



The Language of Kikuyu Popular Artists as “Community Spokespersons” On Ethnic Cleansing in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper focuses on popular songs that were performed on the Kenya’s mega historical period of 2007/2008. The country experienced socio-political conflict precipitated on the winner of the Presidential race, hence the ethnic cleansing. New Historicism arrives at a deeper insight into the context of the songs. It is interested in the reconstruction of the actual relations among people at a particular time. The presidential aspirants named in the chaos, remain historical personages in Kenya. This discussion reveals the interaction between poetics and political history. The discussed poets immersed themselves in the real historical phenomena positioning themselves as spokespersons on the upheavals. The chapter is based on song-texts selected from Gikuyu artists who engaged the audience on the events.

Keywords: Kenya, Kikuyu Popular Artists, popular songs

1.0 Theory and Methodology

Mutualism was first used in a biological context by a Belgian zoologist, in 1873. According to (Bronstein, 2015), it refers to the symbiotic relationship or interactions between two species. Each of the organisms benefits. Human beings are undeniably attracted by the idea of cooperation in nature. Bronstein (2015), argues that such interactions have for long captured public imagination. Beyond biology and ecology, the term has referred to all mutually beneficial, interspecific interactions, regardless of their specificity, intimacy, or evolutionary history. This paper looked at how history and poetry, are entwined in revealing Kenya as a country. For poetry to chronicle “the faithful representation of reality” or “verisimilitude, hence, realistic literature, it has to employ specific literary tools, techniques and devices. (Lai 2006:2) asserts that “history cannot be divorced from textuality.” The contention here is that there exists a dynamic dialogue between history and it has a reciprocal concern with “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history.” (Bhabha 1990). New Historicism to gain deeper understanding of this poetry of the Post-Election Violence. New Historicists point to the culturally specific nature of texts as products of particular periods and discursive formations, while viewing reality, mediated by linguistic codes which it is impossible for the critic/historian to bypass in the recuperation of past cultures (Spiegel 1997: 190). The selection of the artists was purposively done based on the fact that the three were incarcerated into jails due to their musical renditions which were labeled, hate speech. Data was collected from recorded music and observation of videos.

2.0 The Nation of Kenya

Kenya is an African country which has been independent since 1963. In Kenya people enjoy such rights as freedom of worship, expression and of the press. The Kenyan constitution, which was recently reviewed and promulgated in the year 2012, allows all people above eighteen years to vote. The president, is assisted by Cabinet Secretaries whom he is empowered to appoint. Geographically, the country is divided into forty -seven Counties. Kenya is in East Africa. It was a protectorate and later a colony of the United Kingdom. Jomo Kenyatta was the country’s founding President. He led the country from independence, until his death in 1978. Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi took over power in a constitutional succession the same year, and ruled upto 2002. Emilio Mwai Kibaki ruled between 2002 and 2013 when the current president Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta took over. Kenya was a de facto one party state from 1969 to 1982 when the Kenya African National Union (K.A.N.U) was made the sole legal party. President Moi was re-elected unopposed twice in 1983 and 1988. In response to increasing domestic and international pressure for political reform, this president introduced multipartyism in 1992. As a result politics became more competitive resulting in inter-ethnic conflicts and civil strife. Since the 1920s, political and economic factors have encouraged the movement of populations within Kenya’s national borders, often to zones where they constitute ethnic minorities. It is often suggested that land scarcity and its distribution, which was aggravated by this movement among other factors such as a high rate of population growth and environmental degradation, has

contributed to the violent ethnic clashes. Kenya has a population estimated at 46.1 million, which increases by a million a year. With support of the World Bank Group, International Monetary Fund and other development partners, Kenya has made significant structural and economic reforms that have contributed to sustained economic growth in the past decade. Development challenges include poverty, inequality, and vulnerability of the economy to internal and external shocks, such as ethnic animosity which gets highly ignited during the electioneering period.

3.0 The Kenyans

New Historicism redirects our attention to a series of philosophical and practical concerns that it believes will highlight the complex interconnectedness of all human activities Bressler (2002:185). This chapter addresses negative ethnicity interrogating why Kenyans embrace it and what is its impact is on their lives? Almost all Kenyans are black and the majority live in the rural areas. This settlement is ethnic oriented since the British created a different ethnic majority in each of the eight provinces; each province was subdivided into districts, according to ethnic groups and subgroups. The Luo in Nyanza, the Abagusii in Kisii, the Luhya, in Western; the Kikuyu, in Central; the Somali, in North-Eastern; the Mijikenda in Coast. The Rift Valley region is dominated by the Kalenjin and the Eastern by the Kamba. Nairobi is the most cosmopolitan County, where Kikuyu form a plurality. This tribal based division is a root cause of ethnic hostility. Language is bound up with questions of identity and is a potent force in the revolutions. It is “a discursive power or social self-fashioning force as well as an impression of the temporal aspect of history (Lai 2006: 4). Kenya is mult- lingual. The most dominant communities in this linguistic and ethnic landscape are the Gikuyu, the Luhya, the Luo, the Kalenjin, the Kamba, and the Kisii. There are however many other smaller language communities. Ethnic animosity emerges during elections due to the use of these scenarios, politically labeled the tyranny of numbers. Mother tongue is widely spoken by these groups. Kiswahili is the lingua franca and national language. Alongside English, Kiswahili is also an official language. Some Kenyans know only their local dialects and languages, a large number of them know Kiswahili as well. Literature is mainly in English followed by Kiswahili. Orature is shared in mother- tongue. Music is composed in mother tongue and aired in local radio stations. There has been a proliferation of such radio stations. They have been observed to trigger ethnic based hostility.

4.0 Literature and Kenya’s History

The Kenyan literary landscape shows a very distinct relationship between literature and history. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) states that culture embodies moral, ethical and aesthetic values that people view themselves through and which acts as a basis of people’s identity to their sense of particularity. Bressler (2002: 185) supports the above by asserting that New Historicism:

...redefines both a text and history while simultaneously redefining the relationship between a text and history. It asserts that an intricate connection exists between an aesthetic object-a text or any work of art-and society, while denying that a text can be evaluated in isolation from its cultural context.

The poetry analyzed here has a historical base and is a result of many cultural, social and political forces. Thus, to understand it fully, we have taken recourse to the Gikuyu community and its ethnic formation and orientation that give rise to the sentiments raised by the poets. Music and dance have been of great significance in the study of a people's way of life and culture. Nkonge (1987) postulates the centrality of Joseph Kamaru's music in drawing links between the old ways and new ways of life. He describes Kamaru as an artist who was created by the music performance gap that emerged in post-independent times whereby the introduction of modern musical instruments changed the style of rendition of emergent popular art forms in the new Kenya. Gakuo (1994:116) depicts how modern song borrows from the African traditional song. He demonstrates how technical devices like proverbs are central in Kamaru's music. He adds that "they concretise the issues that the artiste addresses himself to. They not only demonstrate his skill and prowess in the manipulation of language but also the indebtedness to the Gikuyu oral literary tradition." This view is shared by other scholars in the field of cultural and literary studies. Wainaina (1998) opines that "Artistes in the popular music scene re-appropriates texts from orature in their compositions and also styles and techniques" Wainaina voices the standpoints of his predecessors in that contemporary popular artistes apply the same language used in the traditional settings and only add a few inventions to suit the target audiences of their times. They also perform mainly in hotels, motels, nightclubs and also in socio-political function in open grounds or in big social halls or in makeshift structures like tents. In Kenya and globally, poetry has always played a major role in socio-political concerns. The oral artist at the centre as a mouthpiece of the contemporary society (Bressler 2002: 185) also supports this view by observing that, "a text declares the societal concerns of the author, of the historical times evidenced in the work, and of other cultural elements exhibited in the text." Many political songs and poems emerged from past times. The present widespread occurrence of the same songs directly associated with modern political parties and national political concerns can thus be traced to periods before and during the struggle for independence in Africa up to the contemporary times (Mahugu, 1990). Okot p'Bitek observes:

If there are two types of rulers in every society, that is, those who use physical force to subdue men, and those that employ beautiful things, sweet songs and funny stories, rhythm, shape and colour to keep individuals and society sane and flourishing, then in my view, it is the artist who is the greater ruler (p' Bitek, 1972: 40)

Artists employ a variety of structural components and techniques in crafting their compositions so as to capture the imagination of their target audience as the oral artist is seen through the image of the narrator Akivaga and Odaga (1982). A given literary genre displays a wealth of knowledge and culture of a community. The artist displays a great deal of attachment to his roots, history and identity. In Kenya's struggle for independence, the land issue is a major concern and it was an instrumental factor during the clamour for emancipation, which motivated guerrilla fighters in an armed struggle which led to shedding of blood in colonial Kenya. Struggles against economic and other forms of oppression came a close second. (wa Thiong'o and Mugo 1976 : viii) In 1992 Kenya experienced tribal clashes in the Rift Valley, especially in Molo, Olenguruone, Burnt Forest and Njoro, Narok. The elaborate description of how some of these killings were conducted exemplifies extreme ruthlessness and hatred. (Kombani 2012: vi). Like Kombani, the artists in this chapter utilized their poetic skills to harness and document the impact of the same ethnic clashes.

5.0 Gikuyu Protest Poetry

When Kenya was under colonial rule, the Gikuyu were among the most affected people. This was in the late 20th century when most of the people of Kenya had to resist British conquest and land grabbing which took place when the white settlements began in the fertile highlands of Rift Valley and Central province. Administrative structures were designed and effectively used as part of state machinery to impose illegitimate authority. Besides land, there were conflicts over forced 'labour' and hut tax. These conflicts led to the 1923 Devonshire White paper, which stated that 'Kenya is an African country and the interest of the natives must be paramount'. Kenyans, especially the Gikuyu, Maasai and Kalenjin, lost much of their fertile land to the white settlers and the growing population meant increasing land hunger and discontent. A new land redistribution scheme was introduced under Lyttleton constitution of 1954 followed by other constitutional changes, however, this scheme did not adequately address the land question. Struggles for a free Kenya begun as early as 1922. The Mau Mau led the violent and armed struggle and by 1955, 13,000 Africans had lost their lives (Anderson: 2007). By 1960, two national parties were formed KANU and KADU. These were divided; KANU for Nationalism and KADU for Regionalism. These were alliances of leading personalities from various groups who struggled for the release of those in detention at Kapenguria and efforts to form the first government. The British were forced to retreat from Kenya and subsequently, release Jomo Kenyatta and five others from detention, the 'Kapenguria six'. Besides fighting the colonialists using crude methods and weapons, the Gikuyu expressed their dissatisfaction and height of emotions through protest poetry derived from traditional ceremonial songs. However, with the coming of formal education, coupled with Christianity, these genres lost momentum especially after independence. The centrality of Oral Poetry in post-independent Kenya regained momentum with the introduction of Orature into the national curriculum through the now Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). The moving of the

centre of the canon of African literature as a core subject of study at all levels boosted the position of Orature in formal education. As Kabira in *The Oral Artist* notes:

Scholars of oral narratives have tended to lump all oral artists together as if they were not creations of certain societies in particular periods of historical development, the assumption has always been that these artists have played a uniform role in their society; hence the erroneous conclusion that there is not much to be learned about the individual artist in a particular situation. (Kabira, 1983:1)

Akivaga and Odaga (1982) are emphatic on the monumental role played by political songs in Kenya. They have exemplified this by analyzing a Gikuyu Freedom song that indicates the worldview of the artists who emerged in Kenya's colonial era. Their contribution is significant in voicing the importance of teaching Orature. Over the years, Kenyans have continually questioned the value and role of colonialism in their lives. This has propelled the emergence of political activism and rebellion. As earlier stated, the main rebellion arose from the question of land occupied by the foreigners. To make the cause more meaningful and to attract a wider audience's support, the rebellion was given impetus through political songs and dances. Thus, the social-historical and political conflicts are stored in the song genre and dances composed by traditional oral artists. Some of the political activists were formerly conscripted as soldiers and career corps who participated in the 1st World War mainly in Burma in Asia. There is a school of thought that the idea of armed struggle was hatched during the First World War as Africans had witnessed the killing of white people. It was tenable to use mobilisation of the masses through propaganda, song and dance. The notion of protest is echoed in the compositions that appeared in 1920's under the umbrella of *Muthirigu* dance. This atmosphere was confirmed in the trend of resistance oral poetry as evident in *Mwomboko* dance that emerged in 1940s, among others.

Finnegan (1970: 285) purports that:

One of the best examples of the use of songs for secret propaganda is the hymns used by the Mau Mau movement in Kenya in the early 1950s. This movement, part political, part religious, was banned by the government, and yet, largely by means of these songs was able to carry out activities and widespread propaganda among the masses in Kenya.

WaKinyatti (1980) postulates that:

Gikuyu Mau Mau Freedom songs were popular among the masses for they were a source of inspiration in their endeavour to fight the colonial powers from Great Britain. This made the song poetry genre to gain prominence as an ethnopoetic tool for protesting against the (mis)rule meted by the foreigners.

Karega and Kabira (1988:23) note that:

Muthirigu is a song (genre) that was created at the height of cultural nationalism in Kenya in the 1920s...was used as a medium of resistance during the colonial period even after it was legally banned in 1929. Through this song, which was hundreds of verses, the Agikuyu campaigned against the colonial administration and missionary efforts to distort, erase, and totally change the Agikuyu way of life in order to make them more effective servants of the White people.

The Africans appear to have been angered by the dismantling of their cultural practices. Leakey (1954:56) argues that the so-called Mau Mau 'hymns' were used as a propaganda machine for "they were a quick and effective way to reach the hearts of the people" in the height of Kenya's armed struggle. Mahugu (1990) on the protest poetry that emerged in colonial times in Kenya is a motivating factor to this. She deals with Mau Mau Songs of Independence. She argues that the melodies of the compositions were adapted from traditional song and dance sub-genres and also some corrupted Christian music hymns.

Mwangi in Fabula (2002:102) opines:

The Gikuyu are an ethnic community which lives mainly in the central Province of Kenya and the Gikuyu diaspora (the Rift Valley, for example). The oral history of this community is recounted poetically in the songs known as the Gikuyu Muthirigu and Mwomboko. These lyrical genres recapitulate the myth of origin of the people. The Muthirigu is a song genre that emerged due to political upheavals in Kenya. It was an expression of protest against the colonial power's suppression of African traditional values and practices.

The scholars above view on Gikuyu protest literature are quintessential in this chapter. At the time, the coloniser was the common enemy in the struggle of independence, hence, First Liberation. The pangs of colonialism gave birth to the equally exploitative, oppressive and suppressive neocolonialism. The popular songs discussed herein are a response to the excesses of political intrigues and class struggle in post-independence Kenya. Here, the common enemy is the clique of African ruling elite, brothers and sisters in the nation-state. The life and spirit of a people is best expressed and summarized by the oral communication spelt out through the oral artists as the voice of societal concerns of a given time. The spatial and temporal moments in a performance keeps being reenacted from generation to another albeit in a different and varied style. In 1920s political activists of the day did not embrace combat and physical confrontation but opted to build a nexus of cultural nationalism that espoused the values, norms and traditional practices of the African people specifically the Agikuyu.

6.0 Ethnic Cleansing and Poetry

Hansen (2009) in his ISS Paper 205 gives an overview on political violence in Kenya. After the coming of independence in 1963, Kenya's political history was marked by violent uprising and repression. Following the Kenya African National Union (KANU) victory in the 1963 elections, Kenya became a de facto one-party state. Soon, the leader, President Jomo Kenyatta, made banning attempts of formation of an opposition party associated with the Luo. This led to the perception that Kenyatta, was promoting Kikuyu interests over national interests. Hansen (ibid) states that, when Daniel Moi took office in 1978 following the death of Kenyatta, he pursued policies that benefitted parts of his own ethnic group, the Kalenjin. This excluded other ethnic groups from gaining public office or access to state resources. Repression of the political opposition was common practice. This included excessive use of force, torture and indefinite detention. In 1982, following a coup attempt, the Moi regime amended the Constitution and subsequently Kenya officially became a one-party state. Police and security forces dispersed demonstrations against this move forcefully. Only after intense donor-pressure did Moi allow multi-party elections to be held in 1992. The election campaign, the election itself and its immediate aftermath were characterized by threats, harassments and the occurrence of violent clashes between supporters for different parties with ethnic inclinations, claiming many living more displaced.

In 1992 Kenya's post-independent era experienced ethnic/tribal clashes in the areas within the Rift Valley where the Gikuyu had moved in search for land after independence. The clashes culminated into political violence which was ethnic cleansing because it took in a collective sphere where acts of violence were committed by a multitude of individuals from one ethnic group against individuals from a targeted group. The violence took the form of murder, assaults, sexual abuse such as rape, or sterilization. These were the epitome of hatred and inter-tribal ruthlessness. Like in 1992, the 1997 elections were associated with violence. After the elections, politically motivated violence between ethnic groups took place. According to Amnesty International, more than 120 Kenyans lost their lives in the Rift Valley when KANU supporters clashed with armed youths belonging to the Kikuyu ethnic group. Our focal point the 2007/2008 post-election violence, seemingly came as a surprise and shock to many Kenyans and the outside world. The violence had erupted even before Mwai Kibaki was declared winner, but increased in scale after the announcement. Again, it was in the Rift Valley, around Eldoret, that violence first erupted, seemingly taking the form of ethnic-based clashes between the supporters of the presidential candidate Raila Odinga and those of Mwai Kibaki, mostly from the Kikuyu. Hansen, quotes that the carrying out of these clashes was often brutal and simply directed against individuals according to their ethnic affiliation. In retaliation, the Kikuyu are said to have formed 'self-defence forces'. The large scale violence was in most cases followed by looting. This is the case scenario described by the music artists under discussion here. Most of this political violence was normally disseminated through journalese literature and media footages. However, the contemporary Gikuyu popular oral artists sought to borrow

a leaf from premiere oral artists who engaged on music and society issues of the day. Karega and Kabira (1988: 42) postulate that:

In the process of rendering a narrative, a good artist will automatically dramatise the various roles of his characters. In doing this he will be able to integrate the drama, the tone and the mood of the narrative into an aesthetic whole. The artist will use both verbal and non-verbal language to fully communicate his message.

The artists who committed themselves to the great debate revolving the winner of the 2007 Presidential elections include Muigai wa Njoroge, John De Mathew and Kamande wa Kioi. Muigai wa Njoroge who is in his Mid-thirties began composing, producing and performing gospel music in the early 2000s. It is noticable that Muigai wa Njoroge became known after singing a spiritual song called: “*Caitani Waingiriire ku?*” The song spells out the inequities in our contemporary society. Using his poetry based on the ethnic cleansing of 2007/2008, Muigai emerged a strong political commentator, and he composed: “*Ndege ya HIGI*” that is, “The Hague bound plane”. The content is based on the political suspects who were alleged to have committed the atrocities that left many Kenyans dead and thousands of Internally Displaced Persons. The suspects were sent to face judges at the International Criminal Court (ICC), in The Hague in the Netherlands. By referring to the Hague, Muigai employs the literary device of locatability. He also bases his text on the real historical personages as he poeticises the experiences.

“*Ndege ya HIGI*” narrates the dilemma faced by the suspects. Dubs them the “Hague six” in contrast to colonial “Kapenguria Six”. We witness historical allusion being broached in a paradoxical structure. The persona seeks for support and prayers from his well-wishers,

Question: What would you tell your crying supporters as you are being shipped to Hague?

Answer: I would tell them to pray for me and that I know that I am being persecuted for my love for my community.

The persona implores from the maternal emotions. In times of dilemma and difficulties, it is known, a suffering character cries for the mother’s intercession. The persona implores for prayers from his mother he heads to Hague lest he runs mad.

Question: Muigai had you been the one being taken to Hague and know you be sentenced to death or imprisoned for life tell me what you would do

Answer: I would tell mother to pray for me and to intercede for me. This is a bad demon. If it were not for her prayer support, I would have run mad.

Tribal sentiments and stereotypes are markedly evident in Kenya. In this poem, these emerge hidden under simple symbols and images. For instance, the Gikuyu, it is known, have always spoken against the Luo people of Kenya simply because the Luo are a non-circumcising community. In this song, the spokesperson hits hard at them, brands them immature and blames them for the trials.

Question: *When on the dock what would you be thinking of the uncircumcised man who is the source of your predicament?*

Answer: *I would ask God to forgive him. I would also ask that he gets circumcised so that he matures mentally. I would also ask Kenyans to be very wary of that man.*

To the poet, Kenya's leadership and the country in its entirety are solely the property of the Gikuyu. He cannot fathom a Luo speaker taking over this leadership.

Question: What if you knew that you are being pushed to Hague by an uncircumcised man who wants to push you there and take over your wife and all your wealth? A man who can do anything to ensure you are in problems.

Answer: Then, it would be better to die. A man's property cannot be governed by an uncircumcised man. I would kill him. Its better more charges are increased

The Gikuyu mouth piece declares that he had better murder and that get into deeper trouble with the courts than this;

Answer: Then, it would be better to die. A man's property cannot be governed by an uncircumcised man. I would kill him. Its better more charges are increased

John De Mathew (Ndemethiu) is in his mid-50's. He emerged into popular music fame in the mid 1980's with a secular song entitled: "my dear Nduku". Later, Ndemethiu indulged in political songs mainly featuring the 2007/2008 era. In his song, "**Mwaka wa Hiti**" that is "the year of the hyenas" De Mathew addresses the political environment that engulfed Kenya. The electioneering period is labelled, the year of the hyenas. In Orature, the symbol of the hyena indicates extreme gluttony. The political aspirants are seen as hyenas who hunger for power and political seats. The election year is, thus special for the hyenas:

As DeMathew I prophesy and let the stones hear me if men wont.
It is now the year of the hyena. Who will teach you and your ears are blocked?
The year of the hyena is just by the doorstep hide, who will remove
these earrings blocking my ears.

The persona rebukes all political aspirants against Uhuru Kenyatta and calls them hyenas. In his opinion, these are strategists who sit on the fence to monitor the euphoria or wave that evolves during the general elections in Kenya. Later, they crop up as clean political players and declare their interest to lead the populace.

You are like a greedy hyena seeing a man walk and following him hoping that his arm will drop off. You follow him till he boards the train and the arm does not drop and you never eat.

The artist carries out a commentary on historical personages who were presidential candidates for the 2012 general elections in Kenya. The persona carries out a comparison between the Hague trials of Uhuru Kenyatta to the trial of Jesus Christ, the Biblical Messiah of the Jews.

Before Jesus was crucified He stood in the court Judge Pilate and he answered all questions, Judge Pilate said Jesus is free but the crowd asked that a thief be freed instead.

The Persona declares Uhuru another Christ, those against him are the hostile crowd ready to sacrifice him and leave a thief. The song is in favor of Uhuru Kenyatta's candidature and demonizes any other candidate vying against him. Since Peter Kenneth is a Gikuyu like Uhuru Kenyatta, the poet questions this.

Where are you from? If you were really one of us, you would be pained by the people burnt in Kiambaa church. My brother lost his property in Kisumu, how can you tell us you are our community's friend.

Peter Kenneth, should have joined Uhuru Kenyatta's camp and supported his candidature, rather than opposing him. The poet flash backs to burning of a number of the Kikuyu at the Kiambaa church, another mega history of the same time, soon after President Mwai Kibaki was sworn in. He also recalls how another huge number lost their property through burning in Kisumu town and its environs. Another historical personage is Kalonzo Musyoka. The spokesperson labels him an "In law".

In-law things are not going well for you now. You are clueless and your matters are now being discussed by women in the market. But I still remember how you saved me (after 2007 elections) when leopards had attacked me.

This friendly description makes Kalonzo Musyoka a synecdoche, a single person is used to represent the whole of the Kamba community. Others are Charity Ngilu, who are believed to have worked closely with the Gikuyu community, hence in-laws, during an earlier election

period, when the former president Mwai Kibaki was a presidential candidate. However, this time round, they had failed the test. Another utilization of the synecdoche, is Raila Odinga. On behalf of all Luo he is the perceived arch rival and arch enemy. The message that he is not worthy to be a leader and cannot take the country anywhere if ever elected is over stated and it is emphasized that this is because he is uncircumcised; “*When a man is seated on a stool, he sees further than a boy on top of a tree.*” The poet also refers to Martha Karua. She will be remembered as the only woman presidential aspirant during this mega historical period. Since Karua hails from a sub-tribe of the Kikuyu, the poet has no kind words. She is a friend and bag carrier of the enemy “*Father I feel sad when I see your son being persecuted by men of ill-will and a woman is carrying their bags.*” Kamande wa Kioi was born in 1972. His name is Marc Kamande Kioi. He started playing the guitar in church at 12 years. His was an inborn talent. He nurtured it after joining the Kenyan Police Band and the Police Welfare Band. Currently, Kamande wa Kioi is a controversial Mugithi, (glorytrain) Benga artist in Nairobi with a huge local fan base. His most controversial hit is **Uhuru ni Witu (Uhuru is Ours)** – Kamande assumes a prophet’s voice, salutes and speaks to the Gikuyu community. Through Biblical allusion, he compares Uhuru Kenyatta to the Moses who in Biblical mythology was anointed and sent by God to lead the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt to the chosen land of Canaan. The persona sings:

Greetings people of the house of Gikuyu and Mumbi. I bring you a message from all Kikuyu musicians. This is a message from God. Uhuru is the Moses of the Kikuyu nation. He is meant to move the Gikuyu from Egypt to Canaan. Do not agree to be divided. Let all votes go to him. He is ours. He is anointed by God, poured oil on.

Kamande also takes time to focalise on Raila Odinga. In a reversal of roles, he requests him to visit Uhuru’s home and anoint him as king. Using Biblical allusion, the poet advises Raila Odinga (Agwambo) to play the role of Prophet Samuel, who in the Bible ordained David, the greatest King of Israel, and the same to Uhuru. The poet asserts:

Raila, there is a call. Go to Mama Ngina’s house, a king has been born there. Once there ask where Uhuru is seated and pour oil on him. Just like Samuel did for David in the Bible. Stop chasing the wind Agwambo, go to Ichaweri and anoint Uhuru.

This reference is paradoxical in the sense that prophets are higher beings than the people they anoint. Interestingly, Kamande’s argument would seem to imply that Raila Odinga is a higher being than Uhuru. Whether he realizes this suggestion through this allusion is open to doubt. As a result of the doubt created by the song the same becomes a vehicle for propagation of tribal sentiments that fuel ethnic oriented political animosity. Equally it is difficult for Raila’s supporters to appreciate his comparison to a prophet since Raila Odinga’s interest is not in

becoming a prophet but a president. The composer has no kind words for Raila Odinga. In the poet's opinion, the Hague trial would yield nothing much, even though Raila might see it as a panacea to his political ambitions. The poet's reference to circumcision is almost tautological. By reference to the Biblical mythical character, Abraham who was asked by God to circumcise himself and his kindred, the poet reminds Raila that he needs to follow suit:

You thump your chest about Hague, is Hague your mother's? There is a curse from God. Philistines who do not circumcise cannot lead Israel. When Abraham stressed God, he was told to go get cut, even you General of Migingo, your knife is being sharpened.

The persona utilizes locatability. He refers to real places and spaces in Kenya when he refers to Ichaweri where Uhuru's home is and Migingo, an island and a historical landmark in Lake Victoria. Another reference is in the word 'Hague'.

7.0 Conclusion

Our focus is the centrality of the artist as a spokesperson in addressing aspects of Kenya's mega history of electioneering and the traumatic ethnic cleansing. The 2007/2008 era was characterized by strings of conflicts simmering within antagonistic ethnic groups of Kenya under the umbrella of an unhealthy political competition. Verbal bitter exchanges between pro- and anti-government forces ensued and physical confrontation emerged. The rebellious activists were labelled disgruntled elements and enemies of development, stability, peace, love and unity in Kenya. Those days gave rise to the emergence of tribal clashes, against the adventurous Gikuyu, in most parts of Kenya especially in the now North, Central and South Rift. Ethnic violence gave birth to an emerging genre of Kikuyu poetry. It gave rise to emergence of contemporary protest poetry which later led to the appearance in court of the three Gikuyu Songists. It is interesting that poetry was the single genre chosen by the Gikuyu to convey their responses. This is a testimony of the uniqueness of poetry as the genre that lies at the centre of literary experience and as the form that most clearly asserts the specificity of literature and its difference from ordinary discourse especially in addressing psychological issues. The three spokesperson blend Kenya's mega history and art. Despite the poets having the trait of Kenyan historical consciousness, all their poems give the reader an impression of composers who have internalized the ethnic based stereotypes and hatred perpetuated amongst the Luo and Gikuyu. Due to the psychological effects of the trauma, the persona in each song- text is both a prisoner and a satirist of the very problem they strive to fight against. This makes the content of the poems very uncomfortable in that it clearly reveals an imbalance between the affected communities. Though the compositions employ literary devices such as *mega history*, *historical personages*, *datability*, *locatability*, *symbolism*, *Biblical allusions* and *functional characters* with competence, they end up mirroring the elections and the resultant ethnic wars from a biased perspective which ignites even more hatred. Although these were compositions meant to be

sources of information and historical evidences, they are inflammatory, provocative and in very bad taste. They were especially composed when, indeed, the country was yet to heal. These songs could thus be read as harbingers of bad tidings. The claim by the Kenyan police that these poems, which are packed with proverbs, riddles, and metaphors contained hate speech intended to incite feelings of hatred, contempt, and discrimination among the Gikuyu and Luo cannot be challenged. Consequently, the three Kikuyu musicians were arraigned before a Nairobi court and charged separately with incitement and hate speeches. Beside a mandatory jail term of up to five years for incitement charges, the three were to be fined up to Kenya Shillings One Million each if found guilty. Muigai, was charged with two counts of incitement to violence and one of hate speech. He was accused of making the remarks intended to cause violence and hatred between the Kikuyu and the Luo community. Kamande faced two charges of incitement to violence and one of hate speech. De Mathew faced one charge of incitement to violence and two of ethnic contempt. Police charged them with incitement under Section 96(a) of the Penal Code, which attracts up to five -year jail term without an option of a fine. However, prosecution could not prove the psychological effects of the words in the songs. It was difficult to measure whether the songs would be desirable to cause death or physical injury to a person, a community, class of persons or body of persons. This is because no law can measure the consequences of traumatic injury nor the healing process of the same. Therefore, the extent of the fire that these songs caused has not been scientifically assessed. What was clear from the print and electronic media is that the three are some of the most popular Gikuyu musicians with mega sales of their VCDs. Before the banning of the VCDs, they were played in homes and in public vehicles plying the Mt. Kenya region. This chapter focalised on the poetry that emerged after the 2007/2008 elections that ignited happenings that led to a presidential candidate and his supporters ending up in The Hague. The compositions mirroring these activities also caused Gikuyu popular artists to appear in court. However, there were land and ethnic based clashes in 1992 and before in the Rift Valley and other parts of Kenya. However, apart from (Kombani 2012), literary presentations of the same have not been brought to light. Further, it is believed that other communities such as the Luo speakers could have oral literary compositions that speak ill of their experiences with the Gikuyu and maybe other communities. What is the content of these compositions? What literary devices are employed to convey the stereotypical picture that the Luo have of the Gikuyu? To what extent is literature a way to vent the traumatic effects of ethnic conflicts in Kenya. These and more are questions that could continue to be responded through further research.

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