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The Significance of Stylistic Evolution of *Kamabeka* on the *Bukusu* Culture from 1945 to 2015

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Abstract

Technological, economic, social, religious, political and educational agencies have strongly impacted on the Babukusu lives and their music in particular. Their performances of kamabeka have shifted in time, venue and performance styles. Contrary to being performed during traditional marriages, circumcision ceremonies, funerals and beer parties, kamabeka is performed in bars, restaurants and nightclubs. This has led to the development of kamabeka in line with the demands of its consumers. New musical instruments have been introduced in the litungu ensemble, hence new styles of its performance. Kamabeka music compositions have been modernized to incorporate new scenarios and topics. The style of performing kamabeka is ever evolving compromising its original structure hence its function. It casts doubt as to whether the new styles of kamabeka can still convey values, beliefs and customs to the Babukusu. Therefore, the study examined the significance of stylistic evolution of kamabeka to the Bukusu culture in the use of texts for messages, lyrics for word formation and the structural forms of kamabeka from 1945 to 2015. The study took place within and outside the Bukusu territory where litungu musicians could be found. The study used a qualitative research methodology. The study attended to performances to collect data by observation and post-performance oral interviews. Primary sources included oral interviews from Kamabeka artists, dancers and listeners. Correctly designed structured questions were used to ensure validity of qualitative data obtained. In addition, data obtained was compared with that collected by the research assistant to avoid personal bias. For reliability, structured interview schedule was evaluated through Test-Retest method to determine the desired coefficient of 0.7 and above at the pilot stage. Secondary sources included newspapers, journals, dissertations and books related to the study. The study was guided by Social Re-constructionism theory by Guba & Lincoln (1989). The study used a descriptive data analysis method. An assessment of the study against data analysis was done. Conclusions were drawn and recommendation made.

Keywords: *Kamabeka*, Stylistic Evolution, Social construction, Social deconstruction, Social re-construction.

Introduction

“*Babukusu* is one of the eighteen sub-ethnic groups that make up the Luhya cluster of the Bantu of East Africa” (Makila, 1978:26). The other groups of the Luhya include; the *Bawanga*, the *Banyala*, the *Batachoni*, the *Bamarachi*, the *Bamaragoli*, the *Batura*, the *Babesukha*, the *Batiriki*, the *Babedakho*, the *Bakhayo*, the *Basamia*, the *Banyore*, the *Bamarama*, the *Bakisa*, the *Bakabarasi*, the *Bamateka* and the *Bachocho*. The *Babukusu* inhabit the Bungoma County; which is part of the Teso and the Elgon sub-counties as well as Trans-Nzoia County in Western Kenya. “Their neighbors are the *Bawanga*, the *Iteso*, the *Sabaots*, the *Batura*, the *Banyala* and the *Batachoni*” (Wanyama, 2006:1-3).

The *Babukusu* like many other communities in black Africa do not have in their vocabulary a word equivalent to the English word ‘music’. Instead, words such as song, dance, instruments among others could interchangeably be used for music (Keil, 1979). There are various categories of song-dances among the *Babukusu* and *kamabeka* were performed during traditional marriages, circumcision and funeral ceremonies and at beer parties (Wanyama, 2008). They include lullabies, marriage and funeral ceremonies among others. Within the general entertainment repertoire is *kamabeka* the *litungu* song-dance, the focus of this study. Although the *Babukusu* define *kamabeka* as “a shoulder dance”, the study defines it as a song-dance accompanied by a *litungu* player. During *kamabeka* performance, the major supporting instrument is a *litungu* played in an ensemble of *luengele* or *chimbengele*, *bichenje*, *chisasi*, *efumbo*, *silili* and *lulwika* (Masasabi, 2011).

According to the *Babukusu* tradition, *litungu*, the main supporting instrument of *kamabeka* is purely a male venture; one in which male siblings, fathers, uncles and grandfathers teach male members of their families the art of playing the instrument. The other accompanying instruments of the ensemble could be performed by either male or female. Apart from entertainment, *kamabeka* was meant to convey values such as beliefs and customs to the people. This was so because its structure, closely associated with the cultural traditions of the *Babukusu* were so intertwined that the messages embodied in *kamabeka* contextualized virtues of courage, integrity, respect and responsibility among others. This was the traditional *Babukusu kamabeka* before being influenced by foreign cultures (Shitubi, 2001).

As the community evolved, following the foreign influence of traders, European explorers, missionaries and colonialists, the *Babukusu* socio-cultural powerbase crumbled. This resulted into the *kamabeka* performance being modernized (in time and venue). For example, some of the *litungu* musicians in the *Babukusu* territory migrated from their rural homes to the newly created urban centers in search of jobs and what became known as a better living conditions (Osogo, 1966). On the same note, some *Babukusu* youth (who were *litungu* players) went out of the territory to be employed by the Kenya Uganda Railways and Harbours; by the East African Post Offices (all over East Africa); in Tea and Sisal Estates in different parts of East Africa. Those emigrant *Babukusu* youths who were not *litungu* players once in a while invited their music brothers to go and entertain them at their work places.

Such scenario forced the musicians to take up the new roles by performing in the unfamiliar urban centers or work stations where their patrons worked. The political environment in the country was also evolving; thus, required the participation of the *litungu* players. This required incorporating other new items in addition to the existing traditional musical instruments to enrich the ensemble and modernize the compositions by introducing new topics dictated by the new scenarios. This made them to be seen as modern and popular. Foreign musical instruments such as the guitar and the accordion became available to the *litungu* players through the youths who attended mission schools and the ex-World War II soldiers (Masasabi 2011). The study endeavored to establish the significance of these new stylistic adaptations to *litungu* music ensemble of the *Babukusu*.

Urban audiences amongst whom the *litungu* players lived and worked forced them to rhythmically modify their music in terms of instrumentation performance. The rhythm became simpler as opposed to the complex traditional *Babukusu* rhythm. The tempo was also performed slower or faster than the traditional *kamabeka* depending on the performers and context of performance.

The modernized *litungu* performers tended to move away from the *lubukusu*, the traditional language, to use a newly acquired languages such as *Kiswahili*, *Lingala* and English. The poetry for *kamabeka* also became less metaphorical and for the sake of audibility, the *litungu* music became amplified as the use of modern technology became the order of the day. This is how the general style of performing *kamabeka* has continued to evolve. *Litungu* players have embraced modern styles; adopting and adapting technologies and appropriating them at the expense of the traditional style of the *Babukusu*. The new developments in the performance of *kamabeka* compromised its traditional style, hence, its cultural function. It casts doubt as to whether the new *kamabeka* can still convey values, beliefs and customs to the *Babukusu*.

The significance of stylistic evolution of *kamabeka* on the *Babukusu* culture had not been identified and documented. By examining the significance of stylistic evolution of *kamabeka*, the study establishes how the various new socio-cultural changes have influenced the creativity of the *litungu* artists and the significance of it to the *Babukusu* culture from 1945 to 2015. The study was divided in three periods namely; from 1945 to 1965, from 1965 to 1985 and from 1985 to 2015.

Statement of the Problem

Kamabeka plays a crucial role as a channel for conveying values, beliefs and customs to the *Babukusu* because its structure is closely associated with their cultural tradition. Messages and meanings embodied in *kamabeka* contextualize virtues such as courage, integrity, respect and responsibility among others. However, with the socio-cultural changes experienced among the *Babukusu*, there have been a shift in time (*when to perform*) and venue (*where to perform*) *kamabeka*. Contrary to being performed during traditional marriages, circumcision ceremonies, funerals and beer parties, it now features in celebrations of quasi traditional nature. It is currently performed in bars, restaurants and nightclubs in rural and urban centers. Other venues include various parties, government public holidays, political rallies and campaigns. These have led to the development of *kamabeka* in line with the socio-cultural changes demanded by the current consumers. The shift in the time of performance and venue of performance as

part of the evolution in the *kamabeka* performance has therefore led to the changes in the cultural context of its performance.

Contemporary performers of *kamabeka* have evolved with new musical instruments in the *litungu* ensemble, hence new styles of *litungu* performance. *Kamabeka* music compositions have also been modernized to incorporate new scenarios and topics. The general style of performing it keeps on evolving. This seems to compromise its traditional structure hence its cultural function. The concern of this study was therefore to confirm that; *kamabeka* as a music genre was performed as a way of fulfilling a particular cultural function. That is why it was performed during specific occasions and venues and in a particular style in order to pass across desired messages to the *Babukusu*. With the social cultural changes involved, *kamabeka*, performed outside its traditional cultural contexts in differing styles and out of touch with its macro - cultural identifications; the study sought to carry out an ethnographic research (naturalistic inquiry) on the significance of the stylistic evolution of *kamabeka* to the *Babukusu* culture from 1945 to 2015. The study sought to analyze the stylistic evolution in the use of texts for messages, lyrics for word formation and the structural forms of *kamabeka* in order to establish their variations and significance to the *Babukusu* culture.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

The study aimed at contributing to the existing knowledge about the concept of traditional music and the significance of their stylistic evolutions to the traditional cultures. Findings of the study on the significance of the stylistic evolutions of *kamabeka* on the *Babukusu* culture and the transcribed *kamabeka* is one way of archiving them to be used as reference materials by future scholars in social sciences. Through the notation and transcription of *kamabeka* genre for stylistic evolution, it becomes possible to reconstruct, understand and explain the *Babukusu* cultural history. This is done by examining the musical materials that are used in the construction of *kamabeka* during different periods.

In considering musical style as an instrument of sympathetic communication and aesthetic sociability, we could learn a great deal from situations of musical change the way in which aesthetic behavior and its consequences can be used as a variable form of communication in socio-cultural life. In this case, the study shows how the new *kamabeka* fits in the new socio- cultural environments and the significance of its new styles to the *Babukusu* culture.

Theoretical Framework

Discussions on issues of stylistic evolution of music can be supported by theories such as open systems by Bertalanffy (1957), the diffusionist by Bert Hoselitz (1995), evolutionary theory of social change by Herbert Spencer (1896) and the social re-constructionism by Guba & Lincoln (1989). However, based on the direction and interest of the study, the social re-constructionism theory was found to be more relevant than the rest. This is because it addresses the issue of significance of stylistic evolution of music

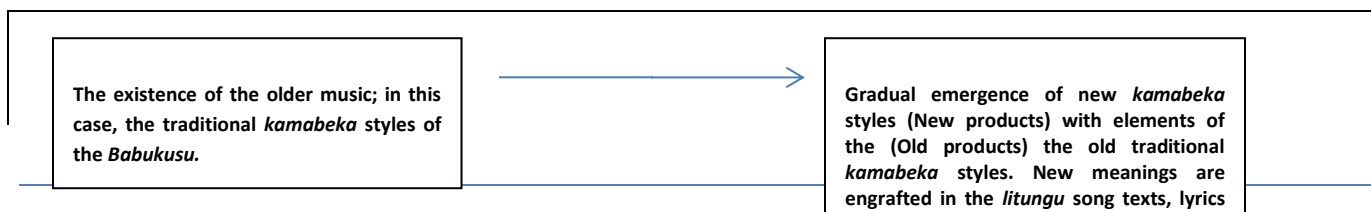
by re-defining music as a social construct in new stylistic and social terms imputing new musical and social meaning to it.

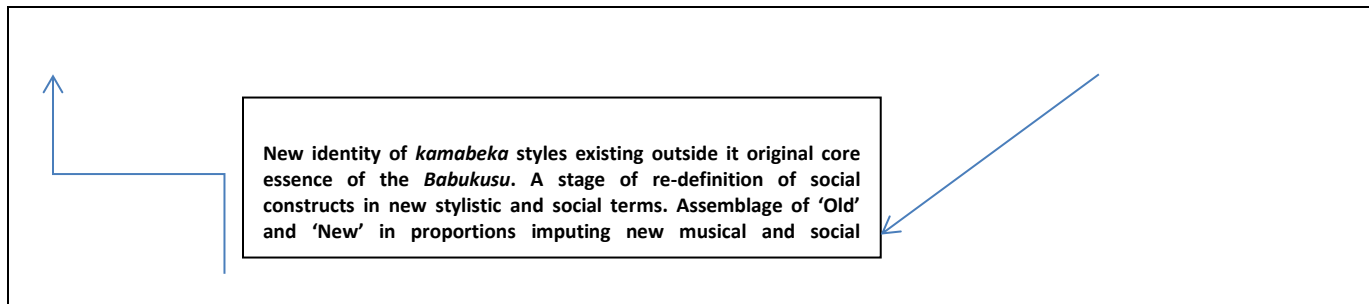
The social re-constructionism theory was propounded by Guba & Lincoln (1989: 43). The theory states that “realities are social constructions of the mind and that there exist as many such constructions as there are individuals, although clearly, many constructions will be shared”. According to Guba et al (ibid), “social constructs or a social construction defines meanings, notions or connotations that are assigned to objects and events in the environment and to peoples’ notions of their relationships to and interactions with these objects. In the domain of social constructionist thoughts, a social construct is an idea or notion that appears to be cultural and obvious to people who accept it but may or may not represent reality, so it remains largely an invention or artifice of a given society”. Guba et al (ibid) further notes that “social change does not occur in a straight line process of birth, growth and decline of a genre. Rather, it treats the decline of a style as a deconstruction in which some of the components of the older style are then reconstructed, as they are creatively integrated within the new socio-cultural context into a qualitatively distinct idiom. The process of social re-constructionism begins with the stage of *construction*, which in this case identifies with the traditional cultural material; *kamabeka*. Through the social process, the construction stage moves on to a stage of *deconstruction* which midwives a re-construction process where the *kamabeka* takes on a new identity existing outside its traditional essence.

The theory was used in the study to establish how traditional *kamabeka* was created by examining the musical resources that were used in its creation and the significance of the musical resources used in its creation. Since social change is a process, the study identified changes that were gradually introduced in the traditional *kamabeka*. The social re-constructionism theory highlights how the changes were acquired during the deconstruction stage. The study established the changes that occurred in the song texts, word formation and the general structural forms of *kamabeka* at the deconstruction stage. At this stage, the changes made the traditional *kamabeka* deviate from its traditional essence and definitive framework. At this stage, new meanings of *kamabeka* were identified and established their signification to the *Babukusu* culture. Finally, the study examined what happened to the *kamabeka* music genre at the re-construction stage where music takes new stylistic and social terms. A stage, where the music displays assemblage of “the Old” and the “New” in proportions that impute new musical and social meanings into the musical product. Specifically, the study examined these changes in terms of how the texts, word formation and structural forms in the *kamabeka* were generated. The study then identified the significance of the new styles realized at the re-construction stage to the *Babukusu* culture. The three stages were analyzed as conceptual framework in the Social Re-Construction Model for the Significance of Stylistic Evolution of *Kamabeka* to the *Babukusu* Culture figure 1.1

The Stage of Social Construction

Figure 1.1: The stage of Social Re-construction





Social Re-constructionism Model for the Significance of Stylistic Evolution of *kamabeka* to the *Babukusu* Culture (SRM)

Conceptual Framework

The model posits that popular music genres are social constructs which can be socially deconstructed and also socially reconstructed contingent upon prevailing socio-historical and technological process. This circular “Socio-Reconstructionism” model was a valuable socio-historical tool for analyzing the dynamics of musical change of *kamabeka*. The process of Social-Reconstruction begins with the stage of Construction, through the social process it moves on to the stage of “Deconstruction” which midwives a “Re-Construction” process where the music takes on a new identity existing outside its original core essence. After the stage of Social Re-construction, the process repeats itself.

Materials and Methods

This was a descriptive survey study aimed at investigating the significance of stylistic evolution of *kamabeka* the *litungu* songs to the *Babukusu* culture. The significance of stylistic evolution of *kamabeka* to the *Babukusu* culture were established through the qualitative or descriptive method. The descriptive research design involved collecting of information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of *litungu* musicians found within and outside the *Babukusu* territory, *kamabeka* dancers as well as members of the *Babukusu* who participated in the *kamabeka* dance were also interviewed concerning the significance of stylistic evolution of *kamabeka* on the *Babukusu* culture from 1945 to 2015. This design used an interview schedule to collect data from participants in a sample about their opinions and experiences in order to generalize their findings (Ary,D.1985). The descriptive research design was used to synchronize texts of *kamabeka* with a focus to contextualize their meanings to the *Babukusu* culture, to analyze the lyrics of *kamabeka* for word formation in order to determine their commonalities and differences and to analyze the structural forms of *kamabeka* in terms of melody, harmony tonality during the stated periods for their similarities or variations and to determine their significance to the *Babukusu* culture. The design was appropriate because the study was qualitative in nature involving interview and listening schedules to collect data which was systematized and presented in a descriptive format.

Population of the Study

The target population for the study was derived from *litungu* musicians within and outside *Babukusu* territory. *Kamabeka* dancers and members of the *Babukusu* who participate in the dance in Bungoma County were interviewed. Bungoma County is made up of nine (9) Divisions namely; Mt. Elgon (172,377), Sirisia (102,422), Kabuchai (141,113), Bumula (178,897), Kanduyi (229,701), Webuye East (101,020), Webuye West (120,233), Kimilili (132822) and Togaren (187,478), Independent and Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC), Saturday Nation March 10th, 2012). The study took place in One Division (1) of the 9 (Nine) that make the entire Bungoma County. This was based on recommendation by Gay (1981) and Borg (1989) who suggest that for descriptive studies, and in the selection of a sample from a homogeneous population, a 10% sample is adequate.

Sample Size

The study took place in Kanduyi Division purposively sampled out for the study because it has the largest number of people in Bungoma County. There are 14 Sub-locations in Kanduyi Division. The study was carried out in five (5) of them purposively sampled as they were geographically located where many *litungu* players could be found. These included; Ndengelwa, Kalaba, Namasanda, South Kanduyi and Namwacha. One *litungu* musician from each of the five (5) sub-locations was identified who assisted in reaching out on other *litungu* musicians. This was because *litungu* musicians are generally few and may mostly be known by their fellow *litungu* players. *Kamabeka* dancers who accompanied the *litungu* musicians invited were part of the population for the study interviewed. Appropriate number of their sample was purposively decided upon realizing how many were in attendance. This also applied to members of the *Babukusu* who came to participate in the *kamabeka* dance during the study. At least one *litungu* musician from other towns outside the *Babukusu* territory was purposively identified to reach out to other *litungu* musicians they knew for the interview. Major towns of Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu were purposively identified for the study. Purposive sampling technique was further used to select *kamabeka* songs which were analyzed from the study. Ten (10) *kamabeka* were selected from each period studied making a total of thirty (30) for the analysis of their texts, lyric formation and structural forms and so as to establish the significance of their stylistic evolution to the *Babukusu* culture.

Sampling Techniques

Two sampling techniques were used in the study. These are purposive sampling technique and the snowball. Purposive sampling technique is where the study purposively targets a group of people or places believed to be reliable for the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). It is also through purposive sampling that suitable *litungu* songs from different periods could be identified for analysis of their contents in terms of text, word formation and structural forms. Due to the constraints of time, at least ten (10) songs from each of the three periods making a total of thirty (30) were purposively sampled out for the study. Towns outside the *Babukusu* territory are many and it is only through purposive sampling that a few which were thought to host *litungu* musicians could be identified for the study to realize its objectives.

Snowball Sampling Technique

Snowball sampling technique involves beginning with a few people as a sample and then gradually increasing the sample size as new contacts are mentioned by the people started with (Benard, 1988). This sampling technique was preferred for the study because *litungu* musicians are few in Bungoma County and may mostly be known by their fellow musicians. Therefore, the study purposively sample one *litungu* musician from each of the five (5) sub-locations identified for the study in Kanduyi Division who eventually identified and introduced other musicians for the study. Snowball sampling technique was used in reaching out to known *litungu* players through the assistance of those that had been purposively selected.

Results and discussions

The translated and transcribed *kamabeka* performed from 1945 to 1965 revealed that at first, the *litungu* player was the solo singer accompanied by percussion instrumentalists. In the event the *litungu* player was not singing, the music played from the *litungu* could be accompanied by percussion instruments of *luengele* or *chimbengele*, *bichenje*, *chisasi* and *efumbo*. The *litungu* player had the monopoly of the story line of the song and only interrupted by the instruments. Significantly, this style of performance enabled him to communicate his wisdom and that of the *Babukusu* culture to the audience. Later on *silili* another instrument of the *litungu* ensemble was introduced and therefore more than one singer emerged in the *litungu* song performance. Even players of the percussion instruments became part of singers in the performance. However, *litungu* instrument remained the major instrument of the ensemble. At this point, the form of the performance was therefore based on call and response. The group could repeat the exact words of the lead *litungu* singer or could only sing the chorus while the lead *litungu* singer sang the verse using the same melody. These were meant to *khulumili sisiasi funosielu lwimbo* give emphasis to the themes of the song which were found to be very important to the listeners. The *kamabeka* songs made use of traditional musical instruments to enhance the performance. The basic instruments comprised of *litungu* as the main instrument performing alongside the voice, *silili*, *luengele/chimbengele*, *bichenje*, *chisasi*, *lulwika*, *kumulele* and *eng'oma*. The informants interviewed indicated that these instruments are identifiers of the *Babukusu* traditional music and symbolize the *Babukusu* culture. These instruments are believed to be a host to the *Babukusu* traditional cultural spirits *kumusambwa*. The instruments were capable of narrating the inner feelings of the *khubuula* and also *khuolele siakumwoyoi*.e. provide consolation of the heart. The themes addressed included selfishness, laziness, responsible behavior, hunger, cattle, family love, deviant behaviors and general good morals.

The imposition of colonial rule on the *Babukusu* in the year 1920 when Kenya became a British Colony fundamentally altered their pre-colonial socio-economic structures (Osogo, 1966). Some *Babukusu litungu* players shifted from their rural homes where they used to perform *kamabeka* songs at beer parties, funeral places and marriage ceremonies to urban areas in search of jobs. They started entertaining their patrons from there. The words of the songs still addressed some *Babukusu* morals and events that occurred before and after 1945 up to 1965. Most melodies sampled out to represent this period used notes of the pentatonic scale.

The period after independence from 1965 to 1985, saw the Europeans introduce foreign musical instruments in Kenya. These included the guitar, electrical drums, piano, accordion, trumpet and flutes. They introduced the use of synthesizers to create new variables in sound which could not be produced by string or rhythm instruments. Exotic lighting systems such as electricity gave the era a new aura. Unlike the African instruments, exotic 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 harmonization through natural parallelism of 3rds and even 4ths. People came to know more about all sorts of music that could be produced by particular instruments. This renaissance period in the field of music produced a great profusion of compositions especially in the orchestral repertoire that exploited the unique sonorities of instruments. Control of volume was in itself a rich source of music. The *kamabeka* were influenced in one way or another by these new developments. The period after independence also saw the influx of Congolese music in Kenya. This was advanced by exposure through radio, television and print media. Consequently, many *kamabeka* performers imitated the Congolese organization of band groups with an aim of disseminating their music through recording industry.

The early *litungu* band could consist of any combination of the following; vocalist, the *litungu*, *silili*, *chimbengele*, *bichenje*, *chisasi*, guitar, microphones and the amplifier and the key board. The themes for the *kamabeka* also shifted from that of telling the history of the *Babukusu* community, their war like history etc. to addressing even contemporary issues facing the *Babukusu* community as well as the Country at large. Other languages were used in *kamabeka* to embrace participation of the larger audience. The ensemble consisted of the vocalist cum *litungu* player, *silili*, *chimbengele*, *chisasil manyanga*, *en'goma*, the acoustic guitar and the microphone. The performance of *kamabeka* the *litungu* songs comprised of both men and women. Restrictions on the basis of gender were removed after liberating women. The *litungu* lyrics were borrowed from neighboring communities mingling together. This was meant for easy acceptability, communication and unification purposes. The new *litungu* song styles exploited high and low registers due to the presence of the guitar or the keyboard in the *litungu* ensemble. Further harmonization of melodies through natural parallelisms as before became possible. This was meant to avoid monotony and to attract attention of a larger audience. Other languages apart from the *lubukusu* were embraced for easy acceptability, communication and for unification purposes. New themes on leadership, politics and other contemporary issues through songs were sung. The last phase of this study covers a period from 1985 up to 2015 during which a lot of music making took place in Kenya. Former retired President Moi supported creativity among the youths leading to composition of many songs.

Conclusion

Kamabeka song presentations became an integral part of presidential state function. *Kamabeka* bands cropped up which cultivated their music talents. Notable *kamabeka* band groups included *tindikiti jua kali*, *Namatete*, *Malakisi Jazz*, *Wanjung'ne band*, *Sinai band*, *Webuye stars band*, *Watwanga Jazz band* and recently Bungoma actionairs team band to mention but a few. The groups that have been mentioned have come up with music compositions which touched on contemporary issues such as children rights,

HIV / AIDS pandemic, environmental issues among others. To embrace on *Babukusu* traditional listeners, themes on moral decay, politics and matters of leadership have been embraced by the modern *litungu ensemble*. A full *kamabeka* or for that matter *litungu* ensemble band comprises of the *litungu* as the main instrument, the electric guitar, the piano, the amplifiers, the drum sets, the microphones including the vocalist /s. The performance of songs in this ensemble is in the form of call and response. The ensemble features in night clubs during the *mulembe* nights performing all sorts of songs including the oldies of the traditional *Babukusu* songs but using modern music instruments in combination with the traditional ones. The *litungu* bands mentioned also explore both high and low registers due to the abundance of rich sound sonorities provided by the western musical instruments within the *litungu* ensemble. Harmonization of melodies and the use of a full range of the notes of a major scale as experienced in the former period were still utilized. This was also meant to avoid monotony and to appeal to a larger audience. Besides, there is a crop of contemporary *litungu* musicians such as that of Wanyonyi Kakai of Nyokha band and Steve Kay of Bungoma actinairs band who are currently using a full band propelled by the electric guitar and the piano mixer to play *kamabeka* and *rhythms* without involving the traditional *litungu* ensemble of *silili*, *chimbengele*, *chisasil manyanga*, and *en'goma*, in what one of the informants described as revolutionizing the *litungu* songs. The informants indicate the significance of this to *buchusi* skillfulness and *khukhwelikinja* creativity and or innovations to appeal to a wider audience.

Recommendations

Studies should also focus on the significance of stylistic evolution of other traditional African songs to understand the dynamic nature of their production and the role they play in their respective communities.

Encourage the use of both traditional and modern musical resources for the preservation of culture and its continuity

Stylistic evolution of traditional songs should be studied for the purpose of understanding and reconstructing the culture history of different communities in Kenya since songs performed at different periods reveal and contain messages of changes that could have taken place over the times.

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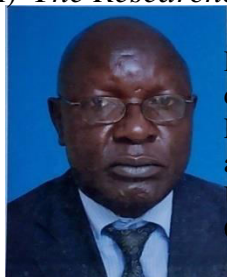
Newspapers

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Personal Interviews

Short resume:

i) *The Researcher*



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