

Political Support for Music Education in Kenya: A Paradox

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Abstract

Music and politics in Kenya have long been intertwined. Song exalted the spirit of political manipulation in Kenya, starting with the founding father Mzee Jomo Kenyatta to his successors including Daniel Toroitich arap Moi (President Moi). During President Moi's regime which is commonly referred to as the *Nyayo* Era (or foot-steps Era), he appropriated the power of music for political purposes. He encouraged music educators in schools, colleges and community organizations to compose music, sing and dance in his praise. He toured countryside and cities around the nation and as he came into contact with music groups including but not limited to primary school and secondary school mass choirs, college and community choirs, he danced with them as the choirs sang and danced in his praise. Kenya's political realities dictated that President Moi continue to build his political popularity by promoting music that praised his government policies throughout the nation. Since scholarly literature has shown that music is both a social performance and an effective communicative medium, this paper explores the paradox that while President Moi supported music education in Kenya, music also became a tool for his political expediency. The paper hence explores the role of music in the political governance in Kenya during the *Nyayo* Era and discusses some of the conundrums music educators in schools and communities confronted while teaching, composing and performing music.

Keywords: music education, music as paradox, politics in Kenya, *nyayo era*, Moi

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1. Introduction

Song can exalt the spirit of political manipulation. Music and politics in Kenya have long been intertwined. There is a large repertoire of songs of praise for the pre-colonial chiefs and post-independence leaders for the newly independent states in Africa. Music is by far the most vital and the most demonstrative artistic expression in the life of the African. The chiefs and Kings of Africa were cognizant of the fact that music performed a vitally important role in maintaining the unity of the social order within the group and help placate the chiefs' political opponents. This practice continued well into post independent Kenya especially where patriotic choral music served the purpose of concealing the many ills that may have been committed by many African presidents such as incidents of detention without trial, torture, ethnic conflicts, violence, and other human rights abuses.¹ Music elicits emotions and emotions can have profound effects on politics. Political leaders especially in Africa, have acknowledged this practice for millennia. Whether the African sings a gay, rollicking play song, a boisterous boat song, a gentle lullaby, or a dignified noble lament, always he pours out his emotions in an appealing form of music.²

Throughout Kenya's history, there has been a connection between music and politics. Prior to Kenya being declared a British colony in 1920, the African chiefs used musicians to sang and dance in their praise in order to popularize the chiefs' reigns. However, between the 1870s and the first quarter of the 20th century when Africa faced European imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, and military, music in Kenya assimilated different connotations. The paradoxical shift of musical role from the mid-20th century was due to conquest, colonization, and the post-colonial effects on civilization itself.

The British government's ideology explicitly claimed a civilizing mission to lift the benighted natives out of backwardness to the new status of [the] civilized.³ During this period, many people from different ethnic groups in Kenya, especially the Kikuyus, the waKamba, and the Maasai, appropriated their musical skills inherent within such social cultural groups and transformed these skills into voluntary and formidable political activists. They engaged in composing music of protest against the British Empire instead of songs of praise for the chiefs and kings. For example, Kikuyu musicians refrained from singing songs in praise of Chief Wangũ wa Makeeri while songs in praise of Nabongo Mumia of Wanga Kingdom of western Kenya, began to dissipate. The Wanga

¹ Fred Mbogo, "Daniel arap Moi Used Music to Rule Kenya." *ArtMattersInfo*, November 19, 2008. <http://artmatters.info/2008/11/daniel-arap-moi-used-music-to-rule-kenya/>

² Laura Boulton, *African Music*. Folkways Records, (1957). New York, NY: Folkways Records and Service Corporation, Album No. FW 8852, 3.

³ Iweriebor, Ehiedu E. G. "The Psychology of Colonialism." In *The End of Colonial Rule: Nationalism and Decolonization*, vol. 4 of Africa, ed. Toyin Falola. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2002.

was synonymous with *Buluhya* and in fact some of the Luo people such as Abaholo (people of Holo) and Jo-Ugenya (people of Ugenya), were ruled by the Wanga where music in praise of Chief Nabongo was performed.¹ The Abawanga musicians composed and danced while praising their chiefs. Music facilitated communication of normative concepts highlighting reinforcing the just deeds of the chiefs while rejecting the unjust policies (Maupeu, 2005; Oyoolo, 2017). The music played a dominant role for the British colony because during the years 1902-1933 with the support of the British Empire, the chiefs became nominal leaders thereby executing the Empire's indirect rule. Here again we see the paradox of music being transformed from praise to protest – chiefs being praised for protection of the villages and chiefdoms, while at the same time the chiefs were simultaneously supporting the British rule indirectly. The lyrics of the song in Figure 1 “Kenya Kenya, Kenya Nchi Yetu” exemplify this paradox.

Beginning with independence in 1963, Kenya's founding father Mzee Jomo Kenyatta appropriated music to support his rule. His successors, including but not limited to Daniel Toroitich arap Moi (President Moi) who came to power in 1978 following the death of President Kenyatta, used choral music and dance as expedient conduits for the propagation of a political ideology. President Moi became popular with widespread support from all over the country in part because he encouraged music educators from schools, colleges and communities to compose music, sing, and dance in his praise. President Moi toured the countryside and cities alike, and came into close contact with music groups including but not limited to primary and secondary school children's mass choirs, college choirs, and community music groups that he commissioned to write songs, sing, and dance in his praise.

Political realities dictated that he would continue to build his popularity by promoting music throughout the nation. Even though music education was quickly recognized nationwide as a flourishing artistic and educational endeavor, there were other factors in play as well. There was a relative abundance of doctors. Health was improving and child mortality rate decreased due to inoculations. “Moi Hospitals” and “Moi Secondary Schools” were being constructed nationwide. Many children were able to receive free or subsidized education. Every child who attended school also received a free packet of *Nyayo* milk each school day. There were repertoires of songs composed by music educators throughout the nation in praise of President Moi for all these economic developments. The opposition parties had their own composers too, but there was a deliberate government effort to silence them due to control. The *Nyayo* Era reshaped music education including the production and consumption in national politics, dividing much of Kenya into pro-government and opposition musicians, while activating grassroots movements on both sides.

President Moi's strategy of using music was both calculated and successful because music is both a social performance and communicative medium of which President Moi so effectually utilized. Without music, the disquiet of the masses would have been irrepressible due to their usurpation of power to contribute to the government policies as a reactionary to assumed tyranny. Members of the opposition yearned for a shared governance model and attempted to achieve it by all means necessary. They marched in city streets in protests. Their protestations were always accompanied with song and dance. Street demonstrations were the one tactic for the masses to usurp some powers. It was much an era of relative progress as it was an era of relative oppression for the opposition. The opposition could sing and rant about unfairness. Kenneth Matiba of FORDAsili,² Jaramogi Oginga Odinga of FORDKenya,³ Martin Shikuku,⁴ Wamalwa Kijana, and James Orengo⁵ were united under a common denominator – they were well into their careers as the foremost liberal Kenyan thinkers of their time. These actions were tantamount to usurpation of powers by the opposition and just as Charles Van Doren has noted “As usurpation is the exercise of power which another hath a right to, so tyranny is the exercise of power beyond right, which nobody can have a right to.”⁶

In this case, the people assumed they were being governed by a tyrannical dictatorship. With regard to African political leaders of the 20th – century, President Moi of Kenya was an unmatched, self-driven, and dedicated music patron during his reign. He will undoubtedly, go down in the annals of music and politics in post-independent Kenya as a leader whose endeavors to promote music education elicited a paradox of music both as an art as well as a utility for mass political and ideological persuasion. Teles has also written on this issue

¹ Heinemann Kenya, “The Origins of the Wanga Kingdom. From Makers of Kenyan History: Nabongo Mumia,” Heinemann Kenya. Accessed June 21, 2017. <http://abeingo.com/SUBTRIBE%20DOCS/wanga%20origins.pdf>

² Ipsos, “Multiparty Elections.” Nairobi, Kenya: The Standard Kenya at 50 magazine, (2013), 4. The 1992 General Election was the first multiparty elections in Kenya since the 60s. Matiba was the Ford Asili presidential candidate, while Shikuku recaptured the Butere MP seat on Ford Asili ticket.

³ Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru: The Autobiography of Oginga Odinga*, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1967.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵ Robert M. Press, “Peaceful Resistance: Advancing Human Rights and Civil Liberties.” *Kenya Research project* Washington D.C: Library of Congress, (2006).

⁶ Charles Van Doren, *A History of Knowledge: Past, Present, and Future*. (New York, NY: The Random House Publishing Group, 1991), 221.

when he notes that political leadership is a complex concept with no universal definition.¹ Teles further observes that political scientists usually define leadership according to their own perceptions of the issue and depending on the aspects they are more interested in.² Kenyan music educators and composers composed choral music and choreographed matching dances based on President's Moi's personality as well as the values he perceived as democratic in order to propagate his manifesto.

2. Brief Biography of President Moi

President Moi was born in Kurieng'wo, a small hamlet in Sacho division of Baringo County. His ethnicity is Kalenjin. After completing his secondary education at Kapsabet High School, he joined Tambach Teachers Training College where he studies teacher education. Upon graduation, he taught in elementary school in Baringo School District from 1946 until 1955. He joined politics at the age of 45 when he was elected Member of the Legislative Council for Rift Valley. In 1960 jointly with Ronald Ngala, a prominent Kenyan politician from Kenya's largest ethnic group, the Kikuyu, with whom he co-founded "Kenya African Democratic Union" (KADU) political party. The objective of the new party was to challenge "Kenya African National Union" (KANU) party of President Jomo Kenyatta during the general election. Fortunately, the political system favored Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. The British had established a highly centralized administrative system that was influenced by extreme administrative centralism, a fundamental political ideology of the British East Africa Protectorate. While KADU pressed for a federal constitution, KANU supported a centralist government. Therefore the British were partisan to the new political movements and ultimately supported KANU's centrist model and rejected KADU's federal model thereby granting victory to Mzee Jomo Kenyatta.

Although President Moi lost the election to Mzee Jomo Kenyatta in his first bid for presidency in 1957, he was elected to the Legislative Council for Rift Valley and appointed as Minister of Education in the pre-independent government of 1960–1961. Following Kenya's independence from Britain on December 12, 1963, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, the founding father of the Republic of Kenya concentrated on amassing political power under the control of the central government. President Moi succeeded him in 1978 and continued President Kenyatta's legacy by tightening the control of Kenyan public life in all spheres, including politics, administration, and management of public finance. Consequently, this central control was evident in the imbalance in regional development.³

3. Tawala Kenya

In the early part of President Moi's single party regime, both school and community music teachers were engaged in composing songs to praise President Moi. One such song was titled "Tawala Kenya," which means rule or lead Kenya, a statement which President Moi took literally. This song later became a characteristic signature tune for the Moi regime (1978-2002) which is commonly referred to as the *Nyayo* (foot-steps) Era. *Tawala Kenya* was composed by Thomas Wasonga, who was by then an elementary school teacher and a choir director of the Mombasa Mass Choir. The words of the song rang like a great brass ring thrown down on marble. It gained popularity among Kenyan primary schools, secondary schools, and community choirs. The media houses including the public radio and television stations all broadcast mass choirs that sang the song. Mass choirs were the epitome of President Moi's creation for political expediency using music. During these mass choir performances, all performers in the stadiums where most ceremonies took place sang in unison or in harmony as a communal solidarity. The impact of solidarity has been addressed by Boulton (1957). Singing the same songs in the same way at the same time binds the individuals together, and a strong group feeling is established, binding the individuals together while a strong group feeling is established.⁴

The Ministry of Education jointly with the Office of the President organized resources to create mass choirs to perform the song during all President Moi's tours around the country. The lyrics of the song encourage loyalty to the president and praise him for his development agenda, and patriotism to the Kenya while castigating the opposition parties during President Moi regime. In 1988, President Moi even established The Permanent Presidential Music Commission (PPMC) to promote the development and practice of music and dance, encourage the growth and development of the music industry, and to contribute to the understanding and preservation of Kenyan music and dance.

During *Nyayo* Era, Kenyan musicians were expected to demonstrate their support for President Moi and military through both praise songs and songs that denounced or belittled his political adversaries in the opposing parties. Historically, African one-party systems are associated with one-party states, military regimes, military

¹ Filipe Teles, "Political Leaders: The Paradox of Freedom and Democracy." *Revista Enfoques* 10 no. 16 (2012),115.

² Ibid., 115.

³Stephen Mutula, Wilson Muna, and Geoffrey Koma, "Leadership and Political Corruption in Kenya: Analysis of the 2010 Constitutional Provisions on the Presidency." *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*, 38 no. 3 (2013):263-285.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

socialist regimes and civil dictatorships.¹ These were established in the late 1960s until the early 1990s when more than half the countries in Africa were ruled by authoritarian regimes. As a young democracy, Kenya has had her shares of multi-party democratic turmoil. Radano and Bohlman (2011), explained how the basis of the opposition dichotomy is colonial in both its epistemological and economic expressions (p.374). The opposition is vilified by young single-party democracies. At the onset of party-based democracy in Kenya in the early 1990s, there were as many as four parties namely, (1) Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-Kenya; (2) Forum for the Restoration of Democracy-People; (3) Kenya African National Union; and (4) National Party of Kenya. All the parties had music groups affiliated with them including choirs and community music organizations all championing their causes while navigating the one-party system and restricted democracies that afflicted Kenya in the 1990s.

The song in Figure 2 “Tawala Kenya” developed into a national patriotic song that also transcended ethnicities. Kenya’s population is composed of about forty different ethnicities all speaking different languages; hence this song built some common artistic experience in spite of promoting a political agenda. In addition, the song was accompanied with dancing, and the entire artistic performances developed into both political and economic appropriation whereby the participants were rewarded at the end of the ceremonies. The emergence of “Tawala Kenya” as a national song under President Moi developed a consumer economy that helped to spur the appropriation of both patriotic and praise musical repertoire for socio-economic mobility. Music directors were hired and given tenure by private schools because the President rewarded both the teachers and the schools that praised him. The guests attending ceremonies, which included but were not limited to public holidays such as Independence Day, were not only entertained by the mass choirs but also reminded of their loyalty to the President. Another song that emerged during President Moi’s *Nyayo* Era is Song in Figure 3, “Fimbo ya Nyayo” which translates to “traditional fighting club or *Nyayo*’s club”.

Song in Figure 3 “*Fimbo Ya Nyayo*” (*Nyayo*’s fighting club) illustrates another Kenyan popular patriotic and praise song. The *Fimbo* emanates from *rungu* (Swahili word, plural *marungu*) which is a wooden throwing club or baton bearing special symbolism for war and elder protector. The *Fimbo* is significant in several East African ethnic groups including but not limited to the Kalenjin and Maasai cultures. The *Fimbo* is especially associated with *sakobei* (Kalenjin male warriors) who have traditionally used it in warfare and for hunting. President Moi adopted the *Fimbo* as a symbolism of his leadership and to protect the nation (*kulinda serikali*) against any external invasion.

The idea of *Fimbo* inspired Dr. Arthur Kemoli (1945-2012) to compose a song by the same title. Dr. Kemoli was a longtime Associate Professor of African Oral Literature and Music at the University of Nairobi and also worked as choral director for The Kariokor Nyayo Choir, a community-based music organization patronized by President Moi. *Fimbo Ya Nyayo* song has since become a pop culture song in the annals of choral music in Kenya. Egara Kabaji, a leading journalist who followed the political art of Kemoli reminds us of Kemoli’s political involvement with music. In 1998, Kemoli was awarded the “Order of the Grand Warrior,” which is a recognition given to an individual for outstanding services rendered to the nation in various capacities and responsibilities.² Among his notable pieces is the famous *Fimbo ya Nyayo* that every youngster sang at the height of Moi’s rule. Kemoli was also a member of the team of experts that composed the African Union anthem in 1986.³

Moi’s influence on music education and politics also had a great influence on younger generation music educators in Kenya. Many of them were simply composing music in rhumba style that was popularly known for promoting the African popular music of the 80s. Kenya’s Presidential Music Commission has large repertoires of music composed during the Nyayo Era although some songs have not yet been archived but exist in the oral tradition. With the advent of technology, some Kenyan music educators such as the author of this paper, also wrote songs in praise of President Moi. Figure 4 song *Uongozi wa Baba Moi* (the leadership of Father Moi) was composed by David Akombo to welcome President Moi to the small town of Gilgil and was performed by the mass choir of about 500 school children from Gilgil Township School District in Rift Valley Province of Kenya.

4. Conclusion

The historical development of both patriotic and praise-music repertoire in Kenya during President Moi’s Nyayo Era provides an excellent analogy for understanding the paradox of music education and politics as a discourse in Kenya. Moi’s Nyayo era was viewed by Kenyans as a determinant of economic growth and prosperity. The buoyant era developed the economy made it possible for music educators who composed for President Moi music purely for praise to be remunerated generously. It was a rewarding time for the music educators in schools

¹ Mohamed Salih and Per Nordlund, “Political Parties in Africa: Challenges for Sustained Multiparty Democracy Africa Regional.” In *Report Based on research and dialogue with political parties*. Stockholm, Sweden: Bulls Graphics Press, 2007.

² The Kenya Gazette, 88, *The Republic of Kenya*, 2002.

³ Egara Kabaji, “Kemoli: the fallen music giant. Standard Group Limited, September 21st 2012, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/lifestyle/article/2000066664/kemoli-the-fallen-music-giant>

because every school in the country endeavored to have a choir with libraries full of patriotic and praise songs for President Moi, just in case he decided to visit the school or the region unannounced. In some instances, music rehearsal times were extended at the expense of other school subjects. The musical strategy of President Moi also extended to the larger ruling elites. Music was used to promote loyalty to the ruling elite. Moi's cabinet ministers were also praised in songs by school, college and community choirs to propagate President Moi's regime. Ministers such as Mr. Stanley Oloitiptip, who was a long-time Minister for Tourism and Natural Resources, and many others such as Onamu, had many songs composed about them.

President Moi's utilization of music for political expediency is the first true case of de-contextualization of music education in the politics of post-independent Africa. His utilization of music for political purposes in Kenya has gained importance, both symbolic and real, for the development of one of the fundamental fields of study – music and politics in Africa. This subject which, arguably like existential philosophy, is a field that has spurred all music learning and endeavor that underpin all knowledge and particularly, the understanding of music as apolitical paradox in Kenya. This paradoxical confluence of music education and politics in the *Nyayo* Era is like so many other politically-instigated grand landmark projects that survived as a testament to the *Nyayo* Era itself— *Nyayo* Bus and *Nyayo* Tea Zone, both for which repertoires of praise songs have been composed and archived. Establishing music for political agenda was a project of unimaginably vast scope that required great vision, energy, patience, and commitment to accomplish. As vital as politics turned to be for the growth and development of music education in Kenya, the *Nyayo* Era politics stands apart—because in this era, politics were musically conceived, musically imagined, musically instigated, musically undertaken, musically perpetuated, and musically perfected by just one man—President Daniel Toroitich arap Moi.

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	Literal Translation
<i>Kenya Kenya, Kenya taifa letu</i>	Kenya is our nation
<i>Kenya Kenya, Kenya nchi yetu</i>	Kenya is our country
<i>Kanyaga nchi yako kwa nguvu na raha</i>	Stamp on your soil with vigor and pride
<i>Hilo ni hakikisho la rais wetu</i>	This is the promise of our president
<i>Zamani walisema hatuna akili</i>	The colonists thought we were dumb
<i>Na kumbe watunyonya, afadhali kupe</i>	But we discovered they were exploiting our resources
<i>Kenya Kenya, Kenya taifa letu</i>	Kenya is our nation
<i>Kenya Kenya, Kenya nchi yetu</i>	Kenya is our country

Figure 1. The lyrics of “Kenya Kenya, Kenya Taifa Letu.” (Translated by David Akombo).
Kenya Kenya, Kenya Taifa Letu shows the devotion and the patriotic movement that was enhanced during President Moi’s era.

Tawala Kenya Tawala	Literal translation
<i>Tawala Kenya Tawala</i>	Rule Kenya
<i>Rasi Moi Tawala Kenya Tawala</i>	President Moi rule Kenya
<i>Unaongoza vyema</i>	Your leadership is great
<i>Unaongoza vyema Rasi Moi</i>	Your leadership is great, President Moi
<i>Unaongoza vyema</i>	Your leadership is great
<i>Peleka Kenya Mbele</i>	Move Kenya forward
<i>Peleka Kenya Mbele Rais Moi</i>	Move Kenya forward President Moi
<i>Peleka Kenya Mbele</i>	Move Kenya forward
<i>Tunamsifu Moi</i>	We praise Moi
<i>Tunamsifu Moi</i>	We praise Moi
<i>Rais wetu tunamsifu sana</i>	We praise our president
<i>Rais Moi, Baba Taifa Kenya</i>	President Moi, father of our nation
<i>Ongoza Kenya nchi yetu</i>	Lead our country Kenya
<i>E baba Tawala</i>	Rule, father

Figure 2. The lyrics of “Tawala Kenya Tawala.” (Translated by Prof. David Akombo)
 Source: Thomas Wasonga. Ministry of Sports, Culture and The Art, Nairobi, Kenya:

Fimbo ya Nyayo	Literal translation
<i>Fimbo ya Nyayo</i>	Nyayo’s fighting club
<i>Yatuongoza kwenda wapi</i>	Where does it lead us to?
<i>Fimbo ya Nyayo</i>	Nyayo’s fighting club
<i>Yatuongoza kwenda Mbele</i>	It leads us forward
<i>Moi ameenda kila mahali</i>	Moi has traveled all over
<i>Uchina hata na America</i>	China, even America
<i>Hiyo ni sifa kwetu wa Kenya</i>	That is pride for us Kenyans
<i>Nani hajui fimbo ya Nyayo</i>	Who doesn’t know Moi’s fighting club?
<i>Wakenya sote tuungane</i>	Let all Kenyans unite
<i>Umoja wetu ndiyo silaha</i>	Our unity is our strength
<i>Ukabila usitugawanye</i>	Let us all unite as Kenyans
<i>Nani hajui fimbo ya Nyayo</i>	Who doesn’t know Moi’s fighting club?

Figure 3. The lyrics of “Fimbo Ya Nyayo” (Translated by Prof. David Akombo)
 Source: Arthur Kemoli, *Lwimbu* Nairobi, Kenya: Directories (A) Limited. (LWLP 004).

Uongozi Wa Baba Moi

A dedication to President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya

Prof. David O. Akombo



Voice 1
U - o - ngo - zi wa Ba - ba Mo - i, U-me - fa - ni - ki - wa

Voice 2
U - o - ngo - zi wa Ba - ba Mo - i, U-me - fa - ni - ki - wa

4
mno, kwa mia-ka ku - mi zi - li - zo pi - ta, Tu-me - pa - ta ma-e - nde -
mno, kwa mi - ka ku - mi zi - li - zo pi - ta Tu-me - pa - ta ma-e - nde-le -

8
le - o, Ha - ra - mbe na nya - yo, Tum -
le - o, Ha - ar - mbe na Nya - yo, Tum -

11
sha - ngi - li - e Ba - ba wa Ke - nya Mo - i.
sha - ngi - li - e Ba - ba wa Ke - nya Mo - i.

Figure 4. *Uongozi wa Baba Moi* (the leadership of Father Moi). Composed by David Akombo
Source: Prof. David Akombo, 2017