

WHAT'S THE DEAL? THE LINK BETWEEN THE SUSTAINABILITY AND COMMERCIAL ASPECTS OF THE KAYAMBA OF THE MIJIKENDA COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This paper aims to elucidate the sustainable systems birthed from the interaction between the kayamba instrument and its commercial elements. The paper underscores the commercial elements linked to the kayamba and how the configuration between the indigenous and contemporary economic contexts contributes to the resilience and sustainability of the kayamba instrument. This research takes on a different approach from the ubiquitous studies of indigenous musical instruments of Africa, which have been linked to their evident endangered state. The strategies provided are mostly based on etic perspectives and outsider interventions, which more often than not lead to essentialised and ossified traditions rather than promoting healthy environments for the music traditions to thrive. This paper shifts focus from a preservation to a sustainability framework. It incorporates a qualitative research approach that highlights the Mijikenda community's perspectives and agency in facilitating the sustainability of the kayamba musical instrument. The participants of this research were purposively sampled. Data was collected through the use of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focused group discussions. The data collected went through thematic analysis. Findings from this research are integral to the development of initiatives linked to the sustainability of musical instruments and music traditions. The conglomeration of indigenous and contemporary economic contexts provides a holistic view of the resilience and sustainability of indigenous musical instruments of contemporary Africa.

Key terms: contemporary economic contexts, indigenous economic contexts, kayamba, resilience, sustainability.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Studies on musical instruments in Africa have been a critical topic in the world of musicology and ethnomusicology. Scholars in these and other related disciplines have often been concerned by the apparent loss of cultural heritage, musical cultures, and indigenous musical instruments. Such concerns are echoed from most parts of the world and are most often contextualised within protection and preservation paradigms, as observed by Defrance (2008):

Everywhere in the world, in varying degrees, traditional cultures find themselves in danger as the conditions under which they thrived are swept away by modernity and the effects of globalisation. These cultures... gradually lose their relevance in their original contexts and end up slowly fading out of existence. Industrialisation, rural exodus, economic or political migrations, rampant urbanisation... All these factors contribute to the deconstruction of traditional cultures with such a force that it would require at least an equal amount of energy to halt the phenomenon (p39).

Consequently, efforts to safeguard musical traditions have primarily focused on preservation, conservation, and safeguarding (Bendrup et al., 2013). Bendrup et al. (2013) have underscored the prevalence of this focus across different continents and academic disciplines. They have highlighted dedicated journals, study groups, and themes aimed at studying and strategising initiatives for preservation and conservation. Notable examples include the formation of the Ecocriticism Study Group within the American Musicological Society in 2007, the special issue of the *World of Music* in 2009, and the inclusion of 'Sounding Ecologies' as a theme for the 2010 conference of the Society for Ethnomusicology in 2013.

While these efforts are commendable and have yielded positive outcomes for the musical cultures under study, their impact is primarily relevant to the academic community and less impactful to the communities under study. Cambria et al. (2011) emphasise two overarching goals in contemporary ethnomusicology: Generating knowledge "on" or "about" specific communities and their music and applying this knowledge "for" and "to" benefit these communities. However, within Kilifi County, the local population has experienced advancements in the former aspect but neglect in the latter. During the fieldwork for this study, participants frequently highlighted the significant gap between research and applied ethnomusicology. The tensions between academic inquiry and practical application, often framed as "pure" vs. "applied" ethnomusicology, are particularly pronounced when studying musical instruments and their preservation against the threat of extinction.

A proposed solution to bridge this divide is the adoption of collaborative research approaches, moving away from top-down or observer-imposed methods, as discussed by Kartomi (2001) and Agawu (2016). Titon (2015) argues that researchers should "partner with music culture-bearers and community scholars to assist them in preserving their music traditions within their community contexts" (p. 124). Such an approach entails understanding and working alongside community members in their efforts to safeguard their musical heritage. This paper is grounded on this collaborative premise.

This paper is focused on showcasing the resilience and sustainability of the kayamba of the Mijikenda community living in Kilifi County, Kenya. A key focus has been placed on elucidating the connection between the commercial aspects of the kayamba and its sustainability. Additionally, this paper highlights the agency of the Mijikenda community in the sustainability of the instrument and its music traditions. It sheds light on both the indigenous and the contemporary world views linked to the kayamba and its

commercial aspects. This research took an ethnographic approach. The researcher lived and worked closely with the Mijikenda people living in Kilifi County. The subsequent section elaborates on the research methods employed in the study.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

From Preservation to Sustainability

The preservation and safeguarding of indigenous musical traditions and cultural heritage have remained fundamental cornerstones in justifying the existence of both musicology and ethnomusicology. Early research in the realm of "folklore" primarily revolved around the documentation of musical traditions perceived to be on the brink of extinction (Grant, 2013). In Kenya, the initiatives aimed at conserving music cultures can be traced back to as early as the 1940s with the establishment of the International Folk Music Council in 1947, which prominently listed "preserving the performed cultures of African tribes" among its objectives (Bushidi, 2015, p. 13). Subsequent efforts for recording and documentation were spearheaded by ethnomusicologists such as Hugh Tracey, the founder of the International Library of African Music (Kiiru & Mutonya, 2020). Moreover, Graham Hyslop, appointed in 1957 as an officer of colony music and drama, had the preservation and revival of indigenous music in the then-British colony as a central component of his mandate (Bushidi, 2015).

The strategies for preserving and conserving indigenous music and its associated cultures have often drawn inspiration from conservation practices in the realms of nature conservation and natural resource conservation (Titon, 2015). These frameworks have frequently taken on museological approaches involving archiving, documentation, and curated performances that are conceived as re-enactments of indigenous music traditions on stage. However, these approaches have been underpinned by essentialist worldviews towards ethnic cultures and musicking, which were deeply intertwined with colonial ambitions (Kiiru & Mutonya, 2020). Additionally, these preservation approaches entail studying and isolating a subject from its natural environment or establishing a distinct focus on musical culture, treating it as an isolated entity separate from its ecosystem.

Museological approaches within organology focused on the collection of musical instruments from various parts of the world. The Enlightenment era's fascination with the 'music of the world' served as a catalyst for the development of ethnomusicology (Rice, 2014). While these endeavours have yielded some benefits, they have also had severe repercussions, often leading to the ossification and rigid perspectives on music traditions (Schippers, 2015).

Hyslop's idea of curating performances in music and drama festivals as a means of preserving and promoting musical cultures provides a temporary solution. Nevertheless, this staging process disconnects the musical culture from its indigenous roots, where its spiritual, social, and political essence is deeply embedded. Furthermore, this approach tends to reinforce essentialist paradigms and perpetuate colonial perspectives on indigenous traditional music, often portraying music cultures as static (Barber, 1987). Barber argues that the displacement of culture from its indigenous contexts results in the creation of an entirely new musical product. Despite noble intentions, the tensions arising from the recontextualisation of indigenous music traditions have been critiqued in studies by scholars (Barber, 1987; Kidula, 1996; Ogude, 2012).

The epistemology of African indigenous music is marked by colonial and essentialist undertones. Agawu (2023) elucidates that the discipline of ethnomusicology is a product of colonialism, placing a significant responsibility on ethnomusicologists, particularly those studying and presenting African music, to disentangle the colonial mission from the study of music cultures. Furthermore, contemporary ethnomusicology is oriented towards enhancing not only the discipline itself but also the well-being of the communities under investigation. Avorgbedor (1992) advocates for the use of empirical knowledge, theoretical concepts, and research methodologies to address contemporary social, economic, and technological challenges faced by the research population. In line with the assertion that "all ethnomusicology is applied ethnomusicology" (Harrison, 2012, p.508), this paper posits that all ethnomusicology should be considered as applied ethnomusicology (especially in the study of African music and traditions), thus facilitating the examination of power and politics, as outlined by (Nettl, 2005).

To achieve this objective, the application of collaborative research approaches becomes imperative. Additionally, a significant proportion of sustainability efforts should be directed towards the culture's native environment. Titon (2009) underscores this perspective by asserting that "Living heritage 'masterpieces' are best maintained by managing the cultural soil surrounding them" (p. 124). Bendrups et al. (2013) emphasise the pivotal role of relationships between non-Indigenous ethnomusicologists and Indigenous communities in assisting these communities in preserving their cultures and traditions. This sustainability paradigm allows for a collaborative, bottom-up impact-oriented ethnomusicology that encompasses initiatives such as engagement, advocacy, and activism (Bithell, 2011).

In view of the highlighted literature, this study translocates focus on the outsider intervention strategies and spotlights the Mijikenda's role and contribution to the sustainability of the kayamba. This study implements Avorgbedor's (1992) call for the use of empirical knowledge to address contemporary challenges. The kayamba is an indigenous musical instrument used in multiple musical contexts ranging from indigenous music to contemporary music. All these contexts contribute to its conspicuous resilience and sustainability. This study places emphasis on the connection of the commercial aspects within the indigenous and contemporary contexts to the instrument's sustainability.

The Ubiquitous Kayamba

In the quest to establish sustainability models for endangered music traditions, it is imperative that researchers also investigate thriving indigenous music cultures (Schippers & Grant, 2016). The kayamba emerges as a resilient musical instrument relevant in both indigenous and contemporary musical contexts.

The kayamba enjoys a global presence, being prevalent in numerous African countries, including but not limited to Mauritius, Reunion, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Congo, and Tanzania. In Mauritius, Reunion, and Seychelles, the kayamba is known as the maravanne or the caiamb and is primarily associated with Sega music. In Kenya, the kayamba is used in diverse musical contexts, serving as an accompanying instrument in choral arrangements, Christian religious services, and local live bands. Moreover, various cultural communities, such as the Abaluhya, Abagusii, Akamba, and the Bajun, incorporate the kayamba in their musical traditions (Floyd, 2005; Kavyu, 1991; Nyangoya et al., 2018; Varnum, 1971). Its appearance in these multiple contexts, as well as its sonic contribution to the curation of the sound of National choirs such as the Muungano Choir, has accorded the instrument a National Status (Akuno, 2016).

Scholars locate its indigenous home among the Mijikenda community (Hyslop, 1959; Kavyu, 1991; Senoga-Zake, 1986). Despite the paucity of outsider preservation and conservation efforts, the kayamba thrives in multiple contexts. This paper focuses on the insider-developed sustainability systems that have enabled it to thrive in this constantly changing world. This paper will highlight the sustainability systems linked to its commercial aspects and the economy.

The connection between aspects of culture and contemporary economic modes is a critical variable determining the sustainability of particular aspects of culture. This paper explores the relationship between the commercial aspects of the kayamba and its contribution to the instruments' resilience and sustainability. The next section elaborates on the findings as observed from the field.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research utilised a qualitative research approach. The study was based in Kilifi County. Data was collected from the following areas: Watamu, Gede, Galana, Sabaki, Mtsangoni, Tezo, Kilifi Town, Kaloleni, and Takaye. This research employed semi-structured and unstructured interviews, Focused Discussion Groups (FDGs), and participant observation for data collection. This study used a purposive sampling method. The participants were divided into six subunits, namely: i) individual kayamba master players who play within indigenous music contexts, ii) individual kayamba players who play within contemporary music contexts, iii) focus group consisting of musicians (dancers, singers, and instrumentalists) who perform in indigenous music contexts, iv) focus group consisting of musicians who perform within contemporary music contexts, v) cultural dance performance groups, and vi) negligible population.

The negligible population comprised members of the community who had interacted with the researcher outside of the research setting but possessed significant information relevant to the research topic. This population consisted of individuals such as transport service providers (drivers, and motorbike riders), hotel managers, and staff members of places of residence for the researcher. This population provided information on the collective attitudes and values associated with the indigenous cultural music of the Mijikenda people living in the County. The data collected was thematically analysed. The analysis process consisted of three levels of coding, namely, axial coding, open coding, and selective coding. The use of *vivo* codes such as *kufanyia ndugu*, *mfumula* were used. The findings were taken through member checks, peer debriefing, and triangulation for trustworthiness.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data from the research unveiled two separate but related economic contexts that exist within the Mijikenda community living in Kilifi County, namely the microeconomic contexts and the macroeconomic contexts. The terms micro and macro have been adopted for the purpose of the study and are not used overtly by the Mijikenda people. For the Mijikenda community, these contexts are defined by the relationships shared between the buyer and seller, consumers, and artists.

The use of micro and macro bear dual meanings. First, it alludes to the size of the economic context in comparison to the other. Macroeconomic contexts are widespread and include multiple networks of individuals, communities, and institutions. Microeconomic contexts, on the other hand, refer to the economic environments created within closely related individuals and communities. Secondly, the use of micro and macro allude to the distance (social and geographical) between involved parties within the

economic contexts. The macroeconomic contexts entail parties from varied cultural and social backgrounds. The microeconomic contexts entail parties who are closely related and share similar social and cultural backgrounds.

The commercial aspects of the kayamba exist within these two economic contexts. The microeconomic contexts are applied more overtly within the indigenous performance infrastructures. Additionally, the macroeconomic contexts are applied within the contemporary global economic context and guide the transactions within the concerned industries and institutions such as tourism, education, and cultural enterprises. Findings from the study showcase a coexistence between these contexts within the community. The next section entails a detailed discussion of these contexts in relation to their implication to the resilience and sustainability of the kayamba.

Discussion

This section elaborates on the two economic contexts (the micro, and macroeconomic contexts) and their implication to sustainability. The discussion is focused on highlighting the perspectives, theoretical frameworks, and agency of the Mijikenda community towards the sustainability of the kayamba.

Kufanyia Ndugu: The Microeconomic Contexts

The microeconomic context elaborates on economic dynamics expressed within members of the same community who include relatives, and(or) close friends, and(or) members of the same cultural group within the Mijikenda. The data collected from interviews and observations showcased that before a price was quoted by a music service provider in the community, the personal relationship between the buyer and seller (musician and consumer) needs to be established. Value in this microeconomic context is calculated based on the nature of the relationship rather than the value of the currency. In other words, the nature of engagement is relational rather than transactional.

It is important to note that the microeconomic contexts are mainly experienced within the indigenous performance settings, though not exclusively. These settings entail musical needs linked to socially maintained institutions such as healing rituals, burial ceremonies, and harvest ceremonies. The informants commonly referred to this context as "kufanyia ndugu" or "*kusaidia ndugu*". This directly translates to helping a brother. The participants explained that on occasion, when a musical performance is needed within the community, such as the death of a member of the community, all members within the affected community take ownership of the musical community and handle the logistics surrounding the performance. If there is a financial implication to the logistics, the costs are directly linked to the items that will be used. Raymond Mckenzie, one of the participants, explains it as follows:

You will pay. You will pay for transportation. You will also be charged for their food and money to wash the costumes they'd be wearing.

This statement was made in reference to when there is a need for musicians to show up for a performance. The participants clarified that the amounts would be based on the relationship between the music group and the community/family acquiring the services. The closer they are, the more affordable the costs quoted within the metaphor and vice versa.

Another metaphor used is the 'mfumula'. At the beginning phase of this study, I organised a Focused Discussion Group (FDG) with a council of elders at the Malindi District Cultural Association. After a

successful interview session, there was a moment of awkward silence and hesitation as I rose to bid the elders goodbye. At this moment, I was certain I had missed a cultural code. One of the elders firmly called my research assistant aside and called him out on not educating me, the visitor, on the cultural norms and expectations. This cultural expectation was the *mfumula*, a measure of local brew that is offered to the elders and shared with them for drinking as they discuss the agendas of their council.

The *mfumula* concept has deep roots within Mijikenda traditions and history. When a family member(s) meeting called for a meeting with the elders, it was required of them to provide a measure of local brew served in gourd/bamboo cups with bamboo straws (*mrjja*). The *mfumula/kajama* represents the main container from which the local brew would be distributed. This tradition is still practised in some homesteads. A monetary representation of the local brew is also accepted as a substitute of the *mfumula/kajama* in some microeconomic contexts. The costs of acquiring services in this music context are arbitrary. Participants highlighted that costs are flexible to allow members of different socioeconomic backgrounds to access the musical services. Some services, such as the healing rituals, offer affordable medical solutions to members of the community who cannot afford contemporary, traditional medical services offered in the government and private hospitals.

Participants maintained that *utamaduni* (community and culture) is prioritised when the need for a musical performance arises. The monetary payment is most often considered an afterthought and a form of appreciation. This research observed that within this context, the music culture maintains its cultural significance, function, and meaning. The use of metaphors such as the *mfumula/kajama* holds more meaning than just holding the place value for the currency. In a postcolonial space that has experienced colonisation, nationalisation, and globalisation, the community encodes its value systems within these concepts to maintain its integrity as well as the integrity of its music cultures in this fast-changing world.

Though the transactions are carried out through local currency, the values transacted preserve the social and cultural meanings associated with it within this context. These metaphors help the Mijikenda community navigate the tensions observed by MacDonald-Korth et al. (2018) as follows:

Artists generally do not view their work as a mere vehicle for profit. Rather, artistic practice is imbued with deep social, ideological, political, and cultural meanings that are a core part of artists' identities. While many would argue that this is one of the core strengths of art or what makes art so unique from the rest of the economy, it is a major challenge to overcome when looking at the sector from a purely economic angle (p. 17).

Within the microeconomic contexts, the Mijikenda community recontextualises the indigenous economic frameworks and uniquely sustains the values embedded within their traditional economic systems. These systems enable them to transact and practice cultural values within a globalised and highly capitalised environment. Most importantly, the microeconomic context provides an ideal ecosystem for the sustainability of the music culture and the *kayamba* within its indigenous context while keeping the music culture's values, aesthetics, symbolic meanings, and cultural essence within the community.

We Make these for the Tourists: The Macroeconomic Context

The macroeconomic context expounds upon economic dynamics resulting from the interaction between the Mijikenda community and various performance infrastructures in Kilifi County, situated outside of

indigenous music contexts. These infrastructures encompass, among others, tourism, music education, and cultural exhibitions.

This context enables an exploration of the importance of technology, commercialisation, legislation, and media in the sustainability of the kayamba instrument and its associated musical traditions. The tourism sector plays a substantial role in the commercialisation of the kayamba, particularly within Kilifi County. As noted by Ongoma and Onyango (2014), 65 per cent of tourists visiting the country opt for the Kenyan coast, rendering coastal regions hubs for tourist activities and economic endeavours, including hotels, museums, and tourist markets. In Kilifi County, the kayamba is commercialised in two ways: as a souvenir instrument representing the material culture of the Mijikenda and as an accompaniment in musical performances. While the tourism sector enhances the economic well-being of the Mijikenda, it does not come without its challenges. Many kayamba instruments crafted for sale were not readily playable. One participant justified their sale as follows, "We create these for the tourists; we do not employ them in our own events." Numerous kayamba instruments in tourist outlets failed to meet the standards of indigenous designs, raising concerns among some participants that this trend could permanently distort the image and sound of the kayamba, potentially causing it to be lost forever.

The music education sector has played a pivotal role in preserving and safeguarding culture in Kenya. This sector hosts music and drama festivals that necessitate the performance of traditional music, thereby creating a natural demand for culture-bearers for training. This, in turn, provides a source of income, albeit seasonal, for master musicians. The Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) implementation has also introduced an additional income source. The CBC curriculum mandates that students learn traditional musical instruments, leading to increased demand for both musicians and musical instruments, including the kayamba.

Government bodies such as the Permanent Presidential Music Commission (PPMC) and the Bomas of Kenya have organised cultural music showcases with deep historical roots in the chronicles of musicians within Kilifi County. This county is home to distinguished musicians, some of whom were prominent performers during the tenure of the first President, Jomo Kenyatta. Notable individuals and families in this regard include Charo wa Shutu, Kazungu Chipa, Masha Iha and family, and the Mckenzie family. These institutions have played, and continue to play, a significant role in providing supplementary income for musicians within the community. Furthermore, they establish the musicians' place within the community as culture-bearers and custodians recognised by both the government and the indigenous community.

The macroeconomic context encapsulates the tensions arising from interactions between indigenous music cultures and contemporary institutions in this global world. Within this context, the kayamba and its associated musical cultures undergo recontextualisation and redefinition. This phenomenon facilitates the kayamba's continued existence in an ever-changing world and provides opportunities for adapting indigenous music and musical instruments to contemporary demands, aligning them with current technologies and the global population.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

This paper examines the implications of the commercial aspects of the kayamba on its sustainability. The introduction section offers a diachronic account of the field's development, ranging from the eclectic burden of the Enlightenment to the necessity for an applied ethnomusicology that addresses the needs of the populations whose music culture is under scrutiny. This paper underscores the importance of adopting an all-inclusive approach to the sustainability of music cultures and traditions. The study of music traditions and cultures should accurately reflect the current realities of the cultures in question. Sustainable music cultures transcend essentialised identities. As exemplified by the kayamba instrument, sustainable cultures are characterised by dynamism. While deeply rooted in Mijikenda cultures and traditions, the kayamba's resilience and sustainability are reinforced by its diversity and its role in multiple contexts. The commercial aspect of the kayamba serves as a pivotal pillar for its sustainability. Much like its presence and relevance within both indigenous and contemporary music contexts, the kayamba manifests itself in both micro and macroeconomic contexts. These two contexts enable the instrument to uphold its cultural values, integrity, and identity, as perceived by the community, while also extending its reach into various contemporary contexts. These dual environments mirror the realities of numerous African instruments. Sustainability thinking provides an ideal backdrop for the study of African music traditions and musical instruments.

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