

Reinvention of Lyre Music and Dance for Knowledge Preservation and Political Mitigation: The Case of The Bukusu of Kenya

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Abstract

The role of music and dance in both modern and indigenous African societies cannot be overemphasized. Music and dance accompany almost every African human activity right from birth to death. Among the variety of songs that accompany musical instruments in indigenous African societies is the lyre music and dance, which is found amongst ethnic groups such as Abagusii, Kuria, Luo, Baganda and the Luhya in East Africa. Despite its significant role in the society, lyre music and dance is seen as a tool for entertainment by some scholars (Karyu, 1991 & Odenyo, 2005). This study therefore sought to investigate the role of lyre music and dance in knowledge preservation and political mitigation among the Bukusu of Kenya in the face of societal change; an area of study that has received little attention from scholars. The study employed exploratory and descriptive design, whereby data were collected through in-depth face to face interviews, focus group discussions, non-participant observation, pictorial, audio and video recording. The multimodal theory of discourse analysis (Kress, 2012) was applied in data analysis, which comprised of texts, contexts and artefacts. Findings reveal that despite the changes in society, lyre music and dance among the Bukusu still remains an important social space for knowledge preservation and political mitigation. The study recommends that the Bukusu lyre music and dance should be preserved and managed for future generations and that future research should consider other types of musical arts that are used by the Bukusu and other speech communities for knowledge preservation and mitigation of societal issues.

Key Words: Bukusu, Knowledge Preservation, Lyre/ Litungu Music And Dance, Political Mitigation, Reinvention, Societal Change.

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Introduction

East African region is the nest of the lyre (Teffer, 2011). The current paper focuses on the Bukusu lyre (thereafter, *litungu*) music and dance. Gray (1993) and Varnum (1971) who studied the Ugandan lyre *Endongo* and the Kenyan Gusii lyre *Ebokono* respectively, agree that despite their sociocultural variation, the lyre instrument cannot be separated from music and dance. In this paper, we analyze primary data that were collected from Kanduyi and Kimilili as well as secondary data that are in form of recorded songs; specifically, three songs performed by one of the *litungu* players. With the use of textual and visual affordances, this paper seeks to explain how the *litungu* player preserves cultural knowledge through mitigation of political issues in the day to day life of the people.

Litungu music and dance is situated among the Bukusu people of Western Kenya. Bukusu people are patriarchal in nature, politically egalitarian and their power is centred on the clan. Below the clan is the family that is headed by the father. With a population of about 1.5 million, the Bukusu people are one of the 18 sub-groups that belong to the larger Luhya community. The Luhya group is the third largest in the Kenyan ethnic groupings.

At the center of *litungu* music and dance is the *litungu* instrument. *Litungu* belongs to the lyre group of instruments. Originally a 7-stringed instrument, *litungu* was made from traditional trees:

kumubumbu, *kumukhuyu*, *kumutoto* and *kumurembe*. These traditional trees were specifically chosen because they had cultural value; they were used to counsel members of the community. The resonator of the *litungu* was made of the skin from the monitor lizard, while the strings were extracted from the tendons, *kumubia*.



Traditional *litungu*, Source: You Tube; retrieved on 25th Oct 2022

The resonator had a hole, through which the members of the audience had an opportunity to place in tokens of appreciation; these were not considered as payment. This act also reflected the generous and welcoming nature of the Bukusu people. The two arms on the *litungu* stand for the man and the woman who are the foundation of a family.

Litungu Playing

Different styles are used in *litungu* playing; these include, playing while seated. In this style, the instrument is placed on the laps as it is played. It can also be played while standing and even while lying on the ground, with the instrument taking various positions. *Litungu* can be played alone or in the context of other instruments such as the *silili* (fiddle), *bichenje* (iron jingles) and *eng'oma* (drum).



Litungu placed on the laps; Source: You Tube; retrieved on 25th Oct 2022



Litungu being played along silili; Source: Kanduyi, in Bungoma County, Kenya.

More often than not, the art of playing the *litungu* instrument is inherited from the forefathers. It is believed that the *litungu* player, *omupeni*, is usually seized by a spirit that drives him to play the instrument. Traditionally, only elderly Bukusu men were permitted to touch and play *litungu* and not women, young boys or girls; for the later, it was a taboo to engage in this.

While performing, participants dance around the player emphasizing their shoulders, *Kamabeka* and not any other part of the body. The dance pattern is hence called *kamabeka*; a dancing style that is considered descent and acceptable to all, regardless of age; see the picture below:



Source: Kanduyi, Bungoma County, Kenya.

Litungu was mostly played in the contexts where people consumed traditional brews and the dancers were customarily men and older women. Their participation in the dance depended on the person presiding over beer pot. Such a person (normally chosen from an older age set) apportioned speaking turns in the room. The dancers, having sought permission from the person presiding over the pot, interrupted the playing of the lyre as they requested to be praised.

Over the years, the context of *litungu* music has significantly changed. Today, *litungu* can be played in contexts where only soft drinks are served such as *chama* meetings. Furthermore, *litungu* has currently been commercialized in that people of all ages and genders play it in order to earn a living. *Litungu* music and dance has also become more audience-driven: the audience determines the type of music to be played, the duration, the dancing patterns and so on.

In the recent days, *Litungu* has changed from a 7-stringed to an 8-stringed instrument. According to our informant, this was to accommodate the eighth note on the solfa (drmfsltd) so that modern tunes that are played on Western instruments can also be played on *litungu*. Likewise, the resonator has considerably become bigger in size. This is observed in the instruments below:



Source: Kanduyi, Bungoma County, Kenya

All the above changes as described on the structure, performance and contexts of use are attributed to the changing environment, which has forced *litungu* music and dance to reinvent in order to adapt.

Kenyan Political Scene

Kenya's political landscape is very competitive both at the National and County levels. Candidates, especially those who are contesting for presidency invest huge amounts of money to secure political seats. Unity is also important for ethnic sub-groups as it gives them bargaining power once a leader they have supported wins. That explains why the question of Luhya unity has always been sought for in every General election. Given this scenario, politicians always seek the services of *litungu* music to promote their political agenda; this is besides players using the same in political mitigation. The following sub-section describes the place of *litungu* music and dance in Bukusu politics.

Litungu and Bukusu Politics

Originally *litungu* music and dance was associated with the Bukusu leaders. Our informants argue that before *litungu* was played in other contexts, it was first played for leaders such as Suti Namachanga (then a leader in King Mumia's court), Paskari and Naftari of Muyeku. In these contexts, that were also beer drinking sessions, *litungu* was not only a way to entertain guests, but it was also viewed as a source of wisdom, *bukambisi*; as it was used to mitigate a variety of societal issues. Through praise, clan leaders were also identified and their role in the community made public. In the recent days however, *Litungu* music, just like other types of music, has been more often associated with entertainment in social functions. In this paper, we argue that despite these changes, *litungu* music and dance have remained true to their original function: to make explicit the nature of political leadership and to mitigate politically related issues among the Babukusu of Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

A lot has been said in the literature about music as a form of entertainment and, thus, as a resource that cannot be used in mitigation of real life challenges (Kavyu, 1991 & Odenyo, 2005). A close observation of *litungu* music and dance among the Bukusu, however, shows that from its inception to date, it has continued to play a critical role in the society; this is despite the changing environment. This study sets out to respond to the following questions: What is the nature of the lyre music and dance among the Bukusu of Kenya? What is the place of the lyre music and dance in knowledge preservation and political mitigation and how does lyre music and dance adapt to the changing environment? In order to identify the gap, we reviewed relevant literature as reported in the following sub-section.

Literature Review

Teffera (2011) describes the lyres across speech communities such as the lyres of the Luo, Kuria, Gusii, Pokot and Abaluhya communities of Kenya; the lyres of the Ingassana, Nuba and Shilluk

people of the Sudan and the lyres of the Basoga, Baganda, Samia, Achooli, Madi and Lugbara of Uganda; and concludes that the number of strings on the instrument extends from five to ten and that the instruments' shape, size as well as playing style also differ from one culture to the other. Similarly, Makubuya, (1999) and Wegner, (2001) have described the lyres as having “*regional and cultural differences in terms of shapes, sizes, materials used to make the instrument, type of strings, songs sung, playing methods, tuning models, performance styles, as well as music repertoire*” (Teffera, 2011: 273). Such descriptions are important as they give a view of what lyre music and dance entails across cultures. The current study goes beyond the artistic description of lyre music and dance among the Bukusu of Kenya as it seeks to show its place in knowledge preservation through political mitigation.

Many scholars today agree that music and dance reflects and shapes historical and contemporary realities of our diverse communities. Allen (2004) argues that music, through its creation and performance provides an avenue through which we can have a feel of Africa people's experiences. Ranger (1975) discusses the competitive dance practices in East Africa and makes reference to the coastal *Beni Ngoma* ensembles as musical and social products of cultural contact. Spencer (1985) interprets dance as a channel for expression of discontent with social inequalities, an antithesis to predominant discourse expressed in the ritual setting. Askew (2002) explores the relations between musical practice, political ideology, and economic change in Tanzania. Other scholars have analysed music and dance as tools for cultural identity and community bonding (Good et. al, 2020); as markers of identity (Nketia, 2001); as educative and entertainment tools (Tudor, 1979); as a social tool that grows over time (Ranger, 1975); as tools for the preservation, perpetuation and development of culture, (Lee, 2021); as intangible cultural heritage (De-Miguel-Molina, et al., 2021); as being therapeutic, (De Bondt, 2020) and as a social space that improves quality of life (Dissanayake, 2000; Nemetz, 2006; Schott-Billman, 1998). All these studies have in some way focused on the role and relevance of music and dance in general as knowledge that is central for the wellbeing of humanity.

With regard to lyre, Teffera (2011) looks at the relationships between instrumental melodies and vocal melodies of the bowl lyre *krar* of the Amhara of Ethiopia as tools for cultural and linguistic heritage; Finke (2003) who studied Kuria lyre music concludes that it does play a central role among the Kuria community; Wafula (2004) on the other hand has looked at the role of lyre instrument (*litungu*) players among the Bukusu of Kenya, where he established that these are very respected people in the community. So far, no detailed studies have been done on the role of lyre music and dance in knowledge preservation through political mitigation in the Bukusu community and hence the need for the current study.

As far as changes in the lyre music and dance is concerned, previous studies have shown that this social space is shifting. Teffera, (2011), who looked at the lyres from central and northern Ethiopian regions, observes that there is shift in the instrument as the lyres are currently made with boxes of various shapes so that we now have box-shaped lyres replacing the traditional bowl-shaped lyres. Likewise, this scholar observes that there are changes in the gender of instrumentalists who plays the bowl lyre *krar*, as currently it is played by both genders as opposed to males only. Further, Omondi (1980) who looked at lyre (*nyatiti*) music and dance among the Luo of Kenya argues that this social space has changed over time. However, despite the changes, Write (2021) observes that the *nyatiti* music and dance still plays an important role in the Luo culture.

Despite the fact that there's substantive literature on the changes in lyre music and dance, so far there is scarce literature on changes that have taken place specifically in the Bukusu lyre, justification on why and how members of this speech community are contesting, negotiating and reinventing in order to fit into this changing social space; this is where the current study comes in.

Whereas a lot of research has been done on the role of music and dance in human society, in this study, we argue that literature about the place of *Litungu* music and dance in knowledge preservation through political mitigation among the Bukusu is scanty and yet *Litungu* music and dance hold an important place in this speech community. Furthermore, given the mobilities and learning in this era

of modernization, an understanding of how this social space is adapting in the changing environment is crucial as it helps predict its future and survival.

The literature cited points to an apparent academic gap that led to data collection that was analysed using the multimodal theory which is discussed below.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse theory is a social semiotic approach to communication propounded by Gunter Kress (Kress, 2012). The key argument is that a discourse is both ideological and textual. While ideology makes up discourse patterns that are inherent in a text, the text refers to the site from where discourses emerge. This theory is multi-disciplinary and as such, it goes beyond the linguistic mode as the central means for representation and communication (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001). It also provides the methods and a framework for data collection and analysis of various modes and their relationships (Jewitt, 2009 and Kress, 2009).

According to the theory, a discourse is a complex multimodal message constituted by a complex set of signs to be interpreted by the members of the society. The signs shape interpretation as a network of modes. The modes include linguistic signs, visuals, gestures, colours, design, sounds, images and highlights (Bucher, 2017); each of which plays a certain specified role in shaping up a text, since a text results from a network of threads that can be speech or writing.

Threads that form a text are many and differ in material terms; they can also include, music and images. These threads create one textual or semiotic whole that represents and is based on the maker's interests. According to this model, resources that are available to the members of the society to make and interpret meaning and the nature of knowledge and how it is revealed by different affordances are analyzed.

The theory has enabled us to establish the nature of the lyre music and dance by analyzing affordances or modes that are part of and that accompany lyre music and dance as a complex multimodal text. It has also enabled us to establish the political knowledge and how different affordances reveal it in the context of *litungu* music and dance. *Litungu* music and dance is situated in a changing context, thus, the affordances have enabled us to show the changes in *litungu* music and dance as it preserves the traditional Bukusu knowledge through political mitigation. In the next sections, we discuss methods of data collection and analysis.

Methodology

Study Design and Expected Output

The study used the exploratory and descriptive design. The design helped the researchers to establish the role of lyre music and dance in Knowledge preservation and mitigation of political challenges; this is despite the dynamic and complex nature of the environment. By focusing on Bukusu, which is a Bantu language, we managed to elicit rich data on the subject of the study. Such data made explicit the centrality of lyre music and dance in this culturally complex community; this is besides providing an understanding of how the community deals with the ever changing environment.

Study Site and Population

Given that the study was a preliminary, hence small, we collected data from two sites; that is, Kanduyi and Kimilili in Bungoma County, Kenya. The sites were purposively selected as they are predominantly occupied by the Bukusu ethnic group that largely makes use of lyre music and dance in many contexts that are themselves dynamic.

The study targeted lyre music players, singers, dancers and audiences; both male and female from the ages of 18 to 90. This is the age bracket within the participants have proper understanding of their actions; that is, the purpose/ reason for playing, singing or dancing to lyre music in relation to their social structure. In particular, participants who were 60 years and above are relevant as they are appropriate sources of data on the dynamism in lyre music and dance as we compare the type of content in the music and dance as performed by the young and the old, any differences or similarities in the instruments, contexts and costumes over time. Our focus was to understand how lyre music and

dance are used for knowledge preservation and mitigation of political challenges in the face of the shifting environment. This sample provided us with multiple affordances (texts, dances, dancers, contexts, costumes and instruments) that were analyzed based on the multimodal theory of discourse analysis (Kress, 2012).

Sample Size, Type and Sampling Procedure

In order to identify study participants, during the reconnaissance, we used two Gate keepers from Kanduyi and Kimillili in Bungoma County, Kenya, who are familiar with the cultural environment of the community. The Gate keepers were purposively identified. Two methods were used to sample participants in the main study: Firstly, stratified purposive sampling was applied in identifying men and women between the ages of 18 and 90 years, who are lyre music players in the community. Secondly, snow ball sampling was used whereby the identified participants identified others who had the required characteristics. In total, we sampled 4 lyre instrument players. However, for singers and dancers, we didn't sample any specific number, instead we collected songs and dances in a natural setting; this is besides those that we sampled online. We also purposively sampled 5 informants from the community; who provided data on the history of lyre music and dance, its place in the community in question, its function in the ceremonies under focus, the changes that have taken place in these social spaces and the strategies that the community members are using in order to adapt. Finally, we purposively sampled 12 informants to participate in 2 focused group discussions (6 in each FGD). On the basis of the objectives of the project, we purposively collected 20 songs and dances from the community, out of which we purposively selected 3 for this paper.

Data Type and Data Collection Methods

In order to collect in-depth data on lyre music and dance among the Bukusu, we used multiple methods. Non-participant observation was used where live performances were observed. An observation guide, was used to elicit relevant data on the nature of the instruments, the behaviour of the players, the content of the songs, the dances, the dancers, the costumes and the contexts. In-depth face to face interviews with the 5 informants were also used to elicit more relevant detailed data on the reasons why the instruments differ, the cultures, especially taboos surrounding the playing of lyre music and the changes and how the society is adapting to the changes. Focus group discussions were used with the 12 informants to obtain not only more relevant information on the subject of the study but also varied views, attitudes and feelings concerning lyre music and dance. This enabled us draw better conclusions. Likewise, pictorial method was used, where pictures of performances, the lyre instrument, the position of lyre instrument players (sitting or standing), facial expressions, the dancers and their moves and costumes were captured. Audio and video recordings were used in order to capture all the relevant data, especially the songs and dances. For each method of data collection, there was a guide; that is, an observation, an interview, an FGD and a pictorial guide, which helped us not to deviate from the study objectives. Note-taking was used to collect data as we observed and interviewed the respondents. This eclectic method of data collection was appropriate given the complexity of the study as it involved multiple facets.

Data Analysis Procedure

Given the nature of the study, we used descriptive analysis, where a number of procedures were utilized to analyze the various data based on the study theory. Firstly, all the data were transcribed; that is, data from the pictorials, audio and video recordings as well as notes were converted into texts. Secondly, any data collected in languages other than English were translated and finally, using the multimodal theory, the data that is in form of texts, contexts and artefacts were analyzed both linguistically and thematically based on the objectives of the study. The researchers were guided by the following ethical considerations in data collection and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

We sought for research permit from NACOSTI (National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation); we also sought for approval from the Bungoma County commissioner and also sought

for Participants' signed consent before being engaged in the study. Likewise, all the collected data were de-identified in order to protect the participants' identity.

Data Analysis

In analyzing data, multimodal theory was applied while focusing on the specific objectives of study as discussed below.

Reinvention of *Litungu* Music and Dance

We organise this section under two themes: modern day political challenges and political solutions. We begin with modern day political challenges.

j) Litungu Music and Dance in Addressing Modern Day Political Challenges

In the section below, both linguistic and thematic analyses are done in order to achieve the objectives of the study.

Example 1 is taken from the song entitled “*pressure*” in which the lyre player sings about political challenges that have led to his illness.

Example 1

1 S: *ekura yakila nanyola pressure baye*

election caused me to get pressure

2 C: *uui lelo ndwala*

uui these days I am sick

3 S: *khukwa ekura yarera pressure*

losing an election brought pressure

4 C: *uui lelo ndwala*

uui these days I am sick

By fronting the word *ekura* (election) in the sentence *ekura yakila nanyola pressure* (election caused me to have pressure), the *litungu* player introduces elective politics. With *khukwa ekura* (to lose an election), the *litungu* player shows one of the results of elective politics i.e. there are winners and losers. In the chorus *uui lelo ndwala* (*uui* these days I am sick), the *litungu* player reveals not only the effect of elective politics on the health of a contestant but also the stakes in politics. The contestant becomes ill because, having invested a lot of resources in the campaigns, loss of a political seat means loss of wealth and the future. In a bid to mitigate such challenges, the *litungu* musician adapts *litungu* music to the prevailing political situation, with the aim of providing counsel, through song and dance. This is patterned with traditional Bukusu way of expressing sadness i.e. the cry *uui* and the Bukusu dancing style in which shoulders are emphasized using the visual images that accompany the singing. While *litungu* music preserves the traditional dancing style and culture, it also reveals significant changes. For instance, *Kamabeka* (shoulders) was mostly enacted by elders in beer party; such parties were presided over by men from old age sets. Today, *kamabeka* is enacted in contexts without beer and even children are allowed to dance as shown in the picture below. Notice that the young girl is dancing all alone in the field and she is not dressed in any special way/ in the traditional regalia.



Source: You Tube; retrieved on 12th Nov 2022

Example 2 that is taken from the song *Mudavadi kobola* (Mudavadi come back), that is about an urge for Luhyas to unite hints at the existence of non-performing leaders.

Example 2

1 *bali noli nomukhasi nakebula busa babana*

that when you have a wife and if she gives birth to girls only

2 *bakhasi bong'ene ochenja lirango bana befwe*

you change 'lirango' our children

The saying *noli nomukhasi nekebula busa babana bakhasi ochenja lirango* (if you have a wife who always gives birth to daughters, change your sleeping position) is used among the Bukusu people in the context of marriage. It is said to people who sire children of the same sex only. The saying introduces another challenge in elective politics: the need for change. The *litungu* singer incorporates an aspect of traditional Bukusu culture to sing about political incompetence and the need for the incompetent to be punished by being removed from power. Thus, a number of metaphors are embedded in the saying: *omukhasi* (a woman) represents the politician; *khukhwibula* (to give birth) represents political success that needs to be balanced i.e. the success of politics is measured by the ability of the politician to 'give birth to female and male children'. *Lirango* (the thigh) in this context refers to the politician and therefore the second person 'you' (who is being advised as shown in *ochenja* (you change) is the electorate. In this way, politics is viewed in terms of a sexual union between a man and a woman. Change in the context of *litungu* is also revealed in the visual images that accompany the singing; this is made possible because of the presence of the advanced technology. The women in the picture are not the appropriate audience for the saying; in traditional Bukusu context, the saying is applied to men who sire only girl-children. Besides, the women emphasize their waists in their dancing; this is a shift from the traditional *kamabeka* (shoulders), which is descent and culturally acceptable. This blend of the traditional and modern is done to suit the modern ways of doing politics. This is shown in the picture below:



Source: You Tube; retrieved on 12th Nov 2022

An aspect of leadership is also captured in example 3 that is also taken from the song entitled *Mudavadi Kobola* (Mudavadi come back).

Example 3

1 *wamalwa nga kaba musiwanja*

when wamalwa was in the field

2 *kumupira baapanga bulai*

they used to play 'the ball' well

To talk about the lack of unity among Luhya leaders, the *litungu* player incorporates an image of the football team from the world of sports. In this, politics is metaphorically likened to a football match, while politicians are individual players in such a match. With *musiwanja* (in the field) and *kumupira* (the ball) the lyre musicians metaphorically compare politics with being in the field and playing football respectively. Thus, politics is metaphorically 'beaten/played' by a team as indicated by the pronoun 'they' *ba-* in *baapanga* (they used to play). With the use of the past tense form *-a-* in *ba(-a-)panga bulai* (they used to beat/play well) the *litungu* player compares current politicians with the former politicians, who according to the musician, were better. Together with the verbal message, the musician incorporates still pictures of Wamalwa Kijana, a former Bukusu politician. This is a departure from the traditional *litungu* music where it would not only have been possible but also culturally unacceptable to present the dead in the context of music and dance. Thus, technology is adopted whenever the musician wishes to evoke aspects related to the dead; a shift from the traditional Bukusu norm.

Lack of leaders to unite the people is also captured in the excerpt taken from the song entitled *Mudavadi Kobola* (Mudavadi come back). In example 4, the musician makes reference to one of the greatest Luhya leaders, Masinde Muliro.

Example 4

1 *wakana wamalwa omundu kela khumulosi woo*

may be a man re-marries your wife

2 *wakana wamalwa omundu kela khu mukhayee woo*

may be a man re-marries your wife

3 *khusaba okhubele. Khusaba okubele ndii*

we beseech you to forgive. We beseech you to forgive us'

4 *khuli busa nio wakhulekha*

we are just where you left us

The noun *omundu* (a person/ a man) metaphorically refers to a politician, while the nouns *omukhaye* and *omulosi* (wife) both metaphorically refer to the Luhya people. The association between Wamalwa and his people is metaphorically understood in terms of the relationship between a husband and wife. Thus, the verb *kela khumulosi woo* (he takes your wife) reveals a metaphorical understanding of change of leadership in terms of taking someone's wife. In line three, the musician adopts a prayerful mode: he prays to Wamalwa, now an ancestor, to forgive the community, and this is because the community has not changed as shown by *khuli busa niyo wakhulekha* (we are just where you left us). In this instance, dance does not accompany the singing. This is in line with traditional context of the lyre player, where during mourning the lyre music was not played.

The lack of unity is also shown in example 5 taken from the song entitled *Wakhuloka* (Bewitched).

Example 5

1 S: *enywe baluya*

you luhya people

2 C: *Omundu wakhuloka bayee (dancing by the fireside)*

The person who bewitched us

3 S: *wakhuloka kafwa khalee*

The person who bewitched us died a long time ago

To speak about persistent - and perhaps the irredeemable - lack of unity among the Luhya community members, the musician incorporates the biblical verse where Paul speaks to the Galatians who refuse to accept the truth of Christ's death and resurrection. St Paul wonders who bewitched them. The musician adopts and modifies this verse adding the view that since the Luyhas cannot unite, then the person who bewitched them must have died. The phrase '*kafwa khale*' (died long time ago) culturally and semantically signify that chances that the Luhya people will ever unite are diminished by the fact that the witch already died.

The dancing by the fireside is an enactment of the activities of the witches. This complements the message being sung. This is observed in the picture below:



Source: You Tube; retrieved on 12th Nov 2022

Besides, the Luhya community is also in danger of being excluded from the ruling coalition (2013 ruling coalition) due to their inability to unite. In example 6, the musician allows one of the politicians to comment on what disunity means for the Luhya community.

Example 6

Ata sahi msipochunga mtachezwa tena (moses kuria)

Even now if you are not careful you will be short-changed again

In this excerpt the Sheng expression *mtachezwa* ‘you will be short-changed’ is used in reference to the Luhyas, who due to lack of experience can be deceived and what they have, taken away from them. With the word *msipochunga* ‘if you are not careful’, a warning to the Luhya people is revealed. This is also a rally to them to unite and take a political position. Once again the *litungu* player uses technology to show the present day politicians. Traditionally, members of the audience could be allowed to speak as the music played.

ii) Litungu Music and Dance in Mitigating Political Challenges

The lyre musician proposes a number of solutions to the present day political challenges among the Luhya people. In example 7, he proposes the return of some prominent Luhya leaders.

Example 7

1 S: *ewe mudavadi*

You Mudavadi

2 C: *mudavadi kobolaaa*

Mudavadi come back

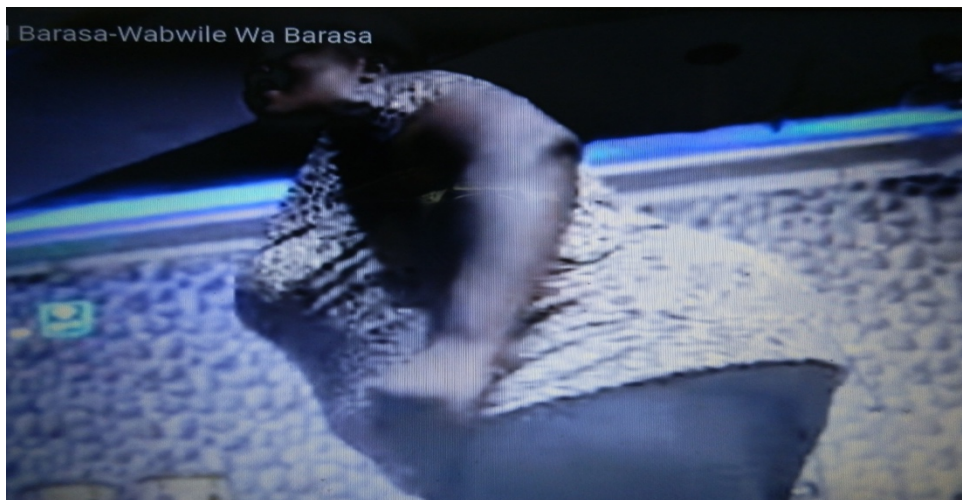
3 S: *mwana wa malagoli*

Child of maragoli

4 C: *Bubwami bwolile*

Leadership has come

With the verb *kobola* (return), unity is conceptualised in terms of a journey. The noun *Mudavadi* is significant as it refers to a politician who comes from outside the Bukusu community. *Mudavadi* comes from the Maragoli sub-group, one of the members of the larger Luhya community. The context of *litungu* is expanded to include other sub-tribes. In the past *Litungu* was specifically played for the members of the Bukusu community. The dancing pattern shown while the musician utters the words in the excerpt depicts the changing context of lyre music. In this instance, women dance emphasizing their waists. This dance pattern that is mostly associated with *Rhumba* is a departure from the traditional Bukusu ways of dancing, where the dancers emphasize the shoulders. Below is a picture showing a woman dancing emphasizing her waist.



Source: You Tube; retrieved on 12th Nov 2022

The women also dance in modern wear (as above), including uniforms instead of the traditional sisal fibres, *biyula*. However, despite the changes in the dancing patterns and mode of dress, *litungu* music has continued to play its role in shaping the politics of the Bukusu people.

In example 8, the lyre musician explains why, especially Mudavadi must return.

Example 8

1 *Baluhya balomalomanga bali khakhendo khali munyanjaa*

Luhyas say that a magic guard is in the lake

2 *Luno luri mudavadi echile ne khakhendo akha*

Today Mudavadi has come with it.

The word *khakhendo* among the Bukusu people refers to a magic guard, known for bringing luck to its possessor. According to the lyre musician, only Mudavadi has it; thus, it is only him who can lead. With *Baluhya balomalomanga* (Luhyas normally say), the lyre musician indicates that he is citing the Luhya wisdom. *Khakhendo khali munyanja* (a magic guard is in the lake) is a Bukusu saying which in this instance is applied to the wider Luhya community. The lake reveals luck as independent and as something that comes to the chosen few who should be supported. Thus, the excerpt is also an attempt to rally the Bukusu community to recognise Mudavadi as the leader of the wider Luhya group and to support him. Accompanying the singing is a bull fighting contest, which does not only show politics metaphorically as a contest but it also situates *litungu* music in the wider Luhya community. Bull fighting is one of the Isukha cultural practices; the Isukha people belong to the larger Luhya group and they live in Kakamega. Thus, adopting bull fighting is an attempt to show unity through practices.



Source: You Tube; retrieved on 12th Nov 2022

Unity of the people behind one leader is instructive, as it has many benefits as shown in example 9.

Example 9

1 *Enywe khuambane khulie silala*

You let us unite so that we can eat one thing

2 *Ne nekhali lunoo*

If it is not today,

3 *Enywe nanywe muliloma manyandio*

You will say I wish I knew

The expressions *khulie silala* (we eat one thing) metaphorically reveals unity in terms of ‘eating one thing’. The anticipated unity has to happen immediately; this is shown using the word *luno*

(today). According to the lyre musician, should the people not unite, they will regret. This is shown using the hypothetical speech report whose quote is *manyandio* (I wish I knew).

Unity of leaders has to involve the young, unseasoned politicians. In example 10, he names some.

Example 10

1 *new generation muambane nende mwambu wa mabonga*

new generation unite with Mwambu wa Mabonga

2 *ebumula* (young dancers by the river side)

at Bumula

Code switching to English in example 10 indicates lack of a word in Lubukusu to capture the intended meaning of the phrase ‘new generation’. This is a mark of linguistic change that has affected *litungu* music and dance, more so, among the youthful players. The musician appeals to young politicians to reach out to other young politicians. Thus, unity is also to be seen in line with age; not only among the old but also among the young. This is depicted through the young dancers by the riverside as shown below:



Source: You Tube; retrieved on 12th Nov 2022

Another solution especially to the problem of lack of leaders/failure of leaders to move the people forward is suggested in example 11.

Example 11

1 *baluya be chinyinga chino papa*

Luhyas of these days, papa

2 *munabona etimu bakhupi bali musiwanja*

when you see a team in the field,

3 *bana base inyaa kimiaka kitaru buli eligi*

my children, playing for three years and for every league

4 *neinyaa ekwila busa khungila*

it plays it fails on the way

5 *etimu eyo mukirusiayo mwachenja bakhupi*

remove the team and change the players

6 *niyo kimipira kiapikha*

so that football can be properly played

The musician in example 11 again incorporates an aspect of imagery relating football where, politicians are metaphorically viewed in terms of a football team and their performance is viewed in terms of a league. Using the conditional expression, he sets the standard for the team: it plays for three years in a league, *inyaa kimiaka kitaru buli eligi*. The musician also sets the rule of the game and what should be done if the team does not measure up to the standard i.e. should it fail on the way it should be removed and the players changed: *ekwila busa khungila; etimo eyo mukirusiayo mwachenja bakhupi*. In this excerpt, the musician suggests that all non-performing leaders must be removed, but that all players must function as a team tasked to win a league.

To broach the question of expensive political campaigns, the musician proposes prior gathering of wealth in example 12.

Example 12

- 1 *newima ekura lola mwitala naye lola emukunda baye*
if you should vie, check your cowshed, check your farm
- 2 *lolakho litoka baye lolakho emali baye*
get a car, get wealth

Framed in a conditional expression that begins with *ne-* ‘if (*ne-wima* ‘if you should vie’), the excerpt reveals an association of wealth with material things i.e. a car, land and animals; with these aspects, the musician provides a pre-condition for contesting.

To deal with problems associated with politics, the musician in example 13 also suggests that the people need to repent to receive God’s forgiveness.

Example 13

- 1 *Nemusima khwikanile* (Israel dance)/dancing in water/on the road
Please let’s repent
- 2 *Wele papa akhubelee*
So that God forgives us

The musician uses the word *nemusima* (please) to politely urge the Luhyas to repent. The subjunctive, indicated by *-e* on the word *akhubel-e* (he forgives us), shows that musician’s wish that the Luhyas are forgiven for not conducting themselves as they should.

In the song *Wakhuloka* (bewitched), the musician also begins by inviting God to save the situation. This is shown in example 14.

Example 14

- 1 *Wele papa sibumbi wabumba likulu ne liloba ne sisialo*
God the father, creator; you created the sky and the earth and the world
- 2 *Ewe wamwene ointervine*
You yourself should intervene
- 3 *Wele papa khubele*
For God to forgive us
- 4 *Bakhukhoma bakhila*
They have abused us a lot

By using a juxtaposed word ‘*ointavine*’ derived by code-mixing Bukusu prefixes ‘oi’ (you should) and the English verb ‘intervene’, the musician contextualises his identity as a young educated person as he invites the Supreme Being to intervene. God is to intervene in a conflict between the Luhya people and other communities. The expression *bakhukhoma* ‘they have abused us’ reveals two sides: the Luhya community that has refused to unite and the other communities that chide the Luhya people for refusing to unite.

As the excerpts and many instances from the data show, the lyre player uses both visual and textual messages to preserve the Bukusu traditional heritage that is embodied in *litungu* song and dance as he mitigates various political challenges such as Luhya disunity, expensive political campaigns, stress and illness that arise from loss in campaigns and incompetent leaders among others. The contexts and dancing patterns/visual affordances adopted are designed to complement the themes under discussion and they therefore depart from the traditional dance that emphasizes the shoulders. This shift is in line with the changing environment.

Findings

The study set out to investigate the reinvention of lyre music and dance for knowledge preservation through political mitigation among the Bukusu of Kenya in the face of the shifting environment. Consequently, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- i) What is the nature of the lyre music and dance among the Bukusu community of Kenya?
- ii) What is the place of the lyre music and dance in knowledge preservation and mitigation of political issues among the Bukusu?
- iii) How does the Bukusu lyre music and dance adapt to changes in the environment?

Based on the primary and secondary data that were elicited, analysed and interpreted, we found out that:

1. Traditionally, the Bukusu *litungu* was a 7-stringed instrument that was made using very specific materials that spoke about the norms and practices of the people; it was played by elderly men who were held in high esteem; the music that was played (accompanied with narrations) served to mitigate various societal issues; the dancers, dances, contexts and costumes used were all aligned with the Bukusu customs and traditions.
2. *Litungu* music and dance among the Bukusu serves to create, perpetuate and preserve knowledge.
3. Over time, there has been a shift in the *Litungu* music and dance as players, singers and dancers negotiate the changing demands in the environment. In order to fit into the shifting environment, the players have had to reinvent new ways of performing *litungu* music and dance in order to meet the changing needs of their audiences; these include, adapting to an 8-stringed *litungu* (borrowed from the West); having other modern instruments such as the key board, guitar and drum accompany *litungu* instrument, adapting to new/ modern modes of dressing; performing in a variety of new/ modern contexts, use of modern technology to improve on their performances, inclusion of ladies and young men in the playing of and dancing to *litungu*, which was initially a reserve for elderly men, hence shifting from the set norms; using *litungu* music and dance as a source of income generating thereby, departing from its original function, where this social space was highly valued and revered. As much as the elderly players contest the changes, they are also seen to conform to modern trends in order to remain relevant.
4. Despite the shifting social space, *litungu* music and dance still serves to preserve knowledge through political mitigation as observed not only among the elderly but also the youthful players.

Conclusion

Taking a linguistic approach, the current study investigated resources with which the lyre music and dance has reinvented itself against the ever-changing Bukusu political landscape. Particularly, the study established that in order to remain relevant, the lyre music and dance incorporates current political themes and proposes solutions to political problems. Using textual affordances such as metaphors, sheng, codeswitching among others and visual affordances, the lyre musicians show that *litungu* music and dance is also changing. Some of the changes in *litungu* music and dance include the introduction of the eighth string on the instrument, the use of the keyboard instead of *litungu*, the

emphasis of the waist instead of the shoulders, the adoption of modern costumes and contexts, the inclusion of women and the youth in the *litungu* playing and dance; these are some of the many changes that have taken place in this social space. Besides, the Bukusu political landscape has also changed tremendously. As a result of movement of people due to enhanced technology, people from different ethnic communities have settled among the Bukusu. Further, the Bukusu find themselves in a setting where unity among ethnic communities is essential if they hope to get a share of the national cake. These coupled with other political problems such as poor representation and rising cost of campaigns have made Bukusu leaders to consider uniting with other Luhya ethnic groups. The current project thus raises the need for further reflections on the method of how to study this and other related complex phenomena. A study on how the lyre music and dance interacts with other social correlates such as gender can shed further light on the nature of *litungu* music and dance.

Recommendations

Based on the literature reviewed, data collected and analysed as per the study objectives, we recommend that:

- 1) The Bukusu *litungu* music and dance should be preserved and managed for future generations.
- 2) Future research should consider other types of instruments that are used by the Bukusu community for knowledge preservation through mitigation.
- 3) There's need for research on the lyre music and dance in other speech communities and contexts/ forms of mitigation not only in Kenya but beyond.
- 4) There's need for research on gender and power relations in *litungu* music and dance.

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