation. in Kenya, 1850 - 1963, A case study of the Abagusii", M.A. Thesis submitted to University of Nairobi, 1998.

\* This song was later accepted as a work song among the Abagusii.

songs of bitterness even in the presence of their ‘masters.’ On the inquiring what these songs were all about, the Abagusii could trick the Europeans telling them that the songs were sang in praise of their jobs and their colonial ‘masters’ knowing very well that the Europeans did not understand the Ekegusii (Gusii language). They knew also that the European could not discover easily since the workers cherished a hard work and efficiency in their production activities<sup>217</sup>. During the meetings of the clan elders and their villagers, songs and dances were performed by the Abagusii to resent against colonial imposition in Gusiiland. Songs also gave the Abagusii a sense of togetherness in the fighting of a common enemy who was obviously the Whiteman. Songs and dances also around this period acted as a record of the community’s changing history. They served the purpose effectively since other methods of recording the community’s history had not been invented.

#### **5.4 The Impact of Western Culture and Policies on the Gusii-Songs and Dances 1907 - 1919**

Before 1907, Gusiiland was a special area, far from Kisii town, richly fertile, but at the same time difficult to cultivate with its hilly terrain<sup>218</sup>. There were no White settlers occupying the highland areas. The only white settlers were in a “buffer zone” between Kisii and Kericho. There was also a small plantation near Kisii town owned by Europeans<sup>219</sup>. However after 1907, the British foreign office, then in charge of the British East Africa protectorate, allowed settlers in Kenya in order to make both the protectorate and the railway to generate funds. The foreign office had been disturbed by the high costs incurred in running and maintaining the protectorate and railway respectively. The

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<sup>217</sup>O.I. with J. Omari, at Bochoria village on 8/10/97.

<sup>218</sup>A. Raikes, Pregnancy, Birthing and Family Planning in Kenya changing patterns of Behaviour, (Copenhagen, 1990) P.19.90.

<sup>219</sup>S.M. Omwoyo OP.cit. PP 89-90.



protectorate therefore had to be made self-sufficient financially and cease depending on the foreign office. The railway had to pay back the costs for its construction and continued maintenance. It was for those reasons that the policy of settler agricultural production was formulated and launched in Kenya at the beginning of colonial rule. Among other things, it aimed at attracting private investment for developing and investment in the protectorate. Overtime, the Abagusii were influenced by colonial policies to start growing crops for sale over and above the level of pre-colonial production. They were gradually introduced into the money economy and found themselves producing both for subsistence and sale<sup>220</sup>. As early as 1908, it was recorded by the colonial administration that the Abagusii were very industrious and excellent cultivators<sup>221</sup>. In the years between 1907 and 1919, the colonial government was concerned with economic development through agricultural production and trade. The government also aimed at improving communication networks integrating new crops and agricultural implements into the Gusii economy. 1909 had introduced the ox-drawn plough introduced in Gusiiland as well as the European hoe. All these advancement required the recruitment of labour from among the Abagusii. Some Abagusii clans resisted this move by the colonialists. They could hide in the forests where they composed songs that satirised the Europeans. Those who offered themselves for wage or sometimes-free labour in the European farms and public works also sang songs partly to keep themselves busy as they worked, and also to express dissatisfaction towards forced labour. Those who were seized forcibly worked with the Sotik farmers, Maasai Reserve and Muhoroni<sup>222</sup>.

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<sup>220</sup>W.R. Ochieng. *An Outline History of Nyanza upto 1914* (Nairobi, 1974). P. 86.

<sup>221</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/1, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports 1908 - 1912.

<sup>222</sup>O.I with J. Kimanga, at Mwaboto village, on 22/10/97.

The introduction of new iron implements such as hoes, axes, mapanga and ox-ploughs increased farming and other economic activities among the Abagusii. In performing those activities the Abagusii sang many work songs. The Abagusii composed some songs to suit the various economic activities, which came up as a result of the introduction of new tools and equipment. An example of such a song is “The bird has come which keeps on flying” as discussed earlier on.

Livestock’s keeping was one sector of the Abagusii economy that was most affected by the imposition of colonial rule. In September 1905, a British patrol was sent on a punitive expedition against the Abagusii who were alleged to have frequently stolen Luo cattle. The Abagusii lost a total of 400 head of cattle to this expedition. As a result of ambushing a patrol, singing songs and performing dances of victory the Abagusii killed a sergeant. They further lost another 400 head of cattle after being subdued on killing the sergeant<sup>223</sup>.

Colonial administration wanted to transform the Gusii economy by depleting livestock in order to force them to enter into money economy. They thus turned to the destruction of cattle villages, ebisarate. The colonialist disliked these cattle ‘bomas’ and regarded the young men as war-like and offenders against the British<sup>224</sup>.

The imposition of hut tax in 1907, whereby all the huts in the boma were counted and called to be paid for was a blow to the ebisarate. Lack of money coupled with conscription into forced labour in default of payment, forced the Abagusii to pull down the huts in the ‘bomas’. They sang songs of bitterness protesting against the British. Eventually, all the cattle villages were dismantled. In this regard, in 1909, the then District Commissioner wrote:

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<sup>223</sup>P.M. Gordon, An outline of the History of the District of South Kavirondo - Kenya colony, 1780 - 1946, unpublished memo, 1946, p.36.

<sup>224</sup>C.J.O Choti OP. Cit. P.88.

In my report of last year, I mentioned that I consider it important that the cattle villages should be broken up and the young men who inhabit them forced to return to their parents' villages until married. This has to a great extent come about automatically through my having them counted for hut tax and informing the natives that every hut in a cattle village must pay<sup>225</sup>.

After the abolition of cattle villages, Abagusii men moved their animals to their respective homes, closer to women. What happened according to the recollections of an old Abagusii man was the following:

There came a time when the ebisarate had to disappear for good. This period was a very bad one because with the disappearance of cattle villages they feared there would have to be no life for the Abagusii any more in future. They felt like that because they used almost exclusively things that were produced by the cattle. For marriage they needed cows, they used their skins as clothes, their horns as containers, their milk and meat as food. The decline of Ebisarate came with the coming of the white man, who did not like the existence of groups of warriors who might form the nuclei for rebellious armies<sup>226</sup>.

The abolition of cattle villages had instant impact on gender roles. The burden of milking cows, previously carried by men at cattle villages, now fell on women. This meant increased workload of Abagusii women. It also became the responsibility of women to clean the cattle Kraals<sup>227</sup>. Men worked on European farms and also engaged in such activities as hunting and gathering to earn living for their families. As the Abagusii were performing all these roles, songs became a source of pleasure and comfort. The songs also served as a record of the Abagusii's past history as they sang songs and recited poems

<sup>225</sup>KNA DC/KSI/II, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1908 - 1912.

<sup>226</sup>Quoted by, M. Silbersmidt, In Rethinking men and Gender Relations: An investigation of men, their changing roles within the household, and the implication for gender relations in Kisii District, Kenya, Centre for Development Research, (Copenhagen, 1991), P. 40.

<sup>227</sup>C.J.O. Choti, Op. Cit. P. 89.

to recount the past<sup>228</sup>. With the emergence of extra roles among the Abagusii songs and dances also increased in number to cover the various and numerous socio-economic activities that had been necessitated by the colonial policies and western culture.

The need to raise the payment of taxes was meant to coerce reluctant Abagusii men into wage labour. In June 1909, some 50 Abagusii men were employed in making easy gradient roads. However, even the few enlisted, it was noted, "Proved rather trouble some about turning out to work and if left to themselves commence at about 9 a.m. and leave at mid-day<sup>229</sup>. Abagusii men were not readily willing to be engaged in manual labour. At this time, they only wanted to raise money for taxes and once this limited objective was met through the sale of agricultural produce, manual labour, particularly away from home, did not appeal to the majority of young men<sup>230</sup>. In the pre-war period, including Portage had to be extracted by force. The 300 Abagusii men enlisted to work for a contractor at Sultan Hamud in 1910 must be viewed from his perspective of forced labour, given the high rate of desertion (100 before leaving Gusiiland)<sup>231</sup>. Here again they sang songs to denounce the move to force them into wage labour which was out to force them to work outside their homes, they wanted to remain in their villages so as to maintain family ties and customs against theft from their neighbouring communities such as the Luo, the Kipsigis and the Maasai.

<sup>228</sup>O.I., with I. Simba, a music teacher at Isena Secondary School, on 3/10/97.

<sup>229</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/1, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1908 - 1912.

<sup>230</sup>S.M. Omwoyo Op. Cit., P.107.

<sup>231</sup>W.R. Ochieng Op. Cit., P.244.

## 5.5 The Advent of the Missionaries in Gusiiland

By 1911, with the completion of graded roads, the missionaries and the Asian traders had started moving into Kisii<sup>232</sup>. This was the time when the British administration was busy laying out the foundation of the government and the economy. The missionaries came into Gusiiland armed with “the good news”. The first missionaries to arrive were the Fathers of Mill Hill Society of Roman Catholic Church who in 1911 founded a mission station at Nyabururu in Wanjare<sup>233</sup>. Father G. Bradsma opened a mission school whose objective was to improve the moral, social and intellectual status of natives<sup>234</sup>.

The Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) later came to Gusiiland and established Mission Stations at Nyanchwa in 1913. It was from these stations that Christianity was spread in the entire Gusiiland. Missionaries in Gusiiland were strongly opposed to traditional religion, songs and dances among the Abagusii. They often referred to these practices as “heathen and anti-God.” Instead of engaging themselves in the traditional practices, the Abagusii were encouraged by Christian Missionaries to sing Christian songs and accept the “holy and living” Christian God. This angered many elders who complained that mission stations taught young people idleness and rudeness, nor were many of the missionaries in the district genuine Christians. Most of them according to the elders settled with an intention of accumulating lots of profits. Those who were opposed to the coming of the Christian Missionaries sang and chanted poems to express their dissatisfaction towards the missionaries and the colonial rule. It was at this juncture that the Christian missionaries flew in to establish stations at Nyanchwa and Nyabururu relying on the security provided by colonial administration. Meanwhile, the Abagusii converts did not react against missionaries, as this would be against the will of God.

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<sup>232</sup>Kenya National Archives - DC/KSI/3/2.

<sup>233</sup>Kenya National Archives - DC/KSI/3/7.

<sup>234</sup>O.L., with N. Ogetorenki, at Regina on 27/12/97.

Those who accepted Christianity among the Abagusii were often referred to as abasomi (readers). The term bosomi was used to refer to SDA villages where abasomi lived. The converts in mission stations, claiming to have been possessed by the holy spirit, screamed, sung and spoke in tongues to the embarrassment of church authorities who could not follow the language used to communicate by the converts. They sang and danced to praise God. What Christian missionaries brought to Gusiland was a “white Christianity” holding a “white Jesus in view”. Their religious pictures and films, methods of worship, songs and dances, dress, church organisation and all religious endeavours were modelled along western lines<sup>235</sup>. Traditionalists who were opposed to Christian way of life conducted traditional ceremonies and sacrifices, which were climaxed on Saturdays. Songs and dances were performed to grace the occasion. Such songs usually had good melodies and attracted people from various villages who also joined in the dancing and singing. Saturday was chosen as a day of offering sacrifices because, it was the day when everybody including tradition priests were free from other instruments. Abasomi could not partake the exercise of offering sacrifices, as this was “ungodly”. According to the Christian teachings. They instead attended church services where they offered tithes and offering as they sang the following song:

*Bionsi Yeso bionsi asore*  
*Bionsi Yeso bionsi asore*  
*Bionsi namoire Yeso moyo bwensi narure*  
*Bionsi namoire Yeso moyo bwensi narure*  
*Moyo bwensi narure x2*<sup>236</sup>

All to Jesus I surrender all  
 All to Jesus I surrender all  
 All I have given to Jesus and my heart all  
 All I have given to Jesus and my heart all  
 All to you I surrender Jesus

<sup>235</sup>A song sang by J. Okongo, at Nyamangesa village, on 6/1/98.

<sup>236</sup>P.M Gordon, Op.cit, P.44.

All my heart I have given x2

Unlike the SDA, the Roman Catholic Church was liberal to some aspects of the Abagusii culture. For example they allowed the Abagusii to 'circumcise' their females. This encouraged the singing of circumcision songs. The Catholics also incorporated indigenous musical instruments such as the drums and jingles in the singing of sacred songs, a thing, which the SDA church was against.

### **5.6 The Impact of the First World War (1914 - 1918) On Abagusii Songs and Dances**

The running of British administration in Gusiiland was interrupted by the war when the Germans, wanting to capture the strategic Uganda railway, advanced in Gusiiland. With the declaration of war in August 1914. The D.C. Kisii district put into effect a scheme for the security of the district by commencing patrols along the Anglo-German border, early in September 1914, a German force entered the British territory in the neighbourhood of Isebania. Caught unawares, the DC and his police withdrew and the Germans entered the station at dawn on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 1914 without any resistance.

With the reinforcements, the British returned to rescue the station. After an exchange of fire lasting the whole day neither side made any appreciable progress and at dusk, unknown to the other, each withdrew<sup>237</sup>. The following day, 13<sup>th</sup> September, the British force which had taken up a defensive position in the north of Kisii, waited for the expected German advance. When this did not occur, it re-entered the town on the 14<sup>th</sup> September after being reinforced. As the British repulsed the Germans from Gusiiland, the Abagusii staged anti-British campaigns with the aim of driving them out of their land.

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<sup>237</sup>C.J.O. Choti, Op.cit. P.90.

The Abagusii adopted the cult of Mumbo from the Luo and used it effectively to continue their struggle against the British<sup>238</sup>. Mumboism rejected European customs and advocated a return to the old prophets of old ways. According to the teaching of Mumbo cult, the White man was destined to go and Africans would be left alone. In addition to this Sakawa, the renowned Omogusii prophet had promised that one-day the white man would go.

The Abagusii thus embraced the prophecy of Sakawa and Mumboism in their revolt against the British, when they saw the forces withdrawing to the north and south. They felt assured that the prophecy was fulfilled and that the Europeans had gone forever. Their works, their offices and the missions had therefore to be cast out. They were plundered, ransacked and burnt<sup>239</sup>. However, their stance prompted British punitive expeditions. As a result a total of 3000 heads of cattle were seized and many Abagusii men were captured and dispatched to work outside the district<sup>240</sup>.

The Germans from the Northern Tanzania kept up a series of small raids along the boundary with southern Kavirondo. But when the border locations passed direct contact the war came to an end. The effects of the First World War on the Abagusii were fundamental. Other than being sent outside the district for work for their rebellious conduct, more workers were needed in the war against the Germans as carrier corps. Between 1914 and 1916, 21,684 men were sent out of district to work within a period of 18 months, an average of 1,215 men per month for 18 consecutive months<sup>241</sup>.

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<sup>238</sup>Ibid. P.91.

<sup>239</sup>P.M. Gordon OP. Cit, P.42.

<sup>240</sup>Ibid, P. 42.

<sup>241</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/2, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports 1913-1923.



The table below shows the numbers of Abagusii involved in the war in relation to other types of labour.

**Table 1: Labour recruitment during World War I**

Year	Carrier corps labour	Other labour	Total
1914/15	8,915	5,055	13,970
1915/16	6,822	1,070	7,892
1916/17	9,558	1,658	11,216
1917/18	8,758	1,052	9,810

**Source: KNA DC/KSI/1/2 South Kavirondo**

A total of 42,888 men were recruited for labour between 1914 and 1918 from the district. Most of them were recruited through coercion. Young men were rounded up during sport meetings. Others were taken from their huts at night. The chiefs and headmen used all manners of force and tricks to avail the required labour under strict orders from the district commissioner.

The World War 1 affected the Abagusii songs and dances in a number of ways. First absence of men from various Gusii homesteads caused fear and despondence among women and children. Women and children used to sing songs of sorrows to express their bitterness and suffering from loneliness. Such song usually relieved them of their anger as they remembered their men who usually suffered outside the district. Absence of men from Gusii homesteads also meant loss of male labour. Division of labour patterns was upset to a great extent as men were recruited. Abagusii women were overburdened by both agricultural and domestic activities. They often sang various songs to not only relief themselves from their daily fatigue but also to console their souls as they remembered the

kind of experience they had undergone during the war. Secondly men who had gone to participate in the war sang various war songs as they fought with the Europeans. This was to give them encouragement and determination as they hoped to be successful.

The war ended with the streaming back of the war veterans. These veterans returned home with better education and skills. They came with knowledge of the various war songs and dances. The songs, which were mainly in European and other languages, were adopted and later translated to suit the various themes of the Abagusii war songs. Since the war period was relatively short and busy the Abagusii veterans who participated in the war only managed to adapt a few songs, which changed the style and delivery of some Abagusii songs and dances in terms of rhythm arrangements and delivery<sup>242</sup>. An example of such a song is “Otenyo the elder” as discussed earlier on.

## 5.7 The Famine of 1918 - 1919

Famine or lack of food normally affects all members of society indiscriminately. It is an undeniable fact that parents as seekers and providers of food in the family suffer most during times of famine. Children, the elderly and the infirm turn their “begging eyes” towards their mothers or wives for food whenever they are hungry. Such parents suffer much psychological pain and frustration during periods of famine<sup>243</sup>. The 1918/19 famine in Gusiiland though thought to have been caused by drought was also believed to have been caused by the war. Tired with the war, the followers of Mumbo cult turned to prophesy according to Ogot and Ochieng, the year 1917 is traditionally remembered by the Abagusii as the ‘Year of prophets’<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup>J. Onkaga OP. Cit.

<sup>243</sup>C.J.O. Choti, OP. Cit. P.93.

<sup>244</sup>B.A. Ogot and W.R. Ochieng, “Mumboism - Anti-colonial Movement” in B.A. Ogot (ed.) War and Society in Africa (London, 1972) pp. 141-19.

Many Mumbo prophets rose and told their compatriots to keep their hoes indoors and simply wait for finger millet to come by itself and fill their empty pots. The days of the white people, they prophesied, were just numbered and that they would disappear along with taxes and other burdensome jobs. The Abagusii were thus advised to ignore cultivation. With cropless fields, empty granaries and rainless days, the Abagusii suffered the worst famine ever witnessed in the history of the society.

Around this period the British reacted by arresting the three leading personalities of Mumboism, Mr. Ogowora and his wife and Ndigiti. The three were deported to Kismayu. On learning that their cult was blamed for the famine, many of its members lost hope and abandoned the movement. Besides drought and Mumboism the famine was as a result of colonial capitalism<sup>245</sup>. This illustrated how the Abagusii precapitalist economy had been systematically destroyed. Abagusii granaries that stored food for a hungry day disappeared with the monetization of the economy. The surplus food that had been stored as security against famine was now sold to obtain tax money. The consumption of able-bodied men by the war and other labour services meant less food production. The storage of maize, the colonial favoured food crop, was short-lived compared to finger millet.

The year immediately after the war (1919) was a year of misfortune. Weakened by the famine, the Abagusii became increasingly vulnerable to the influenza epidemic that swept through the area, claiming the death of 5,000 natives. The same year saw the emerging of a terrible disease, probably syphilis that attacked the private parts of people. Apparently the returning porters and carrier corps brought the disease. The disease had a terrible impact on the unsuspecting and innocent Abagusii women whose reproductive prowess was threatened. In the words of a medical officer of Kisumu ..... "Now with the conclusion of hostilities many thousands of porters have carried the infection into districts

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<sup>245</sup>S.M Omwoyo *Opcit*; P 124.

previously healthy”<sup>246</sup>. The famine of 1918 - 1919 meant a terrible experience to the Abagusii at times they prepared their farms for planting without signs of rain. This was because devotion to work was highly cherished by the community. Frustrations by bad weather, climatic changes, pests and diseases and famines were braved and tolerated when one was devoted to serious work. When the rains failed to come and famine continued they used to sing songs to remind them of the good days when they used to have good harvests comparing it with the experiences they were then undergoing. One such a song was:

*Nchiama roche ndua ma roche*  
*Nchiama roche nchama roche*  
*Baito chinchugu chiama roche*  
*Nchiama roche echwachwa*  
*Obanto baito, tenera nchama*  
*Ngai morarusie abana baito*  
*Anarabwani abana baito*  
*Amaemba abana baito*  
*Enchara yacha bono yacha bono*  
*Baito Ngai morarusie endagera bono*  
*Remereria obokongu mboere*<sup>247</sup>.

They grew well near the river  
 They grew well near the river  
 Our groundnuts grew near the river  
 They wonderfully grew  
 Our food grew well  
 Where will you get it our children  
 Sweet potatoes our children  
 Finger millet our children  
 Famine has come has come  
 Our people where will you get food now.  
 Be patient life has to continue.

The main concern of the above song is that it carried a message of shaping a stable society whose members were not to be scared by such natural calamities like floods, lack of

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<sup>246</sup>KNA DC KSI/1/2, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1913-1923.

<sup>247</sup>Van Zwanenberg, Colonial capitalism and labour in Kenya 1919 - 1939 (Nairobi, 1972) P. 109.

rainfall, drought, diseases and famine. It encouraged community members to keep on having hope in life. It reminded them of the past when the community used to be self sufficient in food production with good yields. They were expected to be patient as they waited for the calamities to be over. As they buried the dead tribes people due to 1919 influenza epidemic that had swept many of the Abagusii the Abagusii sang and chanted poems of sorrow and consolation to the grieved.

### **5.8 Abagusii Songs and Dances in the Early colonial Education up to 1919**

In the early decades of colonial rule, western education among the Abagusii was not a priority. The colonial government was concerned with general economic progress of the colony. Education was left to missionaries up to 1930s<sup>248</sup>. The missions that undertook the burden of school education in Gusiland included the Roman Catholic Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Both missions established mission stations at Nyabururu in 1911 and Nyanchwa 1913, respectively. Missionary activities challenged African socio-economic and political life. Their primary aim was to evangelise and win Africans for Christ by ‘civilising’ them. Literary education was secondary. This fact was clearly illustrated by pastor Baker of Wire Hill mission in Luoland in 1912, who reported that:

For furthering of the same, we couple the educational and industrial line. The educational so far the native may be fitted to help in evangelising his people. (Sic) the industrial because we believed the "gospel of work" hand in hand with the "gospel of salvation"<sup>249</sup>.

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<sup>248</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/4, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1933-1939.

<sup>249</sup>Ibid.

The pupils in schools were taught the basic principles of Christianity as well as rudiments of writing, reading and arithmetic. Missionaries felt that knowing how to read, write and to do sums in arithmetic was part and parcel not only for the evangelising task, but also for their civilizing mission. Hence education went hand in hand with religion with effect that in due course every aspect of Abagusii life was considerably affected.

The Catholic Mission at Nyabururu was the first centre of European education in Gusiland. From the centre missionaries travelled across the rural areas, assisted by chiefs and headmen, as they propagated their religion and sought for pupils. By 29th June, 1912, there were 14 male regular attendants at Nyabururu school, besides those tutored during the safaris<sup>250</sup>. Around this time, the first five boys at Nyabururu were baptised, thus becoming the first Christians in Gusiland. The names were Saboke Ongori, Otero Mairura, Kitembe Nyamosi, Ochumi Nyamosi and Otieno Ositu.<sup>251</sup> The Schools that the missionaries brought aimed at isolating pupils and young converts from the general community so that they could not be contaminated with what the missionaries identified as 'ungodly'. Missionaries used these early Abagusii converts and the press to propagate their church. Magazines were published and also new testament and gospel hymns were translated into Ekegusii. This translation was the work of Beavon (the then Nyanchwa station head) assisted by two Abagusii early Christians converts namely; Pastor Nathaniel Nyanusi and Abel Nyakundi<sup>252</sup>.

The early Christian education greatly affected songs and dances among the Abagusii around this period. In their schools and missions they discouraged African children from singing and performing traditional songs and dances. The Abagusii children

<sup>250</sup>KNA/DC/KSI/1/1, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1908-1912.

<sup>251</sup>Fr. A. Wall, Writing to R.w. Hempstead, in "Nyabururu Diary" 30th March 1912.

<sup>252</sup>S.N. Bogonko, Christian Missionaries Education and its impact on the Abagusii of western Kenya; Ph D Thesis, \University of Nairobi, 1977, p. 171.

were taught church hymns and choruses which they sang daily in their mission stations and schools. Such songs were usually simple with very interesting European melodies which attracted the majority of Africans to singing them.

However, regarding the gospel songs some SDA missionaries distorted the message of the gospel by implying to some Abagusii converts that there was “commercial” connection between the divine blessings one received and the amount of money “he surrendered” to Jesus. Such songs have remained so up to this day<sup>253</sup>. The implication of such songs is that one’s loyalty to Christian’s faith is largely determined by how much money one gives each church service of which is not the case. An example of such songs is:

Karwe aye karwe bono  
 Karwe aye karwe bono  
 Monene nakoroche ase omobukooo  
 Karwe aye esadaka  
 Karwe ase etaisi  
 Karwe aye bono monene agoswesenie kegima<sup>254</sup>.

Give you now  
 Give you now  
 God sees you unto your pocket  
 Give now so that you you may be blessed  
 Give now your offering  
 Give now your tithes  
 Give it now so that God can bless you more and more.

The Mumboism was reflected as the opposite of Christian way of life. Adherents disregarded missionary education, they kept long hair, sang traditional songs and dances, offered sacrifices to ancestral spirits and were strongly opposed to what the missionaries called “progressive” which took the form of Western Civilisation<sup>255</sup>.

<sup>253</sup>See for example *Ogotera kwa Nyasae* (Gospel Hymns), Kendu Bay, 1984, song No 298.

<sup>254</sup>M.N.S. Getu, ‘The Historical establishment and activities of SDA church among the Abagusii of Western Kenya’ MA Thesis University of Nairobi, 1987.

<sup>255</sup>O.I., with O. Gesaka Nyamache, South Kisii, on 18/1/98.

They also clung to Abagusii traditional religious values such as divination using magic and traditional medical practices. In their villages which were far away from mission stations Mumbo adherents sang various songs and performed mockery dances to castigate those Gusii converts who had abandoned the Abagusii tradition and were now slaves of their “foreign masters”<sup>256</sup>

### **5.9 The Place of Songs and Dances Among the Abagusii in Socio-economic Transformations, 1920 - 1945**

The years between 1920 and 1945 witnessed significant socio-economic changes in Gusiland that were bound to affect women in one way or the other. Already by 1920 the new colonial institutions of wage labour, taxation and western education had been established. The expansion of agriculture and the penetration of capitalism in the area were steadily pursued in this period. However further penetration of capitalism was shown by two world depressions of late 1920s and early 1930s.

The impact of the 1929-1933 world economic depression was a realisation within the colonial officialdom of the need to increase the income earning capacity of the Africans<sup>257</sup>. Thus the African production of cash crops became a priority of the colonial office. This period also saw increased interest and involvement of the colonial administration in the education of Africans. Prior to 1920, mission churches led education. The period between 1920 and 1945 was thus characterised by significant changes and increased colonial efforts in the promotion of agriculture, trade, education, transportation and other socio-economic institutions. Land tenure systems, legal rights, inheritance and property rights, marriage and family arrangements were all affected

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<sup>256</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/19, South Nyanza District Annual Report, 1957.

<sup>257</sup>C.J. O Choti, OP cit, P110.



profoundly by the vigorous colonial policies of this period. In the 1920s Abagusii spread further in the areas bordering Maasailand and Kipsigisland. This resulted in an increase in border conflicts and cattle raidings. Consequently the Abagusii were moved from the Kipsigis border. This led to the creation of a buffer zone in the Sotik area, which was taken up by the white settlers for the growing of tea<sup>258</sup>.

Though the indigenous system of land tenure had not changed to allow the permanent occupation of part of the clan land by anyone not originally rested with cultivation rights, locations were demanding to have their boundaries definitely fixed by 1928<sup>259</sup>. Due to population increase members of various villages began paying much attention to land. According to the administrators land cases formed a bulk of Gusii litigation. This made the administration to brand the Abagusii as “people loving litigation”<sup>260</sup>. The land cases were actually a reflection of the fundamental socio-economic changes, which later led to land enclosures and sales. Land was thus beginning to acquire market value, several economic activity songs and dances. Activities such as bush clearing for cultivation, tilling of the land, sowing of crops such as finger millet and sorghum, vegetable planting, weeding, harvesting, cattle herding, milking and fencing required a lot of patience and hard work. The duration for performing most of these activities was long. Therefore the Abagusii could often find themselves singing the various work songs to facilitate efficiency and make them enjoy working.

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<sup>258</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/20, South Nyanza District Annual Reports, 1958.

<sup>259</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/3, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1924-1932.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid.

### 5.91 The Abagusii and labour question

There is no doubt that the institution wage labour had profound impact on the Abagusii. During the years 1920-1933, labour conditions underwent drastic change. Some writers have shown that the house hold in Nyanza province, whose members had started showing reliance on migrant labour, were further developed to become labour exporting households <sup>261</sup> in the early years of this period most Gusii men were forced to work inside and outside the district.

Various methods were employed to lure people into labour missions. The chiefs and headmen under instruction from the DC ordered most of the forced labour out. The recruiting methods included armed raids and other plays as holding women hostage in labour camps until their male relatives substituted them <sup>262</sup>. Some private recruiters could often misrepresent themselves as government agents as chiefs took the DC's requests to provide labour as an order, to forcibly seize parties of young men and dispatch them as virtual prisoners to Kisumu.

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<sup>261</sup>P. T. Zeleza "Forced Labour and Migration in Early Colonial Kenya" Paper specially written for the collection on Forced Labour Migration. Pattern of Dispersal within Africa, to be edited by Dr. A. Zegeye, Director, Oxford Centre for African Studies, England, 1987, p. 23.

<sup>262</sup>S. Sticher Migrant Labour in Kenya Capitalism and African Response, 1895-1975, (London, 1984) pp. 37-38.

The following table shows the number of people recruited for labour between 1919 and 1929.

**Table 2: Labour Recruitment in South Nyanza District for Various Years**

Year	Outside the district	Inside the district	On their own accord (DC's Estimate)
1919/20	234	322	5,000
1920/21	3,148	141	3,000
1922*	6,837	187	1,000
1923	5,421	105	3,000
1924	2,397	550	10,000
1925	1,294	112	10,000
1926	4,010	3	N.A.
1927	8,494	6	8,500
1928	6,710	-	6,000
1929	7,910	-	N.A.

**Source:** KNA/DC/KSI/1/1-3

\* The end of financial year was changed from 31st March to 31st December and so 1922 has 21 months.

NA. No Actual figure known.

As shown in the above table, the number of people "registering" for work kept increasing steadily. The table illustrates only these registered in Kisii thus not representing the actual number of those who went out of work. The majority of workers registered in this district were registered in Kisumu or Kericho, and large number of Abagusii especially went out to work in the neighbouring district on their own accord and were not registered at all. The DC's estimate for his category is also shown in the table. Employment outside the reserve increasingly became a major means through which a large number of Abagusii workers raised money for tax. The transition from Gusii resistance to labour recruitment in the colonial economy to their active seeking of wage employment outside the home

district has been well explained by Sharon Stichter (1982). She observes that immediately after the first world war the Abagusii still showed a “marked inclination to be harnessed to labour market”<sup>263</sup>. The war and the immediate post-war period saw the spread of the Mumbocult as a last phase of resistance to colonial rule, taxation and wage labour. By the 1922 depression with the reduction of the produce, trade and continued taxation pressure the Abagusii went out to work in large numbers<sup>264</sup>. They went to Magadi Soda works, which by 1925 was drawing most of its labour force from Gusiiland. The trend of outward labour migration continued into the late 1920s, when the nearby Kericho tea estates became an important new source of employment.

Tea growing required a lot of labour as its activities required labour all the year round. Therefore, for adequate supply of labour to Kericho tea estates, a European officer was stationed in Gusiiland to recruit and forward labour to estates. By 1928 the African Highland Produce (AHP) company boasted that “10,000 boys could be obtained from Gusiiland whenever required. The introduction of tea estates in Kericho attracted the Abagusii who went there to sell their labour to raise money for paying taxes and for meeting the day to day cost of living. In the estates, they interacted with several communities with whom they exchanged ideas. Such communities included the Luo, the Luhya, Kipsigis and the Abakuria. The Abagusii songs and dances were enriched from the new dances like Mayenga, techniques and dancing styles they adapted from these communities who they worked with. They also acquired some musical instruments such as the horn, and the flute in tea estates as a result of these interaction styles like Mayenga dance.

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<sup>263</sup>Ibid.

<sup>264</sup>KNA DcIKSM\13 South Nyanza District Annual Report 1957.

According to Omari, one of the eye witnesses at Kericho tea estates women used to make beer in Gusiiland to transport to tea estates where they sold it to make profits. Tea workers, who now had income from their wages and salaries usually assembled at specific quarters in the tea estates where they would drink the local brew after work to relief their fatigue. Singing and dancing usually accompanied such occasions. At times the colonial administration through the police could arrest those involved in beer drinking and could be tried and judged in local courts. Around this period the drinking of local brew was abolished. Whoever was found engaging himself in beer drinking faced severe penalties after being proved guilty. However, Abagusii elders and other people from among the communities who worked in tea estates could drink secretly in bushes and other private places during odd hours. Traditional songs and dances connected to beer drinking were performed but secretly and quietly in low tones. Because of such restriction such songs as siberia onge mosaiga (sip beer and give me age-mate) and Mosaiga Oiye oiye Mosaiga (agemate oiye agemate) to denounce this kind of restriction imposed on them. These two songs were the key songs, which dominated all the beer party ceremonies among the Abagusii through their history. In the estates, such songs were loosing popularity as they could not be rehearsed by beer drinkers since they feared the risk of being arrested and tried in the local courts or fired heavily or even loosing their jobs<sup>265</sup>.

In the tea estates wrestling and other entertainment competitions were organised by tea workers as a source of pleasure and exercises which relieved workers from their daily fatigue. Songs and dances from the various communities climaxed these occasions.

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<sup>265</sup>O.I, J.O Omari at Bochoria village Nyamira, on 8/10/97.

This provided an arena for socialisation of tea workers. This enhanced a sense of nationalism and patriotism, which removed any form of community biases or prejudice<sup>266</sup>.

### 5.92 Western Education

During this period, education was still in the hands of Mission churches. After the first world war, the attitudes of the Abagusii towards Christian enterprise is reported to have changed so considerably that the DC noted:

During the last few months however a noticeable change has come over them, one result being that many of them have suddenly expressed a wish to learn reading and writing. Their wish is being acceded to and it is hoped that good results may be obtained in due course<sup>267</sup>.

The claim is also noted in the Nyabururu Diary in which it is stated that during the latter half of 1918 things got more settled in Kisii country and some showed anxiety to have Nyabururu Mission reopened. As Father Scheffer was in charge he got those anxious to 'read' and receive baptism to go to Asumbi<sup>268</sup>. This change of attitude towards mission education saw a marked increase of pupils attending schools. In 1920, Nyanchwa, the only SDA school in Gusiiland had 20 pupils; in comparison to Nyabururu and 12 other Roman Catholic Schools in Gusii locations which had a total attendance of 150 pupils. The number kept on increasing steadily in 1920s as shown in the table below.

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<sup>266</sup>Ibid.

<sup>267</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/2, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1913-1923.

<sup>268</sup>KNA "Nyabururu Diary", April 123, 1920.

**Table 3: Schools, Enrolment and Catechists Under Nyabururu Roman Catholic Mission, 1922.**

Location	No. of Schools/Churches			No. of Catechist			No. of Attendants
	1920	1921	1922	1920	1921	1922	1-8-1922
Bobasi	1	2	2	1	2	2	12
Bagetutu	6	8	3	6	8	3	31
Bogusero	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
Nyaribari	1	1	3	1	1	3	29
Bonchari	4	4	2	4	4	2	4
North Bogirango	3	6	6	3	6	6	40
Bomachoge	2	1	0	2	1	0	0
South Bogirango	1	1	6	1	1	6	121
Total	19	24	22	19	24	22	237

Source: KNA DC/KSI.1/20-22

**Table 4: Schools and Enrolment Under Nyanchwa SDA Mission, 1920-1929**

Year	No. of Schools	Student Population
1920	1	20
1921	1	55
1922	11	183
1923	13	600
1924	20	1131
1925	19	1019
1926	27	1597
1927	40	2222
1928	81	3000
1929	90	3155

Source: KNA DC/KSI/1/21-29

The Abagusii interest in education was as a result of increased efforts and campaigns by church missions and government officials. The chiefs and village headmen were urged to stress the importance of formal education to their people. However, the Abagusii girls were excluded from formal education and this marked the beginning of sexual division of labour. Women were home centred as men's new status were now beginning to be based on education, jobs and labour migration<sup>269</sup>.

In Missions schools, children were taught how to read and write. They were also taught industrial education. In these schools they were introduced to sacred songs and dances. Most of the songs were Christian oriented and were full of praises to God, the creator.

One of such song sang by SDA students during this period was:

*Omogoko ase ense*  
*Monene nache*  
*Omogoko ase ense*  
*Monene nachiche*  
*Kera oyomo aganye kera oyomo aganye*  
*Ere kagochicha, ere kagochicha*  
*ere eee kagochicha*<sup>270</sup>.

Joy to the world the Lord is come  
 The Lord is come again  
 Joy to the world the Lord is come  
 The Lord is come again  
 Let every heart rejoice let every heart rejoice  
 When he is come again when he is come again  
 When he is come come again.

The above song served as an encouragement to the youth that the Lord was always with them to protect and help them in whatever situation they were. In mission schools and churches they also learnt various choruses and verse recital from the Bible. As they went back to their villages having completed their education, they taught their

<sup>269</sup>C.J.O Choti Op. Cit. , Pp.117-118.

<sup>270</sup>See for example ogotera kwa Nyasae (Gospel Hymns) Kendu Bay, 1984) p. 242.



parents, sisters and brothers the kind of songs they had learnt in the mission stations. In this way missionaries could get converts. The young Christian converts completing school education were discouraged from the singing of traditional songs and performing folk dances. They viewed this as ungodly however some Christian songs especially those of the catholic were incorporated into the Abagusii traditional tunes and dances. The popularity of traditional songs and dances in such areas as Nyaguta, Nyaribari and North Bogirango where the number of Abosomi (Christians) had steadily increased was fading away<sup>271</sup>.

### 5.93 The war years 1939-1945

The Second World War just like the First World War had far-reaching effects on the Abagusii society. Its outbreak caused panic among the Abagusii. Many ran away into the bush to hide, and those outside the district started streaming back home, apparently fearing being conscripted into the war as carrier corps<sup>272</sup>. In an attempt to explaining this fear, the DC remarked:

It appears in the last war the young men were caught and sent wholesale to carrier corps, where overwork, undernourishment and disease killed a large proportion of them, and they now greatly dread a possible repetition of this experience<sup>273</sup>.

This fear, however, did not last long as nearly all returned to their jobs while other were forcibly recruited to the army. The district was affected by the war in many ways. First, conscription of manpower started through force and propaganda. In 1940 conscription for the East African Military Labour Service (EAMLS) started followed in 1941 by “assisted recruiting” for essential civil undertakings. This put a strain of labour resources

<sup>271</sup>O.I., with T. Bosibori, at Nyankononi market on 30/12/97.

<sup>272</sup>O.I., with Mogire Sakawa, at Mache-Achumbi village, on 28/12/97.

<sup>273</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/4, South Kavirondo, District Annual Reported 1933-1939.

of the district as the workload and responsibilities on the Abagusii women increased. While a total of 98,000 Kenyan participated in the Second World War, Gordon puts the final contribution of the Abagusii at 10,000 askaris and a slightly greater number of compulsory civil labours<sup>274</sup>. There was also loss of cattle in Gusiiland. Elderly informants who witnessed the war complained bitterly about their animals being taken away at very low prices. This practice of taking away cattle, coupled with expanding agricultural production was in keeping with the wider colonial policy of producing enough food for the war effort. The profound effect of the war was that a great deal of wealth was poured in Gusiiland affecting a large portion of population. By 1945, much money had entered the district through family remittances, gratuities and profitable farming.

The prosperity of the war, perhaps coupled with the great consciousness of the outside world, induced demand for more educational facilities. Before the war, missionaries ran most of the schools in the district, and only Kisii Government African School gave non-denominational education. Due to increased demand, the local native council decided in 1944 to built non-denominational schools. There was likewise a rapid increase of candidates for the common entrance examination from 65 in 1942 to 202 in 1944<sup>275</sup>.

The Second World War affected the Abagusii in a number of ways. First, when the young and energetic Gusii men were taken as carrier corps, they left women, the aged and children at home. In the remembrance of the relatives who were absent from home family members sung songs like the following:

*Kianyambega ee Kianyambega eee*  
*Kianyambega egesusu kianyambega eee*  
*Nekeng'aini ee nekengaini eee*  
*Kianyambega egesusu kianyambega eee*

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<sup>274</sup>P.M. Gordon, Op cit., p.56.

<sup>275</sup>Ibid, p. 56.

*Ekio ebara ee ee baba ee*  
*Ekio ebara egesusu kianyambega eee*  
*Negechancha ee negechancha eee*  
*Omosongo oyio negesusu eee*  
*Omosongo negesusu kianyambega eee*<sup>276</sup>.

The cunning animal the cunning animal eee  
 The cunning animal hare the cunning animal eee  
 A cleaver animal the cunning animal eee  
 The hare is a cunning animal ee ee  
 It has come on the road ee ee  
 It has come on the road the cunning animal eee  
 It is so tricksome ee it is so tricksome ee ee  
 that white man is the hare eee  
 The white man is a cunning eee.

Like the case of the First World War soldiers who had been taken to participate in the Second World War encountered many experiences which they later brought back home. In the war they had heard songs some of which carried patriotic themes like:

Match forward together we win  
 Together we win divided we fall  
 Forward forwards match soldiers  
 Together we win fight on  
 Fight with determination we shall win  
 Forward marching forward match soldiers.

Such songs encouraged the soldiers to fight on as they were determined to see into it that they were successful. In the war, the Abagusii men saw advanced and sophisticated musical instruments which accompanied patriotic songs that were designed to elicit a feeling of national pride. Such songs stimulated the citizens during the war. When the Abagusii war “veterans” returned home, they were welcomed with song and dance. One such a song was:

*Bono bachire Nyansaiga*  
*Bachire abamura Nyansaiga oiye oiye*  
*Nyansaiga korwo ase esegi Nyansaiga*  
*Nyansaiga oiye oiye Nyansaiga*  
*Barwaniri e abasongo Nyansaiga*<sup>277</sup>.

<sup>276</sup>O.I, with P. Nyamatana, at Mwaboto Village, on 4/1/98.

<sup>277</sup>Ibid.

They have come well our men  
 They have come our young men oiye oiye  
 Our men have come from the war our men  
 Our men oiye oiye our men  
 They have fought with the Europeans our men.

As the Abagusii men who had participated in the Second World War settled in their villages, they shared their experiences with their people. From then on, the Abagusii were able to compose songs and dances of nationalism to elicit that element of national pride besides community pride<sup>278</sup>.

After the Second World War the number of Abagusii children going to school increased. The influence of western culture was felt through formal education. A reasonable number of children were registered in both primary and secondary schools. Children were taught songs and dances of western culture. Since they were fully enrolled in schools they had little time to stay with their parents to learn tradition songs and dances.

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<sup>278</sup>O.I, with O. Gesaka at Nyamache, South Kisii, on 18/1/98

The following table shows full figures of school attendance in Nyanza Province by 1947.

**Table 5: School attendance in Nyanza Province (1947)**

PRIMARY STANDARD	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
BOYS	43,673	18,873	12,521	7,314	6,090	1714
GIRLS	16,279	7,841	3,705	1,749	815	224
SECONDARY						
FORMS	1	2	3	4	5	6
BOYS	682	532	60	71	-	-
GIRLS	86	40	-	-	-	-

**Source:** KNA DC/KSI/1/14, South Nyanza District Annual Reports, 1952

**Note:** Nyanza Province was constituted of the Abagusii, Luo and Kuria

The figures above show that the importance of education had started gaining popularity by 1947. This was as a result of efforts by colonial government officials, through chiefs and with the help of Mission Churches. All these made great efforts through propaganda, articles and barazas.<sup>279</sup> It was around this period that music education started to be offered as a basic course in both primary and secondary schools although it was not tested at examination levels. Western songs and dances were used as a means of realising togetherness and a sense of belonging by school children.

<sup>279</sup>KNA DC/KSI/1/14, South Nyanza District Annual Reports, 1952.

## 5.94 The years after the Swynnerton plan up to 1963

The concept of communal ownership of land in the Gusiiland tenure was altered by the British colonial land policy. The Swynnerton plan of 1954 had the greatest and most fundamental impact on the African communal ownership of land<sup>280</sup>. The plan was drawn up by R.J.M Swynnerton, the Assistant Director of Agriculture. It recommended the abolition of traditional system of land tenure. It also aimed at the promotion of agriculture through land reform in the shape of land consolidation programmes and the registration of individual titles. The plan also provided for increased extension services, processing and marketing services and the provision of some credit to African farmers. It encouraged the increase of output of cash crops among African farmers, notably coffee, pyrethrum and tea, the seeds were availed to thousands of farmers in 1950s and the co-operatives urged for their marketing. Tea was introduced in Gusiiland in 1957. It was first planted at Mokononi and later at Magombo in East Kitutu location. The introduction of crops such as coffee, pyrethrum, sisal and tea in Gusiiland undoubtedly altered production and labour processes in food crop production. Households that expanded acreage of cash crops were forced to change their traditional labour patterns.

In 1950s when Robert and Barbara Levine carried out their study in Kisii, women were reported to be doing almost all the cultivation - from breaking ground with hoes to harvesting. They milked the cows. They also kept an eye on the herding which preadolescent boys who had replaced young men in this job did<sup>281</sup>. Women were also involved in the production of cash crops as labourers.

While Abagusii women managed the production of food crops and the provision of food to family members, men became increasingly dominant in the management of cash

<sup>280</sup>R.M. Maxon, 'Agriculture' in W.R. Ochieng, (ed.) *Themes in Kenyan History* (Nairobi, 1990) p.12.

<sup>281</sup>R.A. Levine and B.B. Levine: *Op cit.*, Pp.18-24.

crop production and the controls of its income. All the colonial agricultural field officers were men who, customarily, targeted male members of the household<sup>282</sup>. The men were the first recipients of education on modern agricultural techniques and technology, men usually collected cash derived from sale of coffee, pyrethrum and tea. The main areas of these financial responsibilities were clearly defined as school fees, school funds, uniforms, books, tools and seeds. Most men also clothed their family members. They also bought prestigious family items such as radios, lamps and comfortable furniture. The provision of food for the family was the obligation of women, though men admitted that sometimes they contributed money for food as their wives could not manage on their own<sup>283</sup>.

The period affected songs and dances among the Abagusii in a number of ways. First, as a result of intensive cultivation of such crops as finger millet and maize, the Abagusii were able to prepare local beer easily. These crops were ground, fermented and processed to produce local beer. During beer drinking, traditional songs and dances were performed.

Secondly land preparation for the growing of various crops was usually done by hand and was a slow and tedious process. The use of tradition working groups was expanded and strengthened. Such working group was referred to as egesangio, of which members of the neighbourhood voluntarily co-operated and worked for each other in turns. The various work songs, most of which have already been discussed were performed to give workers morale and also to speed up the work. As noted earlier on when this group worked in the morning sessions, it was referred to as egesangio, and evening session as ekebasane<sup>284</sup>. After working tasks had been accomplished. there was

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<sup>282</sup>O.I with J. Moraa at Bonyamoyio village, on 13/12/97.

<sup>283</sup>C.J.O Choti Op cit., p. 149.

<sup>284</sup>O.I., with O. Gesaka at Nyamache, South Kisii on 18/198.

always a merry making occasion where food and drinks were served. Entertainment, which involved songs and dances, could last until late in the evening. One such a song was:

*Siberia onge aye siberia onge mosaiga  
ae ae ae mosaiga  
Toa nonde aye toa nonde okobayabaya  
ae ae ae mosaiga  
ae mosaiga ae mosaiga.*

Sip and give me age-mate sip and give me age-mate  
ae ae ae age-mate  
Do not give the one who loiters  
ae ae ae age-mate  
ae age-mate ae age-mate.

During war sessions, laziness and loitering instead of doing work was highly discouraged. In celebrating for the good work done, lazy men and loiters were discouraged from participating in the celebration. They were often criticised using songs so that they could change and be active and organised members in the society. The Abagusii were always committed and perfected their work of any kind. After the entertainment women left earlier than men to attend to the children and other domestic matters such as milking, fetching of water, firewood, and cooking. Men left at their own pleasure after discussing matters that concerned the community's history and their lives in general.

At times the Abagusii men who usually had a lot of money from the sale of their agricultural produce, wage labour and cattle, socialised a lot with other men. They drank local beer, which included busaa and changaa. Some spent large amounts of money in drinking. There were those who spent virtually all they earned on beer and then came



home drunk while singing beer party songs and took their wives savings by force to go and drink the following day<sup>285</sup>.

### **5.95 Songs and dances among the Abagusii in they post war period**

After the first and second world wars, western commodities started flowing smoothly to Kenyan markets. Agricultural shows were introduced. In these shows, school choirs, club choirs and traditional dancers competed as they at the same time entertained people in the show grounds. Groups of people from overseas countries such as Germany, France, America and China had direct influence on songs and dances among the Africans. In the early 1960s Europeans introduced advanced musical instruments such as the guitar, electrical drums, piano, accordion, trumpet and flutes. The use of synthesisers created new variables in sound, which could not be, produced by string or rhythm instruments. Exotic lighting system such as electricity gave the era a new aura. Unlike the African instruments, western instruments produced high sounds, they had a variety of tunes, at the same time were easily played without much effort and modulated sounds, which easily enabled voice harmonisation. The dances which evolved around this time were highly physical compared to the proceeding era. Dancers required the art of stamina. The dances which evolved around this time were twist,(shaking of the waist), rumba, (slow swing), kumfu, (limb movement) and marshed, (hand holding). These dances were mainly popular among the youth. The elders also to some good extent used to enjoy dancing or watching these dances as they gave them the feeling of youth<sup>286</sup>. People came to know more about all the sorts of music that could be produced by particular

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<sup>285</sup>O.I., with J. Omari, at Bochuria village, on 20/12/98.

<sup>286</sup>O.I., with S. Onkaga at Kisii town, on 2/1/98.

instruments. This renaissance period in the field of songs and dances produced a great profusion of compositions, particularly in the orchestral repertoire that exploited the unique sonorities of instruments, control of volume was, in itself, a rich source of music colour.

During this period the Abagusii songs and dances were influenced in one way or another. Their traditional dances such as ribina, okoiyeria amareka and sugusia were changing gradually as they were partially or fully overtaken by the western dances which became common in especially Kisii town and other urban centres by 1963<sup>287</sup>. The popularity of traditional folk songs among the Abagusii was dimming gradually with a replacement of published music scores of western songs. Around 1959, education system in Gusiland had gained a lot of prominence. In 1960, south Nyanza council spent about 44% of the councils' expenditure on education. This shows the importance and level of commitment the colonial government attached to education of Africans.

The following table shows school attendance statistics for the Abagusii in 1961.

**Table 6: School attendance for only Gusii children**

SCHOOLS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
Aided primary	25,640	9,065	34,705
Aided intermediate	6,209	727	6,936
Aided total	31,849	9,792	41,641
Unaided primary	3,627	1,803	5,351
Unaided intermediate	577	309	886
Unaided total	4,204	2,112	6,237

**Source: KNA DC/ KSI/1/14 South Nyanza District annual report.**

<sup>287</sup>O. I., with J. Nyandika, at Bomobebe market, on 10/1/97.

The influence of western education affected the Gusii songs and dances in that, western songs and dances stimulated misgivings about the integrity of the Abagusii traditional culture, songs and dances in particular. Teachers in these schools most of which had been westernised by the European culture stressed the need to imitate foreign arts rather than originality. In this way most of the Abagusii young people were brain washed by European culture thus abandoning the Abagusii traditional songs and dances.

With the introduction of new and advanced musical instruments by the Europeans in Gusiiland, recording industry came alive. With the expansion of instrumentation, arrangers had great latitude in the orchestration. A number of artists formed their own companies for performing and recording music. At the initial stages, many of the songs written and performed by the artists were never published as score music. With time, drummers took an advantages of the newly introduced electric drums to expand their drum sets to give them greater latitude of sound for mere emotionally explosive effect. The major Gusii musicians reknown for their song and dance artists' talents were Onyagore, Nyakerita, Ooga bwa Angwenyi, Oirere, Arati and Mosiori<sup>288</sup>. The words of the songs they composed encompassed a variety of subjects ranging from romance to patriotism. Instruments were used to accompany the songs. Either solo guitar or small instrument ensembles, of rhythm section accompanied the early recordings of Gusii songs. In around 1967 piano, brass guitars and drums were introduced in Gusii land. Later in 1970 electric guitars and drums were introduced in Gusiiland. Occasionally, the rhythm sections were augmented with smothering of wind instruments. These new trends provided an opportunity among the Abagusii to attain a high level of creativity, competitiveness and to continue developing improvisation skills and musical techniques. It further allowed the musician among the Abagusii musicians an opportunity to extend

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<sup>288</sup>O.I , with I simba, Music teacher at Isena Secondary School, Kisii.

improvisation skills over several choruses instead of only short passages. In 1970, group bands, which had earlier on, started as village clubs in the early 1960 could now arrange, perform and record their songs. The earliest of such elaborate groups was Nyamwari band, Christopher Monyoncho's brainchild. The band consisted of four members. However the bands activities were limited by lack of finance. As time went by it gained popularity<sup>289</sup>.

In general, the early bands were comparatively small and lacked public address system. A band expanded as financial conditions improved and more personnel could be recruited, trained and retained in the band. This kind of skill development enabled the composition of many songs, which touched on political, social and economic conditions that surrounded the Abagusii. In this period, co-operatives musical bands were formed with an aim of realising huge profits. In this case, several Abagusii musicians could pool their skills and resources together to form competitive music bands, which could not only feature, in Gusiiland but also in the "outside world". Basically, most bands were under a single leader musically and financially. The best example was Nyamwari jazz band under the leadership of Christopher Monyoncho. For recording and rehearsing purposes, a leader had to hire an arranger to write down all the music in the style the arranger wanted. The personnel and the arranger were to be paid for their services.

The general public usually promoted the early bands in the post war period in Gusiiland especially when they entertained them in public places. For example Nyamwari jazz band in the early period of 1970 used to entertain the public in such places as Keroka market, Kisii town, Nyamira and Ogembo town centres. Booking agencies that often

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<sup>289</sup>O.I, with J. Mikae, at Mwamoriango Village, on 21/1/98.

required performances staged by the various bands could make arrangements to finance them, provided that the bands could allow them to become their agents.

Early musical instruments artists around this period in Gusiiland were, for most part, untrained in music fundamentals and therefore “played by hear”. They memorised a theme and then extemporised upon it. Many themes were copyright or matches played by military band. One player would teach a melody to another that in turn improvised the melody so that, in time, the melody became vastly removed from its original form. The young musicians probably did not know the original title of the melody so they would rename it. Soon they began composing their own melodies since most of the early Gusii musicians like Nyako, Makone and Bosibori could neither read nor write music, they relied very much on memorisation<sup>290</sup>. As a band worked on a melody and its harmonies, the selection became their particular composition and arrangement.

Much of the Abagusii gospel music evolved from early European church music. Christian missionaries introduced gospel hymns, which were written in music language. In their schools, missionaries taught the early converts how to sight-read and write music scores. In essence, it was the Christian missionaries who introduced written music in Gusiiland. Church musicians, choirmasters spent a great amount of their time writing original hymns for their church. The songs in such hymns basically preached salvation. The songs were written in major keys with predominately eight measure phases utilising a two-theme format (theme A and B). The lyrics often spoke of the wonder of heaven. With time the Abagusii early converts came to know how to sight, read and write music. They became music teachers in school<sup>291</sup>. Film technology, radio and television affected

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<sup>290</sup>O.I, with J. Mikae, at Mwamoviango village on 21/1/98.

<sup>291</sup>O.I, with S. Barongo, a music teacher, at Ramasha, on 9/10/97.

the style and performance of Gusii songs and dances. Many young people adopted western singing and dancing styles.

From the above discussion, it is evident that Gusii songs and dances were dynamic that's to say they kept on changing from time to time as they came into contact with other cultures. Western policies affected the traditional songs and dances of the Abagusii by the introduction of the various colonial policies, which turned Kenya into a capitalist country, Gusiiland inclusive. The European adopted theories of modernisation, which were aimed at improving the standards of living of the Africans. They introduced the various musical ideas and instruments that gave the Abagusii a new direction.

## CHAPTER 6

### 6.0 THE NATURE AND ROLE OF THE ABAGUSII SONGS AND DANCES IN DIFFERENT HISTORICAL PERIODS.

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the nature and the role that songs and dances played in different historical periods as far as the Abagusii were concerned. It is in this chapter that a thematic analysis of various songs among the Abagusii is given. The songs in this chapter are written in Ekegusii and then provided with literal translations. The periods that are covered in what follows are pre-colonial, colonial and the early years of post colonial.

In the pre-colonial period the Gusii social processes such as birth, circumcision, education, marriage, religion and death were very important. These social issues are handled in this chapter in a manner that reflects the position and roles of songs and dances in the social systems of the Abagusii. The role of songs and dances in the economic structure of the Abagusii such as various types of work in farms, hunting and gathering, traditional industries, and cattle herding are discussed.

The nature and role of songs and dances in the period of the imposition of early colonial rule by 1904 are also analysed. During this period, the imposition of colonial rule in Gusiiland fundamentally altered and disrupted only crucial pre-colonial socio-economic structures. It not only disrupted crucial pre-colonial mechanisms of control over persons but also inaugurated a period of flux that lasted until the Great Depression of 1929. An analysis of this period as far as the Abagusii songs and dances were concerned is based on thematic approach.

The various themes and nature of Abagusii songs and dances in the post war period are also discussed. Around this period, several issues regarding education, socio-economic structures and technology emerged which called for the need for songs and dances.

## 6.2 Birth songs and dances

Among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period pregnancy was seen as dangerous as being perched on a tree, korina omote igoro. When a woman gave birth she was seen as having safely climbed down a tall tree. During such occasions songs and dances could be performed to celebrate the newborn baby, termed omogeni, a 'visitor'. The following was such a song:

*Kemunto, omwana Bwomoyo  
Rero nomogoko tore noro  
ee baminto ee sindigisa  
Rero nomogoko omwana oiboirwe  
ee sindigisa  
Kemunto, orure omote igoro  
ekiomogoko nomwana otoire  
ee sindigisa ee baminto  
Rero nomogoko baba  
Rero nomogoko baminto  
oiboirwe omwana omoke  
Baminto rero nomogoko ee ee  
Ekiomogoko nomwana otoire<sup>292</sup>*

Kemunto, daughter of Omwoyo  
Today happy we are  
Ee our community ee welcome  
Today we are happy a child is born to us  
ee welcome  
Kemunto has climbed down the tree  
ee welcome  
The child has brought pleasure to our invitation  
Ee welcome ee our community  
Today it is happiness, mother  
Today it is happiness, our community  
a new born has been given unto us  
Our community today it is happiness ee ee

<sup>292</sup> A song sung by T. Gechemba, at Bonyamasicho, on 10/11/97.



Today it is happiness  
The child has brought pleasure to our invitation.

Besides the singing of the above song, the womenfolk at the scene where a baby was born burst into ululation, ebiririato. Usually a baby boy was received with twice, as loud and more prolonged ululation than that of a baby girl. This was mainly because the traditional Abagusii valued boys more than girls. This bias in favour of boys could be explained through a Gusii proverb that Ensinyo amagokwa nwa nabamura etabwati<sup>293</sup>, meaning “when people talk ill of a certain village it is because it does not have boys”. Boys were generally regarded as protectors of society against external aggression. After birth and dedication of a child: naming ceremony was conducted in which people celebrated, sang and danced after naming the child. Such songs and dances were supposed to thank God through ancestors for having given them a newborn baby. The songs and dances during this period were short, simple and repetitive.

### 6.3 Early childhood education

As children grew, they were taught fundamental basics like knowing names of their family members, ancestors and clans. They were also required to know their close relatives, understand their family lineage and know how to relate to their cousins, uncles, aunts and grandparents. They were also taught the names of various trees, animals and the nature of their immediate environment. The grandparents mainly taught children at the age of three to four years. The teaching of children was done through lullabies, stories, myths, legends and songs. Songs especially sang to young children by grandparents

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<sup>293</sup> M.M. Okeng'o, Op. Cit., p.9.

communicated the community's history, religious beliefs and laws. Songs were preferred in teaching young children because they kept the memory in tune<sup>294</sup>.

#### 6.4 Children's songs and dances

As children grew, they learnt through imitating the adults, how to form social groups. In these groups, they imitated a number of activities performed by adults. They could sing and dance together. Most of the songs they sang were those taught to them by their grandparents. These songs were usually simple, short with repetitive melodies. One such a lullaby song was:

*Tata na baba nabaya  
Bakong'a obokima naigota  
Tata, tata, baba,  
Baba, baba, tata  
Baba,tata, baba  
Mbura gatwe komanye koigama  
Mbura gatwe komanye koigama*<sup>295</sup>.

Father and mother are good,  
They give me food to satisfaction  
Father, father, mother  
Mother, mother, father,  
Mother, father, mother  
Let it rain I shelter  
Let it rain I shelter.

At times, children would defy the rain by dancing outside in it. The common dance which was popular among the children was entaburuta, that is forward and backward steps which they imitated from adults.

In their play songs, children also praised the hunters when they brought home what they hunted. In the early pre-colonial period especially when the Abagusii stayed at Goye

<sup>294</sup> O.I. with T. Bosibori, at Nyangononi village, on 30/12/97.

<sup>295</sup> A song performed by a group of lower primary school children at Mache-Achumbi on 2/11/97.

forest and Kano plains they used to hunt wild animals. Children used to gather together to welcome a hunter who had become successful in the “catch of the prey”. The following was such a song:

*Ninki ekio obwate?  
 Ngagoye mbwate  
 Otakong'a ndome gaki  
 Yaya nkaroro mono  
 Niki aye ogokariera?  
 Nche tindi motwari  
 kai kwarusia kagoye  
 Ndosana narusia  
 Otakong'a ndome  
 Yaya nkaroro gaki  
 Otakong'a ndome<sup>296</sup>.*

What is that you are carrying?  
 It is a bitter fruit  
 let me chew it please  
 No it is very bitter  
 Why are you chewing it?  
 I am not a hunter  
 Where did you get the prey  
 I got it in the bush  
 Let me chew it please  
 No it is bitter please  
 Let me chew.

In the above song the children expressed their admiration for the work done by the hunters. By so doing the children recognised the importance of hunted prey as a source of food to supplement other kinds of food that were available at home. In their play songs and dances the children improvised their own apparatus like dancing sticks, shields as well as musical instruments which were meant to enhance their performance.

The songs and dances performed by boys and girls were longer than those of young children. Youth dances were vigorous and were more or less like those of

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<sup>296</sup> A song sung by lower primary pupils of Nyanturago Primary school, Kisii on 4/11/97.

adults<sup>297</sup>. Most songs by the Abagusii youths in the pre-colonial period, tackled a wide range of subjects. They touched on past events, deeds of people, various issues at village, clan and community levels. The following was such a song:

*Ekeronarengewana  
 Obe ngakanigwa baba  
 Ngakanigwa timbasa koria amara eee  
 Ngakanigwa timbasa koria amani baba  
 Ngakanigwa obe ngakanigwa eee  
 Ngoria amara obe nintamwe baba  
 goria amara obe nintamwe eee  
 NgacNhi gotiga baba - Ngachi gotiga baba  
 Ekeronarengewana tata ere agantebia gaki  
 Yara gachie orisie aye nomorisia eee  
 Ngachi gotiga baba ngachi gotiga  
 Baba, baba eee  
 Inkakanigwa obe nintamwe ee  
 Nkoria amani obe nintamwe ee  
 Ekeronarengewana obe ngakanigwa ee  
 Ngachi korigia baba  
 Ngachi korigia  
 Obe ngakanigwa ee<sup>298</sup>.*

When I was a child  
 Oh I was denied mother  
 Not to eat intestines eee  
 Not to eat liver eee  
 Not to eat oh not to eat eee  
 If I eat intestines I would be rude mother  
 If I eat intestines I would be rude eee  
 I left mother, I left mother eee  
 When I was a child  
 My father told me please  
 Lad go and graze the animals  
 you are a shepherd ee  
 I left mother, I left mother  
 Mother, mother ee  
 I was denied oh I would be rude eee  
 If I eat a liver, I would be rude eee  
 When I was a child, Oh I was denied eee  
 When I searched mother  
 When I searched  
 Oh I was denied eee.

<sup>297</sup> O.I. with T. Bosibori at Nyangononi Market, on 30/12/97.

<sup>298</sup> A song sung by E. Nyarang'o, at Nyangononi village, on 28/10/97.

The above song was usually sang by boys and girls in envy of the adults who used to deny them some kinds of food. In the pre-colonial period, some parents used to cheat their children that if they ate some kinds of food or some parts of meat supply, they could be rude and would develop acids in the stomachs.

In this way the adults enjoyed some kinds of food of which the young people could not have access to. For example in the pre-colonial period hunting of wild animals was traditionally a male's activity. It used not to be considered as an economic activity of the Abagusii. It was usually undertaken seasonally, mostly after harvesting when most people were relatively free from field tasks. When hunters used to bring hunting prey back home, they discouraged young boys and girls from eating some parts of meat such as liver and intestines, parts which were usually sweet, leaving other parts for boys and girls. In this connection therefore the young people used to envy them as it can be interpreted from the song above.

### 6.5 Circumcision songs

In the pre-colonial period, initiation was a very important aspect of life as far as the Abagusii were concerned. It was the rite through which an individual was introduced to adulthood. Every young person, boy or girl looked forward to this rite of initiation with a lot of anxiety. It was the duty of the society to prepare them both psychologically and emotionally during this period. A lot of leisure time was spent on teaching the youth on the significance of this rite. "Initiation was the gateway to adulthood, manhood and adulthood"<sup>299</sup>. The expectations of the community from the initiates were instilled into them through songs. Songs were chanted to inform candidates that they had become men

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<sup>299</sup> O.I. with C. Nyabonyi, at Mwamosioma village , on 28/11/97.

and women ready to take up challenging responsibilities in the community, to marry and to be respected. Such songs acted as an educative tool to the concerned candidates. The following was such a song which was sang and still is sung for boy initiates :

*Obeire Momura, Obeire Momura eee-Oyoo*  
*Boro mambia, bono mambia eee-Oyoo*  
*Afureirwe itimo, atureirwe itimo oo-Oyoo.*  
*Nanguba mbibo, na nguba mbibooo-Oyoo*  
*Arwane sigisi, arwane bosoba eee-Oyoo*  
*Ngina amosike, ngina amosikeeee-Oyoo*  
*Tamotoma roche, tamotoma rocheeee-Oyoo*  
*Ise Mokami Oirire, chimborochiabo*  
*Ise mokami oirire, chimborochiabo*  
*Omoisia Omoke Mbororo-Bwamorire*  
*Omosia Omoke Mbororo-Bwamorire*  
*Omoisia Omoke Mbororo-Bwamorire, bwamorire.*

He has become a man, he has become a man eee-this one.  
 This morning, this morning eee-this one  
 let a spear be made for him, let a spear be made for him.  
 And a thick shield, and a thick shield eee-this one  
 He will fight in Kipsigis land, he will fight in Masai land eee this one  
 His mother to respect him, his mother to respect him ee-this one  
 She should not send him to the river, she should not send him to the river eee-this one  
 His grandfather has taken, their Penis  
 His grandfather has taken, their Penis  
 The little lad has felt-Pains.  
 The little lad has felt-Pains  
 The little lad has felt-Pains, Pains.

The above song was meant to encourage the youth to be ready to defend their community against any external aggression. Reference to fight in Kipsigis land and Maasai land in the above song was used to imply that the initiate was expected to defend

the communities from the raids that were often waged by the neighbouring communities mostly the Kipsigis, Kuria and the Maasai<sup>300</sup>.

### 6.6 Division of Labour

In the Abagusii traditional society in the pre-colonial period there was clearly defined division of labour. This was based on 'sex and age'. It set adult males apart from women and children along lines which contributed to their categorical dignity. There was a very clear division of labour which was manifested in two separate hierarchies, where the male hierarchy (sons, husbands and male elders) was superior to the female hierarchy (daughters, wives and elderly women).

Abagusii women performed the routine household duties such as grinding finger-millet and sorghum, cooking, collecting firewood, fetching water, taking care of the children, maintaining the houses, gathering vegetables and giving advice and guidance to young girls on various issues of life. They also plastered houses using clay soil. Mature but unmarried girls, *abaiseke*, helped their mothers with duties around the home and also with agricultural work. The uninitiated young girls looked after their small brothers and sisters. They also helped their mothers with some of the household chores such as cleaning the houses and fetching firewood and water<sup>301</sup>.

Circumcised boys in the Abagusii community were never expected to participate in the housework. This was women's affairs. Instead they were expected to stay in the cattle *boma*, to take care of cattle and also to defend the community against any interference from any quota. Circumcision songs defined and divided the roles according to gender. While leading the male initiates to their places of seclusion, the following song was sang:

*Ngina amosike, ngina amosikeeee-Oyoo*  
*Tamofoma kwaa, tamofoma kwa eee-Oyoo*

<sup>300</sup> O.I. with H. Isena, at Gesusu on 27/12/97.

<sup>301</sup> C.J.O. Choti, Op. Cit., p.67.

*Tamofoma gotenya aaa-Oyoo*  
*Tachi Koruga, tachi korugaaa--Oyoo*<sup>302</sup>.  
 His mother to respect him,  
 his mother to respect him eee-this one.  
 Not to send him to fetch vegetables,  
 not to send him to fetch vegetables eee-this one  
 Not to send him to fetch firewood,  
 not to send him to fetch firewood aaa-this one  
 Not to cook, not to cook aaa-this one.

The above song communicated that the male initiates were not to perform their work in the Kitchen environment. They had a more difficult role to play in the boma as discussed above.

Male circumcision songs also touched on political experiences. Initiates were taught through such songs how they would deal with foreign relations. This would be achieved through bravery, which was seen as a paramount attribute of manhood. All the circumcised men were expected to display a high degree of bravery. During circumcision, prominence was given to enduring pain. There was no anaesthesia during the period. The cutting of a foreskin was usually done by the use of a sharp knife. This process involved loss of blood and a lot of pain. Whoever passed through this process endured a lot of pain and was indeed a man. Circumcision songs in this respect had a primary concern of developing the virtues of patience and endurance among the initiates. These prepared the initiates to face the many life challenges that lay ahead of them. In this case, initiates were prepared fully to cope with hostility and tolerance to pain in relation to their future roles<sup>303</sup>.

Female "circumcision" songs in the pre-colonial period also played a very significant role in teaching girl initiates the many expectations that the community required

<sup>302</sup> O.I. with G. Maeba, at Nyamagesa market, on 23/1/98.

<sup>303</sup> O.I. with Nyabonyi, at Mwamosioma vilage, on 25/11/97.



of them. In such songs their future roles were outlined. They were advised through such songs on the way they would carry themselves as mature and adult girls, abaiseke.

The following was such a song:

*Oreng egesagane eee*  
*Obeire Omoiseke Omosera*  
*Oo yaye Oyaye Oo Oyae*  
*Oreng mokabaisia Oo yayae Oyaeeee*  
*Obeire mokabamura ooyae Oyaeeee*  
*Ofigire egosorio Ooyaeeee*  
*Ise amosike Oo yae oyaeeee*  
*Abe Omokungu omuya oyaeeee*  
*Onyore abana orosie egesaku oyeeeee*<sup>304</sup>.

She has been a las eee  
 But now she is a good lady  
 Oo yae, Oyae Oo yae Oyae  
 She has been boys' wife oo yae oyeeee  
 She is now a wife of men Ooyae oyeeee  
 She has left jokes Oo yae Oyae  
 Her father to respect her Oo yae oyeeee  
 She will get a husband Ooyae oyeeee  
 She is to be a responsible woman Oo yae oyeeee  
 You will bear children to make a clan .

The above song was performed to encourage the female initiates to be responsible women in the society. The ability to bear children was seen as a vehicle through which the cycle of life could be fulfilled. It was considered as a gift from God and the ancestral spirits. In the above song, the female initiates were wished well and long life as they were to get children to fulfil the community's and the ancestral spirits' expectations.

Female "circumcision" songs in the pre-colonial period were also sung to discourage female initiates from having pre-marital sex. Pre-marital sex among the Abagusii was condemned. Anyone who was proved to have had pre-marital sex was

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<sup>304</sup> A song sung by a group of villagers at Mache-Achumbi during a female circumcision ceremony on 25/11/97.

considered an outcast.

The clitoris in the female “circumcision” song was referred to as ‘dirt’ to connote the fact that it could cause disrespect and shame to the young female if she allowed its being touched, especially by members of the opposite sex. Clitoris was referred to as ‘dirt’ because the moment a girl allowed sex before marriage, virginity could be broken and the girl could be contaminated by blood and the male’s penis could also be contaminated. That is why the male penis was referred to as *enyamweri*, that is a dangerous snake which could cause harm if there was sex before marriage. In another perspective the term ‘dirt’ referred to the spoilage of the good name of a girl who could be considered as unclean, irresponsible and an outcast throughout her life. All these could bring about disrespect and embarrassment, all of which were symbolically referred to as “dirt”. The following song was sang to communicate this message to the female initiates.

*Nakunire bionsi-kuna*  
*Nakunire bionsi-kuna moyakè eee baba kuna*  
*Nakunire ekoko- kuna*  
*Nakunire ekoko- kuna moyara ee baba kuna*  
*Nakunire enyambu- kuna*  
*Nakunire enyambu- kuna moyakè ee baba kuna*<sup>305</sup>.

I have touched all-touch  
 I have touched all- touch ee granny touch  
 I have touched dirt- touch  
 I have touched dirt-touch ee granny touch  
 I have touched a chameleon- touch  
 I have touched a chameleon- touch ee granny touch.

In the above song, the performers usually drew attention of the initiates to the ‘sacredness’ of the reproduction among the abagusii. Touching the clitoris would arouse

<sup>305</sup> M.M. Okeng’o, Op. Cit., p.80.

the female sexually which would in turn induce her to having sex. A strong symbol of chameleon was used to refer to the various responses by the body in general when the clitoris is being touched.

### 6.7 Wedding songs and dances

In the pre-colonial period among the Abagusii, after circumcision there followed marriage, which was an important social-process. It was considered as a sacred institution as it played an integral part in the continuity of life. Organisation for marriage among the Abagusii involved parents and close relatives of the concerned parties. Usually, it was the duty of a relative or a close friend of the man's family to look for the girl (bride) who was expected to hail from a "respectable family". This was usually a family, which was free from such vices as witchcraft, soccer and pride. Once a suitable girl was found the family of the marrying man (bridegroom) went into negotiation with the girls' family over the payment of dowry. Dowry was paid in terms of several cattle and goats. However, the number of animals paid to the girls' parents depended on the ability of the mans' family.

The songs and dances of the whole process of marriages were humourous, instructive and amusingly entertaining. Wedding songs discouraged the unusual behaviour of divorcing and wife beating. Such songs emphasised love and harmony among the marriage participants. Songs in this period could be performed to condemn men who were fond of mistreating and divorcing their wives. It was incredible to go for a wife and send her away. People who mistreated their wives were often referred to as *abaisia*, which meant lads, implying uncircumcised, young and immature boys<sup>306</sup>

The Abagisii expectation of marriage was manifested in the following song, which was usually performed when the bride and the bridegroom were escorted to their new home,

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<sup>306</sup> A song sung by B. Moraa at Lietago Market, on 28/12/97.

that is the bridegrooms' home. The song was:

*Okegori Omoisia Yara, Inkanywoma Kinde Omoke  
Etwani rende Yara  
Inkanywoma Kinde Omoke Ekegori Omoisa Yara  
Etwani rende Yara  
Kemunto O'Nyamacharara, akavora ywaisanei  
Agancha aikaranse  
Kamoseria genda! genda!  
Agancha agaikaransa  
Kamoseria genda! genda  
Kwabeire Kironchi yara, Kironchi Otarochi  
Inkorutwa ore omwaro  
Otabwati mochiande<sup>307</sup>.*

My age mate you 'lad' I married when young  
I thought I was a cock  
I married when young, my age mate you 'lad'  
I thought I was a cock  
Kemunto Nyamachararas' daughter thought you were  
mature  
She agreed to stay  
But you chased her go! go!  
She agreed to stay on  
But you chased her go! go!  
You are an outcast and blind  
The bed leg will be thrown on your grave  
Because you don't have a home.

The above song was performed to warn men that whoever divorced could not have a home and therefore would be considered an outcast.

Like any other African community, the Abagusii valued children more than anything else. The Abagusii did not specify any limited number of children a couple could get during their life span. They believed that it was through children that the community could expand and continued. Songs were composed and performed during marriage ceremonies to put across the community wishes that for the achievement of the purpose of marriage there was need to live in harmony, have mutual understanding within the

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

family and have children who would ensure the continuity of the community and the future life that was to come on their way<sup>308</sup>.

The importance of bearing children was stressed in the following song during wedding ceremonies:

*Abagusii bakare mbakwanete  
Bagakwana bagoteba ng'a  
Oyofabwati Obwata moraa Mwomo  
Oyobwate Omwaua Obwatwa Koboko Ochakaa  
Nyasae abakonye monyore abana<sup>309</sup>.*

The olden Abagusii people said  
They spoke and uttered  
Whoever does not have a child holds a dry tree  
Whoever has a child is held by the hand  
And is directed home  
Whoever does not have a child holds a dry tree  
Let God help you to bear children.

According to Zake a wedding ceremony in the pre-colonial period among the Abagusii involved quite a number of things. Merry making songs and dances were performed. The best example was when the go-between, esigani, was sent to the girl's home. During such occasion, the girl's parents and relatives would eat, drink and then an Obokano player would sing and get them dancing. Each dancer had the freedom to choose his or her style of dancing. However, the most popular dance was entabanana, that is jumping and shaking of the shoulders. In this dance, the Obokano player who usually sat in the middle while dancers made a circle round him supplied the music. Okomana, that is a discussion after the dowry followed. Among the Abagusii dowry was given in form of cattle as noted earlier on.

<sup>308</sup> M.M. Okeng'o, Op.Cit., p.82.

<sup>309</sup> A song sung by K. Buyaki at Bonyamoyio village, on 16/1/98.

In addition, they provided a goat which was usually slaughtered at the brides' home for the wedding ceremony<sup>310</sup>.

Okomana was followed by egekwana, meaning plans for the wedding. Old men from both families and clans usually did this. On the eve of the wedding day women relatives of the bridegroom, would go to the brides' home where they would spend the night celebrating and dancing. In the morning, they would start their journey back with the bride and the bridegroom.

On the wedding day, Omonyanyangi, a marriage specialist arranged to conduct some oral interviews through which the bride and the bridegroom would undergo. These interviews mainly were concerned with questions regarding to the future lives and roles of the bride and the bridegroom. After the interview, the Omonyanyangi would sing the following song:

*Ee eri, ya tata erameri Kimonge  
Eeri twagorete mbori ere nemanwa  
Nabono twayegora mwancheri.*

Oh, my fathers' bull should be made to clear Kimonges' garden bush  
The bull we exchanged for a goat with her kid  
And now we give it free because of love.

On hearing this the bridegrooms' relatives would feel pleased because the bull and the goat they had brought as part of dowry had brought in a bride, this was the theme of the above song. After the bride and the bridegroom had been declared husband and wife, small children were allowed to nip and pinch the bride in order to test her patience<sup>311</sup>.

After a day or two the newly married woman would sing a song in which she asked for a hoe to go and till the land as a sign of starting life. In the song, she could

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<sup>310</sup> G.S. Zake, Op.Cit., p.104.

<sup>311</sup> O.I.with T. Nyaanga, at Gesabakwa market, on 22/11/97.

mention the lazy people who had a tendency of moving from house to house looking for beer whereas they themselves never brew. The woman could sing:

*Emong'ererie Obokombe nekebago egesera  
Emong'ererie Obokombe nekebago egesera  
Nekebago egesera ngende kwabusera Omogoroo  
Omogondo nyakieni Kebariri Omaiya,  
Omaiya, Chingero bonyangero.  
Omokungu sioma sioma kayi akomanya arugeivule  
amrwa are ase enyongo  
Omaiya, Omaiya, chingero bonyangero  
Omokungu sioma sioma moe oboremo bwekeyembi  
Omaiya chingero bonyangero oo<sup>312</sup>.*

Give me a good hoe, with a good handle  
Give me a good hoe, with a good handle  
A good hoe so that I can go to cultivate  
The garden looks reddish  
O' perfect person, O perfect person sings and sings  
A woman who loiters where does she know it has been  
brewed the brew prepared in a pot  
O ' perfect person, O' perfect person songs and songs  
A woman who loiters give her a hard ground  
O' perfect person, O' perfect person sings.

With the above song, the honeymoon for the newly married couple came to an end and normal life of husband and wife began with the married woman being integrated in her new home.

### 6.8 Work songs and dances

Emeremo, work, was understood by the pre-colonial Abagusii to be God given occupation. It was geared towards improving the social, political and the economic life of the Abagusii. Songs and dances were performed as the Abagusii enjoyed their occupation. This was because work sessions according to Abagusii tradition were joyful experiences<sup>313</sup>.

<sup>312</sup> A song sung by G. Nyabonyi, at Girango village on 20/11/97.

<sup>313</sup> O.I. with T. Nyaanga, Op.Cit.

The Abagusii occupational songs in the pre-colonial period defined clearly the issue of division of labour. Efforts to develop the character of youths and shape them into responsible citizens were not shunned in the traditional Abagusii society<sup>314</sup>. Division of labour ensured that each member of the community performed certain tasks based on sex and age.

The following table shows tasks and their performers in the pre-colonial Abagusii society: -

**Table 7: Tasks And Their Performers in The Pre-Colonial Abagusii Society**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Performer</b>
(a) Subsistence	
Bush-clearing for cultivation	M
Land tillage	FM
Sowing of finger-millet and sorghum	F
Planting vegetables	F
Weeding	F
Erecting scare crows	M
Harvesting	B
Looking after animals	MF
Milking cows	M
Making ropes	M
Fencing	M
Cutting sticks for fencing	M
(b) Searching for food	
Hunting	M
Fishing in the river	MF
Gathering mushrooms	FM
Gathering edible fruits and plants	FM
Gathering edible insects e.g. locusts	FM
Trapping birds	M
(c) Domestic / household chores	
cooking	F
Brewing of beer	F
Keeping floor clean	F
Collecting firewood	F
Cutting wood from the forest	MF
Tending house fire	F
splitting wood	MF
Making iron implements	M

<sup>314</sup> M.M. Okeng'o Op.Cit., p.84.



Fetching water	F
Weaving cloth	FM
Slaughtering animals	M
Feeding children	F
Taking care of the sick children	F
Baby sitting	F
counselling children	B
(d) House building tasks	
Gathering thatching grass	M
Roof thatching	M
Gathering vines for binding	M
Preparing wood for building	M
Preparing ground for building	M
Hauling the material for the site building	MF
Mud-smearing and plastering	F
Cooking for builders	F

**Source:** Adapted from A. Oakley, Subject on Women, Pantheon Books, New York, 1981, PP. 140-141, 180.

**Note**

B = task performed equally by females and males

F = task performed by females only

M = tasks performed by males only

FM = tasks performed usually by women which are normally performed by men

While performing the above tasks, various songs that covered many subjects were performed. People were encouraged to work hard in whatever task they were engaged in.

A hard working person was compared to a weaverbird, which was usually busy whenever it wanted to built a nest. Those of the Abagusii community who relied mainly on begging were encouraged to work like a weaverbird so as to have their own food. The following song was to put this message across:-

*Egetinginye ekengaini kerigie Oboundi  
 Kiagache embura egotwa gesoe mwaye  
 Egetinginye ekengaini kerigie Oboundi  
 kiagache embura egotwa gesoe mwaye  
 Ee baba ewalegetinginye ekengaini  
 Kerigie Oboundi Kiagache  
 Omaiya Omaiya o chingero bonyangero  
 Abanto bainto mwensi inwe mobe egetinginye*

*Mwagache embura egotwa mosoe nyomba  
Omaiya Omaiya chingero bonyangero<sup>315</sup>.*

A clever bird builds  
Its nest so that when it rains it shelters  
A clever bird builds  
Its nest so that when it rains it shelters  
Ee mother eh! a clever bird  
builds its nest nicely  
O' perfect person, O' perfect person sings and sings  
Our people you should be like a clever bird  
So that you build houses when it rains you shelter  
O' perfect person, O' perfect person sings and sings.

The above song encouraged people to be self disciplined in searching for economic resources so that they could improve standards of living as the clever bird used to do.

Laziness was not entertained among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period. for instance lazy people were ridiculed in the following work song:-

*Nyamworoto tamanyeti korema baba  
Nyamworoto tamanyeti korema baba  
Migo agoisaransa Oragerigwa  
Nyamworoto O'baba  
Nyamworoto tamanyeti korema mogondo  
Ee nyamworoto.*

The lazy one does not know how to dig, mother  
The lazy one does not know how to dig, mother  
The lazy one sits waiting to be fed  
The lazy of my mother  
The lazy does not know how to dig in the garden.

In another work song the lazy woman was criticised and at the same time encouraged to work hard for the betterment of her home. This was communicated through the singing of the following song: -

*Omokungu, nyamworoto moe oboremo bwekenyambi  
Omokungu nyamworoto moe oboremo bwekenyambi  
Moe oboremo bwekenyambi  
Nabwo akorema obwata omotwe*

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<sup>315</sup> A song sung by students of Kereri Girls' Secondary school on 4/11/98.

*O'maiya, Omaiya chingervo bonyangero*  
*Omokungu, siona siomia moe oboremo bwekenyambi*  
*Moe oboremo bwekenyambi*  
*Nabwo akorema obwata Omotwe*  
*O'maiya, Omaiya chingero bonyangero*  
*Mokungu omworo moe oboremo*  
*Bori bwekenyambi nabwo akonyara*  
*Kero akorema obwata omotwe*  
*Oye nomogongo Oye namakere<sup>316</sup>.*

A lazy woman, give her an overgrown Kikuyu grass piece of land

A lazy woman, give her an overgrown Kikuyu grass piece of land  
Give her overgrown Kikuyu grass piece of land

She tills it and holds ther head

O'perfect person O'perfect person sings and sings

A woman who loiters, give her an overgrown  
Kikuyu grass piece of land

Give her an overgrown Kikuyu grass piece of land

She tills it and holds the head

O'perfect person O'perfect person sings and sings

A lazy woman, give her a piece of land

Overgrown with Kikuyu grass so that she digs

When she tills she holds her head

She holds her back and waist.

In this way then, songs in the pre-colonial period were educative tools which advised people to constantly work hard in whatever task they were involved in. This confirms the fact that Abagusii cherished work above all other things.

Group workers used to carry food and drinks to their places of work since working places were far away from homes. As they worked they sang a variety of work songs to inspire them so that they could work faster and efficiently. The following was one of the songs: -

*Tata nekebwaro baminto nekebwaro ee*  
*Tata nekebwaro baminto nekebwaro ee*  
*Tata nekebwaro kani na mama nekebwaro*  
*Tata nekebwaro na mama nekebwaro*  
*Aa ee Omoyo, e tata nekebwaro*  
*Na mama nekebwaro aaa*  
*Kemunto ngagokania Kemunto ngagokania*  
*Kemunto ngagokania Kemunto ngagokania*

<sup>316</sup> A song performed by Kenyerere Women Group choir, at Ichuni market on 18/12/97.

*Kemunto ngagokania ae Omoyo*  
*Ae ee Omoyo Kemunto ngagokania*  
*Kemunto ngagokania aaa*  
*Tata nekebwaro na mama nekebwaro*<sup>317</sup>.

My father is a rhino, yes he is a rhino ee  
 My father is a rhino, yes he is a rhino ee  
 My father is a rhino and mother is a rhino ee  
 My father is a rhino, mother also is a rhino  
 Ae ee heart, my father is a rhino  
 And my mother is a rhino aaa  
 Kemunto\* I refused you, Kemunto I refused you  
 Kemunto I refused you, Kemunto I refused you  
 Kemunto I refused you ae ee heart  
 Ae ee heart Kemunto I refused you  
 Kemunto I refused you aa  
 My father is a rhino and mother is a rhino.

The ability to work on a farm with a lot of energy was highly regarded among the Abagusii when it came to perform work tasks. A rhino was a wild animal, which was known to have a lot of energy for work. That is why the above song kept on referring to a rhino as an embodiment of hardworking members of the community. Parents used to work much faster than children did. That is why also the song kept on referring to father and mother working hard as a rhino a wild animal which the Abagusii hunters came into contact with during their hunting experience in their past history. This song, although it has been modified, has a theme and relevance, which live unto this day among the Abagusii. The singer refuses Kemunto since she is lazy. Instead, she should be as hardworking as a rhino as the singer's parents are. This song was and still is usually performed to discourage laziness in the Abagusii community.

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<sup>317</sup> A song sung by J. Mikaye, at Mwamoriango village on 9/1/98.

\*Kemunto, apparently, was the singer's fiancée.

### 6.9 Livestock herding songs.

The domesticated animals, which were reared by the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period, included cattle, goats, sheep and poultry. Cattle were the most valued property. They provided essential products including foodstuffs such as meat, milk, butter, ghee and blood, which were highly valued. Their skins and hides were also used in making beds, cloths and shields<sup>318</sup>.

Livestock in general also had a religious importance. Religious rituals required sacrifices of poultry, cattle, sheep or goat. Goats and poultry were commonly offered to the Abagusii ancestral spirits or God, Enkoro during times of illness, drought or various kinds of misfortunes. Cattle were also important because they were used in marriages. Livestock keeping was a demanding activity that required tight security against raids especially from the cattle loving Kipsigis and Maasai. Cattle songs mainly existed in the livestock rearing regions; the songs were punctuated by whistling and various types of vibrations such as 'fwa - fwa - fwa -, fwa, ee - chwa, ee - chwa and ee - chwa. It is very important to note that the Abagusii like the Embu had a unique language that was understood by only the herdsmen and their herds. Real cattle songs' singers were expected to be intelligent, skilful, diligent persons capable of making cattle to stop feeding, moving or doing anything else in order to listen attentively to the song, apparently enjoying the music. Like the Embu, cattle songs among the Abagusii enabled the herdsmen to control their large herds effectively<sup>319</sup>.

Cattle songs were sang to induce the cattle to eat and to rally near the headsman for further "instructions" and stop eating and leave the grazing fields for the cattle sheds. Hence the herdsman had to be careful as to what to sing depending on the time of the day.

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<sup>318</sup> C.J.Choti, Op. Cit., p.77.

<sup>319</sup> H.S.K. Mwaniki, Op.Cit., p.42.

In their songs, the herdsman sang on many subjects. Like the Embu these included praising the animals, orientating the animals to a new geographical area, instructing the animals to eat grass or drink water and comforting them to 'relax'. This was a special category of entertainment songs for relaxation purposes. The following song was sung to that effect: -

*Chiombe chiato e chiombe chiato  
 Chiombe chiato e chiombe chiato  
 Nyag'era na maritati Chiombe chiato  
 Mbweri are ee baba, mbweri are Omoibi mberi are  
 Kura mono ee kuva mono  
 Kura mono ee kura mono  
 Kura mono omoibi mbweri are  
 Chiombe chiato ee chiombe chiato  
 Chiombe chiato chiarimeire sigisi  
 Abana baito ningi bare gocha koria  
 Chiachire ee baba chiachire  
 Chiachire konyora chiachire  
 Korende chiairanire  
 Nyang'era yaito mbuya ere  
 Maritati yaito mbuya ere<sup>320</sup>.*

Our cattle ee our cattle  
 Our cattle ee our cattle  
 The black and spotted  
 Our cattle  
 The thief is in the shed  
 Scream at him scream at him  
 Scream at him scream at him  
 Scream at him the thief is in the shed  
 Our cattle our cattle  
 Our animals had entered Kipsigis land  
 What would have our children eaten  
 They had already gone ee mother they had gone  
 They had already been taken  
 But black cow is safe  
 Our spotted cow is safe.

The above song was usually sang by a herdsman taking care of the animals that

<sup>320</sup> A song sung by S. Nyakweba, at Masimba market, on 29/11/97.

had been stolen or raided but had been recovered. In the song the herdsmen narrated the story on how raiders had taken them by surprise but then the animals were back. Usually the herdsmen would be happy for recovering their animals. This happiness was usually expressed through song and dance.

Diligence was a praiseworthy quality and vital for the success of any particular worker looking after livestock which was considered as an activity that demanded a sharp brain. In the pre- colonial period the Abagusii had a saying that 'Chiombe ne chia Nyakemogi nyariso riomo'<sup>321</sup>. That is, cattle can only belong to one who does not blink his eyes and has dry eyes. Whoever looked after the animals was expected to be careful not to lose any. Negligence of work was not tolerated. The following song was sung to encourage the herdsmen to take great care of their livestock: -

*Ee Omonto ogetii kende ee baba  
Omonto ogetii konde boria eeri eye magwari ang'o'  
Ee Omonto ogetii kende ee baba  
Omonto ogetii kende oboria eeri eye magwari ang'o'  
Aboria eeri eye magwari 'ang'o ee baba  
Aboria eeri eye magwari ang'o' tarochi  
Eng'ina Nyabisembe*<sup>322</sup>.

Ee somebody from different field ee mother  
Somebody from a different field asks whose bull is this spotted one  
Ee somebody from a different field ee mother  
Somebody from a different field asks whose bull is this spotted one  
Asks whose bull is this spotted one ee mother  
Asks whose bull is this one as if he cannot see  
This bull's spotted mother.

A careful herdsmen was expected to know all the animals he looked after lest he lost one or two, inquiry about the spotted bull as pointed out in the above song was a sign

<sup>321</sup> M.M.Okeng'o, Op. Cit., pp.84-85.

<sup>322</sup> A song sung by J. Kimanga, at Mwaboto village, on 22/10/97.

of carelessness. A stranger from a different field or grassland could be excused though. But the owner who knew the cattle very well could not be excused. Ever a person from a neighbourhood field or grassland with the skills of likening animals could notice the bulls' mother. This song played a vital role in encouraging the herdsmen to develop a sense of intelligence, skills and attitude for the perfection of their herding task.

### 6.10 Beer Parties' Songs and Dances

Beer parties among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period were organised to bring members of the community together. Such parties were a forum for guidance, counselling, consultations, celebrations for the community's achievement such as good harvest, conquering of enemies in war and the reviewing of the community's history. Women did the brewing of amarwa, which is beer. When the brew was ready a word would go round the village to invite community members to come for the brew. Young boys and girls were usually sent as messengers to take word round of the readiness of beer in a given house<sup>323</sup>.

Upon receiving word that beer was a ready, adult member of the society would come to the drinking place. Beer drinking was accompanied by a great moment of singing and dancing. Abagaka (men) could sit at the eero, that is, the outroom of the house where the beer, prepared in enyongo enene, that is, a big pot, was. Using chingore, meaning straws, which were usually prepared from wild plants, the men could start sipping beer as they discussed community issues. Gradually as they got drunk, they could start singing in praise of the occasion. The following was one of such songs:

*Nyansaiga mbono tokonywa  
Nyasaiga oiye oiye nyansaiga  
Amavwa na masera nyasaiga*

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<sup>323</sup> O.I. with C. Moraa at Keumbu Kisii, on 4/1/98.



*Nyasaiga oiye oiye nyasaiga*  
*Kanywe amarwa bitena- nyasaiga*  
*Kanywe amarwa bitena*  
*Nyasaiga oiye oiye nyasaiga*  
*Amarwa na masera - nyasaiga*  
*Nyasaiga oiye oiye nyasaiga*  
*Kanywe amarwa bitena nyasaiga*  
*Oiye oiye nyasaiga*<sup>324</sup>.

Comrades we are now drinking  
 Comrades oiye oiye comrades  
 This beer is good comrades  
 Comrades oiye oiye comrades  
 Drink peacefully - comrades  
 Drink peacefully  
 Comrades oiye oiye - comrades  
 This beer is good - comrades  
 Comrades oiyeoiye comrades  
 Drink peacefully - comrades  
 Oiye oiye comrades.

In a beer party, Abagusii women in the pre-colonial period were never allowed to drink beer with men in the same room. Neither were they allowed to use drinking straws. The Abagusii women usually had ebisanda, which are traditional utensils made from calabashes. When men would reach the climax of their beer party accompanied by a dance, women could be heard ululating to endorse the climax of the occasion. Women at beer parties also sang to warn against exploitation of the weak by section of the strong or more advantaged members. They could be heard singing the following song: -

*Engoko nkorera ere bwandire*  
*O amagena ane amagena ane*  
*Engoko nkorera are bwandire*  
*Amagena ane*  
*Emborie moborie ninchee, ninche narire ee*  
*Emborie moborie ninchee nariree*  
*Engoromoni ngokarariee*  
*Engoromoni ngokarariee*  
*Oo yaye buna ndere airirwee*<sup>325</sup>.

<sup>324</sup> A song sung by C. Moraa, at Keumbu Kisii, on 4/1/98.

<sup>325</sup> A song sung by M. Ondieki, at Mache -Achumbi, on 15/10/97.

The hen is crying bitterly  
 Oh my eggs my eggs  
 The hen is crying bitterly  
 My eggs  
 Yes you have eaten and said it is me  
 Yes you have eaten and said it is me  
 Famine is approaching soon  
 Famine is approaching soon  
 Oo me let me cry they have been taken.

In singing the above songs, the Abagusii women felt discriminated against when it came to the distribution of resources such as wealth, division of labour and eating certain kinds of foods such as poultry meat. In their songs, they also condemned injustice and corruption.

In this respect beer party songs tackled quite a number of subjects that included warning, advising, discouraging, encouraging and appreciating. For instance, irresponsible relations such as borrowing peoples' items without returning to the owners were discouraged. It was expected that once somebody borrowed an item from somebody he or she was to return it to the owner. The following song was usually performed at a beer party to discourage borrowing of items without returning to the owners: -

*Mokungu oisiko moino*  
*Kae Bosibori ensio yaye*  
*Mokungu oisiko moino*  
*Kae Bosibori ensio yaye*  
*Kae Bosibori ensio yaye*  
*Nero akano gesera mwaye*  
*Omaiya, omaiya chingero Bonyangero*<sup>326</sup>.

Woman of the neighbourhood  
 Return to Bosibori her grinding stone  
 Woman of the neighbourhood  
 Return to Bosibori her grinding stone  
 It is the one she uses to grind in her house  
 O'perfect person, O'perfect person sings and sings.

<sup>326</sup> M.M. Okeng'o, Op. Cit., p.90.

Loitering was also discouraged in the Abagusii community. Songs to discourage such vices were sung at beer parties as well. Abagusii had a saying that whoever loiters from house to house was lazy and irresponsible. The saying, "Mogendi gendi bisieri tana koborwa mbori"<sup>327</sup>, that is, one who loiters from door to door cannot miss an allegation. Loitering at a deeper level meant not being organised even in marriage.

In the pre-colonial period the Abagusii, like any other human society, resented all human vices such as witchcraft, theft, corruption, injustice and robbery. They had songs, which were freely sung, and danced at, at beer parties, all of which pointed accusing fingers on the above vices. All the Abagusii subjected such vices to criticism. This was because they would lead to broken marriages, unstable families, and unstable society, a low development and suspicion among community members. Witchcraft for example was singled out as the most dangerous vice of all societal members, the young and the old resented it strongly. They registered fear of it. Witchcraft in the community led to divorce, a thing which was bare in the pre-colonial Abagusii society. In case there rose divorce due to witchcraft or any other reason a man in the Abagusii community opted to take another wife. A divorced woman, in most cases would be reluctant to leave her husbands' house as this meant leaving her children in the custody of her husband or co-wife. The co-wives were notoriously known for maltreatment of other women's children.

Abagusii composed several songs and poems to decry the practice of witchcraft. The following was the common song, which was usually sung at beer parties to warn against witchcraft.

*Nyanchoka Mogesironi ee ee*  
*Nyanchoka Mogesironi mogesironi*  
*Gwatachire Omutena Obande- eeee*  
*Gwatachire Omwana Obande Okoeyana*  
*Okoeyana buna egesengi ee ee*

<sup>327</sup> O.I. with J. Mikaye, at Nyamagesa market on 21/1/98.

*Gwatachire Omwana Obande okoeyana*  
*Eee nkere eee nkere*  
*Okoeyana buna egesengi kiorosana*  
*Nyanchoka mogesironi ee ee ee*  
*Nyonchoka mogesironi Mogesironi*  
*Gwaitire Omwana Obana Ookoeyana*  
*Okoeyana buna egesengi kiorosana*  
*Nyanchoka Otagotiga ayio*<sup>328</sup>.

Nyanchoka wife of Hezron ee ee  
 Nyanchoka wife of Hezro Hezron  
 You have stepped on somebody's child - ee ee  
 You have stepped on somebody's child who breathes  
 Who breathes like a squirrel  
 You have stepped on somebody's child who breath  
 Ee it is so , ee it is so, eee it is so.  
 Who breathes like a wild squirrel  
 Nyanchoka the wife of Hezron  
 You have killed somebody's child who breathes  
 Who breathes like a wild squirrel  
 Nyanchoka leave alone such a practice.

In the above song, the performers not only decried the practice of witchcraft but also demanded that it be stopped for the development of a stable society, which was to be free from envy and witchcraft.

### 6.11 War Songs and Dances

In the pre-colonial period, the Abagusii had songs and dances, which were special for warfare from the time of preparation for war, to war period and after the war. Throughout their history, the Abagusii were involved in tribal animosity. The various Abagusii clans fought against each other. The best example is with the Bassi and Nyaribari. The Abagusii also fought with the Kipsigis, Maasai and the Luo. Cattle thefts, and other conflicts and cultural disagreements often caused these clashes<sup>329</sup>. War songs

<sup>328</sup> A song sung by Kereri Girls' Secondary School choir, during the 1997 Kisii District music festivals at Kisii High School on 26/7/97.

<sup>329</sup> O.I. with N. Ogeturenki, at Rigena village on 31/12/97.

were performed by the Abagusii to assert their superiority and also to encourage warriors to fight “winning battles”. In preparation for war, the warriors in high spirits performed songs and dances in order to confront the enemy with a lot of confidence. War songs were sung and poems recited especially by women and the old men to praise the warriors so that they could fight to the very end of the war. After war songs and dances were performed to praise the warriors more especially after they had recovered the animals that had been stolen by the enemies<sup>330</sup>. For example in the late 1880s the Mojoge cattle thieves got bolder and on one occasion organised an armed thieves’ mission to Bassi country. The Bassi ambushed the thieves and at Ekebengo, close to Etoro, the entire Majoge thieves mission was annihilated. To teach the Majoge a decisive lesson the Bassi followed up their victory with more attacks on Majoge village and on the same night, they destroyed many Majoge huts, seized their cattle and killed those who offered resistance. Happy with their victory, the Bassi warriors sang the following song on their way home.

*Iyooo twaitire Abamajoge,  
Ekeru Twaitire barabwo baraire iyooo  
Iyoo twaitire abamajoge  
Ekeru barabwo bararoire.*<sup>331</sup>

Iyoo we have burnt the Majoge  
While sleeping, Iyoo,  
We have burnt the Majoge  
While sleeping, iyoo.

Song and dance also played a very important role in the battle of “saosa” which was a war between the Abagusii and the Kipsigis at Cherengani. Prior to the battle, the Kipsigis often raided North Mugirango, Kitutu, Nyaribari, Bassi and Majoge clans of the Abagusii. In 1891, the Abagusii realised that if they were to survive at all something had

<sup>330</sup> W.R. Ochieng’, Op. Cit., p.156.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., p.129.

to be done about the Kipsigis. Two elders of the Kitutu, Ogalo and Kimaiga collected their people at seusi, near Manga, and reminded them of the constant trouble and destruction that had been done, they asked the warriors, "to make our homes and children safe from the evil and treacherous Kipsigis". In this meeting the Kitutu elders agreed that another meeting should be called in which leading elders and warriors from Nyaribari, Bassi and North Mugirango should be present.

In the next meeting presided over by Sakawa son of Ngiti, the main topic of discussion was defence arrangement against the Kipsigis and Maasai. Kimaiga, pessimistically observed that if they were not to act swiftly the Abagusii as a tribe would be finished through killings and assimilation. In conclusion he called on North Mugirango, Kitutu, Nyaribari and Bassi to bury their differences and to fight the Kipsigis as a united front. This speech was crowned with song and dance from the members presented. In the meeting, two resolutions were passed. First, that wherever Kipsigis or Maasai cattle raiders were seen in Gusii land, horns were to be blown, drums beaten and a word had to be sent round so that the Gusii warriors could come out to meet the enemy. Second, Sakawa was asked to keep the Abagusii well informed, since he was a prophet, on any day when the Kipsigis or Maasai would strike<sup>332</sup>.

Word got round to the Kipsigis that the Abagusii had united against them, says the tradition. For two to three years, the tradition says, the Kipsigis did not set foot in Gusii land, except on a few thieving expeditions and not organised raiding expeditions. During the Kipsigis' raid in Luo land, the Abagusii began to blow their horns and beat their drums accompanied by war songs and dances. They knew that the Kipsigis had gone to raid in Luo land. Runners were sent from Kitutu to Nyaribari and Bassi. Warriors, on receipt of

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<sup>332</sup> S.S. Lang'at, "Some Aspects of Kipsigis History before 1914", In B.G. McIntosh (Ed.), Ngano, (Nairobi 1976) p.71.

the news, hurried northwards to Manga. By the early hours of the morning, the Kitutu, Bassi, Nyaribari and North Mugirango forces had lined up along the eastern edge of Manga escarpment, in ambush. At dawn a lot of noise was heard from the direction of Kabondo. The Luo were chasing the Kipsigis raiders. When the Kipsigis began to ascend the escarpment, along the valley of the river Cherachani, they fell upon the Abagusii, at Getwanyi in Kitutu. Aided by the Luo who were hurrying the Kipsigis from Kabondo, the Abagusii killed the Kipsigis. According to the Abagusii traditions, the water of river Cherachani turned to blood, due to the slashed bodies of the Kipsigis that were thrown into it. Some Kipsigis warriors attempted to hide themselves in the marshes along the river, some pretending to be dead by covering themselves with the blood and intestines of the dead. But the Abagusii were not taking any chances. With the spirit of victory, they tested whether all the Kipsigis bodies were dead. The Abagusii did this by piercing them with spears. They discovered that some of the Kipsigis stirred with anguish at such tests, the Abagusii embarked on a full-scale cutting into pieces of all the bodies that lay along the river:

So great was the Abagusii population  
that the Kipsigis elders ordered an initiation  
of young boys in advance of their appointed  
time, and encouraged the boys to marry  
early so as to increase the population of the tribe<sup>333</sup>.

The Abagusii who had never in their history achieved such a victory over their enemies were extremely elated. They named the bloody fight the "Battle of saosa". And as each Gusii group left the battlefield; they garlanded themselves with flowers and sang merrily as they trotted home. For example the Bassi warriors sang the following: -

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<sup>333</sup> W.R. Ochieng', Op. Cit., p.132.

*Oo oo sanyera*  
*Omayo Oo sanyera banto, ee sanyera*  
*Ee ee gwansora buna tata, sanyera*  
*Oo oo sanyera nanto, ee sanyera*

They used to follow us and to disturb us Ee sanyera  
 They should stop to follow us, Ee Sanyera  
 As they followed our ancestors, Ee Sanyera  
 They used to follow us and disturb us, Ee Sanyera

The Nyaribari and Kitutu group sang an equally joyous victory song. Theirs went as follows:

*Takaga mogori nabwo bangas saosa*  
*Ee benga saosa, Oraiya Oraiya kani chingero*  
*Oo bonyangero.*

You cannot compare the battle of Migori  
 With the Battle of Saosa Oraiya  
 Yes not even the songs of  
 Oo oo Oraiya<sup>334</sup>.

The defeat of the Kipsigis had a lot of importance on the nature of Kitutu and North Mugirango settlement. People of Masaba could now expand southeastwards across river kuja and sondu. In North Mugirango People began to expand towards Ikonge. In Eastern Kitutu expansion was made to the area of the present day Rigoma. The war songs that were performed during the victory of Saosa battle are still remembered by some Abagusii clans. In this way then songs and dances acted as a record of wars as important events in the Abagusii history

While singing war songs, the singers used great names of such wild animals as lions, elephants and rhinoceros to praise the successful warriors. The following was an example of such songs:

*Abaisia ababe twairanirie chiombe*  
*Sibuori nyarimboo - mboo*  
*Twabuire esegi ya Abarumbwa*  
*Sibuori nyarimboo - mboo*

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.



*Ntwe nabasacha bono*  
*Sibuori nyarimboo -*  
*Mbono to kare gocha*  
*Sibuori nyarimbo - mboo*  
*Twensi twachire Sibuori nyarimbo - mboo*  
*Toe gento torie Sibuori nyarimboo - mboo*  
*Twensi twachire*  
*Sibuori nyarimboo – mboo*<sup>335</sup>.

‘Big boys’ we have recovered the animals  
 We are the lions - Mboo  
 We have won the battle of the Kipsigis “Lumbusa”  
 We are the lions - Mboo  
 We are now men, We are now men  
 We are the lions - Mboo  
 We have come all  
 We are the lions - mboo  
 Give us something to eat  
 We are the lions - mboo  
 We have come all  
 We are the lions - mboo.

The above song was usually performed by Abagusii when they recovered their stolen cattle especially from Kipsigis and Maasai lands. Warriors were expected to be firm whenever war erupted. Warriors were required by the Abagusii taboo not to tell their mothers or women news concerning a war whenever they planned it. According to Abagusii tradition telling women about the planned war in advance would automatically lead to the defeat of the warriors in the war by enemy.

## 6.12 Funeral Songs (Dirges)

Death is the last social process one undergoes in society after birth, circumcision and marriage. There is an Abagusii saying that amakweri namakoro that is death is as old as mankind. In the pre-colonial period, the Abagusii considered death as an inevitable eventually. It was accepted inescapable reality of human existence. The Abagusii

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<sup>335</sup> A song sung by a group of elders at Masimba village, on 27/10/97.

respected the dead and often offered sacrifices to them. They believed that a person who died at an advanced age joined the ancestral spirits in the underworld from where he or she determined events on earth<sup>336</sup>. It was against this background that funeral dirges communicated a sense of optimism so as to perpetuate the noble belief of death being a normal and expected phenomenon of life<sup>337</sup>. The Abagusii tended to attribute death to ancestral powers or Enkoro, God. Death was also attributed to witchcraft.

After death funeral songs were performed. There were song-texts designed for funerals. There were only short and repetitive choruses that were hummed at amabe, funerals. The nature and wording of those choruses entirely depended on such factors as the environment surrounding the death which included the cause of the death, the age of the deceased and the relationship of the death to the mourners. Songs were composed instantly to mourn the dead. Such songs varied in their style of presentation and performance but they all pointed at a major theme of mourning the dead person.

The Abagusii understood death as an evil that attracted both friends and foes. At death, one won the community's veneration even if he or she was bad during his or her lifetime. Death being the greatest misfortune and agonising experience was a communal concern. The community came together not only to assist in the final disposal of the deceased's remains but also to console the bereaved members and to give them new hope. In consoling the bereaved family, mourners, friends and relatives could sing such funeral dirges as:

*Baba, ng'ina kerubo notana korera okure  
Baba ng'ina kerubo notana korera e ochire  
Bororo mbori goita kanga bwaitire abange  
Bororo mbori goita kanga bwaitire abange  
Makweri namakoro notana korera baba  
Makweri namakoro notana korera baba*

<sup>336</sup> O.I. with C. Moraa, at Keumbu, on 4/1/98.

<sup>337</sup> M.M. Okeng'o, Op. Cit., p98.

*Ngai ndarusie omwana onga kerubo  
 Ngai ndarusie omwana onga kerubo Baba,  
 Baba, Ngina omwana notana korera  
 Baba ng'ina omwana notana korera okure<sup>338</sup>.*

My mother, mother kerubo don't cry she is dead  
 My mother, mother kerubo don't cry she is gone  
 Sorrow never kills it would have killed many  
 Sorrow never kills it would have killed many  
 Death is an old phenomenon so don't cry mother  
 Death is an old phenomenon so don't cry mother  
 Where will I get a child like Kerubo  
 Where will I get a child like Kerubo  
 My mother, mother of the child don't cry she is dead  
 My mother, mother of the child doesn't cry she is dead.

With a deliberate use of repetition, the mourners in the above funeral dirge affirmed to their audience that death was a reality in the continuity of life. Death was inevitable and had been there since time immemorial and yet the society continued to be there. Therefore there was no cause for much worry. The dirge implied that death was not to break the family or community down. Instead, it was to provide a base on which the future was to be projected. However, mourners in their funeral dirges agreed that death of a beloved member of a given family was a very bitter experience. But then they comforted the audience that sorrow does not kill. If it were so, it could have killed many people on earth. The implication here was that bitterness could not harm the living. The bereaved in such funeral dirges were reminded that other members of the community had faced similar experiences before but had not died neither had they lost hope.

In another funeral dirge, mourners always accepted that death was a bad experience to the family, which could not be easily forgotten. They sang the following:

*Ngatara aaria Magombo nganyora omongina okorera  
 Ngatara aaria Magombo nganyora omongina okorera  
 Ngai ndarusie omomura onga Nyanchera?  
 Ngai ndarusie omoiseke onga kemunto?*

<sup>338</sup> A funeral dirge performed by C.Moraa and I Mogire at, Chingoko village, on 17/11/97.

*Obororo nobororo bwaitire abange*<sup>339</sup>.

I visited Magombo, I found an elderly mother crying  
 I visited Magombo, I found an elderly mother crying  
 Where will I get a son like Nyanchera?  
 Where will I get a daughter like Kemunto?  
 Sorrow is sorrow and has finished many.

In the above funeral dirge, mourners communicated the message that physical departure of a beloved son or daughter of a given couple meant a great loss not only to the family but the community in general, it brought a terrible experience. It was a loss to the mother who usually experienced pain at pregnancy and at birth which now become a waste as a result of death. Mourners who usually were close to the deceased performed the above funeral dirge in the funeral. They did so out of emotional affliction.

### 6.13 Religious Songs and Dances

In the pre-colonial period, singing and dancing or some sacred chanting accompanied each religious practice among the Abagusii. People acknowledged their creator through worship. They worshipped to thank him for being kind to them, they could plead or appeal to him over the things they thought he had allowed to happen or sent to them as a punishment. These include plagues, epidemics and droughts. All occasions were accompanied by monotonous but rhythmical and tonal chanting among the Abagusii like the case of Embu<sup>340</sup>.

At worship, the performers were not expected to sing in high-pitched voices. A moderate voice and movement of the legs backwards and forwards could do. However, at

<sup>339</sup> A song performed by B. Mokeira at Manga market on 17/11/97.

<sup>340</sup> For example, see H.S.K. Mwaniki, *Op. Cit.*, p.60.

such occasions there was hectic stamping of ground with sticks or with the performers feet. The significance of this was to express tribute to the ancestors on one hand and appeal to them on the other. At certain points of performance the male participants could jump as high as two or three feet above the ground as an expression of joy. There was a moderate clapping of hands especially by the female participants to express joy.

The moderately pitched voice in the religious songs was a gesture of humility before God and ancestors. Dry seasons were thought by the Abagusii to be occasions for Enkoro, God and the ancestors to express their displeasure about certain behaviour of the community. They were seasons for punishment. In petitioning God and the ancestors' spirits, performers of religious songs were expended to supplicate and show remorse<sup>341</sup>. This was done in humility of mid-pitched voices during performance.

In celebrating a good harvest, the Abagusii had a celebration, which they referred to as ribina, that is merry making dancing. This was a dance for closing the old year and beginning of the new. When the Abagusii wanted to please their God. They danced the ribina so that their 'gods' would in turn send them rain. This took place in the open air and in circles<sup>342</sup>. The inner ring stood facing the out ring. Each participant placed the left hand on her breasts, while the right hand was held by the partner straight in front of the body. They jumped very high, nodding their heads. Every time jumping stopped, they took two steps backwards and then started again without getting back at the original place. Ribina dance was usually performed by women only.

When dryness lasted for long after ribina dance, the elders of the clan, both men and women, meet at a chosen place for prayers. The leader wore a black skin. A goat was slaughtered, roasted whole and eaten. Left overs were left there. They drank beer

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<sup>341</sup> M.M. Okeng'o, Op. Cit., p.102.

<sup>342</sup> G.S. Zake, Op. Cit., pp. 97-98.

while others danced Orogunchara, an antelope horn was blown to summon others to come and join in the dance. It is said by the Abagusii tradition that on the same day, sometimes before they stopped dancing, rain would fall.

An alternative procedure was when women arranged the dance. Two women from one village would walk to another village, to a woman who was known for throwing clubs and for performing singing the ribina dance. They would snatch the clubs and a small skin of an animal from her as a sign of competition in ribina dance by the various villages. The woman whose club and skin had been taken would report to the elders who would arrange for the ceremonies. They then smeared their body skins with oil and red ochre.

Meanwhile the two women messengers would inform their people to prepare themselves. They in turn would oil and dye their skins until the contest day. Neighbouring villages from whom the club and skin were taken, would then go to those who had challenged them, collect their gear and arrange for the day they would meet. When the day came, both men and women, young and old wore their prepared skins and proceeded to the proposed field. They danced and danced until very late. This dance was usually done during the afternoon. In this case also rain used to fall after the dance. After the rains crops could grow well and the Abagusii used to have good harvests.

In celebrating a good harvest, the Abagusii could sing in a high raised voice with a vigorous dance for what God had done unto them. The following song serves as an illustration:

*Banto baito, obanto baito*  
*Banto baito, obanto baito*  
*Baito chinchugu nchiama roche nchianywa amache*  
*Ewawa Nyarikamoro nchiama*  
*Nchiama roche nchiama roche*  
*Nchiama roche nchiama roche*  
*Baito chinchugu nchiama roche*  
*Nchiama roche ewawa nyarikamoro nchiama.*

Our people, our people  
 Our people, our people  
 Our groundnuts grew well near the river  
 Oh yes the harvest is good  
 They grew well near the river, grew well  
 They grew well near the river, grew well  
 Our people groundnut grew well near the river  
 Grew well near the river yes they grew.

In performing the above song, the Abagusii thanked God for the good harvest.

#### **6.14 The Role of Songs and Dances in the Early Colonial Period up to 1919**

The Abagusii composed and sang various songs to condemn the forceful occupation of the British on their land. Such songs expressed their feeling of bitterness and dissatisfaction to the oppression under which they lived. They resented forced labour, introduction of hut tax and the destruction of their traditional way of living. The abusive songs during this period portrayed that the Abagusii were unhappy with the mistreatment they received from their colonial master. Messages of discontent, bitterness and grievances were all carried through songs and dances. Such songs brought a sense of unity among the Abagusii clans who came together to fight for their rights. While working on European farms where they were forced to work, Abagusii men sang several songs all of which pointed at the oppression they had undergone in their own land. They also performed such songs to keep them in high spirits so that they could finish work in good time. When the colonial rule in Gusiiland abolished ebisarate, cattle villages, by counting their huts and imposing heavy taxes on them, in the name of hut tax, the Abagusii, especially the young men who lived in the ebisarate protested this move by singing songs of bitterness against the British rule. Nevertheless, these village were eventually destroyed.

During the early occupation of the British in Gusiiland a number of social-economic policies were introduced which altered the tradition social roles among the Abagusii. As they performed all these roles the Abagusii composed songs and poems which gave them encouragement and pleasure as they performed these duties.

When the Christian missionaries arrived in Gussiland they got a few converts whom they trained in order to have a base for preaching salvation. They taught the early converts Christian songs and dances. During Christians gathering songs and dances with sacred texts were performed to grace the occasion. They were also performed to attract a large crowd since they had very interesting and admirable melodies. Such songs functioned to give the early converts encouragement and hope in their Christians lives. The songs were also used as vehicles to preach the gospel, since they were good to listen to and won the souls of many. In the denominational schools, pupils were taught and encouraged to sing sacred songs mainly from religious hymns. Such songs made the young converts to realize the relationship between God and his people. For example the Seventh Day Adventist church had a songbook, Ogotera kwa Nyasae which was a hymn book for all church services. The songs contained in such a hymn book preached the gospel and the will of God. In the Seventh Day Adventist School, pupils had to master most of the songs as this was mandatory. In this way then, songs were used as a source of inspiration.

#### **6.15 The Role of Songs from 1920 to the Second World War Period**

The years between 1920 and 1945 saw the various social- economic changes in Gusiiland, which called for the role of songs and dances in one way or the other. Already by 1920 the new colonial institutions of wage labour taxation and education had been established.



The expansion of agriculture and the penetration of capitalism in the area were pursued in this period.

Significant changes and increased colonial efforts in the promotion of agriculture, trade, education, transport and other social-economic institutions thus characterized the period between 1920 and 1945. Land tenure systems, legal rights, inheritance and property rights, marriage and family arrangements were all affected profoundly by the vigorous colonial policies of this period as noted early on between 1920 and 1930 the Abagusii spread further into the areas bordering Maasailand and Kipsigisland. This resulted in an increase in border conflicts and cattle raidings. Consequently the Abagusii were moved from the Kipsigis border. This led to the creation of a buffer zone in the Sotik area, which was taken up by the colonial settlers. The creation of colonial settlement and agricultural activities increased. This called for the recruitment of labour. Various methods were employed in luring people into labour market as it was ordered out by the chiefs and headmen under instructions from the D.C. The recruiting methods included armed raids and other ploys. Some private recruiters could often misrepresent themselves as government agents as the chiefs took the DC's requests to provide labour as an order, to forcibly seize parties of young men and dispatch them as virtual prisoners to Kisumu.

Employment outside the reserve increasingly became a major means through which large number of Gusii men raised money for tax. The Abagusii migrated to Magadi soda works and Kericho estates in 1930s.<sup>343</sup> All these became an important source of employment. Songs and dances continued to play an integral role as agents of socialization and also to keep the workers in the high spirits of working.

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<sup>343</sup> Arap Korir, K.M., "The Tea Plantation Economy in Kericho and related phenomena to circa 1960". B.A. Dissertation, History Department, Univerasity of Nairobi, 1976 p.52.

The year 1939 was certainly an important transitional year in the history of Gusiiland. The years of the great depression began to ease around this period. Agricultural produce once again flourished and all crops produced found ready market. However, the major impact of the 1929-1932 world economic crisis was the realization within the colonial officialdom of the need to increase and diversify the income earning capacity and opportunities respectively for Africans. This could ensure uninterrupted payment of taxes and thus the boosting of the colony's revenues. This became a major governmental and imperial concern as from 1933 onwards. An agricultural school was inaugurated at Kisii and an agricultural officer posted in 1933. The same year also saw the appointment of a produce inspector in trading centres. His responsibility was to assess the suitability of a crop for sale. A local nature farm was started at Kisii to grow all crops for demonstration purposes. Such crops included maize, linseed, coffee, Canadian wonder beans, marrow fat peas, Irish potatoes and guavas. The local native council distributed improved seeds of various crops throughout the district. In addition, 700 orange seedlings were issued <sup>344</sup>. In 1936 the first agricultural show was organized in Kisii. Traditional dancers and school choirs were invited to present their songs and dances to entertain the show goers. Here song and dances played an important role not only for entertainment but also bringing people of various races and origins for better socialization and understanding. From then agricultural shows were organized at Kisii town annually. Songs and dances continued to be a source of pleasure and socializing agent in such shows.

Around 1937, the colonial settlers had allowed the growing of coffee to the Abagusii growers. 25 growers in the Gusiighlands, Chief Musa alone had cultivated a total of 50 acres of the crop. By the end of 1937, the attitude of most of the Abagusii

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<sup>344</sup> KNA/DC/KSI/1/4, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports 1933-1938.

peasants had changed in favour of coffee growing and, writing in the same year, the agricultural officer remarked, "It is no longer a question of persuading people to plant, but of selecting the most suitable applicants and allowing them to plant small areas only."<sup>345</sup> The introduction of coffee as a cash crop in Gusiiland played a role in changing patterns of accumulation and status. Abagusii musicians composed songs to encourage farmers to grow coffee since the crop fetched good market prices. The following is one of such songs:

*Abaremi baminto mwensi*  
*Mionore rero*  
*Tosimeke Chikagwa minto*  
*Tonyore Chibesa*  
*Abaremi baminto mwensi*  
*Toreme chikagwa*  
*Intwe \*Mwanyangetinge*  
*Tonyore chibesa.*<sup>346</sup>

All our esteemed farmers  
 Remember today  
 Let us Plant coffee  
 To get money  
 All our esteemed farmers  
 Us \*Mwanyangetinge  
 To get money.

The singer of the above song aimed at urging his or her hearers to improve their living standards by exploiting the agricultural resource which has been introduced to Gusiiland as opposed to other parts of Kenya, where the growing of such a crop was forbidden.

In the 1940s, the Abagusii women, children and men were the most hardworking population in the whole of western Kenya. They were faced with great burdens in the

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> A song sung by N. Mogere, at Bondaracha village, on 3/1/98.

\* Mwanyangetinge is a term which is used to date to refer to the members of the Abagusii origin.

transition towards an increasingly commercialized agriculture <sup>347</sup>. Songs and dances inspired their spirits while working on farms.

#### **6.16 The Role of Songs and Dances among the Abagusii in the Post War Period**

The prosperity of first and second world wars periods, perhaps coupled with the greater consciousness of the outside world, induced the Abagusii for more legal system of government, education facilities and improved standards of living by the end of 1945. The intensification of agricultural production was great<sup>348</sup>. As far as educational facilities were concerned, a state whereby before the wars most of the schools were owned by denominations who barred some children from other denominations, to get access to education was rectified. Due to increased demand, the Local Native Council decided in 1944 to built non-denominational schools. There was likewise a rapid increase of candidates for the common entrance examination from 65 in 1942 to 202 and 320 in 1944 and 1946 respectively<sup>349</sup>. Songs and dances were encouraged in schools to promote a sense of belonging.

The colonial government and Native Council Schools had a broad curriculum, which accommodated or permitted the performance of secular songs and dances as well as local drama. All these creative arts in one way or another acted as a socializing agent and also a record of the preservation of personal identity and African culture. The following table shows major intermediate and secondary institutions in Gusiiland by 1955.

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<sup>347</sup> KNA DC/KSI/1/3, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports.

<sup>348</sup> KNA/DC/KSI/1/7, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports, 1945.

<sup>349</sup> O.I. with M. Nyaboke, at Bochoria Village, Nyamira, on 16/12/97.

**Table 8: Major Post Primary Institutions in Gusiiland by 1955**

Type	Name of School	Sponsor	Location
Secondary	Government African School Kisii	Colonial Government	Kisii
Intermediate	Kereri	District Education Board	Nyaribari
Intermediate	Gionseri	District Education Board	Bassi
Intermediate	Nyabururu	Roman Catholic Church	Kitutu
Intermediate	Amasago	Roman Catholic Church	Nyaribari
Intermediate	Itibo	Pente Coastal Assemblies of God	Kitutu
Intermediate	Iterio	Swedish Lutheran Mission	Wanjare
Intermediate	Nyanchwa	Seventh day Adventist	Nyaribari
Intermediate	Sengera	Seventh Day Adventist	Kitutu
Intermediate	Gesusu	Seventh Day Adventist	Nyaribari
Intermediate	Magena	Seventh Day Adventist	Machoge
Intermediate	Motagara	Seventh Day Adventist	North ugirango

Source: KNA DC/KSI/5/3 South Nyanza Gazatteer, 1943-1955.

In Gusiiland, like many other British Colonial Africa the Principle of indirect rule required that colonial officials administer through local chiefs, abagambi (Omugambi – singular). Colonial officials used the chiefs and elders to reach the rest of the people and even in interpreting certain traditions and customs that the colonialists did not comprehend<sup>350</sup>. Such colonial chiefs in Gusiiland included Mathayo Ratemo of Bobasi, Asa Onyiego of BomaChoge and Musa Nyandusi of Nyaribari. Colonial officials also sought to handle conflicts through the application of customary law, with justice meted out through “native” courts. Chiefs and headmen in Gusiiland in the post war period organized village and local Baraza, that is, Public meetings to educate the Abagusii. During such meetings songs and dances were performed for entertainment purposes before serious issues could be discussed.<sup>351</sup>

Most of the Abagusii musicians attained high level of creativity when new and advanced musical instruments, such as electric guitars, pianos and modern drums were introduced by 1970. Songs and dances were composed and encompassed a number of subjects such as nationalism, romance and sacred texts. The Abagusii songs and dances were greatly enriched in creativity and instrumentalization. Such artistic values continued to play a vital role in economic, social and economic spheres of the Abagusii culture. For example, the colonial socio-economic structure presented a fundamental transformation in Gusiiland that had far reaching implication. With little or vague understanding of the Abagusii customary law and traditions, colonial officials tended to enact policies that disrupted social and economic organisation of the community. Men were pressurized to enter the wage labour force through taxation and abolition of cattle villages by 1912. However, male migration reached its peak between 1930 and 1960. The absence of some

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<sup>350</sup> KNA DC/KSI/1/3, South Kavirondo District Annual Reports.

<sup>351</sup> O.I. with M. Nyaboke, at Bochoria Village, Nyamira, on 16/12/97.

men due to this migratory labour presented their wives with opportunities for exercising decision-making powers and general management of the household. The introduction of cash crops such as coffee, tea and phyrethrum as from 1930s led to the increased participation of the Abagusii in agricultural production.

The colonial era opened increased opportunities for the Abagusii in terms of formal trading and marketing centres and roads for transportation purposes. As the Abagusii men were associated more with cash crops and the running of shops, women reigned in open market activities. In the marketplaces, the Abagusii were able to acquire musical instruments, songs and dances from the people they traded with. Such people included the Luo, the Maasai, and the Kipsigis. Song and dance competitions were also organized in the open-air market. In this way then songs and dances acted as socialising agents to the various trading communities.

As a result of the outbreak of the first and second world wars, carrier corps were recruited from Gusii land. Mostly young men from Gusii villages were recruited to participate in the world wars leaving behind women, children and the aged. Sometimes these young men were forced to go outside Gusiiland. Back at home there was a problem since this kind of migration labour system caused breakage of family ties. Those who remained at home lived in fear with a lot of psychological suffering. They more often than not found themselves singing songs that expressed their suffering, sorrow and discomfort as they remembered the absence of their kinsmen from their villages most of whom were bread winners to their families. Division of labour was disrupted as women were left to do most of the tasks that were previously performed by men, songs in these respects consoled them. When the Abagusii who had gone to participate in both the first

and second world returned from the wars they were welcomed home with songs and dances.

The Abagusii in the post war period continued to compose songs to reflect their past history. Such songs reminded them of the past events that formed the base for the present and future. During work sessions, especially during harvesting, a singer could remind his hearers of the past droughts, famines, and plagues. The major aim was to teach them to be careful in storing food so that they could not starve should such calamity befall them. In that respect the following song was sung: -

*Ekebwe ngiakura manga nse  
Ee manga nse ekebwe ngia kura ee  
E manga nse baba motegere nyangweso  
Obori bwa baba keande  
Ee keande obori bwa baba  
Ee matagoro baba motegere nyangweso  
Ee nyangweso yacha  
Enyangweso yacha yaboriaa - ee yaboria  
baba motegere nyangwesoo<sup>352</sup>.*

A fox is crying at Manga down  
At manga down the fox is crying ee  
Ee Manga down keep watch of the locust  
My mothers' millet has grown well  
Has grown well my mothers' millet  
Grown nicely keep watch of locust  
The locust came and ate it- ate it locust came  
Ate it please keep watch of locust.

The above song was sung to remind the Abagusii of the locust invasion in Gusii land during this period that resulted in a disastrous famine. It was believed that the ancestral spirits sent wild animals such as foxes to warn people of the danger of locust invasion but people did not take it seriously<sup>353</sup>.

<sup>352</sup> O.I., with Buyaki, at Bonyamoyio, on 16/1/98.

<sup>353</sup> O.I., with T. Bosibori at Nyangononi market on 30/12/97.



In the late 1940s, the locusts invaded Gusii land and ate all the farm produce such as finger millet, maize and beans. This situation led to enchara enene, great famine, which entered in the record of the Abagusii history. The song was thus performed to warn against carelessness in the spending of food since there could have been another advent of locusts or any other natural calamity. Proper utilisation of the available resources was demanded by the Abagusii to be vital for the stable development of the community. In this respect therefore performers of the above song used the past as a raw material to interpret and mould the present and future<sup>354</sup>.

The other type of songs and dances that were developed and enriched in the post war period were esimbore, entabanana, egoro or esita, erieri or eburu, esubo or enyabububu, chingero and some unique dances.

Esimbore were songs that were performed in this period, like it used to be, to praise the initiates for being brave and facing the circumcision knife without panicking. These songs were slightly different from those of the past periods in that they had additional words and messages to the initiates to reflect the changing times. A company of the male initiates to the seclusion place singers could sing:-

*Obeire momura obeire momura ee  
bono mambiaaa  
Ise amosike ise amosike ee  
Omoisia omoke obororo bwareire  
Omoisia omoke obororo bwamorire  
Oremereirie, oremereirie.*

He has become a man become a man ee  
this morning aa  
Let his father respect him his mother to do so  
This small lad has undergone pain  
This small lad has undergone pain  
But he has proved to be brave, brave enough.

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<sup>354</sup> M.M. Okeng'o, Op. Cit., p.90.

In the above male circumcision song, boys were advised to keep out of their mother's rooms and parents were advised to respect the initiates hence forth since he had now undergone the rite of becoming a man and he had now graduated into a man. The initiates received praise through the above songs. Esimbore songs continued to shed light on the future role of the initiates and division of labour in the family. Esimbore songs were predominantly vocal, that is, they were performed without instruments except for the obokano. Esimbore songs were performed in August, December and January so as to allow initiates to first attend school for their basic education<sup>355</sup>. These songs also carried themes such as nationalism, community relations and division of labour among the Abagusii.

Entabanana songs and their jumping style of dancing called ekebenenia, that is shaking were performed for the entertainment of people at social gathering such as community meetings to solve disputes, chiefs' baraza, meetings and community worship through ancestors' spirits. They were also performed when opening new markets, marriages, harvesting, naming celebrations and at post-burial celebrations to comfort the bereaved. A marriage or wedding celebration when all the in-laws of the couple met to feast and drink, amarwa, beer made from maize, an obokano player led the group in singing and dancing all day. After harvesting crops, Gusii men and women used to meet on a special date, slaughter a goat or a cow and organised for a drum music, which began in the evening and continued till the morning hours. The naming entabanana song was performed. The ekebana dance was basically a horseshoe shaped spectacle involving an obokano player and chorus. The dancers and the obokano player performed in an arch formation then the performance reached the climax<sup>356</sup>.

<sup>355</sup> O.I., with E. Nyarng'o at Nyakongo village, on 28/10/97.

<sup>356</sup> G.S. Were and D. Nyamwaya, Op. Cit., pp. 185-186.

Egoro were war songs, which were performed during this period after a successful battle with an enemy in which some of the enemies were killed. These songs when performed before going to war were called esita. Since tribal wars declined in the period after 1960, egoro songs were used to celebrate the recovery of stolen cattle. Egoro songs were also performed after a successful hunt of wild animals such as buffaloes, lions, elephants and other wild beasts, which harassed the community<sup>357</sup>.

The composite horn, engoma accompanied esita and egoro songs, which exhorted brave men and fighters. Hunters of wild animals in this period used to wear the skins of animals and were accorded celebrations, songs and dances on success.

Erieri, songs were performed at the post burial remembrance rirtual for a departed relative during which some sacrificial offerings were made. On the appointed date relatives from far and near sing and dance to remember the dead. The obokano, rirandi, engoma and chikonu featured prominently as musical instruments during the performance. Erieri and some war songs were performed with the enactment of war tactics using bows, arrows, spears and shields. The song texts of erieri and eburu praised the deceased and comforted the bereaved.

In the post war period, emeino poems were developed. After an organized communal labour, Gusii men performed them in a narrative style (in free rhythm) at beer parties and at home for entertainment. Emeino, poems were also sung and performed at weddings and when men were drinking, feasting and really enjoying themselves. With the songs they praised each other for their achievements during their youthful days. The emeino contained many wise sayings which were meant to guide the youths and the community in general in their day to day transactions<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid. p.186.

<sup>358</sup> O.I. with N. Mogire, at Bondaracha, on 3/1/98.

Esubo or enyabububu were songs by circumcised boys and their teachers' when their wounds had healed and were now ready to come out of the seclusion 'den' to join in the tasks performed by other members of the family and the community.

Chingero songs were also performed in this period when the Abagusii could perform certain tasks, for example building, weeding and domestic activities such as looking after babies. In this category were the grain grinding songs to praise farmers who cultivated the various crops such as finger millet, maize and potatoes. Esubo and chingero songs were mainly performed as work songs to keep the workers in good working spirits. They were also performed when members of the Abagusii community celebrated over the proceeds from their labour, which they considered rewarding after hard labour. These songs carried the message that hard labour and patience in performing work tasks always pays. The dance styles accompanying the above-explained songs were okwareria, where dancing involved the use of arms and the trunk, alternatively moving towards the ground. In the above discussion, it can be realized that the post war period was characterized by a variety of songs and dances which were developed in form and function to a point of specialisation where each song and dance had a function in the social, economic and political spheres of the Abagusii way of life. Such songs were handed over from one generation to another to remind the descendants of Mogusii about their past history. In this way then songs and dances played an important role as a record of the Abagusii's cultural history.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

This study was an incisive and purposeful historical study of songs and dances among the Abagusii of Kenya. A sample of the Abagusii knowledgeable men and women and other music professionals all over Gusiiland were reached to provide information concerning this research project. The respondents totalled to 43 members. The songs have been literally translated from Ekegusii to English. The various respondents interviewed during the field research varied in ages and occupations and came from different parts of Gusiiland.

Chapter one deals with the introduction of the research. It covers such areas as the context of the problem, which gives a brief introduction of the research. It introduces songs and dances, and the role they play in the traditional life of African communities, Abagusii in particular. It is also in this section that the people, that is Abagusii, and the geographical study area are defined. The works that relate to our study are reviewed. This review starts from East Africa, then to Kenya and to the Abagusii in particular. Although the studies are not directly connected to our study of the Abagusii songs and dances, they shed some light on the understanding of the Abagusii cultural history and songs and dances in particular. It is in this chapter that we also get the statement of the problem. This chapter clearly shows that no specialised study has been carried on the Abagusii songs and dances before. This research was specially carried out to document what had been for long period forgotten.

The objectives of the study, research premises and a justification of the importance of carrying out this research are all presented in this chapter. Theoretical approaches,

mainly sociological, which are enriched with the perspective of cultural change with the vigour of historical method, are applied in our study of songs and dances among the Abagusii. The methodology that was adopted to realise data collection is also discussed in this chapter. Secondary and primary sources were employed. These methods brought about positive and desirable data, which enabled proper compiling of the research findings.

Chapter two deals with the origins, migration and the early cultural history of the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period. This provides a base on which songs and dances among the Abagusii are grounded. The pre-colonial Gusii society was run on patriarchal system and man was the major actor in terms of decision making and leadership. Division of labour on the basis of age and sex ensured that, at least, each member of the household performed his/her roles for the well being of the family. The capitalist tendencies and its mercantile relations were generally absent within the Gusii substituting unit of production. The household was the basic unit of socio-economic production.

The Gusii pre-colonial society's major goal was to produce and reproduce the material conditions of existence and community members respectively. Any goods produced or items of trade were regarded as important for their use value rather than capital formation. The Abagusii had well-developed socio-economic and cultural institutions that were organised and run effectively. They valued their traditions more than anything else did. Songs and dances played a crucial role in all the social, political and economic activities that the Abagusii carried out in the pre-colonial period.

Chapter three deals with the evolution and development of the Gusii songs and dances in the pre-colonial period. In this chapter we find that the Abagusii traditions, such as traditional histories, myths, riddles and taboos which were passed on from one generation to another became a source for songs and dances. This ensured memorisation

traditional industries such as the making of iron implements, which included axes, spears razors and arrows, became a source for song and dance. Blacksmiths sang as they worked to keep off tiredness and to bring about enjoyment in their work. Hunting also provided the Abagusii with horns, which were used to make musical instruments, and skins, which they wore during performances and ceremonial occasions. Trading activities with the neighbouring communities, especially the Luo, provided a chance for the Abagusii to learn some musical ideas and to import some musical instruments from these neighbours. Cattle herding, wars with the neighbouring communities, contact with the environment and religion all became the sources of songs and dances among the Abagusii as discussed in the text of this chapter. The various changes that occurred in the pre-colonial period Gusii songs and dances are also analysed in this chapter. This is a clear indication that the Gusii songs and dances were dynamic.

Chapter four deals with the history of musical instruments among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period. It analyses the origin, nature and the role-played by these instruments in the enhancement and performance of Gusii songs and dances. A variety of popular Abagusii musical instruments are provided. This chapter also deals with the characteristics of the various musical instruments in terms of how they were made, played and the occasions in which they were used.

Chapter five deals with Western Policies and their impact on the Gusii songs and dances in the early colonial period, through the world wars and how they altered the organisation and performance of Gusii songs and dances. For example, the colonial socio-economic structure presented a fundamental transformation in Gusiiland that had far reaching implication as far as the Abagusii were concerned. With little or vague understanding of the Abagusii customary law and traditions, colonial officials tended to

enact policies that disrupted social and economic organisation of the community. Men were pressurized to enter the wage labour force through taxation and abolition of cattle villages by 1912. However, male labour migration reached its peak between 1930 and 1960s. The absence of some men due to migratory labour presented their wives with opportunities for exercising decision-making powers and general management of the household. The introduction of cashcrops such as coffee, tea and phyrethrum as from 1930s led to the increased participation of the Abagusii in agricultural production.

The colonial era opened increased opportunities for the Abagusii in terms of formal trading and marketing centres and roads for transportation purposes. As the Abagusii men were associated more with cash crops and the running of shops, women reigned in open market activities. In the marketplaces, the Abagusii were able to acquire musical instruments, songs and dances from the people they traded with. Such people included the Luo and the Maasai, and the Kipsigis mainly. Song and dance competition was also organized in the open-air market acting as socialising agents to the various trading communities. The songs and dances in the post- second world war period are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter six deals with the role that songs and dances played in the whole life of the Abagusii in different historical periods. These roles cover pre-colonial, early colonial, the war years and the post war periods. The aim is to record the various events that happened in the history of the Abagusii and that the song and dance became an important vehicle of passing the community's history from one generation to the next. The role of songs and dances is brought out in this chapter.

The origin, migration and settlement of the Abagusii has been outlined in an effort to understand the traditions that governed songs and dances among the Abagusii. In the



cultural background, the human developmental stages of pregnancy, birth, naming, circumcision, marriage, death, and their associated rites are explored. This was in an effort to establish the nature of songs and dances among the Abagusii.

The performances of songs and dances among the Abagusii have been discussed in this chapter. Their place and their dynamism have also been explored revealing that the Abagusii used songs and dances as a vehicle for controlling and rationalising human behaviour. They used them as a medium of education, a tool for political mobilisation, for entertainment or aesthetic purpose, for criticism and ridicule and for the reflection of the past historical experiences like the great famine that invaded Gusiiland in 1940s. Songs also functioned as a vehicle for expressing deep feelings like love, sorrow and hatred.

A good singer and dancer among the Abagusii was one who balanced his or her voice and had a mastery of the Abagusii history, Ekegusii, as well as one who had a memory of remembering the various phenomena, songs and dances that were performed at different historical periods. A good artist was judged from the point of view of his or her originality or authenticity in the performance of the various songs and dances. The vast spectrum of the artistic forms of song and dance strengthened and made more logical or comprehensible the religious, social, political and economic aspect of life. Musical instruments especially were agents of social and political control. Their dynamic pulsation stimulated the rhythmic patterns of life. The Abagusii musicians placed more emphasis on rhythmic quality than on melody.

The great value of Abagusii dance lay in its ability to fuse words, melody and the song into an artistic unity. Dance, like song, signified expectation, hope and gratitude to the community. Accompanying songs enabled performers to legitimately voice their position against such issues like colonial rule, corruption and oppressive conditions.

Among the Abagusii, songs and dances communicated a lot concerning individuals, institutions and customs.

Songs were also developed for work. The Abagusii sang while clearing fields and bush paths, sowing, weeding and harvesting. Songs of communal expectations were also composed and performed by the Abagusii. For example during a long dry season, the community gathered together to perform the ribina dance, that is, a rain making dance.

In general songs and dances were performed by the Abagusii to instil a sense of belonging to the community and also as a means of passing their beliefs and customs from one generation to another. Thus the community's identity rested partly on songs and dances in the period.

The sample songs and dances collected were analysed at two levels; the thematic level and the stylistic level. The thematic analysis focused on the main themes that emerged from the incisive study of the Abagusii songs and dances in the different historical periods. The primary themes were dealt with in depth. From the research findings, it appeared that patriotism, nationalism, tolerance, love, morality, justice, injustice, adherence to the traditional network of social relations and hard work were some of the thematic concerns of the Abagusii singers and dancers. This suggests that the Abagusii used songs and dances throughout their history to express their perception and stand points in regard to a variety of issues whose main concern was on the community's past in terms of social, political and economic organisations. Song and dance was a true vessel for airing the inner feelings of the community's aspirations and expectations, which it recorded and then passed from one generation to another as cultural heritage.

Gusii songs and dances were also analysed at stylistic level. The focus here was on the nature, mode and means of presentation. The stylistic devices employed in the presentation of songs and dances among the Abagusii were delineated. From the study it

was found out that accompaniment, dance mode, manner of poetic expressions used symbols and imagery to refer to the various animals hunted, elision, elongation of syllables and repetition were all used to emphasise the meaning and importance of songs and dances among the Abagusii.

To enhance song and dance performance, the Abagusii used a wide range of musical instruments and costumes. The major instruments that the Abagusii used to enhance their song and dance performance include: the drum, horn, jingles, bells, obokano, the lyre and the flutes. Musical instruments had desirable effect in the rhythm, sound, melody and the general style of song and dance presentations in different historical periods.

From the research carried out on songs and dances among the Abagusii, it was realised that as with largely preliterate communities elsewhere, most Abagusii songs and dances were socially controlled. That is, they were organised in relation to the activities of everyday life. Use of songs and dances in a social or private event was either traditional or spontaneous. Traditional songs and dances were mostly combined with musical activities with such fixed occasions as festivals, rites and religious celebrations. Spontaneous song and dance activities occurred in the private and recreational spheres. In traditional combinations, there were rigid prescriptions regarding roles, responsibilities, general framework, and performance. In spontaneous category, the instruments, songs and their texts, with certain exceptions, enjoyed great freedom of expression. Traditional musical activities among the Abagusii included marriages, funerals, rites of cult groups such as the historical Mumbo cult of Abagusii, warrior associations, communal labour, celebrations in connection with chiefship, and worship of gods. In many cases, the musical activity took much of the actual time of the event. Such places of performance as Village

Squares, markets, streets, the church or shrines, the courtyard, or chief's camp were the musical centres for Abagusii singers and dancers' community.

Among the Abagusii, songs and dances of all kinds were associated with the various ages of life from infancy, through childhood, adolescence, and maturity to old age. The repertoire of a single village community could include several hundred songs in the Abagusii traditional styles, all of which were appropriate to one or another of the many seasonal, religious and social occasions. In addition, secular dance songs and songs of entertainment followed the familiar cycle of novelty, popularity, and decline within a relatively short period. The currency of a dance or popular song is usually longer in rural areas than in towns.

Work songs were the constant companion of much manual labour such as hoeing, threshing and harvesting. These songs provided the rhythmic compulsion that kepts the work going at a steady pace and thus making it a form of dance.

During their long history, Abagusii songs and dances have been dynamic. Most influential in recent times is their encounter with western songs and dances, religion and academic influences. During the period of European colonisation in Gusii land, western educators at first dismissed Gusii songs and dances as "primitive" and substituted for them in the schools, the simpler forms of western songs and dances. Missionaries, fearing the possible association of Gussii songs and dances with heathendom, discouraged them. Both professions, together with the phonograph industry, represented the weight and authority of successful material culture. They have persuaded a proportion of Abagusii men, women and children especially those in towns and institutions, to accept their foreign musical prejudices. Culturally, western songs and dances lack the normal structure and continuity of African traditional musicianship and are constantly spurred into activity through the usual channels of commercial publicity. Thus in modern Gusii land, there are

many forms of western-influenced urban social music that originating in the streets, conquered the ballrooms, the radio stations, and the commercial disc market.

At present, some Abagusii musicians and scholars have begun composing works aimed at the concert hall, church, school and music festivals, but which seek to recreate traditional musical styles. The influence of western culture on Abagusii songs and dances is important in that it has stimulated misgivings about the integrity of indigenous African culture. Thus many Abagusii leaders stress the need for imitation of foreign arts rather than originality. No such doubts appear among the active practitioners of Abagusii songs and dances who have not broken the thread of artistic continuity. It was established that Christianity, which discourages the drinking of beer, has entered in most of the families and hence beer drinking has lost its popularity. The modern media of communication network such as the television network, video shows, films and cinemas have in turn taken entertainment place of the Abagusii traditional material culture, song and dance in particular. The formal education system in Gusiiland has little room for the attendance and teaching of traditional songs and dances. Therefore it is not possible to have the originals of traditional songs and dances. Most of the Abagusii musicians have now turned to Christian songs and dances. However, a few of the musicians have started revisiting Abagusii traditional songs and dances of the community. It is to these musicians that the future Abagusii will look for inspiration if they wish to achieve further maturation of their unique musical art.

From what has been discussed in the research findings, a record of some of the Abagusii songs and dances, traditions and cultural values of the community are provided in these research findings, which will help the growing and future generations of the Abagusii to learn to accept and enjoy their songs and dances.

It was also found out that the changing songs and dances can be an external indicator of changing social institutions and their needs to create songs more suited to new conditions. Songs in particular can be a very subtle index of the dynamics of change. The esimbore song in Gusiiland, for example, shows a very definite shift in sensibility in the last forty years. This is particularly noticeable in the very musical area of Nyaribari chache, Kisii north district. For example, the performance of Kasba song by a Muslim school children's Kasba flute essemble by a Nubia village in the district, popularly called Madrassati Noor. The ensemble plays the National anthem and joins the police Band in a kind of mass band parade to give the salute during national day celebrations such as the Jamuhuri day. The essemble consists of six kasba flutes and four imported side and share- drums played with sticks. One of the drums is large and the remaining three are small and of the same size. Kasba song is a popular creation, which is fairly recent. Its music is meant for pleasure and sheer enjoyment. It may be performed for recreation or at any ceremony, which incorporates the performance or recreational music. Kasba therefore is a true reflection of the index of the dynamism of change<sup>359</sup>.

At present there are significant social changes taking place in Gusii land that have brought about many currents which criss cross the music scene and new idioms of songs and dance are being introduced into the Gusii land and they are increasingly gaining popularity. These idioms of songs and dance and other forms of entertainment can be heard in schools, hotels, cinema halls and other public places, as well as at home on the radio and television and at social functions. In addition to the imported western Christian songs, can be heard.

Many musical groups performing a variety of popular music and employing various combinations of western musical instruments, like guitar, flutes percussion and

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<sup>359</sup> G.S.Were and D.Nyamwaya, Op. Cit. Pp.179-193.

voice, are found all over Gusiiland at present. The best examples include Nyamwari Jazz band under the leadership of Christopher Monyonjo, Kegogi Jazz band under the leadership of Isaac Otworu and Nyang'au Bwe'Egetonto.

Even though external sources are important contributors to the growth of performing arts in the Gusiiland, steps need to be taken to ensure that things of value inherited from the past are preserved and promoted. We should also ensure that the knowledge of the Abagusii heritage is transferred to present and future generations. Serious teaching of traditional arts such as song, dance and drama should be performed in schools and colleges. The survival of artistic skills can be only through performances. Traditional songs and dances should, therefore be made part of any active programme designed to promote Abagusii cultural life. The new song and dance traditions from Europe, America and elsewhere which have been embraced in the Abagusii culture today should be considered as additions rather than substitutes for our indigenous songs and dances. Our song and dance traditions still serve very useful purposes in the ceremonies and activities of the Abagusii's cultural life and their history.

Songs and dances of the community have got unique artistic values and hence quite interesting to listen to and watch. They artistically express emotional intensity which enhance a variety of artistic enjoyment. Through songs and dances, one can follow the origin and continuity of Abagusii. Hence they serve as powerful tools in the understanding of the community's cultural historiography. As it was found out from the field interviews songs and dances inherit stylistic features which were, and still, are capable of enhancing memorization without element of boredom. Their song and dance idioms are still powerful and original in form. And hence they serve as a record of the Abagusii events as they occurred in the past.

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Name	Age in Years	Location	Date of interview
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2. Josphat Omari	56	Majoge	8/10/97
3. Samwel Barongo	45	Nyaribari	3/10/97
4. Bathrisia Moraa	68	Bassi	13/10/97
5. Moke Ondieki	58	Nyaribari	15/10/97
6. Johnson Mogire	70	Nyaribari	18/10/97
7. William Masese	67	Nyaribari	18/10/97
8. Joseph Kimanga	70	Majoge	22/10/97
9. John Onkanga	75	Nyaribari	2/11/97
10. Isaac Otwori	64	Bogirango	10/11/97
11. James Nyandika	95	Nyaribari	10/11/97
12. Truphena Gechemba	54	Bassi	10/11/97
13. Bathseba Mokeira	69	Bonchari	17/11/97
14. Sylvester Mosioma	97	Bogirango	17/11/97
15. Gori Maeba	75	Nyaribari	23/11/97
16. Tabitha Nyaanga	64	Nyaribari	23/11/97
17. Cremenziah Nyabonyi	68	Bogirango	28/11/97
18. Solomon Nyakweba	84	Bonchari	29/11/97
19. Jennifer Moraa	53	Majoge	13/12/97
20. John Nyangau	63	Bonchari	13/12/97
21. Cremenziah Buyaki	89	Kitutu	13/12/97
22. Magdalene Nyaboke	51	Kitutu	16/12/97
23. Jackson Okong'o Ogoro	80	Nyaribari	18/12/97
24. Jennifer Monyeka	77	Nyaribari	18/12/97
25. Julius Ongeru Omari	49	Kitutu	20/12/97
26. Callen Mogute	55	Bonchari	22/12/97
27. Nyangoto Ogeturenki	96	Bassi	27/12/97
28. William Obare	79	Nyaribari	27/12/97
29. Hezekiah Isena	65	Nyaribari	27/12/97
30. Beatrice Moraa	42	Bogirango	28/12/97
31. Ezra Nyarang'o	69	Bogirango	28/12/97
32. Abigael Kwamboka	66	Bassi	28/12/97

33. Iriasi Mogire	78	Majoge	28/12/97
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39. Rael Kerubo	47	Bonchari	12/1/98
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**APPENDIX I:****A SELECTION OF SOME OF THE POPULAR GUSII SONGS****(a) Beer Party songs:**

Below is a beer party song which was usually performed during a social gathering such as beer drinking to warn people who had poor relations and engaged in social evils such as witchcraft and theft to refrain from such behaviour for the proper development.

**1. NYANCHOKA MOGESIRONI (NYANCHOKA WIFE OF HEZRON)**

**Sung by Kereri Girls Secondary School choir on 12/10/97**

Nyanchoka mogesironi ee baba	Nyanchoka wife of Hezron ee mother
Nyanchoka mogesironi mogesironi	Nyanchoka wife of Hezron , wife of Hezron
Gwatachive Omwana Obande ee baba	You have stepped on the owners' child ee mother
Gwatachire Omwana Obande ee baba	You have stepped on the owners' child ee mother
Nyanchoka mogesironi ee	Nyanchoka wife of Hezron ee
Mogesironi ee	Wife of Hezron ee
Ee ee nkere ee nkere	Ee, ee it is so ee it is so
Nyanchoka mogesironi gaki gaki	Nyanchoka wife of Hezron please, please
Kwabeire rikoru nkere	You have become a hawk you
Mogesironi ee	Wife of Hezron ee
Kwabeire egesege kiorosana.	You have become a wild beast.

**(b) Work songs**

Work songs were performed to keep the workers in high spirits when working. These songs also had some advices on how to relate well among the Abagusii community. They also carried out the message that hard work and patience pays in undertaking any economical activity. The following are selected examples of such songs.

**2. EGETINGINYE EKENGA'INI (A CLEAVER BIRD): A song sang by Sironga Girls High School Choir on 22/10/97**

Engetinginye ekengaini Kerigie	A cleaver bird looks for the nest building
Oboundi Kiangache embura egotwa	Technology when it rains
Gesoe Mwaye	It shelters in its nest
Engetinginye ekengaini	A cleaver bird
Kerigie Oboundi Kiangache	Looks for nest building technology
Oraiyo O Oraiyo O	Oraiyo O Oraiyo O
Chingero bonyangero	Songs and songs
Ritutu Namwerera Obe	To a foolish bird woe
Obe ewaaa	Oh it is unfortunate
Ndibwati mwaye	It doesn't have its house

Obe Chingero bonyangero

Oh songs and songs

Oraiyo O Oraiyo O

Oraiyo O Oraiyo O

Obe Chingero bonyangero.

Oh songs and songs.

### 3. ABU-RERA ABU RERA (THERE- IN THE OPEN): A song sung by Sibiah Kwamboka on 22/1/98

Abu-rera Abu rera  
 Kemunto Mogaiseya  
 Abu-rera Abu rera  
 Kemunto Mogaiseya  
 Kemunto Mogaiseya  
 Ateba omoro bogesacha  
 Ateba omoro bogesacha  
 Ateba rera tokobori  
 Ateba rera tokobori  
 Nenyama ya Jumapili  
 Ateba rero tokobori  
 Nenyama ya Jumapili.

There- in the open there-in the open  
 Kemunto wife of Iseya  
 There- in the open there-in the open  
 Kemunto wife of Iseya  
 Kemunto wife of Iseya  
 Sharpens a panga like a man  
 Sharpens a Panga like a man  
 Says today you will not eat it  
 Says today you will not eat it  
 With Sunday's meat  
 Says today you will not eat it  
 With Sunday's meat.

### 4. EE NGERERIE OBOKOMBE (EE GIVE ME A JEMBE): A song sung by Ogigi Isena on 25/1/98

Ee ng'ererie Obokombe  
 Ong'e nekebago Egesera  
 Ong'e nekebago Egesera  
 Ng'ende kwabusera Omogondo  
 Ngende kwabusera Omogondo  
 Omogondo nyakieni kebariri  
 Omaiya , Omaiya  
 Chingero bonyangero  
 Auma aka Ng'umbu  
 Auma aka Ng'umbu  
 Auma gento tikeri roche  
 Auma gento tikeri roche  
 Nesasati ekona kwoga  
 Omaiya , Omaiya  
 Chingero bonyangero  
 Ee ngererie orotambe  
 Nduseria abanto baito roche  
 Nduseria abanto baito roche  
 Orwane nengegu waereri  
 Omaiya Chingero bonyangero  
 Ee Oyokorigia emeino  
 Agende mwa kwamboka O'maragia  
 Ee Oyokorigia emeino

Ee give me a jembe  
 Give one with a good handle  
 Give one with a good handle  
 I go to sweep the garden  
 I go to sweep the garden  
 The garden which is beautifully brown  
 O'perfect person O'perfect person  
 Songs and songs  
 Auma cross to the other side  
 Auma cross to the other side  
 Auma there is nothing in the river  
 Auma there is nothing in the river  
 It's long grass that make noise  
 O'perfect person O'perfect person  
 Songs and songs  
 Ee give me a tall one  
 I remove our people from the river  
 I remove our people from the river  
 Mine has reached the bank  
 O'perfect person O'perfect person  
 Ee whoever looks for fine songs  
 Should go to Kwamboka Maragia's house  
 Ee whoever looks for fine songs

Agende mwa kwamboka O'maragia  
 Ee Oyokorigia emeino  
 Agende mwa kwamboka O'maragia  
 Agende mwa kwamboka O'maragia  
 Asungore emeino nebitonga  
 Omaiya , Omaiya  
 Chingero bonyangero.

Should go to Kwamboka Maragia's house  
 Ee whoever looks for fine songs  
 Should go to Kwamboka Maragia's house  
 Should go to Kwamboka Maragia's house  
 To get plenty of songs  
 O'perfect person , O'perfect person  
 Songs and songs.

### (c)War Songs

War songs were usually performed by the Abagusii during the war with their neighbouring communities and also among themselves when conflicts arose. Such songs as noted earlier on carried the message of patriotism and often encouraged participants to be brave during the war. As well, they were performed to celebrate over their victory. The following are examples of such songs.

### 5. MORAA NKORERA ARE (MORAA IS WAILING):

A song sung by Nyanturango Secondary School Choir on 8/10/97

Moraa nkioko otang'anetie?  
 Torochi nechiombe?  
 Otang'anetie,  
 Torochi nechiombe otang'anetie?  
 Obee eee obee  
 Moraa nkorero are-mm mmm  
 Onye momura hare-mm mmm  
 Nkominyoka nkobong'o-mm mmm  
 Onye momura nare-mm mmm  
 Nare korora Nyomba-mm mmm  
 Onye momura nare- mm mmm  
 Nare korina irongo- mm mmm  
 Ee Moraa Nkorera mm mmm  
 Chiombe chiaye chigenda boira  
 Chiombe chiaye chiirwa nankio  
 Akandangeria nche  
 Obe bamura akanga bokeigo.

Moraa what is that a head?  
 Can't you see it is cattle?  
 A head of you  
 Cant you see it is cattle a head?  
 Obee ee Obee  
 Moraa is wailing- mm mmm  
 If I were a young man -mm mmm  
 I would run to raise dust-mm mmm  
 If I were young man-mm mmm  
 I would not sleep in the house-mm mmm  
 If I were a young man-mm mmm  
 I would not climb the ceiling-mm mmm  
 Ee Moraa is wailing  
 Her cows are taken always  
 Her cows are taken every other day  
 She called me  
 Oh youth give a little.

In the song Moraa is wailing in her home having lost her animals through cattle theft. The song was usually performed during the war with the Maasai who used to attack the Abagusii and could rob them of their livestock.

### 6. MOINYORE OMOMURA OTENYO (REMEMBER YOUNG MAN OTENYO): A song sung by Nyangoto Ogeturenki on 27/12/97

Moinyore Omomura Otenyo  
 Omorwani Oreng akarwania

Remember young man Otenyo  
 He was a warrior he fought

Abasongo minto Nyarigoti  
 Ekero ere arwania Otenyo  
 Abasongo bakamongaina  
 Agende Getembe minto  
 Aegwe chibesa  
 Otenyo amachia koigwa  
 Enyasore mobuko ne ritimo  
 Riaya koboko kogenda Getembe  
 Ekero aika Getembe basongo  
 Bakamobwata bakamura  
 Ritimo riaye akanachwa ebigoti  
 Baminto moinyore  
 Omomura Otenyo  
 Tari amarwa anywete  
 Enyasore anywete  
 Naenda moinyore Omomura Otenyo  
 Nere Omotangani  
 Konwania omosongo.

The Europeans, our people he beat Northcote  
 He fought with Northcote  
 The Europeans deceived him  
 To go to Getembe our people  
 To be given money  
 When Otenyo heard of it  
 Opium in the pocket and the spear  
 In his hand he went to Getembe  
 When he arrived at Getembe Europeans  
 grabbed him and took away  
 his spear and his neck was amputated  
 our people remember  
 Young man Otenyo  
 He never drunk liquor  
 He took Opium  
 So remember young man Otenyo  
 He was the first one  
 To fight with the Europeans.

## **7. MBWERI ARE OMORUMBWA (AN ENEMY IS IN THE DAIRY SHED): A song sung by Bathrisia Moraa at Rietago on 25/11/97**

Mbweri are ee baba  
 Mbweri are  
 Mberu are omorumbwa  
 Mbweri are  
 Eteni twaigure  
 Mbweri are  
 Chiachire ee baba  
 Chiachire, Chiachire  
 Chiombe chiomogesi  
 Eteni twaigure ee baba  
 Kura mono ee kura mono  
 Kura mono Chiombe Chiachire  
 Eteni twaigure ee baba  
 Eteni twaigure chiachire ee baba  
 Chiombe chiato  
 Chiarimeire sigisi  
 Abana baito ninki  
 Barache Koru?  
 Nyang'era yaito  
 Yarimeire sigisi  
 Abana baito  
 Ninki barache koru.

He is in the dairy shed ee mother  
 He is in the dairy shed  
 He is in the dairy shed 'a Rumbwa'  
 He is in the dairy shed  
 We have heard a knock  
 He is in the dairy shed  
 They have gone ee mother  
 They have gone, They have gone  
 The bachelor's cattle  
 We have heard a knock ee mother  
 Shout loud ee shout loud  
 Shout loud the cattle have gone  
 We have heard a knock ee mother  
 They have gone to Kipsigis land  
 Our cattle  
 They have gone to Kipsigis land.  
 What will  
 Our children eat?  
 Our black spotted cow  
 Has gone to Kipsigis land  
 Our children  
 What will they eat.

The above song was usually performed to encourage the young Abagusii warriors to be courageous when attacking the invading enemies such as cattle rustlers and external aggressors.

### (d)Entertainment songs

These songs were, and still are, performed to entertain guests and community members during communal gatherings such as fund raising, the birth of a new born baby among other social gatherings in Gusiiland. The following are examples of such songs.

#### 8. EKERO NARENGE OMWANA (WHEN I WAS A CHILD): A song by Kenyerere Women Group at Ichuni on 18/10/97

Ekeronareng Omwana	When I was child
Obe nkakanigwa Oboba	Oh I was denied mushroom
Ekeronareng Omwana	When I was child
Obe nkakanigwa ee	Oh I was denied
Inka kanigwa	I was denied
Timbasa koria amara ee baba	Not to eat intestine ee mother
Inkakanigwa	I was denied
Timbasa koria amara ee	Not to eat intestine ee mother
Inkakanigwa	I was denied
Timbasa koria amani ee baba	Not to eat Liver ee mother
Inkakanigwa Timbasa koria amara ee	Not to eat Liver ee mother
Ginkoria amara	If I eat intestines
Obe nindarware ee baba	Oh I would be sick ee mother
Ginkoria amara	If I eat intestines
Obe nindarware ee	Oh I would be sick ee mother
Ginkoria amani	If I eat Liver
Obe nintamue ee	Oh I would be rude ee mother
Nganchi gotiga ee baba	Then I left it ee mother
Obe nintamue ee	Oh I would be rude ee mother
Nganchi gotiga ee baba	I tried to stop ee mother
Nganchi gotiga ee	I tried to stop ee
Bamura ekero nainyoire	Youth when I remember
Kero narengo Omwana	When I was a child
Tata agantebia	Father told me
Yara gachie orisie	Lad go and look after the animals
Ndisia boira mbokia	I look after the animals day and night
Tankori ndero	I wish it were today
Tankori ndero.	I wish it were today.

#### 9. CHISANI (PLATES): A song sung by Christine Oanya and Alice Oanya on 28/1/98

Chisani isano nemo ee	Six plates ee
Chisani isano nemo baminto	Six plates our people
Chisani isano nemo Jambo Jambo	Six plates hallow, hallow

Ibere ne chiomogaka ee	Two are for the elder ee
Ibere ne chiomogaka baminto	Two are for the elder our people
Ibere ne chiomogaka Jambo Jambo	Two are for the. elder hallow, hallow
Ibere ne chiomogaka ee	Two are for the elder ee
Ibere ne chiomogaka baminto	Two are for the elder our people
Ibere ne chiomongi'na Jambo Jambo	Two are for the woman hallow! hallow!
Chisani isano nemo ee	Six plates ee
Ibere ne chiomwalimu baminto	Two are for the teacher our people
Ibere ne chiomwalimu Jambo Jambo	Two are for the teacher hallow hallow!
Chisani isano nemo ee	Six plates ee
Chisani isano nemo baminto	Six plates our people
Ibere nechoimogeni Jambo Jambo	Two are for the visitor hallow hallow!
Chisani isano nemo Jambo Jambo	Six plates hallow hallow!
Chisani isano nemo Jambo Jambo	Six plates hallow hallow!
Ibere ne chiomogaka ee	Two are for the elder ee
Ibere ne chiomongi'na baminto	Two are for the woman our people
Ibere ne chiomogeni Jambo	Two are for the visitor hallow hallow!
Ibere ne chiomwalimu Jambo Jambo.	Two are for the teacher hallow hallow!

Chisani, plates is metaphorically used here to mean a moment of happiness. Traditionally with the Abagusii community after circumcision, the initiates were escorted home (seclusion place) where there were moments of great joy. Several kinds of food were served to all. Those present included teachers, the youth, the elderly and women. Each person was supposed to be given food to his or her satisfaction. The above song uses the term plates to mean the various kinds of food available and how they were distributed fairly among those who celebrated the initiates' circumcision ceremony.

## **10. OYOKAGITA TIGA AGITE BUNA ENYONI (THE ONE WHO FENCES LET HIM FENCE LIKE A BIRD): A song sung by Margaret Mangera and Damackline Ontweka on 10/11/97**

Oyokogita tiga agite buna anyoni	He who fences let him fence like a bird
Oyokogita tiga agite buna anyoni	He who fences let him fence like a bird
Buna anyoni andute nchera baba	Like a bird throw me on the road mother
Inki okomboria Omwana One	What are you asking me my beloved child
Kiriri kiane	My beloved one
Iso angite naye Ongi'te?	Your father beat me, you also?
Kiriri kiane	My beloved one
Oyokogita tiga agite buna anyoni	He who fences let him fence like a bird
Tiga agite ee baminto naye Ogite	Let him fence ee please you also
Mokungu Omworo moe oboremo	Lazy woman give her land
Bori bwekenyambi	Land of couch grass
Nabwo akonyara	she will not manage it
Kero akorema obwata omotwe	When she digs she holds her head
Oye, Omogongo, oye amakere	Oh, my back oh my waist
Netu boire embura netu boire	Always it rains, always it rains
Mama, netwa boira	Mother, always it rains

Tingonyara korema  
 arumba nembe  
 Yambutoire Omogongo  
 Abusa nse  
 Omanyé goisaransa  
 Abusa nse  
 Omanyé goisaransa.

I cannot manage digging  
 Kikuyu grass is bad  
 It has cut my back  
 Sweep the ground  
 So that you can sit down  
 Sweep the ground  
 So that you can sit down.

### (c) Christian songs

The christian songs below were performed, and still are, to give hope and spiritual encouragement to the depressed members especially the bereaved. They are also sung during worshipping services in churches in Gusiiland.

## 11. ADAM NA HAWA (ADAM AND EVE): A song sung by Nyanturago Secondary School choir on 10/11/97

Adam na Hawa  
 Bakaba abatang'ani gosaria  
 Ee Adam na Hawa Bakaba  
 Abatangani Gosaria  
 Tewitie twensi tomorore Nyasae  
 Adamu Esokoro na mokaye Hawa  
 Banyabibe mbarere  
 Bagosoa omorero  
 Bachenu batere buya  
 Banyabibe mbarere  
 Bagosoa omorero  
 Bachenu batere buya  
 Bagosoa aria igoro  
 Bachenu batere buya  
 Tweitie twensi tomorore yeso  
 Rero nomogoko ee  
 Rero nomogoko baminto  
 Oiboirwe Yerusalemu  
 Ere nabatorie ee  
 Ere nabatorie baminto  
 Korwa ase abibe  
 Korera bono obe tata  
 Koranche Obabere  
 Korera bono obe  
 Tata koranche Obabere

Adam and Eve  
 Were the first ones to sin  
 Ee Adam and Eve were  
 The first to sin  
 Let us repent and see God  
 Adam our ancestor and his wife Eve  
 Sinners will lament  
 When they face eternal fire  
 The saints will sing Hosana  
 Sinners will lament  
 When they face eternal fire  
 The saints will sing Hosana  
 When they enter heaven  
 The saints will sing Hosana  
 Let us all repent and see Jesus  
 Today it is happiness  
 Today it is happiness our people  
 He has been born in Jerusalem  
 He will deliver them from their sins  
 He will deliver our people from sins  
 From sins  
 I pity them oh Father  
 Accept their repentance  
 I pity them oh  
 Father forgive them

Tweitie twensi tomorore yeso  
Adam na Hawa  
Bakaba abatangani gosaria

Let us all repent and see Jesus  
Adam and Eve  
Were the first ones to sin

Tweitie twensi tomorore yeso  
Koramorigie Yeso  
Nyasaë Natokonye  
Nyasaë Natokonye.

Let us all respect and see Jesus  
If you seek Jesus  
God will save  
God will save us.

## 12. KERIRANDI RIKOBUGIGWA (WHEN THE TRUMPET SOUNDS): A Christian song sung by Sibiah Kwamboka on 23/1/98

Kerirandi rikobugwa  
Ase Omoerio  
Abakwete kare bonsi mbabokigwe  
Bamorore Yesu Omotoria lagocha  
Gakorangeria amarieta  
Nimbeo  
Gakorangeria amarieta  
Gakorangeria amarieta  
Gakorangeria amarieta nimbeo  
Natomenye nere rituko ase rituko  
Eve natotinyie amariga  
Natomenye nere, Obosio ase Obosio  
Gakorangeria amarieta nimbeo  
Gakorangeria amarieta  
Gakorangeria amarieta nimbeo  
Gakorangeria amarieta nimbeo  
Natoumerane intwe rituko riomoerio  
Gakorangeria amarieta nimbeo.

When the trumpet sounds  
During the end of times  
Those who died will be risen  
To see Jesus the redeemer as he comes  
When he calls upon  
I will be there  
When he calls upon the names  
When he calls upon the names  
When he calls upon I will be there  
We will be with him day by day  
He will wipe our tears  
We shall see him face by face  
When he calls upon I will be there  
When he calls upon the names  
When he calls upon I will be there  
When he calls upon I will be there  
We shall see each other day by day  
When he calls upon I will be there.



## APPENDIX II

### GUSII SONGS AND DANCES EXPRESSIONS

#### a) Dances

Ribina - a dance performed by the Abagusii women to welcome rains.

Okoiyeria amareko - a dance which involved the shaking of shoulders.

Entaburuta – a move forward and backward dance

Entabanana – a dance that involves jumping, shaking as dancing.

#### b) Songs

Esimbore – A circumcision song performed after the exercise.

Enyangweso – A song introduced in Gusiiland in 1930s.

Egoro/esita – these are war songs performed after a successful defeat of the enemy.

Erieri/eburu – these are songs performed in remembrance of the departed relative.

Emeino - Set of poems sung in narrative style (in free rythem) by Gusiimen at

beer drinking parties at home after organised communal labour.

Esubo/enyabububu – these songs are sung by circumcised boys and their teachers when their wounds are healed and they are about to be released from the cottages to join the community.

Chingero – these were songs performed when performing tasks such as grinding grains and building.

#### c) Musical Instruments

Chindege – legs or ankle bells used as musical instruments.

Egetureri – This is an instrumet made of a horn of wild animal and was also used as signal during the war to alert the warriors.

Ekororia - This was a flute used as a wind instrument.

**APPENDIX III**  
**SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

1. General information

Names.....Sex.....Age.....  
 Status in the society .....  
 Clan.....Date of interview.....  
 Place of interview.....Address.....

**EARLY HISTORY OF THE ABAGUSII**

2. Who were the original inhabitants of present day Gusiland?
3. From your knowledge of the Abagusii's past comment on the origin, migration and the settlement of the present day Gusiland.
4. How did the Abagusii people relate socially, politically and economically with the following communities?
  - (I) The Luo
  - (ii) The Nandi
  - (iii) The Maasai
  - (iv) The Kipsigis
  - (v) The Kuria
5. Describe the
  - (a) Social
  - (b) Political and
  - (c) Economic organisation of the Abagusii.
6. Describe the cultural values that the Abagusii cherished.
7. How did the song and dance among the Abagusii evolve prior to the coming of the Europeans?
8. Do you enjoy songs and dances? If yes,
9. Name the kinds of songs and dances, which are your favourite.
10. Briefly comment on the performance of songs and dances among the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period.
11. What have I not asked you on pre-colonial Abagusii songs and dances that you think I should know?

### **THE COMING OF THE EUROPEANS**

12. What was the nature of songs and dances among the Abagusii at the time of contact with the Europeans?
13. Comment briefly on the period of collaboration and resistance and the nature of songs and dances that the Abagusii had.
14. Name the type of musical instruments that prevailed in Gusiiland during the colonial era.
15. What else have I forgotten concerning the coming of the European in Gusiiland you would wish to comment on?

### **DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

16. Were the Abagusii people involved in the war with the Germany?
17. What was the position of song and dance in Gusiiland during the war with the Germans?
18. Describe the songs that were sung during the war with the Germans. Give the reasons, which brought about these songs.
19. Name the known music composers during the war with the Germans.
20. Describe the type of dances that the Abagusii had during the war with Germans.
21. Can you comment generally on the importance of songs and dances in the war?

### **DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

22. Comment briefly on the Abagusii music and dance during the war with the Italians.
23. What dances did the Abagusii have during the war with the Italians? Why did they perform these dances?
24. Describe the themes of the songs that were sung during the war with the Italians. Who composed these?
25. What have I forgotten that you can remind me concerning the war with the Italians?

### **POST WAR PERIOD**

26. Describe the nature of the Abagusii songs and dances during the post-war period.
27. Name the areas in Gusiiland that were rooted in traditional songs and dances in the post-war period. Give reasons why this was so.

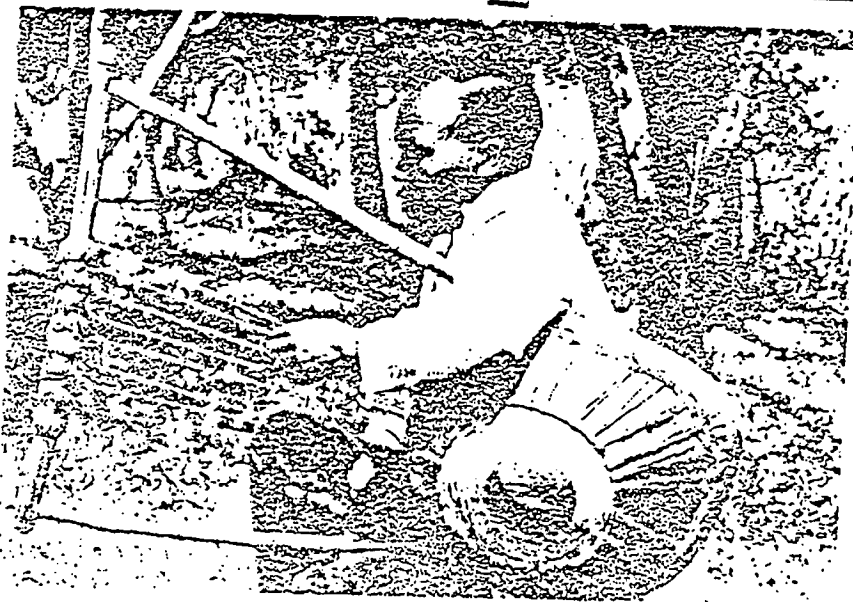
28. In which areas of the Gusiland did western songs and dance concentrate? Why is this so?
29. Name the known Gusii musicians in Gusiland during the post-war period.
30. What were the popular themes contained in the songs and dances during this period? Who composed the songs?
31. Please, what I have not asked you that you feel is relevant to what we have just discussed?.

### **POST INDEPENDENCE**

32. What was the nature of Abagusii songs and dances after independence?
33. How did the Abagusii compose, arrange and perform songs and dances after independence?
34. What is the role of traditional folksongs and dances in the cultural history of the Abagusii today?
35. Comment on the place of songs and dances among the Abagusii of today.
36. Which categories of songs and dances do you enjoy? Please briefly comment on this and whatever else I have not asked you and you consider relevant to what we have been talking about.

## APPENDIX IV.

## Adaptation and Arrangement of Gusii Folksongs and Melodies.

Nyatama Onchuru with *Obokam*

# Ekebwe ngiakura

A Gusii Folk song

Arranged by M. N. Wanyama  
Copyright 1996

$\text{♩} = \text{About } 55 \text{ to } 58$

Gaily

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

First system of the musical score. It consists of four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. Each staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is in 4/4 time. The lyrics are written below each staff. The lyrics for all parts are: "E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -". The Soprano staff starts with a dynamic marking of *f* and a tempo marking of *Gaily*. There are some handwritten annotations above the notes in the Soprano staff.

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -

Second system of the musical score. It consists of four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. Each staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is in 4/4 time. The lyrics are written below each staff. The lyrics for all parts are: "nse ke - bwe ngia ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i -". The Soprano staff starts with a dynamic marking of *f* and a tempo marking of *Gaily*. There are some handwritten annotations above the notes in the Soprano staff.

nse ke - bwe ngia ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i -

nse Ee - ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -

nse Ee - ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -

nse Ee - ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -

nse Ee - ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so A - ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so A - ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go

ro Ee - ma - to - go ro ma - e - mba ba - ba

ro Ee - ma - to - go ro ma - e - mba ba - ba

ro Ee - ma - to - go ro ma - e - mba ba - ba

ro Ee - ma - to - go ro ma - e - mba ba - ba

A - ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go - ro Ec - ma - to - go -

A - ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go - ro Ec - ma - to - go -

ro Ec - ma - to - go - ro ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe -

ro Ec - ma - to - go - ro ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe -

so ndi - ndi - ndi E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse Ec - ma - nga - i -

so ndi - ndi - ndi E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i



S r f f | r a : f f | S : f f | r a : f f |

nse ke - bwe ngia ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i

nse ke - bwe ngia ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i

nse ke - bwe ngia ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i

nse ke - bwe ngia ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i

f d : : t : L - L - L - L - L : f t : : t : L - L - L - L - L : f

nse Ee - ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i

nse Ec - ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i

nse Ee - ma - nga - i nse Ee - ma - nga - i

nse Ee - ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i

f r : d i s t r i b u t e d : f a l l o u n d e d : f

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so

nse ba - ba mo te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i nse Ec

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i nse Ee - ma - nga - i

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i nse

nse 'ke - bwe ngia ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i

nse 'ke - bwe ngia ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i

nse Ec - ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i

nse Ec - ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i

nse Ec - ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i

nse Ec - ma - nga - i nse Ec - ma - nga - i

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so 'ke - bwe ngia ku - ra

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so 'ke - bwe ngia ku - ra

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so

nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -

E - ke - bwe ngia - ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse

E - ke - bwe ngia - ku - ra ma - nga - i

E - ke - bwe ngia -

E - ke - bwe ngia - ku - ra Ee - ma - nga - i - nse

E - ke - bwe ngia - ku - ra Ee - ma - nga - i - nse

E - ke - bwe ngia - ku - ra

ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse

Ec - ma - nga - i - nse ba - ba      Ewe bwe

Ec - ma - nga - i - nse ba - ba - mo      te - nge - ra nya - ngwe - so

Bwe \_\_\_\_\_ bwe \_\_\_\_\_      te - nge - ra nya - ngwe - so \_\_\_\_\_

Bwe \_\_\_\_\_ bwe \_\_\_\_\_      te - nge - ra nya - ngwe - so

*rit* Ec - ma - nga - i - nse ke - bwe ngia      ku - ra: E - ke - bwe ngia

*rit* Ec - ma - nga - i - nse ke - bwe ngia      ku - ra E - ke - bwe ngia

\_\_\_\_\_      E - ke - bwe ngia

\_\_\_\_\_      E - ke - bwe ngia

*Atempo* ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse      Oh - E - ke - bwe ngia

*f* A - ma - e - mba

ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse      A - ma - c - mba ba - ba ma - to - go -

ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse

ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse

ba - ba ma - to - go - ro ma - e - mba      A - ma - e - mba ba - ba

ro      Ee - ma - to - go - ro - ma - e - mba ba - ba

Ba - ba ma - to - go - ro - ma - e - mba      A - ma - e - mba ba - ba

Ee - ma - to - go - ro -

A - ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go - ro      Ee - ma - to - go

A - ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go - ro      A - ma - e

A - ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go - ro      A - ma - e

A - ma - e - mba ba - ba      A - ma - e - mba ba - ba ma - to - go

ro      Ee - ma - to - go - ro ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe

mba      Ee - ma - to - go - ro ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe

mba A - ma - e - mba Ee ma - to - go      ro ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe

ro      ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe

so Ndi - ndi - ndi - ndi - ndi ndi ndi - ndi - ndi ndi - ndi - ndi

so Ndi - ndi - ndi

so Ndi - ndi - ndi

so Ndi - ndi - ndi ndi - ndi - ndi ndi - ndi - ndi ndi - ndi - ndi - ndi

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba'ke - a - nde

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba'ke - a - nde

nde

nde

nde

Ee - ke - a -

Ee - ke - a -

Ee - ke - a -

Ee - ke - a -

nde bo - ri bwa ba - ba

nde bo - ri bwa ba - ba

nde bo - ri bwa ba - ba

nde bo - ri bwa ba - ba

O - -bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -

nde be - ri bwa ba - ba

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -

nde Ee - ke - a - nde Ee - ke - a -

nde Ee - ke - a - nde Ee - ke - a -

nde Ee - ke - a - nde Ee - ke - a -

nde Ee - ke - a - nde Ee - ke - a -

*Soprano*  
nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe so Ee - nya - gwe - so ya - cha ya - bo

*Alto*  
nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe so Ee - nya - ngwe - so ya - cha - ya - bo

nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe so

nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe so

*Tenor I*  
lia Ee - ya - bo lia Nya - ngwe - so ya - cha

*Bass I*  
lia Ee - ya - bo lia Nya - ngwe - so ya - cha

*Bass II*  
lia Ee - ya - bo lia Nya - ngwe - so ya - cha

Ee - ya - bo lia Nya - ngwe - so ya - cha

Ec - Nya - ngwe - so ya - cha ya - bo lia Ee Ee - ya bo  
 Ee - Nya - ngwe - so ya - cha ya - bo lia Ee - ya - bo  
 Ee - Nya - ngwe - so ya - cha ya - bo lia Ee - ya - bo

Ee - Nya - ngwe - so ya - cha ya - bo lia Ee - ya - bo

lia Ee - ya - bo lia ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe  
 lia Ee - ya - bo lia ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe  
 lia Ee - ya - bo lia ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe  
 lia Ee - ya - bo lia ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe

*Soprano*

so  
 so  
 so  
 so

*Alto* O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -  
*Tenor* O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -  
*Bass* O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -  
 O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a -



nde Ec - ke - a - nde bo - ri - bwa ba - ba

nde Ec - ke - a - nde bo - ri bwa ba - ba

nde Ec - ke - a - nde bo - ri bwa ba - ba

nde Ec - ke - a - nde bo - ri bwa ba - ba

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a - nde Ee - ke - a -

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a - nde Ee - ke - a -

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a - nde Ee - ke - a -

O - bo - ri bwa ba - ba ke - a - nde Ee - ke - a -

nde Ec - ke - a - nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe -

nde Ee - ke - a - nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe -

nde Ee - ke - a - nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe -

nde Ec - ke - a - nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe -

nde Ec - ke - a - nde ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe -

*pp* *Grave mp*

*Soprano I*  
so ————— E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i -

*pp* *Grave mp*

*Soprano II*  
so ————— E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i -

*pp* *Grave mp*

*Alto*  
so ————— E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i -

*pp*

so —————

*gliss* *Atempo*

nse ————— Ee - ma - nga - i - nse ————— Ee

*gliss* *Atempo*

nse ————— Ee ma - nga - i - nse ————— Ee

*gliss* *A tempo*

nse ————— Ee ma - nga - i - nse ————— Ee

*Key C* *ff*

*Soprano*  
E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -

*f*

*Alto*  
Ee

*f*

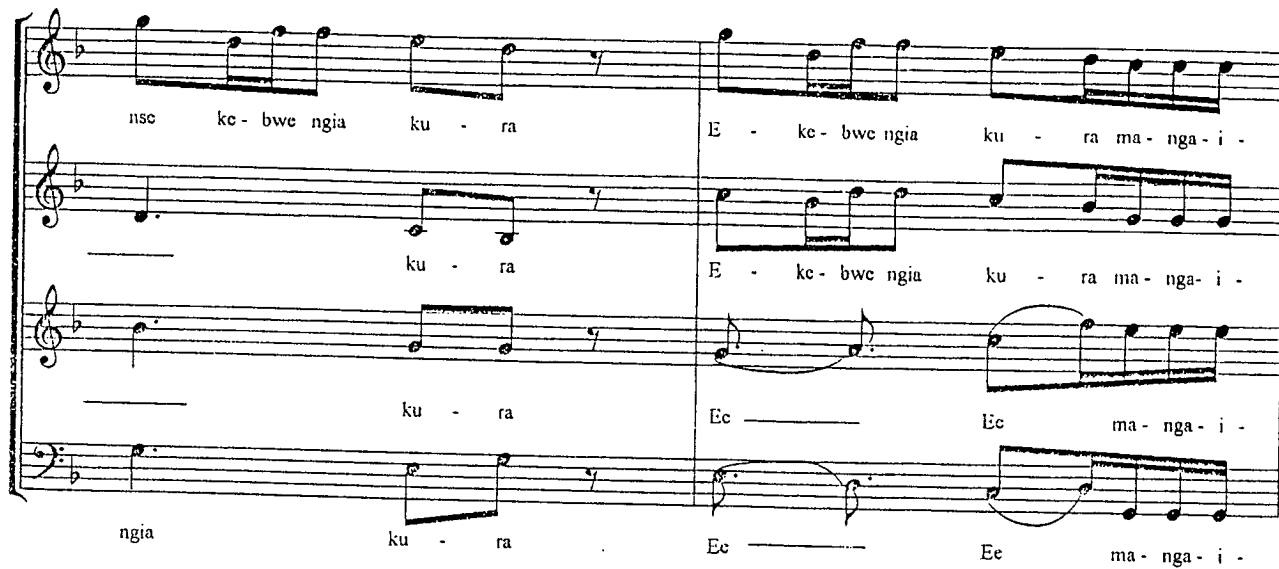
*Tenor*  
Ee ngia

*f*

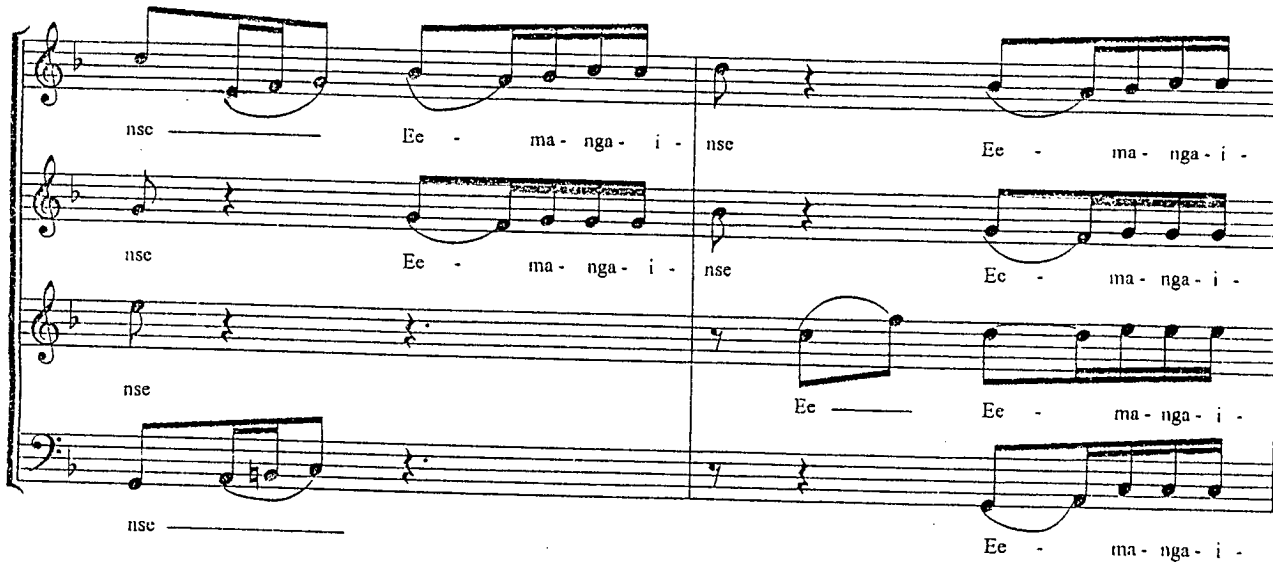
*Bass*  
Ee Ec ngia

*f*

Ee Ec ke - bwe



nse ke-bwe ngia ku - ra  
E - ke-bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i -  
ku - ra  
E - ke-bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i -  
ku - ra  
Ec - ma - nga - i -  
ngia ku - ra Ec - Ee ma - nga - i -



nse Ee - ma - nga - i - nse Ee - ma - nga - i -  
nse Ee - ma - nga - i - nse Ec - ma - nga - i -  
nse Ec - ma - nga - i -  
nse Ec - ma - nga - i -

Key F



nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra - Nya - ngwe - so  
nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so  
nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so ke - bwe ngia ku - ra  
nse ba - ba mo - te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so

*f*

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse

E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse

nse - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - Ee - ma - nga - i - nse ma - nga - i -

nse ma - nga - i - E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - E - ke - bwe ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i -

nse ma - nga - i -

nse ma - nga - i - nse Ec ma - nga - i - nse ma - nga - i - nse  
 nse ma - nga - i - nse ma - nga - i - nse  
 nse nse Eh ma - nga - i - nse Ec -  
 nse Ec — ngia ku - ra ma - nga - i - nse ma - nga - i - nse

Ee - ma - nga - i - nse ba - ba mo -  
 Ee - ma - nga - i - nse Ee ba - ba mo -  
 Ee — Ec — Ee — Ee ba - ba mo -

Ee Ee ma - nga - i - nse  
 te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so ndi ndi ndi  
 te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so ndi ndi ndi  
 te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so Oh — ndi ndi ndi  
 te - nge - ra Nya - ngwe - so ndi ndi ndi

## Synopsis and translation

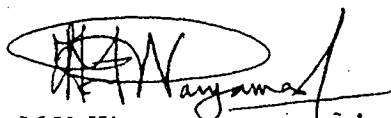
### Ekebwe ngiakura

1. 'Ekebwe' ngiakura manga i nse  
*The 'fox' howls down the manga hill*
2. 'Baba motengera Nyangweso'  
*The fox warned that the locusts are coming 'Please note'*
3. 'Obori bwa baba ekeande'  
*The rich and well grown 'wimbi' with big grains*
4. 'Amaemba 'baba' matogoro'  
*The sorghum ('dear mum') looks like eyes of a human being opened wide!*
5. 'Ee nyangweso yachayaboria'  
*The locusts came and ate the wimbi and sorghum (then the famous famine period called Nyangweso followed.)*

**Note:** In the Abagusii Community it was believed that animals warned people about the forthcoming danger- but sometimes they ignored. One of the animals associated with this was 'ekebwe' - the fox.

### Pronunciation Guide

1. The 'b' sound in words like ekebwe sounds between the sounds 'b' and 'v'.
2. The 'i' in the word mangainse is almost silent.

  
M.N. Wanyama