

## Bambeh's Song: Music, Women and Health in a Rural Community in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone

KATE BINGLEY

School of Oriental and African Studies | University of London | UK\*

---

### ABSTRACT

*If we knew more about "music" as a human capability and its potential as an intellectual and affective force in human communication, society, and culture, we could use it more generally to enhance general education and to build peaceful, egalitarian, and prosperous societies in the twenty-first century, just as our prehistoric ancestors once used it to invent the cultures from which all civilisations evolved.*

(Blacking, 1995, p. 242)

In December 2008 I travelled to Sierra Leone to undertake research into the role of music in effective health promotion. Situated on the coast of West Africa, Sierra Leone sits at the bottom of the UNDP human development index, and has the highest maternal mortality rates in the world; the country is recovering from a ten-year civil war which decimated infrastructure and traumatised the nation. These facts notwithstanding, I took as my premise that music continues to be a vibrant part of Sierra Leonean culture, and has a key role to play in promoting good health, but that its full potential has yet to be fully harnessed. My field research was funded by a Gerry Farrell Scholarship, awarded by the Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research (SEMPRE). This paper follows on from my field research; through a combination of ethnographic method, musical and textual analysis, and insights from the ethnomusicology literature, I examine the different ways in which music can be used to promote health and well-being in rural post-conflict Sierra Leone.

\* Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG, UK

## INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone is a small country on the coast of West Africa, neighboured by Guinea to the north and Liberia to the east. It has a population of about 6 million, consisting of more than fifteen ethnic groups and languages; the Mende and Timne are the largest ethnic groups, followed by the Limba and the Kono. Sierra Leone gained independence from the British in 1961. Whilst English remains the official language, the lingua franca is Krio. Subsistence agriculture is the mainstay. The recent civil war (1991-2002) decimated the country's fragile infrastructure, and, seven years on, rehabilitation of roads and health and education services remain priorities. In 2007/8, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) classified Sierra Leone at the bottom of the human development index (HDI). Maternal and child mortality rates are appalling,<sup>1</sup> and malnutrition is widespread among children and lactating mothers. A process of decentralisation has been underway since 2004, yet the capacity of the government to provide health services across Sierra Leone remains extremely limited. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) continue to play a major role in the provision of primary healthcare and the delivery of health education programmes.

Sierra Leone has strong traditions of performance, including music, dance and masquerades. However, there has never been significant support from the government to promote and sustain these traditions, and the recent civil war has taken its toll on the musical traditions associated with rural life. The dislocation resulting from a protracted period of rural-urban migration and widespread displacement has adversely affected the transmission of musical traditions.<sup>2</sup> Many instruments were lost or destroyed during the war;<sup>3</sup> moreover, fewer young people are learning to play traditional instruments, and this knowledge is dying with the older generation.<sup>4</sup> The hunters' associations in northern Sierra Leone are no longer so active, as guns were banned after the civil war; and their music is dying out with them.<sup>5</sup> Young girls still learn the musical traditions of their mothers and grandmothers on the farm and during preparations for initiation ceremonies.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, however, government and NGOs have put pressure on women's leaders to reduce the time spent on initiation rites in order to reduce the disruptive impact

<sup>1</sup> According to the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), recent statistics estimated under-five mortality rate and maternal mortality ratio of 267 per 1,000 live-births and 2,100 per 100,000 live-births respectively.

<sup>2</sup> According to Sommers (2003), Freetown "saw its population rise from 384,499 in 1985 to an estimated 837,000 in 2001 [...]. This 217 percent increase mainly took place during the decade of civil war (1991-2001)".

<sup>3</sup> For example, musician and former Oxfam GB engineer Femi Kuti-George shared with me his observation that the *kongoma* (a bass lamellophone) is now rarely seen in rural areas and was much more widespread before the war (p.c., 18 Dec 08).

<sup>4</sup> According to producer/radio presenter Emrys Savage, "The traditional music has a very strong potential to do well. The younger people are not learning from the older people, they're not interested. And so it's dying out (intvw 19 Dec 08)." Praise singer and kongoma player Mohammed Koroma, from Safinya, Neini Chiefdom, said: "For the moment, I am doing this thing without getting much from it, so people within the community don't think it is very important, so nobody will decide to follow me, because I just get a small amount of money [...] to buy maggi (stock powder), onions for the day's cooking."

<sup>5</sup> According to John Kamara (intvw, 13 Dec 08), the situation of hunters in his own village was typical of elsewhere in the north: "Before the war, we were having some hunters, and we were having some singers who were praise singing hunters. But after the war, these people have all died and most of these local instruments have got destroyed. So by now it is difficult to find those people. You can find the hunters here. But you see, because of this disarmament, people are afraid to [...] as a hunter."

<sup>6</sup> Traditionally, girls entering puberty undergo initiation in the bush under the guidance of older women.

on the girls' formal education, and this may have adversely affected the transmission of the songs linked to initiation in some areas.<sup>7</sup>

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON MUSIC AND HEALTH

The study of the therapeutic nature of music and its actual or potential role in health and healing is by no means a new phenomenon, and in his anthology *Music as Medicine* (2000), Peregrine Horden deals with the history of music therapy from antiquity to modern times.<sup>8</sup> A complementary anthology edited by Penelope Gouk, *Musical Healing in Cultural Contexts* (2000), offers a more contemporary and comparative perspective; chapters include John Janzen's study of ngoma rituals performed throughout southern and central Africa, and Friedson's case study on the use of music in healing trance ceremonies among the Tumbuka people of Malawi. Gouk observes in her introduction that whilst there is a wealth of literature by music therapists and psychologists about music's healing properties,<sup>9</sup> comparatively little has been produced by scholars engaged in social and cultural studies. A notable exception is Marina Roseman's study, *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest* (1991). Ritual healing ceremonies among the Temiar provide Roseman with an entry point to explore and understand local concepts of illness and well-being. Whilst 'dream songs' can be performed by anyone, in any place, the evocative and transformative power of dream songs can be activated only when performed by a medium with the intent to invoke the spirits.<sup>10</sup> Thus musical sounds, and healing sounds, are situated in a web of local meanings which are culturally mediated to render healing ceremonies effective.

The term 'medical ethnomusicology' was first introduced by Barz in 2002, "to inspire the need for further ethnographic-based studies of the roles of music in the performance of health- and healing-related activities" (cited in Barz, 2006, p. 60).<sup>11</sup> This nascent sub-discipline deals with the interface between music, culture and healing, and is fundamentally interdisciplinary. *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology* (2008) is the first compilation of articles from key scholars in the field; in the introduction, editor Benjamin Koen acknowledges that there is no unifying theory for medical ethnomusicology at present. According to Barz, "Discourse in medical ethnomusicology, while still in a developmental stage, nevertheless values the potentiality for research and reflection that can lead to both assessment and action" (2006, p. 68). Barz locates research related to medical

<sup>7</sup> Bambeh Kamara (intvw, 10 Dec 08) described how in recent years she heard fewer stories about circumcision in her areas of work, indicating a reduction in initiation activity. When we returned to Sumbaria in early January 2009, after two weeks away, it became clear that new initiates were being celebrated after only a short period of initiation during the school holiday, where formerly girls may have been taken to the bush for several months. It is not clear to what extent this trend towards reduced initiation activity observed in Neini Chiefdom can be generalised to other areas of Sierra Leone.

<sup>8</sup> Horden understands the term in its broader sense, rather than as denoting the modern profession of music therapy.

<sup>9</sup> Sloboda reaffirms the prevailing view in the music mood induction literature that the apparent 'power' of music rests on the full engagement of the listener, and is not a 'pharmaceutical' property of the sound stimulus (Sloboda, 2004, p. 383). Describing the findings of a study in which participants became more happy, more alert, and less bored by listening to music, Sloboda asserts that music maximally enhances well-being when participants exercise some degree of autonomy in the type of music they hear (Sloboda, 2004, p. 335).

<sup>10</sup> Dream songs are an integral part of Temiar healing performance.

<sup>11</sup> Whilst the term 'medical' evokes Western, clinical medicine, medical ethnomusicology does in fact consider healing in a broader sense; like its antecedent, medical anthropology, it highlights the performance of culture, while taking into account localised understandings of medicine, spirituality, healing, and general health care.

ethnomusicology within an action-oriented framework of cultural advocacy, a form of applied ethnomusicology.

## SETTING THE STAGE

In *Singing for Life: Music and HIV/AIDS in Uganda*, Barz (2006) emphasises that his focus is on telling a broad story, that of the role of performance in local and national efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in Uganda. He acknowledges that there is scope for a more detailed, nuanced case study. It is my hope that this present study can in some way respond to this, although my research focus is on health and well-being rather than HIV/AIDS specifically.<sup>12</sup> I adopt a broad definition of health, to denote strength and vigour in body and mind, with attention to physical, psychological and social aspects of health. Investigation of indigenous conceptualisations of health remains beyond the scope of this short study. My purpose in this present study is to examine the ways in which music may be harnessed for effective health promotion in rural Sierra Leone. I argue that music has a valuable role to play in post-conflict society, and that music should be more explicitly valued within health and development interventions in rural Sierra Leone. My analysis and insights also offer opportunities for reflection and change among actors in the development sector.

In section two, I set out my research methodology, situate my key informants, and share reflections on the nature of the relationships in my field research. Barz (2006) defines two major ways in which music is conceived in Uganda to have associations with health and healing: the first is music or song as offering an educational message for prevention or treatment of disease, and the second is music as offering healing or providing pain relief or the opportunity to forget. I have chosen to structure sections three and four broadly along these same lines, although my analysis departs from that of Barz, and I take account of Clayton, *et al.* (2004) who advocate a shift in emphasis in ethnomusicology towards the holistic investigation of music-making as embodied, interactive, communicative behaviour. Where Barz (2006) prioritises textual analysis of a number of different songs, I will conduct a textual and musical analysis of one song in particular, in order to situate the song in the musical tradition of Kuranko women. In the fourth section, I move beyond the narrow focus of song which seeks to communicate a specific health education message, to consider how music-making as a social activity may impact positively on health and well-being in a post-conflict context such as Sierra Leone.

## METHODOLOGY AND RELATIONSHIPS IN THE FIELD

### BACKGROUND

I spent two years from 2005 to 2007 in the remote town of Kailahun, in south-east Sierra Leone, managing a public health programme for Oxfam GB. I observed that drama and song play a central role in the oral tradition of Sierra Leone and many

---

<sup>12</sup> Definitions of well-being as adopted by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) and Well-being and International Development (WeD) both include attention to mental and emotional health, and an awareness of the social dimension of well-being.

community development practitioners incorporate music into their work.<sup>13</sup> However, the specific ways in which music is used to promote health have not been widely examined.<sup>14</sup> I returned to Sierra Leone for six weeks in December 2008 to conduct my research; I was fortunate to spend much of this time living in rural communities of Koinadugu District, in the Northern Province, alongside local staff from Catholic Relief Services (CRS).<sup>15</sup> This study draws on my field research in Koinadugu District as well as insights gleaned from living and working in Kailahun District from 2005-7.

## METHODOLOGY

I spent nearly three weeks shadowing Bambeh Kamara, a community health worker with CRS who is based in Neini Chiefdom, Koinadugu District. For comparative purposes I also shadowed her colleague, Samuel Mara, in the northernmost chiefdom of Mongo, Koinadugu District. I participated in CRS-led health sessions with pregnant women and lactating mothers, observing the ways in which Bambeh in particular utilised music in health sessions. During my stay, the focus of these education sessions was on balanced nutrition for mothers and babies, and exclusive breastfeeding of babies up to six months old; additional attention was given to HIV/AIDS through a briefing with members of the village development committee and the organisation of an inter-community quiz. A typical health session led by Bambeh started off with singing; as the singing got underway, and more women joined the session, she invited volunteers to come forward and lead songs from the traditional repertoire of their own ethnic group or in Krio; some songs were familiar to everyone. After a succession of songs, Bambeh encouraged everyone to take seats on the benches; she introduced the key education topic for the session. Often, a specific song was introduced later in the session to reinforce a particular health message.

I explored the musical capacities of community members more broadly through performances and guided conversations or focus group discussions with performers. This included learning about the song repertoire of Kuranko women in order to gain a broad understanding of the musical context within which Bambeh was working. I learned most about Kuranko song tradition by working with a group of women who called themselves Kankelan. These women performed for me on a number of occasions, twice by arrangement so that I could record their songs and ask them about their repertoire and the role of music in their lives, with support from a Kuranko interpreter. In addition, I interviewed musicians in Kailahun District, and made audio recordings of their performances. Other key informants included the local schoolteacher, and Freetown-based representatives of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, a music producer and radio presenter at Talking Drum Studio, the

---

<sup>13</sup> Former colleagues expressed this in different ways: "Music is a way of life for people in Sierra Leone. Music is used during farming and festive seasons and the words are made of community concerns. (Abdul Thoronka p.c., 31 March 2008)"; "The first thing children learn to do in primary school, and even in pre-school, is to sing. (Komba Lawrence Teh intvw, 5 April 2008)".

<sup>14</sup> The most pertinent study that I am aware of was conducted by Bell (2006), who examined the use of creative media within Oxfam GB's public health programme in Kailahun District.

<sup>15</sup> CRS is an international NGO implementing a public health programme aimed at improving maternal and child health in a number of chiefdoms in Sierra Leone.

director of the Ballanta Academy of Music, and managers of health programmes within NGOs.

My principal methodology was that of participant-observation; I joined in everyday life and work with Bambeh and Samuel. When I used my hand-held audio recorder I was limited to the status of an observer.<sup>16</sup> At other times, as I joined in with singing and dancing, the activities of participation and observation merged into experiential observation. The term I favour throughout this paper is ‘musicking’, as I believe it is equally apt as a way of describing the visiting ethnomusicology researcher as for members of the host community; coined by Small (1998), musicking refers to music not as an object, but rather as practice and process, as something we do – whether in capacity as performer or listener.

### ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Individuals have always played a crucial role in field research, and yet have not always been represented in ethnographic writing. Whilst this paper does not constitute a biographical account, a woman, Bambeh Kamara, lies at the heart of it – as musician, community animator, interpreter and culture broker. Bambeh is a gifted musician with a melodious voice and a charismatic personality, who uses music extensively in her community health work. Bambeh’s story sheds light on aspects of musical tradition and transmission of the tradition among the Kuranko in Sierra Leone. Moreover, Bambeh played a central role in interpreting and mediating performances and other community events for me, and I recognise that she helped to shape my interpretation of community life. Observation and analysis of her approach and strategies in working musically with communities have enabled me to achieve my overall aim of identifying ways in which music may be harnessed for effective health promotion in the Sierra Leonean context. In this way, Bambeh’s musicianship, personality and status are themes which run through this paper.

Born in 1971 to Kuranko parents,<sup>17</sup> Bambeh’s family origins are in Mongo Chiefdom in northern Koinadugu District, where there are *jelis* in the family; Bambeh talked of one in particular who still lives in her family’s village and plays the *balanji* (xylophone) and the flute.<sup>18</sup> Despite having grown up in the urban environments of Freetown and Makeni, Bambeh speaks her native language of Kuranko alongside Krio, and feels a strong connection to her cultural heritage.

I love singing. I grew up with that... that was the spirit I got. Then my mother taught me how to sing, tell stories, yes. Even last night when we got in I was giving out some stories on past events about some chiefs who married plenty women. So after explaining that, I started singing to my younger sister in the room. She was laughing. She said you have old, old, old stories, you are an old woman. Yes, I love singing, really. Singing is my hobby. [...] I was having it at the back of my mind that music will be my career. But within our own culture people think that singing will lead to

---

<sup>16</sup> I recorded using an Edirol R-09 with internal speakers, and recorded all music on wav format. Operating in a rural environment without electricity for days at a time posed certain constraints, and most notably impacted on my choice of technological equipment; I made only limited use of a digital camera to complement my audio recordings.

<sup>17</sup> The Kuranko constitute only 3.5% of the population in Sierra Leone, and Kuranko is a minority language, classified by Charry (2000) as belonging to the Mandekan family of Mande languages.

<sup>18</sup> The *jelis* or *griots* are hereditary musicians among the Mande peoples.

prostitution. If a woman is singing and dancing, they will take you all over the country. As they are going along with you, so you will meet with different men. So they are afraid. So people started giving me all this type of fuss. That made me to sit down quietly. [...] So singing was my hobby until this age. (Bambeh Kamara intvw 10 Dec 08)

Bambeh acknowledges the pivotal role her mother has played in transmitting Kuranko songs, dance styles and stories to her daughter. Bambeh describes above how she aspired from a young age to become a professional musician, but was discouraged by her family because female singers were associated with prostitution, a phenomenon observed in many music cultures around the world (Doubleday, 2008). In 1997, by which time Bambeh had family of her own, Bambeh began training as a nurse. Bambeh recounts that on qualifying she expressly requested to be placed by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) in northern Koinadugu so that she might serve her own people. Bambeh later joined the public health team of CRS as a community-based health and development worker; she has developed her own way of integrating music into the sessions, drawing on her musical talents and cultural heritage.

Bambeh has been based in the village of Sumbaria since 2007, when the CRS health programme started operating there. The Kuranko constitute the majority in this large community, and live alongside Limbas, Timnes and Konos; each group speaks its own language, and Krio is also widely spoken.<sup>19</sup> Intermarriage is common. Sumbaria has a small health clinic, which also serves neighbouring communities. Access to safe water and sanitation is poor, with over-reliance on the river running through Sumbaria. There is no electricity, and mobile phone coverage can be obtained only by climbing a small forested hill on the outskirts of the community. Most people still depend on farming for their livelihoods; my visit in December was at the peak of the dry season, when harvesting was almost over, a period generally known as the season of plenty.

The community of Sumbaria hosted me for three weeks, and Bambeh played a crucial role in mediating my relationships with the people around me, from the village chief to my musician informants. I quickly became aware of the extent to which I depended on her strong social networks, local knowledge and willingness to engage with me for the success of my research project. In this next section I share further reflections on my field relationships, and consider the notion of reciprocity, which I believe to be highly relevant to studies of music and healing, especially when conducted in a framework of applied ethnomusicology.

## REFLECTIONS ON FIELD RELATIONSHIPS AND RECIPROCITY

Could I master the gestures of giving and taking in this highly charged, unequal encounter? (White, 2008, p. 222)

White's question above succinctly encapsulates the critical issues of power relations and reciprocity in field research, and doubtless resonates with the experience of many

---

<sup>19</sup> In Sumbaria, the Kuranko speak a different dialect to that of the Kuranko in northern Koinadugu from where Bambeh's family originates.

an ethnomusicologist. Hellier-Tinoco laments that the discussion surrounding field relations has been only limited in the ethnomusicology literature, and suggests the need to advance the discussion, “particularly accentuating both responsibility and reciprocity as central to human relationships in fieldwork contexts” (2003, p. 19). In documenting my own brief reflections on the relationships between myself and key informants, I begin by considering the role of Bambeh, and then move on to examine the perceptions of Kuranko women towards me as researcher.

Bambeh was generally credited with bringing foreign visitors to the community.<sup>20</sup> In welcome speeches, Bambeh was frequently described as having *sababu*,<sup>21</sup> which denotes someone who is socially connected, who brings opportunities. Moreover, Bambeh’s role in my visit was acknowledged through gifts. When we visited communities, the welcome gift was often presented directly to Bambeh in recognition that she was my host, and as an expression of gratitude for her work to promote good health in the community.<sup>22</sup> Bambeh and I developed a genuine friendship based on our common musicianship and mutual respect. Bambeh did not request anything of me beyond a contribution to living costs, and that I teach her a song of my own. However, it was clear from a casual conversation in the *poyo* bar of Sewuria that she had hopes of a relationship which would outlive the short research period: “Eh Kate, you no go forget me when you go back?”<sup>23</sup>

The Kuranko women of Kankelan sang about their relationship to me as researcher and their expectations of this relationship. The song is included as [Track 1](#).

We are ready to help you by singing, because we are your mothers. When we help you to sing this song, you yourself will remember us. When there are white people,<sup>24</sup> you are the people that help us. We are all trying to sing a song to help you, and when we have sung a song to help you, you will help us too. It’s left with you alone, but we are ready at any time to sing a song for you. (Kankelan recording session, 14 Dec 08)

In this song the women, whom Bambeh respectfully referred to as “the old mums”, presented themselves as my mothers. By emphasising their status as my elders, they implicitly emphasized the honour bestowed on me by the fact that they had agreed to sing for me. Moreover, by adopting me as their daughter, they were reiterating the binding notion of reciprocity, as per the responsibilities of a child towards her parents. The Kankelan women were willing to sing for me with the expectation that I help them in return.

<sup>20</sup> Bambeh said that each of her ten programme communities were clamouring for a visit from me, no doubt from a sense of hospitality, but also linked also to the perception that foreigners may bring tangible developmental benefits.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Sababu’ is a term understood by everyone in Sierra Leone, although its etymology strongly suggests that it originates from the Mandingo language. The term relates to social networks and the way they operate within the patronage system.

<sup>22</sup> Kuranko custom dictates that a visitor be presented with a welcome gift; usually this consisted of several cups of rice and a chicken, or kola nuts.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Poyo’ is palm wine, tapped from the palm tree; its production is most commonly associated with the Limbas, whilst its consumption is enjoyed by all.

<sup>24</sup> In rural Sierra Leone, the *tubabu*, meaning ‘white person’ in the Kuranko and Mandingo languages, is commonly associated with development assistance. The conviction that white people bring development was communicated to me directly in a song ([Track 2](#)) by women in nearby Safinya: “We have been suffering for quite a long time now [...] We have started seeing white people here through Bambeh’s favour, so we believe development is coming for us.”

The expectations underlying Kankelan's request for help must be located within the patronage system and post-conflict Sierra Leone. Firstly, it is apparent that by requesting my help, these women were performing their perceived role within the patronage system; in effect, they were soliciting support from a 'big man' (or in my case, a woman).<sup>25</sup> Patronage is often described as a system of redistributing wealth; for example, Waterman (1990, p. 178) says of the Yoruba in Nigeria: "[the Yoruba individual] redistributes part of his income to kinsmen, friends, and neighbours, by giving gifts, especially of money and food." In turn, patrons may be lavished with praise, whereby "gestures of praise implicitly urge those in positions of privilege to take action and reinforce networks of reciprocity (Appadurai, 1990, cited in White, 2008, p. 222)". Thus the notion of reciprocity is embedded in social relations within the patronage system. Secondly, the women of Kankelan were performing their perceived role within the humanitarian system; by requesting my help, they assumed a role as passive beneficiaries akin to those who receive hand-outs from humanitarian agencies – behaviour which is doubtless the legacy of the civil war in Sierra Leone.<sup>26</sup>

I experienced a level of discomfort at the message in Kankelan's song, which drew attention to the stark inequalities between us, hinted at expectations I could never truly fulfil, and also pointed to my expected role as a sponsor in the patronage system – a role that I was ill at ease with.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, I concur with Davis (1992) who considers "tangible reciprocity" as an "ethical mandate" in applied ethnomusicology, and, I would argue, any ethnomusicological endeavour. As part of my basic agreement with all performers, I returned copies of my field recordings; in addition I provided Kankelan with a cassette player to ensure that they had the means to listen back to their own songs. On my return to the UK, I compiled an album featuring performance highlights from my research trip (including two songs from Kankelan), with a view to raising the profile of various musical traditions and musicians in Sierra Leone. My relationship with Bambeh continues to evolve: I have met up with her on subsequent visits to Sierra Leone, and am committed to paying school fees for her elder daughter.

Having thus fully situated my key informants and field relationships, and highlighted the importance of reciprocity in a study such as this one, I move on to consider Bambeh's song, and the wider potential of music and song for health education.

## SONG WITH A MESSAGE

The oral tradition is embedded in the culture of Sierra Leone. In rural areas, storytellers and singers provide evening entertainment, and street criers convey the latest news; in Sumbaria, the beating of the chief's drum signifies the arrival of an important visitor, a meeting, or a death. Literacy rates remain low, especially among women and girls, and so oral communication remains the most effective way to transmit information at community level.<sup>28</sup> In Sierra Leone, music is expected to

<sup>25</sup> This usually refers to someone who has a certain socio-economic status or belongs to a ruling family.

<sup>26</sup> This 'dependency syndrome' is a common feature of societies which come to rely on humanitarian intervention over a number of years.

<sup>27</sup> The sense of panic articulated by White (2008, p. 222) in response to these same expectations in Congo resonates deeply with my experience.

<sup>28</sup> The adult literacy rate was less than 35% in 2005 according to the UNDP (cited in Economist Intelligence Unit

have a message,<sup>29</sup> and is thus inherently communicative; this is clearly expressed by women and men involved in performing or producing music:

We sing loudly when we are gathered together, for each and everyone to understand what we're saying. But when alone, we just sing quietly to ourselves. (Fanta Marah intvw, member of Kankelan, Sumbaria, 13 Dec 08)

Music is not just singing, let there be a message, a vital message, which is able to change people, which is able to sensitise people, which is able to take people from square zero to square one. Music is able to do that. (Francis Tucker intvw, singer, Kailahun, 25 Dec 08)

People listen to me, especially when I'm playing, they listen to me, and sometimes they want me to continue to sing to them so that they can continue to listen to what I'm saying. Sometimes [...] I want to hide to go and sleep, but they will say no, don't go home, we want you to sing. (Pa Vandi intvw, accordionist/ praise singer, Kailahun, 24 Dec 08)

Here in Sierra Leone, audiences are really looking for a message. (Emrys Savage intvw, producer/ radio presenter at Talking Drum Studio, Freetown, 19 Dec 08)

Francis Tucker, a singer in Kailahun, believes that music has many advantages over speech because of the way that it draws people in:

When music is playing, people will dance to it, then listen to that particular message. Let's say the instrument is playing, the singing starts, your stress will come down, and you will be able to listen. At least one of the messages will come through your brain. People listen to music more than naked preaching. When a message comes through singing, the beating of the instrument alone can draw the person's attention to that particular message.

Bambeh related how she used this capacity of song to her advantage, to mobilise women to attend health sessions in Safinya in the early days of the programme:

It was difficult initially to mobilise in this community, so a small group came together and said, "let us sing, and then the others will come." This is what happened. This morning also, the music attracted laggards. (Bambeh intvw, 15 Jan 09)

## BAMBEH'S SONG

Songs commissioned by the MoHS are widely used by community health workers across Sierra Leone; since they are produced only in the four major languages, Bambeh may use the Krio version or work with health session participants to translate them into their respective languages. In addition, Bambeh creates her own songs. Bambeh introduced 'Sinkidi Dama' as her own composition ([Track 3](#)), and then proceeded to teach it to me, building it up line by line. In a neighbouring village a few days later, I heard another version of the song ([Track 4](#)): the same melody was being played on flute and kongoma<sup>30</sup> the words were different, and sung by a man.<sup>30</sup>

---

Country Profile 2008, Sierra Leone, p. 11).

<sup>29</sup> Nketia notes that musicians themselves often feel a responsibility towards serving their community (1979, pp. 67-8).

<sup>30</sup> The kongoma consists of a wooden frame with two, three or four metal tongues which are plucked with the fingers of the right hand. Each metal tongue produces a different pitch.

When I asked Bambeh why she had chosen this particular melody for her song, her answer was straightforward: “Because I love it.” Whilst little is known of the origins of this song, the presence of two different versions strongly suggests that the concept of musical creativity among the Kuranko is like that of other Mande groups such as the Mandinka and the Maninka, and that new pieces can be generated by putting new words to an older instrumental accompaniment and melody (Charry, 2000, p. 150). Bambeh’s composition ‘Sinkidi Dama’ shares certain features of Kuranko women’s song, as will be explored further below; thus she draws on her own cultural heritage to support and anchor learning and performance with women in health sessions.

Bambeh incorporated her song into baby growth monitoring sessions<sup>31</sup> in each village. The message is specifically for mothers of newly-born babies, encouraging them to breastfeed exclusively for six months. Breast milk helps to strengthen the baby’s immune system, and exclusive breastfeeding is particularly recommended in Sierra Leone on account of only limited access to safe drinking water in rural areas. The words to the song are in Kuranko, and the English translation is provided alongside.

SIN KI DI DAMA CARO WORO, SIN KI DI DAMA OYA<sup>32</sup>

(x2 leader calls) (x2 chorus responds)

Breast feed [your baby] for six months, breast feed oya

A LE LA MALA NAYO, AN MUN MA YONA OYA (x2)<sup>33</sup>

That will make him crawl quickly, yes mummy oya

A LE LA MALA NAYO, AN TA MA YONA OYA (x2)

That will make him walk quickly, yes mummy oya

A LE LA MALA NAYO, AN KENDIA E BOLO (x2)

That will make him healthy, yes mummy

(E) KAYIDI DAMA CARO WORO,

(E) KAYIDI DAMA FIEU FIEU

(x2 leader calls) (x2 chorus responds)

Don’t give [your baby] water for six months,

don’t give him water at all

A LE LA MALA NAYO, AN BANDI E BOLO OYA (x2)

That will make him sick, yes mummy oya

A LE LA MALA NAYO, AN KOSO E BOLO (x2)

That will make him swollen, yes mummy<sup>34</sup>

SIN KIDI DAMA CARO WORO, SINKIDI DAMA OYA (x2)

Breast feed [your baby] for six months, breast feed oya

The melody is built on a Western heptatonic scale, and the version performed and recorded in the version on [Track 3](#) appears to be in F major. The texture is monophonic, with voices in unison throughout, which is characteristic of the repertoire of Kuranko women: only on two occasions during the performances of

<sup>31</sup> Babies are weighed at these regular sessions; weight loss or lack of growth is an indicator of sickness or malnutrition, which may not otherwise have been diagnosed, and mothers are advised accordingly.

<sup>32</sup> I could find no suitable translation for ‘oya’ (sometimes substituted with ‘ena’); according to Bambeh it “expresses the love of the song”.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Nayo’ was sometimes substituted with ‘nale’, both meaning ‘yes mummy’; I have put it to the end of the line in my translation in order to render more sense in English.

<sup>34</sup> Bambeh explained that if a baby is swollen, nobody will want to hold him.

Kankelan did I hear a note harmonised by a single voice a third above, and it was so unusual that I inferred that it was a mistake on the part of one individual. The song is in duple time,<sup>35</sup> and rhythmic accompaniment is provided by handclapping and shaking of the shegbureh, an instrument associated with women and only rarely played by men.<sup>36</sup> There are however certain variables in performances of Bambeh's song, including the starting point: in the recording on [Track 3](#) for example, the lead singer takes 'Cayidi dama' as their first line rather than 'Sinkidi dama'. Moreover, the song may be sung any number of times in a performance, indicating flexibility in the length of a piece. During one recording session with Kankelan, I found one song in particular to be endlessly repetitive, and yet the performers showed no sign of wanting to finish up; my interpreter John Kamara later explained that songs can be twenty minutes or longer, and there is no fixed length. Sia Princess Fili (intvw, 13 Dec 08) expanded on this: "With certain songs you can sing the song and prolong it far. And then there are those certain songs you cannot go further with."<sup>37</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that common characteristics of African musical forms – such as repetition (Bebey, 1975; Turino, 2000), call-and-response and frequent brevity of lyrical phrases (Alagoa, 1968) – might enhance music's ability to communicate and educate (cited in Noss Van Buren 2007, p. 305). Call-and-response features prominently in 'Sinkidi Dama': as the leader (Bambeh) finishes the first line, the chorus (women participating in the health session) interject with a celebratory 'oya', to create a pleasant harmony with an interval of a major sixth, before leading swiftly on to repetition of the first line by the leader; then, after completing the repetition, the roles are reversed and the chorus sings the first line, followed by the interjection of 'oya' from the leader. This alternation of roles surely keeps the chorus members engaged with the song, and repetition of the leader's call makes the message easy to memorise. Performance of the song works well in communal situations, with a lead singer and chorus, but is equally sung by individuals, and could therefore act as a prompt to breastfeed whether the mother is at home or on the farm, alone or in a group.<sup>38</sup>

We have seen that song can attract listeners more easily than speech, and it can communicate information; and the educational message is surely a first step towards behaviour change. But to what extent can song in general, and 'Sinkidi Dama' in particular, lead to behaviour change? Clearly there are limitations. One of the biggest obstacles to exclusive breastfeeding in Sumbaria is the locally held belief that a baby should be 'cleaned out' with water when born.<sup>39</sup> Whilst the new mothers involved in CRS health sessions may, through education, be persuaded of the advantages of exclusive breastfeeding, for it to become a reality at household level they may have to challenge the more traditional beliefs of their mother-in-law and the child's father,

<sup>35</sup> Horton (1979) notes of the Sierra Leonean context that music in strict time is suitable for dancing.

<sup>36</sup> It is noteworthy that only women make the instrument, a gourd shaker with beads.

<sup>37</sup> This is reminiscent of the pieces played by jelis in the wider Mande region; Charry (2000, p. 12) notes that a piece can last as long as the performer wishes, from a few minutes to an hour or longer, depending on the performance situation and the kind of piece.

<sup>38</sup> On this point, my findings contrast with those of Bell (2006) who asserts that call-and-response songs are not sung by individuals alone, and suggests that this factor limits their efficacy in terms of promoting behaviour change.

<sup>39</sup> The identification of environmental obstacles to change is a core element of behaviour change communication (BCC) methodology in the field of public health.

both of whom hold positions of higher status in the household as a result of age or gender. In rural Sierra Leone, childcare is perceived as being the sole responsibility of the mother, and yet in practical terms, the health and well-being of both baby and mother depend also on the father's support. This points to the need for an inclusion strategy which seeks to engage with fathers as well as mothers. 'Sinkidi Dama' shares certain features with the traditional repertoire of Kuranko women and is used within health sessions to address young mothers. I suggest that song could be harnessed to mobilise and engage fathers, by consciously adopting melodies associated with men's society songs and instruments in the male domain.<sup>40</sup>

### THE ROLE OF AGENCY – PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND MUSICAL

Having conducted a musical and textual analysis of 'Sinkidi Dama', a further consideration pertaining to the communication of the song and its message is the musician who has agency over the song. For Giddens (1979), the capacity to effect change or influence others, is inextricably linked to power, which is manifested through social relations. My assertion is that as the primary agent of transmission, Bambeh herself, by dint of her personality and her position, also contributes to the effectiveness of the health education message. Throughout my stay in Sumbaria, I observed how Bambeh related to others: she emphasized the importance of staying on good terms with everyone, she always made time for people – listening to the problems community members brought to her at any time of day or night, and her sense of humour raised morale. Her charisma and dynamism enabled her to mobilise community members to attend special events such as an HIV/AIDS quiz. And she discretely used the occasion of my visit to mend a rift between the community of Safinya and the nurse based in the health clinic in Sumbaria. Bambeh is a role model for many members of the community; the fact that she is widely respected heightens her influence.

Within the broader system of power and patronage, Bambeh has relatively high status in Sumbaria; not only is she the face of CRS on the ground, but she is also a qualified nurse, literate and educated. In recognition of Bambeh's contribution to the community both as an individual and as representative of a bigger organisational structure, the women in the community sing her praises, as revealed by teacher John Kamara (intvw, 13 Dec 08): "They praise sing 'Bambeh has done well, given that our town is clean, pregnant women are now attending clinic, children are now receiving *maklete*,<sup>41</sup> exercise is good for all people', all of this is within the song." The women praise Bambeh for her contribution to the development of Sumbaria, to motivate and encourage her further, with the expectation that she will continue to support them. Enlightening comments by Bambeh's colleague Samuel Mara help towards a better understanding of the feelings evoked by praise singing: Samuel explained that praise singing conferred upon him happiness, pride and honour, prompting him to give generously; he said, "The praise singers really know how to motivate you."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> This is happening already in Uganda. Barz (2006, p. 77) describes how women have adapted their music in order to engage with men on the critical issue of HIV/AIDS: "No one will listen to us unless we bring our drums!"

<sup>41</sup> 'Maklete' is the krio term for immunisation vaccinations.

<sup>42</sup> Similarly Charry (2000, p. 336), on the interaction between praise singer and patron among the Mande, describes how "singers heat up their patrons, whose pride has been lit when they hear their ancestors being praised; they in turn heat up the singers with gifts, and one can feel the ebb and flow of these ancient symbiotic relationships at work."

Songs are personified: when CRS programme participants think of Bambeh, they think of her music; when they think of her songs, they think of Bambeh.<sup>43</sup> My assertion is that because of both the power and popularity of Bambeh, the song and the educational message reaches a larger audience. Bambeh shared with me her discussion with a woman from one of her health sessions, which confirms that her songs are also sung on the farm, outside of CRS health sessions:

Some communities used to tell me, “You are lucky-o, you will have long life. Yesterday we were talking about you when we were on our farms. We were just thinking about your songs. We were singing some of your songs on the farm. [...] Yes, we were singing them, because you already educated us on how to take care of ourselves, so when we are working we like some of your songs, we imagine you, so we sing them.” (Bambeh intvw, Jan 09)

This finding is especially significant in rural Sierra Leone, where much of the population depends on agriculture for subsistence. Some farmers, including pregnant women, spend months at a time living on their farms – often located outside the community – and cannot fully participate in the CRS health sessions at the clinic. Thus, through song, and her own agency over song, Bambeh can reach women in the wider community and even neighbouring communities who do not attend her health sessions. As Bambeh said, “the song will live in the community”. The advantages of song to convey information are readily apparent: the catchiness of the music itself grabs people in a way that words cannot; music lives on beyond mere words, and it carries on the wind. By fusing ‘Western’ scientific knowledge about health with something which is their own – namely the familiar melodies of the Kuranko women’s cultural heritage – the message has a better chance of infiltrating the world these women inhabit, and becoming a part of their own culture.

## THE HEALING POWER OF MUSIC

In the previous section I situated Bambeh’s song ‘Sinkidi Dama’ within the local musical idiom in order to identify potential contributions and limitations of the use of song to communicate a health promotion message. In this section I examine local conceptualisations of music and ways in which Bambeh used music, to explore the healing power of music and its application in a post-conflict society. My findings suggest that the use of music for personal healing and emotional self-regulation is common currency in Sierra Leone.<sup>44</sup> Many of the women and men I met recognised the restorative power of music, and described ways in which they proactively use music to make them feel better; furthermore, many highlighted the social dimension of music and its power to bring people together.

Music stimulates life. [...] Whenever I’m discouraged, if I start singing or I put on my tape, I’m okay, all the stress just goes away. So I love singing. [...] I always sing

---

<sup>43</sup> In a similar vein, I came to be associated with ‘Sinkidi Dama’ in Mongo Chiefdom, Samuel Marah’s area of operation; after introducing it in three communities, many women sang it back at me whenever they saw me outside of the context of the health session.

<sup>44</sup> The term ‘emotional self-regulation’ was coined by sociologist Tia DeNora (2000), a pioneering researcher of music and everyday life in Britain, who emphasises the extent to which music is now regarded as a personal tool (Frith, 2003, p. 98).

when I'm angry or upset. It calms me down and puts things right. (Bambeh Kamara intvw, 11 Dec 08)

Music is for the enjoyment of life. And to forget about many things. [...] When someone hurts me, I might try to compose a song for myself pertaining to what has been done to me. I compose my own songs. (Kadiatu Turay intvw, Limba woman, Sumbaria, 13 Dec 08)

Music is important because if you love music, when you are alone and you are singing, the music will make you to forget about [...] hardship. Even if you are sick, you will forget. To be within the community, to gather the community, you have to be happy, and that happiness is brought by music. (Ayei Fullah intvw, Timne woman, Sumbaria, 13 Dec 08)

If you're sad, music can make you happy. If you're sick, you're surely on your way to dying if you aren't moved to tap your foot or nod your head. (Kabba Mansaray p.c., former Oxfam GB driver, Kenema, 29 Dec 08)

Furthermore, the notion of music and sound as an embodied experience, whereby sound resonates in the body and the body may respond with movement, is self-evident in a country like Sierra Leone, where music in performance is usually accompanied by dancing. Ruud (2008, p. 55) affirms that the "ability (of humans) to react to music [...] seems to be rooted in our common biological nature, in our embodied responses to music." I frequently observed the therapeutic and restorative effect of singing and dancing especially among older women; below I describe a recording session with Kankelan.

I found a group of Kuranko women waiting for me when I emerged from the evening church service. The night sky was lit by stars, and the women led me with an excited sense of purpose to an empty house. They closed the door and the shutters to delimit the space that was ours for the evening, our very own recording studio. Excited chatter was quietened by Fanta's introductory welcome, in which she reiterated that they considered me their daughter, acknowledging that I had travelled far from my family. Then the singing began, the first song led by Fanta; each consisted of singing and handclapping, and gradually they incorporated more dancing into their performance. There would have been no pause between songs had I not insisted that the lead singer explain the message after each song; there were songs with moral and proverbial messages, initiation songs, and songs telling of relations between mother and child. After fifteen songs or so, the session culminated in a request that I dance with them. I promptly turned off my audio recorder and joined in, with a sense of release to be an active part of the performance. Amid the cacophony of voices, I could sense the energy emanating from those around me, all moving to the same beat; the more they danced, the more energised they became. [...] I had thought this was the finale to the evening, but a small group accompanied me back to my room, and we continued dancing outside in the moonlight. I was struck by the therapeutic nature of singing and dancing; some of the women with me were old and had worked hard on their farms all day, and yet still they had the energy to dance. (Field note, 14 Dec 08)

The women of Kankelan indicated that they often come together spontaneously to sing and dance, and I suggest that such activities have assumed a different significance since the civil war. By tapping into their tradition of communal and participatory

singing, women in Sumbaria actively use music and embodied expression as a form of coping strategy in their daily lives. This is ‘music therapy’ of the general, non-expert kind as discussed in the volume by Gouk (2000). As Gouk says, “it can be argued that any musician is potentially a healer, almost anywhere” (2000, p. 11); in Sumbaria, these women are their own healers.<sup>45</sup> Jane Davidson (2004, p. 122) asserts that the actual physical activity of singing contributes to a sense of enjoyment and well-being among singers in a choir comprising homeless men, because “the breath control required creates both a sense of contact with the body’s basic life impulse, and also gives some control over the body.” Nigel Osborne (2009) postulates that it is the way in which the activity of singing acts on the body’s respiratory and neuro-endocrine systems which means that singing in particular may be beneficial for children in zones of conflict or post-conflict. The ethnomusicology scholarship suggests that the therapeutic benefits of singing and embodied expression may also be attributed to the forging of connections between individuals in a social context.

### SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL CONNECTION THROUGH SONG

Qureshi and Blacking provide valuable insights into other ways in which music can play a powerful role in promoting social connection. Qureshi (2000) explains how the sound of music can create bonds between those who are musicking:

The physical sensation of sound not only activates feeling, it also activates links with others who feel. In an instant, the sound of music can create bonds of shared responses that are as deep and intimate as they are broad and universal. [...] Such a reification of feeling and sensation, in turn, endows musical sound with a social existence coded as identity (“our” music)... (Qureshi, 2000, p. 810)

Blacking (1983, p. 57) coined the term “bodily resonance” to describe the emotional connection and physical sensation of co-ordinated motion with others in a musical situation. Blacking theorised that there was a direct correlation between “bodily resonance” and increased “fellow-feeling” through participating in social music-making (*ibid.*, cited in Clayton, *et al.* 2004, p. 20).<sup>46</sup>

As I observed in a session on maternal and child nutrition in Safinya, Bambeh used song to promote social connection, and a sense of togetherness and solidarity among women participants; singing was invariably accompanied by dancing and handclapping.<sup>47</sup> In this instance, Bambeh drew on traditional songs that everyone in the group seemed to be familiar with, and it was the process of being together and the act of singing which promoted a sense of unity, rather than the words of the song

<sup>45</sup> Pavlicevic (2004, p. 39) observes a similar phenomenon among women members of *Thembaletu*, an NGO in South Africa: “the women say that they need to sing because it ‘de-stresses’ them; *musicking* seems to be about more than just singing, and seems to be related to health: ‘de-stressing’.”

<sup>46</sup> This power of music to can be used negatively as well as positively. In Sierra Leone there is ample evidence that music was used to instil discipline and loyalty among abductees in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Richards (2007) notes that the RUF anthem was sung by the rebels on a daily basis after morning prayers, and that singing and dancing formed a key part of preparations ahead of an attack; indeed, this is confirmed by the RUF’s adoption of musical groups such as the Bandajuma Cultural Dance Group, whose lead drummer Vandi (aka Jah Brother) claimed that “when [villagers] heard our music, all they could do was dance”, so in this way their targets were disarmed and encouraged to submit peacefully (Vandi p.c., 28 Dec 2009).

<sup>47</sup> It is noteworthy that ‘kankelan’, a Kuranko word meaning togetherness or unity, was the name adopted by the Kuranko women who performed for me in Sumbaria, as well as by a female praise singer and her accompanying musicians in Seria, Mongo Chiefdom; this suggests that women locally also conceive of group musicking as bringing people together.

per se. The participants in Bambeh's session on maternal and child nutrition in Safinya shared common challenges in providing their children with an adequate and balanced diet: "We don't have anything, and we don't have men who support us."<sup>48</sup> Developing and strengthening a sense of solidarity through song was one way of encouraging these women to work together and support each other to improve the health status of themselves and their children.

In a different way, Bambeh consciously used music to assert her own cultural identity and build rapport with others. When she first arrived in Sumbaria in 2007, Bambeh needed to gain the trust of the elders, as this would enable her to fulfil her role as a development worker in the village more effectively. Her strategy was to play cassette recordings of Mandingo music from the 1960s which she herself enjoyed – musicians such as the female jeli Senawa<sup>49</sup> – in order to gather old people around her; Mama Musu, an elder from Kankelan, recalled with obvious nostalgia: "When I was a small girl, I used to listen to Senawa." In this instance, Bambeh capitalised on the referential nature of music, and its "capacity to mobilise shared associations that are thoroughly affective" (Qureshi, 2000, p. 827), in order to build rapport with a specific segment of the village population.<sup>50</sup> In so doing, Bambeh eventually gained the acceptance of these elders, so that they said to her: "You're a proper Kuranko girl."<sup>51</sup>

## HEALING WOUNDS WITH MUSIC

Music brings people together. Music allows us to forget about what the war has done to us. (John Y. Kamara intvw, schoolteacher, Sumbaria, 13 Dec 08)

John Kamara's emphasis on the need to forget suggests that memories of the conflict are still fresh in people's minds; furthermore, it is probable that the psychosocial effects of exposure to traumatic events during the civil war are prevalent among the people of Sumbaria, whether or not they are recognised as such.<sup>52</sup> As Kamara explained, rebels attacked Sumbaria in 1998 and burned all but two dwellings, forcing people to go and live on their farms for a number of years; they only returned to Sumbaria after the war was declared over in early 2002. Similarly, Bambeh recalled how she had fled her home with her husband and children: "We were on the run in the bush for a year, with nothing but the clothes on our back." Where forced displacement has resulted in a sense of dislocation and a breakdown of trust, music

<sup>48</sup> When I followed up on this with Bambeh a few days later, she explained: "Some men are without the means, because they're polygamous. They leave all the responsibility to the women; the women prepare all the food. Some are just negligent. Many are in an arranged marriage, so they have no buy-in, and they leave all the responsibility to their mother – the wife's mother-in-law."

<sup>49</sup> Bambeh said that Senawa, a Guinean, is always accompanied by guitar in the style of the kora.

<sup>50</sup> Whilst Qureshi is in fact describing the power of the sarangi's embodied meanings, the notion of affective associations is, I believe, also pertinent in discussing songs of a particular genre and era, which among the older listeners evoke pleasant memories of youth in a pre-war era.

<sup>51</sup> I inferred from this story that Mandingo music is hugely popular among the Kuranko, and that there is sufficient affinity between the Mandingos and Kuranko that Bambeh's knowledge of Mandingo music from 1960s Guinea was proof enough of her cultural roots as a Kuranko originating from northernmost Sierra Leone. This recognition of Bambeh as a Kuranko and cultural insider was clearly important to Bambeh, who feels a strong sense of ethnic cultural identity, despite having spent her formative years outside of her cultural homeland of Koinadugu District.

<sup>52</sup> In his review of medical and anthropological evidence of the psychosocial effects of extreme experiences such as torture, mutilation, rape, and the violent displacement of communities, Summerfield (1991, p. 160) notes that the major features of human response to major trauma typically include depression, sleep disturbance, anxiety and panic attacks; another common feature is somatisation, defined within clinical medicine as the expression of emotional distress in the form of bodily symptoms such as recurrent headaches.

and embodied expression may help people to reconnect with each other, and to regain a sense of identity and belonging; music can thus be harnessed to promote the well-being of individuals and the wider community.

## CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, there is clear evidence that music has a vital role to play in promoting health and well-being in rural Sierra Leone. Health messages attract listeners when they are shared through song, especially when the music is in an idiom that is familiar and meaningful to the listener; when this is the case, song may have a life of its own, extending the message to audiences far from its original source. Furthermore the musical characteristics of a song, its texture and instrumentation, may be strategically adapted in order to target specific audiences according to their gender, age, and ethnic/ linguistic background, thereby creating an enabling environment for individual behaviour change. In turn, findings from this study in Sumbaria affirm that the affective power of music and musicking can have therapeutic benefits not only at individual level but also at community level, by promoting social connection and fostering a sense of common identity. In a post-conflict context such as Sierra Leone, the value of embodied healing activities such as singing cannot be understated.

Bambeh is one of a myriad of health and development workers in Sierra Leone, and as demonstrated in this study, her approach offers an excellent model to colleagues operating in rural areas. As a musician, she instinctively makes strategic use of music, both within and beyond the confines of the health sessions in Sumbaria and neighbouring communities; Bambeh uses music to mobilise women to attend health sessions, to build relationships and rapport, to foster a sense of solidarity among the health session participants; she uses song to reinforce messages and extend them to people who do not attend health sessions, and she encourages singing and dancing among community members for the therapeutic benefits these activities bring.

The insights from this ethnomusicological study would be complemented and enhanced by an evaluative piece of research to assess the effectiveness of a song such as 'Sinkidi Dama' in contributing to CRS' overall goal of reduced maternal and child mortality. Whilst a number of NGOs based in Sierra Leone have undertaken specific musical interventions, for example supporting staff or commissioning professional artists to compose songs with specific health messages, to my knowledge none of these have been evaluated. There needs to be more explicit recognition of the value of musical intervention, and promotion of enhanced opportunities for performance, within broader strategies for health and development in Sierra Leone.

## REFERENCES

- Alagoa, E. J. (1968). Songs as historical data: Examples from the Niger delta. *Research Review* 5/1, pp. 1-16.
- Appadurai, Arjun. (1990). Topographies of the self: Praise and emotion in Hindu India. In *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, ed. C. A. Lutz and L. Abu-Lughod, pp. 92-112. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barz, Gregory. (2006). *Singing for Life: HIV/AIDS and Music in Uganda*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Bebey, Francis. (1975). *African Music: A People's Art*. New York: Lawrence Hills.
- Bell, Carolyn. (2006). Debrief notes and recommendations for Oxfam GB. Unpublished.
- Blacking, John. (1983). The concept of identity and folk concepts of self: A Venda case study. In *Identity: Personal and Socio-cultural*, ed. A. Jacobson-Widding, pp. 47-65. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Blacking, John. (1995). Expressing human experience through music. In *Music, Culture and Experience: Selected Papers of John Blacking*, ed. Byron Reginald, pp.31-53.
- Charry, Eric. (2000). *Mande Music: Traditional and Modern Music of the Maninka and Mandinka of Western Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Clayton, M., R. Sager and U. Will, eds. (2004). In time with the music: The concept of entrainment and its significance for Ethnomusicology. *ESEM Counterpoint*, 1, pp. 1-82.
- Davidson, Jane. (2004). What can the social psychology of music offer community music therapy? In *Community Music Therapy*, eds. M. Pavlicevic & G. Ansdell. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Davis, Martha-Ellen. (1992). Careers, "Alternative Careers," and the Unity Between Theory and Practice in Ethnomusicology. *ESEM Counterpoint*, 1, pp. 1-82.
- DeNora, Tia. (2000). *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Doubleday, Veronica. (2008). Sounds of power: An overview of musical instruments and gender. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 17/1, pp. 3-39.
- Giddens, Anthony. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. The Macmillan Press Ltd: London and Basingstoke.
- Gouk, Penelope, ed. (2000). *Musical Healing in Cultural Contexts*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hellier-Tinoco, Ruth. (2003). Experiencing people: relationships, responsibility and reciprocity. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 21/1, pp. 19-34.
- Horden, Peregrine, ed. (2000). *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy since Antiquity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Horton, Christian Howu. (1979). *Indigenous Music in Sierra Leone: An Analysis of Resources and Educational Implications*. PhD thesis, UCLA.
- Koen, Benjamin D. & J. Lloyd, G. Barz, K. Brummel-Smith, eds. (2008). *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nketia, Kwabena J. H. (1979). The performing musician in a changing society. *The World of Music*, 21/2, pp. 65-71.
- Noss Van Buren, Kathleen. (2007). Partnering for social change: Exploring relationships between musicians and organizations in Nairobi, Kenya. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 16/2, pp. 303-326.
- Osborne, Nigel. (2009). Music for children in zones of conflict and post-conflict: A psychobiological approach. In *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the basis of human companionship*, eds. S. Malloch & C. Trevarthen, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Pavlicevic, Mercedes & G. Ansdell, eds. (2004). *Community Music Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Qureshi, Regula B. (2000). How does music mean? Embodies memories and the politics of affect in the Indian sarangi. *American Ethnologist*, 27/4, pp. 805-838.
- Richards, Paul. (2007). The emotions at war: A musicological approach to understanding atrocity in Sierra Leone. In *Public Emotions*, eds. Perri 6, S. Radstone, C. Squire & A. Treacher. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Roseman, Marina. (1991). *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest: Temiar Music and Medicine*. Berkely, CA: University of California Press.
- Ruud, Even. (2008). Music in therapy: Increasing possibilities for action. *Music & Arts in Action*, 1/1, pp. 46-60.
- Sloboda, John. (2004). *Exploring the Musical Mind: Cognition, Emotion, Ability, Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Small, Christopher. (1998). *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Sommers, Marc. (2003). Youth, war, and urban Africa: Challenges, misunderstandings, and opportunities. In *Youth Explosion in Developing World Cities: Approaches to Reducing Poverty and Conflict in an Urban Age*, eds. B. Ruble, J. Tulchin, D. Varat, L. Hanley. Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington D.C.
- Summerfield, Derek. (1991). The Psychosocial effects of conflict in the Third World. *Development in Practice*, 1/3, pp. 159-173.
- Turino, Thomas. (2000). *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Waterman, Christopher Alan. (1990). *Jùjú: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- White, Bob W. (2008). *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Kate Bingley** is a musician, researcher and social development consultant. She holds a MMus in Ethnomusicology from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork on which this paper is based was made possible by a Gerry Farrell Travelling Scholarship, awarded by the Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research (SEMPRE). I am grateful to Ian Sutherland for editorial guidance and to the journal's anonymous reviewers for their constructive suggestions. My thanks are also due to Suzanne Van Hulle and CRS for their collaboration, to Lucy Durán and Angela Impey of SOAS for their inspiration, and to Bambeh Kamara for her friendship.